

IMPROVING HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS FOR SPANISH SPEAKING FAMILIES

by

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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement in the education of their children has been a widely popular area of study in the past. There is general consensus among many scholars as to the importance and potential positive outcomes of effective parental involvement. Educational researchers such as Lee and Bowen (2006), Marschall (2006), and Jeynes (2007) agree that high levels of parental involvement can result in the improvement of students' academic achievement and improve their attitudes toward education. This area of educational research can be especially impactful among typically lower achieving subgroups of students, such as students of low socioeconomic status (SES) or English Language Learners (ELLs). That makes this issue particularly important for researchers studying English Language Learners or related fields, because parental involvement could have the potential to help diminish the achievement gap for them. The purpose of this research study is to investigate parental attitudes to and perceptions of their involvement in their child's education in a middle school setting in a small city school district in Western New York. It also seeks to delineate specific factors that parents at this school perceive to positively or negatively impact their involvement at the middle school level, specifically those related to language or cultural differences. The goal of this study is to determine specific ways this school can improve parental involvement and home-school relationships for Spanish-speaking parents' based on their own perceptions, in turn, improving the educational outcomes of their children.

Keywords: parental involvement, parental participation, barriers to involvement

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Introduction

Parental involvement is an important factor in education. Many scholars agree that high levels of parental involvement can augment students' academic achievement and improve their attitudes toward education (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Marschall, 2006; Jeynes, 2007). This area of educational research has received a lot of attention over the years. It is a particularly important issue because it has the potential to lessen the achievement gap for low achieving student populations, like those in poverty or English Language Learners (ELLs).

Problem

Although the importance of parental involvement is widely agreed upon, some districts continue to have difficulty either measuring parental involvement, or keeping families engaged in their children's education. Parents may have difficulty becoming or staying involved in their children's education because they do not have access to school-based events, there is a lack of communication between schools and families, or they are unsure of how to involve themselves in their children's education.

Watson Middle School in the Watson City School District (school and district names are pseudonyms) is currently considered a "focus school" in New York State due to its low scores in District Effectiveness (NYSED, 2015). In particular, this school was rated as "ineffective" on two of the items under the tenet discussing family and community engagement (NYSED, 2015). It is troubling that a district with high levels of poverty and a large population of English Language Learners (ELLs) is failing in an area that could potentially lessen the achievement gaps for these populations.

This problem became especially evident to me on the first day of my job in the school, when I attended an Open House event to welcome incoming 6th graders and explain rules and

procedures to their families. The event began with the students receiving their schedules and instructions to open lockers. Then they moved into the auditorium with their families. At this point, school personnel discussed school rules and procedures such as what time to arrive for free breakfast. They also discussed the school mission statement and welcomed the families to tour the school and meet some teachers. Faculty members at the event seemed very pleased with the high levels of attendance. However, no interpreters were present to relay the information in Spanish, and many Spanish-dominant parents seemed confused. Subramaniam (2011) stated that parents in their study felt their attendance was unnecessary at events where the communication was not in their home language, because they did not understand the information. It seems that Watson Middle School may be inviting the same sentiments into their school by failing to recognize and adequately incorporate the languages of all students into a very important event. As this was the first event of the year, I am concerned that the lack of access provided for parents will manifest itself and turn into negative relationships between families and the school, and lead to decreased parental involvement in their children's education.

In their study, Bower and Griffin (2011) suggested that the school might need to directly include families in the exploration of parental involvement, to ensure that programs and events are aligned with their needs. This rationalizes my proposed research, because I intend to directly include parents in the conversation about what types of activities they prefer to engage in, and what barriers they face when attempting to be involved in their child's education.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to investigate parental attitudes to and perceptions of their involvement in their child's education in a middle school setting. Additionally, it will examine the factors leading to or impeding parental involvement at the middle school level,

specifically those related to language or cultural differences. The goal of this study is to answer the following questions in order to determine specific ways to improve parental involvement and home-school relationships for Spanish-speaking parents' based on their own perceptions.

1. What are Spanish-speaking parents' perceptions about their involvement in their child's education at the middle school?
2. What factors do Spanish-speaking parents perceive to influence their involvement in their child's education at the middle school?
3. How do school policies regarding parental involvement relate to parents' perceptions?

Significance

This research will be on a small scale, as it is only intended to include participants from one school district serving a demographic that is not generalizable. However, it is a timely study for this particular school, and can be considered a form of an action research, because the questions arose based on my current work environment. I am working in Watson Middle School, which has identified family and community involvement in education as a major problem area within their school. It is my hope that this research will identify actionable steps that the teachers and administrators can take to remedy the lack of parental involvement in education.

It is also significant because the population in this study is fairly unique. All of the ELLs in this setting speak Spanish as their home language, and they are all from Puerto Rico. Much of the previous research used as background for this study have studied parental involvement based on poverty level or immigration status. As this study only includes Spanish-dominant parents from Puerto Rico, it may uncover influencing factors that are related primarily to linguistic differences, rather than immigration status or income level (Crozier, 2001; Lowenhaupt, 2014;

Moll et al., 2001). One can argue that research regarding parental involvement in education can never truly be generalized because it is so specific on the school and family contextual factors. For this reason, any research in this area is significant for the population or community being studied, regardless of how small or specific the sample is.

This research is also a valuable addition to the literature on parental involvement, because it is a qualitative study, focusing only on parents' perceptions. This will bring about authentic and direct conversations among parents about their own needs in the schools, which school personnel can reflect upon and use in their home-school communication practices.

Literature Review

Upon further review of academic literature on the topic, this research study and context became even more compelling. There were many research studies questioning the academic value of parental involvement in students' education and the factors that either encourage parents to become involved in their children's education or that act as barriers to their involvement. There was also much contention about the definition of parental involvement. These various aspects of parental involvement in education are complex, overlapping, and interrelated, making it an ever-changing and interesting topic. The following sections will discuss some of the theoretical frameworks driving research on parental involvement, various definitions on parental involvement in education, factors that may influence parental involvement, and efforts made by the school to promote parental involvement, and the effects of parental involvement on their children.

Theoretical Frameworks Related to Parental Involvement

The following theories are strongly tied to parental involvement in education. An important commonality between all of these frameworks is that they emphasize the need to understand differences in families' home practices, and value all of them equally. They also all recognize the need for strong ties between students' families and the school in order to maximize the effectiveness of education (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Gutierrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2001).

Mismatch theory. A major factor that may cause parents to feel unwelcome or resistant to become involved in their children's education in the school setting results from a misalignment between home and school cultures, known as cultural mismatch (Gutierrez et al., 2009). In many cases of cultural mismatch, schools, which primarily follow the dominant

culture, default to placing blame for underachievement or lack of involvement on the different cultures or individuals who practice those cultures. Gutierrez and colleagues (2009) suggested that instead, schools should really be focusing on re-organizing structure, expectations, and instructional or learning practices to fit the needs of all of their students. In addition to parental discomfort at school, Harlin, Sirota, and Bailey (2009) posited that cultural mismatch could also lead to lower expectations of students among teachers and lower quality of education for these students. Harlin and colleagues (2009) found that teachers had lower expectations for ELLs or racial minority students, regardless of the teacher's level of experience. These attitudes led to feelings of mistrust, lower self-esteem, lower motivation, and lower academic achievement among these students, suggesting that cultural mismatch is a critical barrier that educators must strive to understand and bridge.

Although it is clearly important to recognize and understand the cultures of students and their families, surface level attempts to value multiple cultures are not useful, and should be avoided. Gutierrez and colleagues (2009) recommended taking caution when judging the cultures of students and their families. Although ethnic groups may have many similarities, there are also within group differences, leading to different daily practices for each individual. Remediating the mismatch between schools by embracing all differences as valuable resources can allow students to implement their entire cultural and linguistic repertoires (Gutierrez et al., 2009).

Funds of knowledge. Moll and colleagues (2001) used qualitative research to include classrooms teachers in studying funds of knowledge among Mexican American families in Arizona. According to Moll and colleagues (2001), the term “funds of knowledge” includes all the knowledge and skill accumulated in a household necessary to survive and function properly.

These various types of knowledge and skills are extremely diverse and unique to each family. Moll and colleagues (2001) also emphasized how understanding and valuing families funds of knowledge can help teachers better understand and facilitate their students' educational process.

The idea of funds of knowledge requires educators to view parent and resources with cognitive capital that can be utilized in the classroom, as opposed to the formerly popular view of families as lacking intellectually and incapable of enhancing practices in the educational domain (Moll et al., 2001). Using and valuing families' funds of knowledge may foster heightened parental involvement in the school.

School, family, and community partnership model. Epstein and Sanders (2002) listed seven types of parental involvement in the School, Family, and Community Partnership Model, which can reflect and influence parental involvement in education.

The first type is parenting, which includes all ways that parents establish "supportive home conditions for healthy child development" (Epstein & Sanders, 2002, p. 418). This includes providing shelter, nutrition, supervision, and other parenting skills, as well as imparting cultural values and knowledge specific to their family. It is the school's responsibility to help the family with parenting through things like workshops and information dissemination (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). The second type of involvement is communication. Epstein and Sanders (2002) stated that this is largely a school responsibility, but that the medium, frequency, and content of the communications might determine whether parents are likely to open two-way paths of communication. Type three of parental involvement is volunteering, with an emphasis on the joint effort between the family and the school. Epstein and Sanders (2002) redefined volunteering to mean anything from using personal talents and skills to support and promote the school and students, or simply being involved as an audience member at a school event. The

school must foster parents' desire to be volunteers or audience members by providing a welcoming atmosphere, seeking their assistance, and ensuring that events take place during times that they are able to attend (Epstein & Sanders, 2002).

The fourth type of involvement is learning at home. Epstein and Sanders (2002) suggested that parents move beyond vague questions asking about their children's day, and begin to ask specific questions about their learning. They can also encourage their children to share class work, or read with them at home. Teachers can also foster learning at home by providing parents with a thorough understanding of the curriculum and learning goals, and specific suggestions for ways they can help at home (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). The fifth type of parental involvement is decision-making. Schools must encourage strong parent organizations and consider parent representation on councils, school boards, or committees, so that they can be an active part of the decision-making process regarding their children's education (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Parents, teachers, and administrators should work together to create strong partnerships in these committees. The sixth and final type of parental involvement and shared responsibility in the model is collaborating with the community. Parents and schools can collaborate with community entities to ensure that children have access to a variety of events and opportunities (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Schools can make connections between community agencies and organizations in an attempt to increase the participation of their students in these organizations. Parents have direct control over how much advantage they take of all of the programs offered in their community (Epstein & Sanders, 2002).

According to this model, the responsibility for implementing and fostering these six types of involvement is shared between the school and the family (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). The Family, School, and Community Partnership Model refers to many different domains in which

involvement can take place, as well as types of parental involvement. The following sections will discuss the ways that parental involvement has been defined in research across these various domains and involvement types.

Definitions of Parental Involvement

The way parental involvement is defined will have a major effect on how it is measured, and the value placed on family activities. It can even send a strong message about the way schools feel about their families and the way they participate in education. Lowenhaupt (2014) suggested that the low levels of parental involvement among immigrant families may result from schools continuing to only value traditional, school-based types of family involvement in education, rather than adjusting and updating their ideals of family engagement to fit the needs and norms of the families.

Home- vs. school-based. It is important to define parental involvement in education in both the context of the home and the context of the school. These definitions can be very broad and include many types of daily activities and routines, or very specific and place value on mainstream cultural ideals of education. Gaetano (2007) differentiated between informal ways and formal ways that parents can be involved in schools. According to Gaetano's (2007) definition, informal ways included what parents do at home to support their children's learning, such as providing a quiet time and space for homework, helping with homework, discussing their children's day at school, or consciously using strategies during household activities or discussions, like sorting socks or comparing television shows. Formal ways include parents participating in activities in the classroom or school.

According to Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, and Nero (2010), simply parenting and teaching children about daily life can be considered involvement in the education of their

children, even though it is not visible to the school. Sánchez (2010) listed some more specific home-based, literacy learning activities that are both formal and informal methods of parental involvement. Gaetano (2007) and Sánchez (2010) both suggested providing a quiet homework time and place, as well as reading together or listening to their children read, making regular visits to the local library, teaching rhymes and songs, and working to improve the literacy of the whole family. These strategies value activities that involve the entire family, as well as community entities, and can help develop lifelong learning habits.

In his study of parental involvement, Domina (2005) defined activities considered to reflect parental involvement using six measures. Four of the measures tested school-based involvement, including attending parent-teacher conferences, attending PTA meetings, volunteering in the classroom, and volunteering at other school events outside of the classroom, such as field trips. The other two measures were home-based, and included helping with homework and checking homework (Domina, 2005). Although these measures include parental involvement both in and out of the school context, they are still fairly restrictive and reflective of traditionally mainstream values, because they place value on reading and writing skills and activities approved by the school, like homework.

Researchers agree that both parental involvement in education at home and parental involvement at school are necessary to influence students' success. Lee and Bowen (2006) emphasized this point, stating that the social capital parents gain by attending events or learning about education in the school setting must be practiced at home in order to be useful.

Traditional vs. new. Although parental involvement can happen at both the school and the home, it is important to differentiate between traditional ideals of parental involvement and more modern ideals. According to Crozier (2001) and Lowenhaupt (2014), traditional

definitions of parental involvement in education tend to place high value on white, middle class, English-dominant cultures, which could allow racism and discrimination to perpetuate in schools. These traditional views of parental involvement ignore the culture and needs of non-mainstream families, and do not take into account the many ways they can contribute to the education of their children. Traditional methods of parental involvement attempt to mold the behaviors of all parents into a pre-determined acceptable norm, which could create a disconnect between families and schools in the mind of non-mainstream children (Lowenhaupt, 2014). These current practices could also deny non-English speaking families access to school events and prohibit them from participating in traditional parental involvement methods. Lowenhaupt (2014) distinguished between parental involvement and parental engagement, stating that engagement strategies treat parents as “equal and active participants” (p. 527).

Some researches have made recommendations for creating more modern parental involvement strategies that reflect the cultural norms of the families in their schools. Ryan and colleagues (2010) suggest that including the involvement of extended family, siblings, and parents’ significant others in definitions of parental involvement or family engagement may align more closely with home practices in cultures other than white American middle class students, particularly Latinos. Zarate (2007) provided a traditional definition for academic involvement, but also discussed the idea of “life participation” (p. 8) as an aspect of parental involvement. This includes the ways all the ways that parents participate in teaching non-academic life skills to their children at home or at the school. In Zarate’s (2007) study, children identified various parental behaviors that they considered to be positive parental involvement. These behaviors were telling stories, asking question about their children’s day, giving encouragement, providing

transportation, discipline, ensuring good school attendance, and giving positive or negative consequences for behavior, among other things (Zarate, 2007).

Garcia and Kleifgen (2011) also emphasized placing value on daily practices of all parents by using funds of knowledge. The use of funds of knowledge in education views families as resources or opportunities to incorporate different kinds of knowledge in the classroom (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2011). Using and valuing students' funds of knowledge helps connect learning and knowledge in the home to learning and knowledge in school.

Factors Influencing Parental Involvement in Education

Researchers have identified many factors that support or bar parent involvement in education. One compelling study that includes many of these factors was the work of Deslandes and Bertrand (2005). In their study, Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) identified four psychological constructs that contribute to parents' motivation to be involved in their adolescent children's education, both at school and at home. The first construct was strength of parents' role construction, meaning the extent to which parents believe it is part of their parental responsibility to assist in their children's education. The second was parents' self-efficacy for helping their adolescent children succeed in school. The third construct was the parents' perceptions of teacher invitations to be involved in the students' education, both at home and the school, and the final construct was the perception of their child's invitations to become involved, both socially and academically (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). The participants in this study included parents of students in five public schools in Quebec at the United States equivalents of grades 7, 8, and 9. These participants responded to items on questionnaires related to the four aforementioned psychological constructs and their levels of involvement (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). The study found that, at home, parents were most motivated to become involved with students due to

perceptions of students' invitations in both the social and academic domains, followed by the parents' self-efficacy in assisting the student (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). In the school context, parent motivation to become involved seemed to be most influenced by parents' role construction, perceptions of teacher invitations to become involved, and perceptions of student invitations to become involved in the social domain (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). It is important to note that this study does not account for language differences or potential linguistic barriers to involvement.

In other articles, the parents' self-efficacy, parents' role construction, and perceptions of teacher invitations or attitudes also surfaced as influencing factors, along with language or ethnic differences, socioeconomic status, and cultural distance from the mainstream.

Language and ethnic differences. Language differences between parents and schools are generally thought to be a major barrier to parental involvement in education. Zarate (2007) called language differences an "insurmountable barrier to participation in their children's academic tasks" (p. 9). Language differences can challenge parental involvement in obvious ways. As Turney and Kao (2009) found, parents who spoke languages other than English tended more likely to report inconvenient meeting times, unwelcoming school environments, and issues with meetings conducted only in English. If parents are unable to understand what is being said at the meetings, they may feel that they miss important information or feel unwelcome, which impedes future participation. Similarly, Peña (2000) found that parents felt their attendance at meetings conducted only in English was unnecessary.

Tang, Dearing, and Weiss (2012) suggested that there is a positive correlation between consistent access to bilingual teachers and parental involvement, leading to higher scores in literacy. This study found that having Spanish/English bilingual teachers between kindergarten

and third grade increased the amount of parental involvement in school, especially for students with low literacy levels in kindergarten. Students who experienced low levels of literacy in kindergarten, but consistently had bilingual teachers outperformed those who did not regularly have bilingual teachers by the third grade. Students with low levels in literacy in kindergarten, but no bilingual teacher also had increased parental involvement but at less than half the rate of those with bilingual teachers (Tang et al., 2012). This shows that common language between parents and teachers can lead to increased levels of parental involvement in education. Zarate (2007) came to a similar conclusion. Parents felt that having bilingual staff was a positive predictor of their involvement because these teachers or staff members were able to translate, rather than having to rely on children for information about and translations for the school or problems at school (Zarate, 2007).

Although many studies found language to be a barrier to education, Peña's (2000) study found that even at a bilingual school, the home language of the parent was a determinant of the activities in which they participated. At a bilingual school, there are bilingual staff members and ample access to bilingual resources, so language should not act as a barrier. Peña's (2000) findings showed that even when translations are available, language alone might not be enough to overcome barriers among different ethnic groups. For example, Marschall (2006) stated that Latinos are more likely to face other challenges associated with ethnicity, such as poverty or issues related to immigration status than white Americans, in addition to the language barriers. Wong and Hughes (2007) also found ethnicity as a factor influencing involvement, regardless of language. When comparing English-speaking Hispanic to Spanish-speaking Hispanic parents' self-rating, the English-speaking parents reported significantly higher levels of educational involvement, so clearly language does play a part. However, in the teacher questionnaire, white

parents were rated as having the highest general parental involvement, but, Hispanic parents were the second highest group and Black parents were the least involved group. In this study, the African American parents were English speakers, but less involved than the Hispanic parents who spoke either English or Spanish, showing that ethnicity influences parental involvement (Wong & Hughes, 2007).

Socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status might also hinder parental involvement in education. Bower and Griffin (2011) posited that most traditional methods of parental involvement require monetary sacrifices from the parents. For example, parents must spend money to participate in fundraisers. They must take time off of work to attend meetings or parent-teacher conferences, and lose wages if they receive hourly pay. It can also be costly to hire tutors, travel to school or sporting events, or buy educational books or resources to use at home.

Research has found some contrasting results regarding the reasons for the negative relationship between socioeconomic status and parental involvement in education. Lee and Bowen (2006) found that parents of low socioeconomic status were less optimistic about their children's education, leading to lower levels of involvement. Likewise, Turney and Kao (2009) posited that economically disadvantaged families were less likely to be involved due to all of the factors in the study, aside from access to child care.

Marschall (2006) found evidence that parental involvement yielded positive effects on student achievement regardless of economic, racial, or cultural background of the family. Despite these findings, high percentages of low-income students have a negative effect on school effort to involve parents. In contrast to the findings of Lee and Bowen (2006) and Turney and Kao (2009), Marschall's (2006) findings shift the blame of low parental involvement among

socially disadvantaged parents to the school, rather than the parents' attitudes or other barriers related to socioeconomic status.

Cultural distance from mainstream. Another potential barrier to parental involvement is the level of the difference between the parent's culture and the mainstream culture, which is generally the accepted culture of schools. Lee and Bowen (2006) stated that the difference between an individual's culture and the acceptable societal culture or the culture of institutions is a general source of inequality. This was evidenced in their finding that parents whose cultures fit with the culture of the school tended to be more involved in education (Lee & Bowen, 2006). As Gaetano (2007) discussed, the culture of the schools reflects the dominant culture, and promotes monocultural education. Turney and Kao (2009) found that the barriers to parental involvement in their study were more evident among minority immigrant groups than native-born white parents. These specific barriers included inconvenient meeting times, lack of child care, problems with safety when going to school, feeling unwelcome at the school, lack of transportation, inability to take time off work, and problems because of speaking a language other than English (Turney & Kao, 2009). Additionally, Ryan and colleagues (2010) found that teachers have negative attitudes towards parents who are culturally different from them, and believe that they are disinterested in their children's education.

Researchers have studied some of the various difficulties that can result from distance between the cultures of the parents and the culture of the school. For example, Ryan and colleagues (2010) found that cultural orientation of the parents determined the importance placed on academic success and social success. Latino parents felt that both academic and social success were equally important, and placed more importance on both types of success than white parents. White parents felt that social success was more important than high academic

achievement (Ryan et al., 2010). Although Ryan and colleagues (2010) found that Latino parents place value on both academic success and social success, Peña (2000) found that Mexican parents' expectations of the school differed from the expectations of parents born in the United States, which can cause misunderstandings. Lowenhaupt (2014) listed some of these potential sources for misunderstandings; parents may have levels of respect for education and teachers that prohibits them from interfering, or they may be hesitant to appear at the school due to fears based on hostile immigration policies.

Cultural differences can also result in parents feeling that their knowledge is insufficient to help their children, or to communicate with school personnel. Peña (2000) stated that in addition to issues like lack of childcare and transportation, parents may also choose not to participate in educational activities or events that require them to visit the school or communicate with teachers because they feel intimidated by the education jargon used in schools. Peña (2000) also stated that least educated parents might choose to participate through volunteering, because it is less intimidating. Less educated parents were also found to internalize their concerns about their children's education, rather than communicating them to the teacher. They felt that their limited knowledge prohibited them from helping their children with schoolwork (Peña, 2000). Zarate's (2007) study also found that parents who did not complete high school felt unable to help their children with homework. Similarly, Subramaniam (2011) posited that the parents' feelings of inadequacy to assist their children with homework and communicate with teachers create a "knowledge barrier" (p. 95) to parental involvement.

Gaetano (2007) warned educators to take caution in working with families with cultures that vary from the mainstream. Even when schools do acknowledge these cultural differences, and attempt to treat them positively, the attempts tend to be superficial (Gaetano, 2007). Schools

may also make the mistake of treating all families from a similar cultural group the same way, but intergroup differences or differences based on context make this practice inappropriate (Gaetano, 2007). Additionally, schools must consider that families may identify with multiple cultures equally (Ryan et al., 2010).

Faculty attitudes. Some researchers have posited that the deficit perspectives of educators toward students and their families are the sources of the problems with parental involvement in education (Gaetano, 2007; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lowenhaupt, 2014). Subramaniam (2011) concluded that even parents who spoke communicative English stated that language was a barrier to their involvement. Although they could communicate with teachers, the teachers' stereotypical reactions to the parents based on external appearances caused them to become less involved at school (Subramaniam, 2011). Peña (2000) encountered similar problems, stating that teachers had indifferent attitudes toward parents, and offered minimal opportunities to become involved. Parents' awareness of racism or unjust stereotyping from school personnel can lead to participation in their children's education at the home, rather than at the school (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Teacher's attitudes play a major role in parents' motivation to be involved in education. Many studies have included interviews or observations of school personnel, and show these negative attitudes. In Gaetano's (2007) study, a teacher commented on parents' inability to help in the classroom due to low levels of education, even though the teacher admitted that she had not yet made many efforts to involve parents. This shows that the teacher has preconceived ideas about what parents are able to do without actually seeing it in action. Her assumption that low levels of education prohibit them from helping students also reflects a traditional and restrictive ideal of parental involvement. Peña (2000) also interviewed teachers about parental

involvement in the classroom. One teacher stated that involving parents was burdensome, resulted in more work on the part of the teacher, and that parents should take responsibility to become involved on their own. During interviews with teachers, Peña (2000) encountered a tendency of teachers who do not attempt to involve parents to respond in these stereotypical ways, making parents feel patronized and devalued.

The types of involvement in education in which parents participate can affect teacher attitudes. If parents are involved in traditional ways that are visible to the school, teachers tend to think they are the parents who care the most about education, which disregards non-traditional or home-based involvement. In turn, this perception leads to teachers awarding higher grades to students whose families are involved in these ways (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Conversely, parents of emergent bilinguals are often stigmatized and treated as incapable of or disinterested in participating in education (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2011). Marschall (2006) suggested ways to improve teacher attitudes and increase parental involvement. These suggestions included staff members taking collective responsibility for the school's success, teachers using reflective dialogue with one another to improve practices, and ensuring high levels of trust between teachers and principals (Marschall, 2006).

Unlike many researchers, Subramaniam (2011) also researched facilitators of parental involvement and found that positive teacher attitudes and hope were strong facilitators. Parents had hope for better educational opportunities for their children, which encouraged them to remain involved in education. Parents also appreciated teachers' efforts to contact them, bring in interpreters during conferences, praise and assist their children, and watch over their children throughout the school day (Subramaniam, 2011).

Comfort-level at school. In addition to teacher attitudes, other factors can affect the level of comfort parents feel at their children's schools and involvement. DeLoatche, Bradley-Klug, Ogg, Kromrey, and Sundman-Wheat (2014) studied parents of students in a Head Start program, and found that the parents with more experience with Head Start were more involved. These involvement activities included home-based activities and remained constant over time. However, those parents who were new to the Head Start program began with lower levels of involvement and increased over time. This suggests that home-based involvement in education increases as parents become more comfortable with their child's educational program.

Social networks or comfort level with other parents can also be a factor influencing parental involvement. Bower and Griffin (2011) found that some parents were not able to communicate with other parents due to language barriers, and suggested that this discomfort in communication led to lower involvement. Therefore, involvement strategies that support relationship building, such as cultural awareness workshops, parent work groups, or courses in English and Spanish, may increase participation in existing activities (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Additionally, Marschall (2006) found that schools with more Latino representation on the school board had higher rates of satisfaction with the school from Latino parents, which could imply that Latino representation increases the comfort level at the school for this subpopulation.

Finally, Latino's hesitance to become involved may be the result of immigration related fears or an apprehension to disrespect the teachers. Smith, Stern, and Shatrova (2008) found that Hispanic parents were reluctant to question the authority of teachers or other faculty, or seemed uncomfortable responding when asked how they could stand up to school officials for their student's rights. The authors postulated that this could be due to the Latino sentiment that teachers and administrators are the experts in the school domain, or due to uncertain immigration

status and reluctance to upset the status quo. Subramaniam (2011) stated that isolation and fear were also cited as barriers to involvement. Parents felt alone because they had left their family, or did not have a network of other families in the community to help them. Parents were afraid of attending school events, believing that police or other officials would be there, or would stop them on their way to the school and deport them. Zarate (2007) suggested that teachers initiate positive contacts with parents more regularly to avoid such negative sentiments.

School's Efforts to Promote Parental Involvement

The efforts made by the school to include parents in students' education are vital. These efforts include providing equal access to school events, using various types of communication, and holding events or valuing activities that align with the values and needs of families. In order to achieve this, schools must create clear expectations, policies, and goals for parental involvement efforts at the district level and the building level (Zarate, 2007).

Michael, Dittus, and Epstein (2006) suggested some efforts schools could make to involve parents in education. These efforts include having parent representation on councils, including the opinions of the PTA in decisions about programming, assigning homework or activities to students that include their families, and promoting cooperative partnerships between parents, community entities, and the school (Michael et al., 2006).

Another popular effort made by schools is offering linguistic services for parents who speak languages other than English. Nino (2014) studied the effects of linguistic services based on the National Survey of Latinos: Education. This report identified four services offered by schools that included offering report cards in Spanish, providing standardized test scores in Spanish, having a school official present who speak Spanish, and having a teacher who can speak Spanish (Nino, 2014).

Although these efforts are helpful, Lowenhaupt (2014) emphasized that measuring types of access offered is not enough to understand how parents are engaged in schools. Rather, researchers must measure and analyze the actual participation to gain an understanding of which practices schools use that really encourage engagement in education. Similarly, Crozier (2001) felt that the policies regarding parental involvement in schools tended to be flawed in their exclusion of ethnic diversity. Crozier (2001) posited that schools must rid their policies of inequitable access and power before they are able to achieve participation in education among all parents. Schools' efforts to involve and value all parents can vary based on the access to events that they provide to parents, the types or media of communication with parents, and the types of events or activities they hold.

Access to events. Schools must be cognizant of the types of services that parents may need in order to be able to participate in school events. Zarate (2007) cited barriers to parental involvement such as long hours at work or multiple jobs and inability to take time off from work. Even when schools developed home-learning activities in an effort to shift away from traditional school-based involvement strategies, they experienced low involvement, especially in areas like returning forms, attending conferences, and participating in school events (Bower & Griffin, 2011). This indicates that schools still need to make efforts that provide more equitable access to pre-existing events, rather than just adding new, more modern activities on top of the existing ones.

The most common and easily avoidable mistake that limits access is not providing information to families in a comprehensible way. Smith and colleagues (2008) found that Spanish-speaking parents and children suffered confusion when the school failed to provide communications such as lunch menus, informational letters, school calendars, or newsletters in

Spanish. In this study, parents and children reported that children would be waiting for the bus on days when school was not in session, or come to school in the uniform on dress-down or theme-dress days. Another important finding was that even when written communications were in Spanish, the language was difficult to understand (Smith et al., 2008). This may have resulted because the reading level was too difficult, the language was translated inaccurately, or a different variety of the language was used for translations. Marschall (2006) conjectured that the use of traditional involvement strategies was a way for teachers and schools to deflect their responsibility for providing parents with access, such as translation or transportation services, childcare, and flexible scheduling.

Scholars seem to agree that teachers' and schools' awareness of the needs of families will increase their efforts to engage families and provide them with the necessary tools to participate in their children's education (Marschall, 2006).

Types of communication. Closely related to schools' efforts to provide parents with equitable access to educational events or activities is the idea of efforts to use types of communication to which parents respond well. This can include more frequent home-language use in a culturally relevant way, or various styles and media of communication. For example, Sánchez (2010) cited the language barrier and lack of awareness or understanding of the school's expectations as factors impeding parental involvement. Because of this, Sánchez (2010) suggested using culturally appropriate folk sayings or proverbs, known as dichos, in Spanish to communicate recommendations for literacy learning at home.

Parents seem to have many negative experiences with contact with their children's schools (Zarate, 2007; Bower & Griffin, 2011). Zarate (2007) found that parents were experiencing impersonal types of communication, and that the communication of information to

parents was infrequent or gave inadequate notice. The school used some regular communication strategies such as web postings or emails, but this was found to only significantly help English-speaking parents, and would not account for families without Internet access at home. Parents expressed their desire for more frequent and personal communication from the school (Zarate, 2007). Michael and colleagues (2006) experienced similar findings. Their study showed that the most common type of communication was unidirectional from schools to parents; however, it failed to specify the medium of communication. This suggests that school-initiated communication is important, but the most common forms may be impersonal, like letters sent home with students, which do not actively engage parents or require input from families (Michael et al., 2006). Additionally, Zarate (2007) found that most teacher interactions with parents were initiated due to a problem that the child was having at school, which sends the message to parents that contact is only necessary and welcome if it is to solve issues their child is having with school.

The research on this topic has yielded some helpful suggestions for educators to follow that might augment levels of parent involvement. For example, Lowenhaupt (2014) found a positive and effective parent engagement practice at one school, in which they had a bilingual staff member call parents personally to set up times for conferences, as well as a follow up call to remind parents of the upcoming conference. This shows the significance of personal communication through direct media, such as phone calls, face-to-face conversations, and home visits (Lowenhaupt, 2014). Marschall (2006) also found that communication to parents from a committee might be effective, especially when the committee has Latino representation. In districts with high Latino populations, having Latino representatives on school committees will promote higher school effort and awareness of the needs of this population (Marschall, 2006). It

seems that teacher- or school- initiated contact with parents is most effective in increasing parent involvement, and leads to more parent-initiated contact (Marschall, 2006; Ryan et al., 2010).

Types of events or activities. A recurring theme in the research on parental involvement is that parents tend to be less involved in traditional forms of engagement, especially parents who do not fit the mainstream norms. Lowenhaupt (2014) found that engagement levels were low in traditional parental involvement activities, even when efforts were made to provide interpretation and translation services. Even when parents attend these traditional school events, they are not active participants, but rather observers or supporters (Lowenhaupt, 2014). The type of event that does require some active participation from parents is volunteering, such as attending PTO or PTA meetings and fundraising. Latinos and immigrant families have very low levels of participation in these types of organizations, probably due to inequitable access to information, or lack of comfort in these interactive situations (Lowenhaupt, 2014; Zarate, 2007). In Bower and Griffin's (2011) study, there was little evidence showing the existence of strategies to involve parents of color or low SES, such as relationship building, advocacy, and efficacy, even though the school was following a research-based framework of parental involvement. Their efforts still included primarily traditional types of involvement, like communication between parents and schools or weekly reports.

Marschall (2006) recommends that schools implement strategies of communication or events that provide low-stress situations. This could be especially beneficial for Latino parents because of their cultural tendency to hold teachers in high regard, and feel uncomfortable or intimidated when communicating with them (Marschall, 2006). One example of a low stress situation for parents could be participation in the classroom. Parents can go to classrooms and tell stories, present mini-lessons, or simply listen to children read (Gaetano, 2007). DeLoatche

and colleagues (2014) studied the effects of an intervention in which parents taught home-based literacy lessons to their children in a Head Start program, after being trained in the program, and received weekly reminders to complete the lessons. The findings suggested that these home-based activities were highly successful in improving the children's literacy, and led to increased engagement in other home-based learning activities, aside from the intervention (DeLoatche et al., 2014). Lowenhaupt (2014) found that parents were more involved in events that targeted their specific needs, like offering adult English classes, or holding meetings to answer specific questions or concerns for parents who speak a language other than English. This parental involvement strategy would also create a low-stress environment, because parents would be surrounded by peers who face similar challenges.

Effects of Parental Involvement

Overwhelmingly, higher academic achievement has received the most attention as one of the outcomes of high levels of parental involvement. Overall, most scholars seem to agree with this point, although there has been some evidence suggesting otherwise. In addition to academic success, positive feelings toward school or teachers and acculturation into the mainstream culture have been cited as positive results of parental involvement in education.

Better academic achievement. Most research articles seemed to generalize about the positive academic outcomes of parental involvement in education. For example, Lee and Bowen (2006) found that parent involvement at the school and parent expectations were highly correlated with students' academic achievement. Similarly, Marschall (2006) found that parental involvement led to improvements in both reading and mathematics achievement. Tang and colleagues (2012) also found a positive relationship between family involvement at school and third grade literacy levels. This correlation was especially strong for students who had struggled

with literacy in their early education (Tang et al., 2012). In a study of students at a liberal arts college, Brueck, Mazza, and Tousignant (2012) found that high levels of parental involvement in high school determined increased academic mastery, increased confidence in college completion, and higher levels of academic motivation in adolescents and young adults in college.

Jeynes (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 52 previous studies to determine the overall impact of parental involvement, as well as the impacts of specific components of parental involvement on the education outcomes of urban secondary school children. Jeynes (2007) found a positive effect across populations and cultures for overall parental involvement. The effect of parental involvement programs was also positive on educational achievement, but this correlation was slightly less significant. Jeynes (2007) suggested that this is because the parental involvement in these cases was compelled, rather than voluntary. Jeynes (2007) also found that “subtle aspects” of parental involvement, like parenting style or expectations have a greater impact on educational outcomes in general, than more obvious types of parental involvement, like attending school functions. Across the 52 studies, Jeynes (2007) found that the effects of parental involvement generally held true across all races, but were slightly lessened when controlling for parents of low socioeconomic status, suggesting that either they are less involved, or that their involvement has less of an effect. Although the results of this study were somewhat befuddled by potential variables such as compelled involvement or socioeconomic status, in general, it found that parental involvement had a positive effect on academics.

Although many studies seem to show definitively that parental involvement in education predicts academic success, some researchers have concluded otherwise. For example, Domina (2005) used three models to measure the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. In the base model, attending parent-teacher conferences, attending PTA

meetings, volunteering in and out of the classroom, and checking homework all proved to have positive relationships with academic achievement, whereas homework help showed a negative relationship (Domina, 2005). The second model controlled for student race, family background, and school sector, and yielded different results, showing negative correlations between attending parent teacher conferences and academic achievement. In this model the rest of the activities show positive but much less significant relationships to academic achievement, indicating that some of the positive association between parental involvement and achievement was actually a result of student background (Domina, 2005). In the final model, the Domina (2005) allowed for the possibility of reciprocity between parental involvement and achievement, and found that parental involvement might actually have no real effect on academic achievement; rather, parents were more involved as a result of having high achieving children. It is important to note that, although the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement was unclear in this study, there was a significant relationship between parental involvement and children's behavior in school. Parents volunteering in the classroom and outside of the classroom and checking their child's homework resulted in positive effect on behavior even when controlling for race, SES, and family or school background (Domina, 2005).

Positive feelings toward school. Another potential outcome of parental involvement in education is students' positive attitudes toward school. Logically, it makes sense that if parents have more positive interactions with education, their children will feel more positively about the school as well, but it seems to be an under-researched correlation. Marschall's (2006) research showed that parental involvement in education enhances students' self-esteem, improved relationships between parents and their children, and helps parents develop positive attitudes toward schools. Dearing, Kreider, and Weiss (2008) also found a correlation between parental

involvement and positive feelings about school, but it was an indirect connection. In this study, teacher-student relationships acted as the mediator between parental involvement in education and students' positive feelings about school (Dearing et al., 2008).

Acculturation into mainstream. Lowenhaupt (2014) postulated that traditional methods of engaging parents in education promotes deficit-oriented perspectives, because it does not view parents as equal and able participants in their own children's education. It also tends to neglect the linguistic and cultural needs of immigrant families, and promote mainstream, monocultural and monolingual ideals. This can further marginalize minority groups and newcomers, and prevent acculturation, because their needs are not met (Lowenhaupt, 2014).

Lee and Bowen (2006) hypothesized that parental involvement may mediate the academic effects of poverty, parents' educational attainment, and race or ethnicity. Although the presence of parental involvement did account for 9% of the difference in academic achievement, demographic factors accounted for 24%. This indicated that parental involvement is effective for closing the gap among minorities, but it was still unable to completely equalize cultural differences. In contrast, Domina (2005) found that, for schools that did employ effective parental engagement strategies, the effects of their efforts to increase parental involvement tended to positively effect minority or low-socioeconomic students and families the most. This shows that effective parental involvement strategies may help parents and students align their expectations more closely to those of the school, facilitating acculturation. Ryan and colleagues (2010) also posited that children whose parents are involved in their education are more socially successful in school, indicating that they are most likely following the social norms of the school that are needed to succeed.

Due to the findings in past research about parent involvement in education, the current study was very important in order to improve the educational experience of students as well as their parents. The themes that emerged from previous research, including factors that influence parent involvement, the multiple definitions of parent involvement, and the different ways schools can promote involvement helped in the development of the interview's guiding questions for this study. This study seemed so important because it has the potential to yield conversations with parents about their perceptions of their own involvement and factors that contribute to it. In turn, this could lead to actions taken by the school to improve home-school relationships, which may then lead to better academic achievement and positive social/emotional health of students. For a school with a large population of typically underachieving student subpopulations, including ELLs and students with low socioeconomic status, these improvements would be a major remedy.

Methodology

The purposes of this study were to understand Spanish-speaking parents' perceptions about their involvement in their child's education at the middle school, to determine which factors Spanish-speaking parents perceive to influence their involvement in their children's education, and to identify ways in which the school's policies regarding parental involvement are related to the parents' perceptions.

Because of the strong focus on parental opinions and perceptions, this was a qualitative research study. The qualitative nature of this study allowed for more in-depth and individualized responses from parents, leading to a more complete understanding of their opinions.

Research Design

This research was strictly qualitative and took the form of individual interviews and analysis of school policies regarding parental involvement. Qualitative research is research that assumes that there are multiple versions of reality of the same situation for different people because of different social constructions. In general, the purpose of qualitative research is to understand these multiple realities from the participants' viewpoints. The methodology of qualitative research lends itself to more flexibility, and the design of the research may change or emerge throughout the study (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). This study fits this description of qualitative research because it only seeks to understand the perspectives and perceptions of a small group of people in a particular situation. This study assumes that each parent will have a slightly different perspective about the same topic.

In the interviews, participants responded to open-ended guiding questions to facilitate authentic conversations about parents' perspectives of their involvement in their child's education at the Middle School. The researcher then analyzed school policy regarding parental

involvement by comparing it to the themes that emerged from parent focus groups, which helped determine whether school policies and practices are aligned to the parents' perceptions of their involvement and needs.

Setting

The study took place at the Watson Middle School, which is in a small city in Chautauqua County, New York. The residents of the city are 67.6% White, 26% Hispanic, 5.2% Black or African American, 1.25% Multiracial, 0.6% American Indian and 0.2% Asian. Of the total population of the city, 25.6% are living in poverty (City Data, 2013). The median age of residents is 39.4 years and the median household income is \$35,681. Common industries in the Watson City, starting with the most common, include manufacturing, public administration, retail, education services, accommodation and food services, construction, and health care and social assistance (City Data, 2013).

The demographics of the Middle School are slightly different from the city. The Middle School consists of 14% of students who are considered "Limited English Proficient" as per the NYS School Report card (NYSED, 2012). (These students are referred to as ELLs throughout this research, to avoid the negative connotation of "Limited English Proficient".) The demographic population of the school is 48% Hispanic or Latino, 39% White, 11% Black or African American, 1% Indian or Alaska Native, 1% Multiracial, and less than 1% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. In the Middle School, 58% of students qualified for free lunch and 9% qualified for reduced-priced lunch based on the socioeconomic status of the family (NYSED, 2012).

Sample

The sample for this study included Spanish-dominant parents or guardians of students at the Watson Middle School. These included both males and females of varying ages. The important qualifying characteristics of the sample were that they are Spanish-speakers and have a child or children attending the target school.

It is important to note that the child who is a student at the school may not be labeled as an ELL or receiving ENL services; the criteria for including participants was simply that they themselves are dominant in Spanish, as opposed to English, even if their child is English proficient.

Participants

The participants of this study were selected from the sample pool described above. Any Spanish-dominant parent at the Middle School was considered an eligible participant, and more specific demographic information was collected at the time of the research.

The study included four Spanish-dominant parents who were all from Puerto Rico. All four of the participants were mothers of students at Watson Middle School. Participant 1 has a son who received ENL services at the Middle School. Participants 2 and 4 have sons who have never received ENL services, and Participant 3 has a son who used to receive both ENL and Special Education services, but no longer receives either. Participants 1, 2, and 4 also have children who attend other schools in the district. Participant 1 and her children moved from Puerto Rico to this school district two years ago, Participant 2 made the same move 16 years ago, Participant 3 made the move five years ago, and Participant 4 made the move 13 years ago. The children of Participants 2 and 4 have attended school in the Watson School District since

kindergarten. The children of Participants 1 and 3 attended school in Puerto Rico before moving to this district.

Data Collection and Procedure

With the help of a veteran ENL teacher at the school, parents were contacted by phone and invited to participate in the focus group. Upon invitation, parents were informed of the general purpose of the study, so they understood what types of questions would be asked before they agreed to participate. When each participant was contacted by phone, the ENL teacher made an appointment with him or her based on each parent's availability. The same guiding questions were asked in all of the sessions, but additional or follow up questions varied based on the direction of the conversations.

Interviews. The researcher's intention was to conduct the parent interviews in small focus groups. A focus group is a type of interview that takes place in small groups, with the researcher asking questions, and the participants responding and listening to the responses of their peers (Fraenkel et al., 2015). This structure was initially chosen because working in a small group of peers may make the experience seem less intimidating to the participants as opposed to one-on-one interviews with the researcher. According to Lowenhaupt (2014), an important aspect of promoting involvement from parents is providing a low-stress environment. Unfortunately, the participants were unable to schedule interviews at similar times, so the interviews were conducted individually.

Upon entering the meeting for the interview, the participants were asked to sign the consent form, shown in Appendix A. This consent form was read aloud to the participants, and they had the opportunity to ask questions if they were confused about giving consent.

Immediately after the forms were signed, they were collected by the researcher and sealed in an envelope marked with the date that the research was conducted.

Following the completion of consent form, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant. This means that there were guiding questions intended to elicit responses that would give information pertaining to the research questions and purpose.

Although there were guiding questions, the semi-structured nature of the focus group interview allowed for follow-up questions, modification of interview items, and spontaneous deviations from the scripted interview items based on the discretion of the researcher to promote the most authentic responses (Fraenkel et al., 2015). The guiding questions were adapted from a list created by the Pacer Center (2015). The adapted questionnaire used in this study is included in Appendix B. These questions were also translated to Spanish and asked orally in each participant's preferred language. The researcher is English-dominant and proficient in Spanish, and the ENL teacher, who is Spanish-English bilingual, assisted in conducting the focus group to ensure the most appropriate translations and interpretations. The focus groups took place in an ENL classroom at Watson Middle School, and lasted between 14 and 18 minutes each. Figure 1 shows the times and dates of each interview.

The participants' responses were audio recorded so that they could be reviewed at a later time. The researcher also took notes throughout the interviews to help create relevant follow-up questions.

Table 1

Interview Schedule

Participant	Date	Start Time	End Time
Participant 1	02/26/2016	3:27 pm	3:52
Participant 2	03/04/2016	1:23 pm	1:41 pm
Participant 3	03/17/2016	12:33 pm	12:47 pm
Participant 4	03/17/2016	2: 44pm	3:02 pm

School policy documents. A second form of data was gathered to answer the third research question and determine how school policy and practices align with parents' perceptions of their involvement and how these school documents implicitly and explicitly highlight parental involvement. This data was analyzed before the interviews were conducted to help frame the guiding questions. The policy documents were then compared to the data gathered from the interviews and organized thematically in relation to both the results from the interviews and findings from earlier research in the literature review. The researcher gathered school policy documents from the school website and offices. These documents included the Diagnostic Tool for School District Effectiveness (NYSED, 2015) and the School Comprehensive Education Plan (DCSD, 2015a; DCSD, 2015b) of Watson Middle School.

Data Analysis

The audio recordings of participants' responses are the data from the interviews in this study. The data was transcribed in the language in which it was audio recorded, which was a combination of English and Spanish. The Spanish transcriptions were then translated to English by the researcher with the help of the ENL teacher.

After all of the data was transcribed and translated, the researcher found common themes emerging among the participants' responses. The themes were used as headings in the data collection table, and data falling under each theme was added to the table along with the number of the participant who made the statement. Organizing the data thematically helped draw generalized conclusions about parents' overall perceptions regarding their involvement in their children's education, and made clear connections to the prior literature on the topic.

Similar to the interviews, the data from school policy documents was documented in the data collection table and organized thematically. The researcher recorded quotes and excerpts directly from school policy documents that related to parental involvement in one column and the title of the document in which the quote was found in the other. The researcher made note of how the school document statements related to the interviews. These notes described either the relation or disconnect between certain aspects of school policy and parents' perceptions of their involvement and are disseminated in the discussion section following the results of this research. This part of the data analysis also helped the researcher make actionable recommendations to improve the relationships and minimize the disconnection between school and home based on the needs and wants of the families.

Validity Consideration

As this is a qualitative study, there are not many validity concerns. One potential concern is that the parent interviews were held at the school, so the parents who chose to participate may be those who already tend to be more active in the school or have positive relationships with the school. Therefore, their responses may be different than the responses would have been from parents who are not already active in the school. Holding the interviews elsewhere could have

yielded different results, because it may have encouraged a wider variety of parents to participate.

Additionally, the researcher is a teacher at the school. This may have made some parents hesitant to be completely candid in their responses. They may have withheld or censored their opinions in a way to avoid offending a teacher at the school about which they were speaking.

Results

The results of this study include quotes from school documents related to parental involvement in education and summaries of quotes from interviews with four parents. The summaries of the parents' interviews are not all direct quotes, and in some cases have been translated from Spanish to English for the purpose of clearer presentation and synthesis of the results. The researcher chose three different school documents that were most closely aligned with parental involvement for the purpose of this study. These three documents include the Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness: School Final Report (DTSDE) from NYSED (2015), the School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) Overview (Dunkirk City School District, 2015a) which outlines the areas of need within the school and plans to improve them, and finally, the School Comprehensive Education Plan (SCEP) Tenet 6 document (DCSD, 2015b), which gives a more detailed outline of the needs and plans for improvement specifically in Tenet 6, or Family and Community Engagement. The quotes and summaries from all three school documents and all four parent interviews have been organized thematically into five tables based on which influencing factor of parental involvement with which they coincide, including Language Differences (Table 2), Access to Events (Table 3), Mode and Frequency of Communication (Table 4), Parental Roles and Abilities (Table 5), and School Environment (Table 6). These five influencing factors are also directly aligned with themes that emerged earlier in the literature review.

Language Differences

One major barrier to parental involvement and participation at their children's school is a language difference between the parent and the school. Although there are some faculty

members who are able to communicate in Spanish at Watson Middle School, the dominant language of the school is English.

As Table 2 shows, during the parents interviews, Participants 1 and 4 both stated that the language difference has not created issues for them in the past, and that the school is able to communicate in either language when necessary. Participant 1 also noted that the written communications sent home by the school are in both English and Spanish. On the contrary, SCEP Tenet 6 stated that not all written communication is translated into the families' home languages at the school (DCSD, 2015b). One potential reason for this discrepancy is that Participant 1 has only had a child in Watson Middle School for this current school year, and the needs statement in SCEP Tenet 6 was written based on an evaluation from the previous school year. Additionally, the SCEP Tenet 6 could be referring to communications from individually teachers that are not sent home in both languages, whereas Participant 1 may be referring primarily to communication from the school or district. According to DTSDE, the school and district do conduct consistent practices in sending written communication home in the home languages, whereas a breakdown in consistent multilingual correspondence tends to occur within grade-level teams or among specific teachers (NYSED, 2015). The DTSDE also notes this teacher-level breakdown of consistent translations on the school's website, stating that the teachers' personal classroom pages do not always provide the option of translation (NYSED, 2015).

Based on the responses of Participants 2 and 3 in Table 1, oral communication in Spanish seems to be more of an issue than written correspondence in this school. Although Participant 2 is able to communicate fluently in English, she has heard complaints from other parents indicating that they would like there to be someone at the school who can answer the phone in

their home language. Participant 3 responded similarly. She felt that parents do try to communicate in English when they call or arrive at the school's main office, but that there should be someone in the office available at all times to speak in both languages, in case the other faculty members are having a hard time understanding. Participant 3 also added that it is important to have a bilingual staff member available at each school to respond and interpret in the event of an emergency. Another example of dissatisfaction with oral communication in the home language emerged in Participant 2's statement that providing adequate interpreters at Parent/Teacher Conferences has been an issue at this school in the past. Participant 2 was the only parent to mention this concern in the interviews and she stated that this happened in the past, so again this may be an area in which the school has been improving.

Table 2

Language Differences

Document or Participant	Summary of Statements
SCEP Overview	"The school will implement a "Hispanic Outreach Coordinator focused on parental engagement"
SCEP Tenet 6	"All correspondence is not translated into family's native language. As a result, reciprocal communication between the school and some parents is limited."
DTSDE	"The school and district send communications home in each family's native language; however, the communication sent home by some teachers and grade-level teams is not always translated into the primary language of the family." "In addition, although some teachers have links to their own classroom website on the school's website, there is not an option to have these pages translated to each family's native language, which limits reciprocal communication between the school and some parents."
Participant 1	There is usually someone I can talk to in Spanish at the school, so that has not been a problem.

Letters and things are always sent home in both languages.

Participant 2 For me the communication is not a problem because I speak English fine, but other parents have told me they wished that more information would be sent home in Spanish and that there would be someone that could answer the phone and talk with them in Spanish.

There also used to be more problems getting translators for Parent/Teacher conferences.

Participant 3 Well I would say you should have someone, well they have people who speak Spanish, but you know if there was an emergency or something like that it is hard for them. It would be better for them to have someone in all the schools with good English and good Spanish.

And to have someone in the main office. I know they try to understand, I heard a lady that tried to talk in English but maybe it was the accent or maybe she don't know how to say it but they don't always understand and they don't know Spanish.

Participant 4 The school can communicate in both languages if I need it.

Access to Events

In this study, the researcher uses the phrase “access to events” to describe how easily a parent or family member can participate in school events or activities, in particular, those located at the school or other places outside the home. For example, a parent’s limited access to transportation may inhibit his or her access to school-based events. His or her work schedule may also prove to be a barrier, as well as limited understanding of the expectations in regards to school events. Table 3 describes parents’ concerns in regards to their access to school-based events.

According to the DTSDE (NYSED, 2015), parental attendance at school-based activities sponsored or promoted by the PTO does not seem to be increasing. One reason that parental attendance at school-based events is low may be because of inconvenient times for families.

Participant 1 stated that she is generally able to attend school activities and meetings because she is a stay-at-home mom, but because a majority of the events take place in the afternoon, her husband often misses them due to his work schedule. The rest of the participants did not acknowledge much difficulty attending school events, meetings, or activities. Table 3 shows that both Participants 2 and 3 emphasized how flexible the school is when scheduling meetings, if they are not available on the times or days for which they were originally planned. Although PTO attendance remains low, Participants 1, 2, and 3 all mentioned that they usually attend Parent/Teacher Conferences, and Participant 4 also mentioned that before she worked, she was able to volunteer during school hours as a chaperone on field trips and school picnics.

Unfortunately, no part of the SCEP Overview mentions any plans to improve consistency in providing oral translations at school events (DCSD, 2015a). While oral translation is also a major part of the theme of language barriers, it could also be a factor in providing parents access to school events. As Turney and Kao (2009) found, parents felt their attendance at events was useless when they could not understand what was happening. Lack of oral translations during phone calls, announcements, and orientations may also diminish parental access to future events because they may miss out on important information.

Table 3

Access to Events

Document or Participant	Summary of Statements
SCEP Overview	*Does not mention improvement of spoken translation at school events.
DTSDE	“While there is a school goal to foster greater parental engagement, the Parent Teacher Organization president was not able confirm that attendance at events is increasing.”

Participant 1	I do not work anymore so I can usually make it to meetings or conferences, but everything is in the afternoon so that sometimes interferes with my husband's job
Participant 2	The school calls home if they need me. They ask me to come to conferences. It works well for my family. They're flexible about the times of meetings. They'll also hold my kids after school if I need them to.
Participant 3	To tell you the truth, I don't really like to go to events like sports or anything at the school. I go to conferences. There's something that I like. If you cannot make it, they always find a way for you.
Participant 4	Before I started working, I used to help at the elementary school on the almost last day of school when they have the picnics and activities. And sometimes I go to the field trips. I go to conferences once in a while but now I am here working so I don't always go.

Mode and Frequency of Communication

Although the researcher anticipated that the mode and frequency of communication would prove to be a major problem in the Watson Middle School, the four participants did not report many issues in this area. All four participants stated that the school uses multiple forms of communication, including letters, phone calls, and face-to-face conversations with the parents. Table 4 shows that all parents interviewed said that the school has contacted them to report positive news or problems that their child is having at the school. More specifically, Participant 1 stated that she has received phone calls from the nurse and has communicated with teachers about her son's grades. Participant 4 said that she likes the way the teachers work with her children and that they will respond to her phone calls when she wants to check in on her children's progress and performance. Participant 2 mentioned the indirect communication that takes place on the school websites in which teachers can post students' homework or extra practice. Participant 3 also agreed that teachers try to answer any questions that she has.

The DTSDE supports the statements of the parents by mentioning the homework hotline that is updated daily and by acknowledging that some individual teachers or grade-level teams regularly send home newsletters about curriculum (NYSESED, 2015). In contrast to the parents’ exclusively positive comments, the DTSDE found school-wide communication practices to be somewhat inconsistent, and reported that there was a lack of regular communication about students’ learning and academic performance (NYSESED, 2015). In accordance with this finding, the SCEP Overview shows that the school plans to create an “engagement plan” which may create more consistent partnerships with families and the community; however, it does not outline any details about what this plan would include (DCSD, 2015a). Regardless of these shortcomings, parents have reported overall satisfaction with the various modes of communication used by the school and the frequency of communication.

Table 4

Mode and Frequency of Communication

Document or Participant	Summary of Statements
SCEP Overview	Current Year’s Plan: “the creation of an informed “engagement plan” to more effectively partner with parents and community members.”
DTSDE	<p>“The school sends home mid-quarter and end-of-quarter grade reports to all families but does not send home information about students’ learning at other times. The school leader indicated that the school has a homework hotline, which enables families to obtain information about homework their child has to complete, but there is no parent portal from which to regularly retrieve their child’s grades or performance data.”</p> <p>“The school leader and staff indicated that some teachers voluntarily send home newsletters to families, but this is not a school-wide expectation and while the newsletters contain information about curricula content, they do not contain details of student learning. As a result, the communication between the school and families is not uniform and is inconsistently provided across the school.”</p>

- Participant 1 Usually they send letters home, but they have communicated in different forms.
- They contact me for different reasons, good and bad. Things like grades or a call from the nurse.
- Participant 2 They contact me with phone calls or in person when I am at the school, about anything positive or negative.
- They have lots of websites the kids can use at home. The high school also has an online program that the kids use at school sometimes and then they can log in and finish at home.
- Participant 3 Every time I go you know if I have a question they try to answer.
- They call me and they send some letters too. It is always in both languages.
- Participant 4 If he has any problems they always call me and say, “hey your son needs to improve in this or that.”
- They do phone calls or they talk to me while I’m here. I also have two other child and most of the time they call or send letters.
- I like the way the teachers work with my kids, even in the fifth grade and high school. I don’t get a chance to see the teachers there as much but they always will have something to say if I grab the phone and ask how is my daughter doing or something. They will say she is doing good or she needs help with something.

Parental Roles and Abilities

The parents’ perceptions of their roles in education and their abilities to participate in their children’s learning can also contribute to different levels of involvement. In the SCEP Overview, both teacher mindsets and a lack of parental support, both academically and behaviorally are attributed as being barriers to reaching the school’s performance goals (DCSD, 2015a). The SCEP Tenet 6 document details plans to overcome these barriers by providing professional development for teachers in parental involvement and hosting workshops for parents to teach them how to participate in their children’s education (DCSD, 2015b). Although

lack of support from parents and negative attitudes from staff are concerns of the district, the participants in this study seemed very supportive of the school and their child's education.

All four participants placed great importance on their role as a parent to teach their child positive behaviors. Participant 1 stated that she and her husband have many conversations with their children about behaviors in and out of school. Participant 2 agreed that parents are the first teachers of their children, and stated that she teaches her children the "golden rule" and prays with them daily. She also mentioned that she always shows them a positive attitude towards education and feels that the parents and teachers must work together in partnership to best support their children. Participant 3 also agreed that it is the parents' job to make sure their children are attending school and following the rules there. Participant 4 responded somewhat differently, because her child acts out at home, so she is still working hard to try to control his behavior at home, and did not mention that she discusses his behavior at school with him often. She did say that she tries to make sure he has completed the work he needs to do and attempts to keep him in the school mentality.

Table 5 also shows that all four parents who were interviewed in this study felt that homework help is part of the parental role in education. For example, Participant 1 stated that she reads often with her children and tries to help with homework when she can. Participant 2 also stated that she helps with homework when her children need it. Although Participant 3 mentioned homework, she did not explicitly state that she helps her child with his homework. She perceived her role as confirming that he has completed his work, but not necessarily assisting him with it. Parent 4 explained that she checks her children's homework and communicates with the teachers when her child does not understand the work.

All four participants also cited a similar area of dissatisfaction in their own involvement. Table 5 shows that these parents tend to have difficulty helping their children with their homework. Although some of the difficulty is attributed to language differences, other parents found that helping with the new mathematics curriculum in the school was more problematic. Participant 1 primarily found that the language difference prohibited her ability to help her son with his homework, especially with the higher reading levels and longer novels that he has started reading in school since entering the sixth grade. She also feels that she would be able to carry out her parental role of helping with homework if she were able to understand the directions better or explain the readings to her son. Similarly, Participant 3 stated that she is sometimes unable to explain the homework to her child when he does not understand it. Her solution is to contact the teachers and ask them to send home information explaining to her how to complete the work properly, so that she is better able to help her child. Participants 2 and 4 both mentioned that they have a hard time helping with math homework because the way their children are learning to do math is different now than it was when they themselves were in school. Finally, Participant 4 had a much different problem when helping her child in the academic realm. Her challenge was that she did not agree with the way he was being taught and felt that he should not be placed in a Special Education program. Now her student is out of the Special Education program, but she found it to be a big challenge to facilitate his placement into an educational track that she felt was more appropriate for him.

One major discrepancy seems to be the definition of what type of parental engagement is most important. For example, in Table 5 the SCEP states that the PTO would be arranging training for parents to learn how to interpret student data, and Table 4 shows the emphasis placed on parental access to data and grades. In contrast, none of the participants mentioned having

great interest in the data and grades of their children. Instead, their perceptions of their roles in education seemed more holistic in nature and placed more importance on promoting academic responsibility, proper behavior, and homework help.

Table 5

Parental Roles and Abilities

Document or Participant	Summary of Statements
SCEP Overview	“Teacher mindset/contractual constraints, lack of parental support for student achievement and behavioral expectations ... are perceived barriers in reaching the goals.”
SCEP Tenet 6	<p>“There is no formal training or plans to train staff or parents on ways to enable families to partner with the school to support their child’s learning”</p> <p>“The School leader will research and recruit a parental engagement specialist to provide staff with professional development.”</p> <p>“During one of the monthly PTO meetings, the district will provide a workshop format for parents on parental engagement strategies.”</p> <p>“The school leader will provide a workshop for parents in conjunction with a PTO meeting focused on reading student data and parental support of student learning.”</p>
Participant 1	<p>It is difficult to help with homework in his English class this year. Especially with the novels they read. I just don’t know how to explain. Even when I read it I can sometimes understand but I can’t explain what it means to my son.</p> <p>I would like to help with homework more if I could understand the directions and how to explain it better.</p> <p>We talk a lot with our kids about their behaviors and what we expect from them. We also read together. Both of my kids like to read, in either English or Spanish.</p> <p>In the elementary school with my daughter, and in the past with my son I helped in the classroom. Like volunteering to help the teachers.</p>

- Participant 2 The role of the parents is huge. We are the first teachers of our children. We also need to have a partnership or team relationship with their teachers at school.
- I try to keep a positive attitude about school and I teach my kids the golden rule. We pray together in the morning and I help with homework if they need it.
- The hardest thing to help with is the math homework. It is totally different from the way I learned so sometimes I don't know how they're supposed to do it.
- Participant 3 Make sure they go to school and study. I ask him how he's doing, how was school today, are you ready for tomorrow with homework, make sure he follows the rules at school.
- Well they used to have him in Special Ed, and I don't know why they had they team he was in. If you don't know how to deal with kids then don't expect them to do good. That was a problem before, but now I got him out of there.
- Participant 4 I think we are involved most of the time with our kids. What I do to help my kids is if they don't understand any homework I always try to communicate with the teacher and let them know he don't understand that homework and if there is a way they can send me a letter or paper explaining how you do it.
- This math is so much different from what I know.
- I try to grab his book bag, check his homework; I try to remind him what to do and to keep his mind on that. Behaviors, the one in this school is pretty bad at home with his brother and sister, so I still have to work on that.
-

School Environment

Table 6 presents other miscellaneous comments from the participants regarding their sentiments about the school environment. The DTSDE and SCEP documents did not have any explicit information about the school environment. Unlike the previous factors that parents perceived to influence their involvement, this one yielded different results from each participant.

Participant 1 noted that she is very satisfied with the security of the school. She stated that her children's school in Puerto Rico was not very secure and that unauthorized people were

able to get into the building easily, whereas Watson Middle School and other schools in the district remain locked, and people must be let in after approval at the main office. Participant 2 mentioned that her son feels very comfortable at the school and that she also feels welcomed by the staff. She also feels that the school helps students and families in many aspects of their lives even outside of education, such as providing clothing.

Unlike Participants 1 and 2, Participants 3 and 4 shared slightly more negative opinions about the school, which may act as barriers for their desire to become involved. Participant 3 did mention that she appreciates that the school promotes adherence to their rules and guidelines; however, she does not agree with their policies guiding eligibility to participate in sports or extracurricular activities. She feels that the school is too harsh when it comes to grades, and that students should not have to miss out on extracurricular activities just because their grades fall behind. In her opinion, children need multiple chances to improve, and some are just not successful with certain topics in school or academics in general. Participant 4 expressed her concern about her children's home language use. She feels that her son is losing his Spanish language skills because he does not speak Spanish in school and has begun to distance himself from his home language. This disconnect between the family's home language and the lack of home language development at the school could cause her to feel like her culture is less welcome or devalued there, and it may discourage her from becoming involved or sharing her opinions with the school.

Table 6

School Environment

Participant	Summary of Statements
Participant 1	I like that the school is very secure. There is always someone watching the door and everyone has to sign in. In Puerto Rico it was totally different. Anyone could just go in the school and walk around.
Participant 2	My son liked the comfortable environment at the Middle School. I really like that the school tries their best to help the kids and families in any area, like academics but even things like giving them clothing if they need it. I feel welcome at the school. The staff is smiling and welcomes you when you walk in.
Participant 3	I don't like everything about the school but there are some things I like. Like they like for the kids to follow the rules. Sometimes I don't like the system they have. Like if a student does not have the grades, they cannot participate and I think that's not right. Some students they are just not good with grades and I think they could just give them a chance. Maybe they will improve or do better at something different.
Participant 4	My kids don't speak much Spanish together and I know they don't speak Spanish at school. But at home they have to speak Spanish because my mother doesn't speak English. But when we are at the school my son don't like to speak with me in Spanish. I try to keep both languages for them.

Discussion

The results in this study were unexpected in many ways. The researcher anticipated that parents would perceive their involvement to primarily be hindered by the practices of Watson Middle School, given the school's low rating in Tenet 6 based on the DTSDE (NYSED, 2015). On the contrary, the participants felt that their involvement was positively influenced by the school in most cases and had very few complaints. The few negative remarks that they did have will play a vital role in improving the communication and relationships between parents and the school in this district, so as to increase the levels of parental involvement in education.

In this study, parents' responses to the interview questions answered the first two research questions. The first research question asked, what are Spanish-speaking parents' perceptions about their involvement in their child's education at the middle school? In general, parents felt that they were very involved in the education of their children by attending conferences, contacting teachers when necessary, helping with homework when possible, and ensuring that students were well-behaved and prepared for school. Due to these findings, it seems that parents combine home-based and school-based practices of participation. In accordance with Gaetano's (2007) definition, these parents felt that their participation in areas such as discussing the child's day and providing time and space for homework are home-based practices which involve them in their children's education. Domina (2005) listed four school-based practices, including participating in PTA meetings, conferences, classroom volunteering, and out-of-classroom volunteering, along with two home-based practices, including homework help and checking homework. The participants in this study have all been involved in these same ways, except attending PTA meetings. Some parents even expressed that they are unable to participate in school-based volunteering as much in the middle school as they could in the

elementary schools in the district. Additionally, parents' perceptions of their role in education seem to play a part in their impressions of their own involvement, and could explain why it differs from the state review in the DTSDE rubric (NYSED, 2015). For example, the DTSDE review stated that the school should be providing parents with data about student achievement more often, but none of the participants mentioned a desire to review data, or issues communicating with teachers about grades. The participants in the study seemed more concerned with their children's behavior at school and responsibility for finishing work. This contradicts the findings of Ryan and colleagues (2010), who found that Latino parents tended to place equal importance on social success and academic success, whereas white parents placed more importance on social success.

Parents also described certain factors that influenced their participation at the school, in regards to the second research question: What factors do Spanish-speaking parents perceive to influence their involvement in their child's education at the middle school? Some positive factors which encouraged these parents to stay involved at the school included the safe and welcoming environment, the school's flexibility when scheduling meetings, and the open communication between themselves and school personnel which could take place in Spanish upon their request. Contrary to prior findings, this study did not yield any results indicating that faculty attitudes or negative school environment were present as barriers to parental involvement. On the contrary, all participants mentioned that they felt welcome in the school. This finding is extremely positive because in past studies, researchers such as Bower and Griffin (2011), Marschall (2006), and Subramaniam (2011) found that parental discomfort at the school led to lower levels of involvement. Additionally, negative faculty attitudes toward Latino parents was cited as a major barrier to parental participation in education in studies conducted by

Subramaniam (2011), Penya (2000), and Lee and Bowen (2006). Therefore, the participants' positive perceptions of faculty attitudes and the school environment will continue to play a role in fostering positive communication and involvement.

Parents also cited certain factors that may hinder their ability or desire to participate in their children's education at this school. These factors include inability to understand and explain some homework assignments, lack of home language development at the school, lack of bilingual office staff, and times of events or activities that interfere with work schedules. Similarly, Penya (2000), Subramaniam (2011), and Zarate (2007) all found that parents with lower levels of educational attainment felt that their knowledge was inadequate to help their children academically. Zarate (2007) also acknowledged the difficulty some parents have attending events at schools because of interfering work schedules. Although the participants in this study felt that the school was flexible when scheduling one-on-one meetings, Participant 1 stated that her husband could not attend some events during the afternoon when he is working. Another finding from this study that reflected the past literature on the topic was the desire for bilingual office staff. According to Lowenhaupt (2014) found that having a bilingual secretarial staff member call families for notifications and reminders yielded positive relationships and more personal communication.

The fact that Participant 1 has not had issues with communication in her home language, and that she has received all written correspondence from the school in both languages, despite the SCEP Tenet 6 statement that communication is not always translated, could be a positive indication that the school has been making improvements in its consistency in bilingual communication with families (Table 2). Participant 1 was the only participant who has only had a child in Watson Middle School for less than one year so it is likely that her satisfaction could

be attributed to the school's most recent attempts at improving their communication practices. She is also the parent who is most Spanish dominant, whereas the other participants have a stronger ability to communicate with school personnel in English. It is very important that the school continues to foster consistent bilingual communication with parents through various media.

In summary, parents' perceive their participation in education to be vital to their children's success. They tend to perceive language differences, ability to help children with academics, and lack of variety in times of events as barriers to their participation. In general, parents perceive the school environment and communication with school personnel as factors that positively influence their involvement. In response to the third research question in this study, the researcher attempted to connect school policy documents to the themes from the interviews. As stated before, due to the many negative observations and statements about school practices from the documents, the researcher expected that the parent interviews would yield more negative results. Rather, the results showed that the documents only aligned with parents' perceptions in a few cases, and the parents' perceptions of their involvement and factors that influence it seemed overall more positive than the school documents.

Limitations

This study was conducted for the purpose of analyzing the parental perceptions of their involvement in one school building, so as to create specific advice and action plans for improving the parental involvement in education in the future. This research study was conducted as a form of action research, which is defined as, "a type of research focused on a specific local problem and resulting in an action plan to address the problem" (Fraenkel et al., 2015, p. G-1). For this reason, the scope of this study is very limited.

One limitation in this study is the small sample size. This study included only four participants who are parents of students in one school district. Parents from other schools or different parents within the same district may have very different perceptions of their participation and the factors that influence it.

Another limitation in this study is the structure of data collection. As mentioned previously, the researcher had hoped to conduct the interviews in focus groups to promote more authentic conversations and open feedback from the participants, but this was not possible. The individual interviews may have caused some participants to feel intimidated or like they could not share all of their true thoughts with the researcher. This could be especially true regarding factors that impede parental involvement.

Suggestions for Future Research

In addition to the researchers implications for teaching and school practices noted earlier, this study presents various opportunities for future research on the same topic. First of all, the small sample size was mentioned as a limitation of this study, so future researchers could further investigate the issue of a lack of parental involvement at Watson Middle School by replicating the current study using more participants. This study could also be replicated in the future, with a minor change, by conducting the interviews in focus groups, which was the researcher's initial intent.

Future research could also be conducted to compare the measures that are being taken to promote parental involvement in education among the other schools within Watson School District with those at Watson Middle School. In that case the researcher may be able to determine which practices differ among the schools and how they impact parental involvement and perceptions.

Finally, the researcher suggests that a related research study could be conducted involving a similar methodology and interview questions in future years to determine what interventions Watson Middle School has made to improve parental involvement in education and communication with the school, and whether parents feel the interventions are working effectively.

Implications for teaching

Following are specific implications and suggestions for the school and teachers to implement in order to foster positive parental participation in education.

Based on the data gathered in Table 2 and Table 5, parents feel that they are unable to help their children with some homework when they do not understand the instructions, and some teacher pages on the school website do not offer translations. Due to this finding, the researcher suggests that the school provides training to parents and teacher about various translation technologies, such as Google Translate or Google Chrome Extensions that are free and could make the website or written instructions more comprehensible for parents. Teachers could also begin using these applications in their classrooms to make the content comprehensible for students, and teach them how to use technology independently to foster their own learning outside of school. Peña (2000) found that a parents' cultural difference from the mainstream can create a barrier to their participation and cause some parents to feel that their knowledge is inadequate to help their children with homework. Zarate (2007) called this the "knowledge barrier" and posited that differences in language may be an "insurmountable" challenge.

Participants 1 and 4 also both discussed that they are involved in volunteering at the elementary schools but not at Watson Middle School. In Table 5, Participant 1 mentioned that she goes into her daughter's classroom and helps the teacher, and that she used to do the same

with her son when he was in the elementary school. Participant 4 stated that she used to volunteer at the end of the year school picnics or field trips at her children's elementary school before she began working. Although these parents have volunteered in the past at other schools, and seem very willing to remain involved at their children's schools, they did not mention that they have had the opportunity to volunteer at Watson Middle School or go into their children's classrooms to help. Moll and colleagues (2001) encouraged teachers to employ practices that value and incorporate "funds of knowledge" or the knowledge and skills of the household in order to better understand and facilitate students' learning. In accordance with the research of Moll et al. (2001), the researcher suggests that Watson Middle School should try to include parent volunteers within the classrooms on a more regular basis and provide teachers and parents with training on this type of partnership.

The previous suggestion may also help remedy the issue of parental inability to attend afternoon events due to time conflicts. Table 3 shows Participant 1's remark that most of the school's events or conferences tend to be in afternoon, which interferes with her husband's job. Watson Middle School should begin holding more morning and evening sessions for conferences or parent trainings to allow parents who work during the afternoon more opportunities to participate. Although Participants 2 and 4 both stated that the school is flexible with scheduling when a predetermined time slot does not work (Table 3), parents who are Spanish-dominant and not fluent in English may be hesitant to initiate contact with the school to reschedule a meeting or conference. As stated before, the school can also start to vary the times of events and start inviting parents to volunteer within the classroom during the school day, which would allow parents who work during the afternoon or evening more opportunities to become involved in their children's education as well.

Due to the results of this study, the researcher also recommends that Watson Middle School should begin to employ at least one Spanish/English bilingual staff member, or community volunteer, to work in the Main Office every day. This employee or volunteer would be responsible for communicating with parents who stop in or call the office throughout the day, and could also be available to interpret for students or teachers in emergency situations. In Table 2, Participants 2 and 3 both stated that the school is in need of a bilingual staff member who is readily available during emergencies or in the office. According to Turney and Kao (2007) and Pena (2000), parents who do not understand the content of meetings felt that there was no point in them attending said meetings. Parents probably feel similarly discouraged from contacting the office if they are unable to communicate with the staff members there. Additionally, Tang, Dearing, and Weiss (2012) found that parents whose children had bilingual teachers tended to have higher levels of involvement in education, so increasing the amount of bilingual staff at Watson Middle School may also help them reach their goal of increasing parental participation.

The final recommendation of the researcher is to create and foster a stronger multicultural school environment. Table 6 showed some disagreement among the four participants. Participants 1 and 2 both stated that they feel very welcome and did not mention any complaints about the school environment. Participant 1 even compared the security of the school to her children's former school in Puerto Rico, showing preference for Watson Middle School. Participant 2 cited the comfortable environment as something both she and her son love about the school. On the other hand, Participant 3 did not mention the school environment directly, but stated extreme dissatisfaction with the way her son's former teacher worked with him, and with his previous placement in a Special Education class in general. Participant 4 indicated that she is

concerned about the lack of Spanish language development in the school, and that her son is hesitant to use Spanish with her outside of the home. If Watson Middle School attempts to place more prestige on the Spanish language and biculturalism, parents may feel more satisfied with the overall environment of the school, and have a stronger desire to be involved in that setting. As Gutierrez and colleagues (2009) found, parents may be hesitant to become involved in their child's school if there is a mismatch or incongruity between the culture of the home and the culture of the school, so creating a school environment that is more closely aligned with that of the parents may increase their engagement in the school.

The school documents were analyzed and organized thematically in correspondence to the parent interview statements to answer the third research question. To the surprise of the researcher, the school documents seemed to outline more negative influencing factors than the responses of the parents. Although no parents stated that written correspondence was only in English, Table 2 shows that the SCEP Tenet 6 stated that correspondence sent home is not always translated into the home language of the families, and the DTSDE stated that teacher web pages do not generally have the option to be translated to Spanish (DCSD, 2015b; NYSED, 2015). In Table 4, the DTSDE also voiced dissatisfaction with the availability of student data do parents, however, none of the participants felt that this was an issue (NYSED, 2015). Finally, Table 5 shows the many recommendations made by the SCEP Tenet 6 detailing various trainings and workshops that the school intends to hold for parents and teachers to improve home-school relationships throughout the 2015-2016 school year (DCSD, 2015b)

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Forms

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Improving Home-School Relations For Spanish-Speaking Parents

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Jane Robertson from the TESOL department at Fredonia State University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This project examines the way that parents feel about their participation in their child's education. It seeks to determine ways to promote positive parental involvement with the school, in particular that of Spanish-dominant parents.

PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

Participate in a tape-recorded focus group interview, anticipated to last one-half hour to one hour long, in which the researcher may invite you to talk about your current perceptions of your involvement at the school, recall past events, or discuss other related issues of concern to you. To allow for further analysis, the researcher will transcribe the interview after it has taken place.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

This study will give you the opportunity to share your personal opinions and experiences. It could also lead to improved relationships between the school and the parents, in particular those who speak Spanish as a home language.

POTENTIAL RISKS

This research study is not intended to pose risks to the participants in any way. However, you will be asked to share personal opinions and discuss your interactions with the school, which may cause emotional discomfort.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your participation in this focus group interview will not be made known to anyone outside of the research study. When the interview is transcribed, the researcher will use a pseudonym for all participants. The recording and transcription will be destroyed upon completion of the class for which the research is being conducted.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the research at anytime without any penalty. If you choose to withdraw, your information will not be used in the study at all.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact the researcher:

Jane Robertson



robe5977@fredonia.edu

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

CONSENTAMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN UNA INVESTIGACIÓN*La Mejora de las Relaciones Entre Hogar y Escuela para los Padres que Hablan Español*

Usted está pedido para participar en un estudio de investigación conducido por Jane Robertson del departamento de TESOL de Fredonia State University. Su participación en este estudio es totalmente voluntaria. A favor de leer la información abajo y haga preguntas sobre cualquier usted no entiende, antes que decides si desee participar o no.

PROPUESTO DE ESTE ESTUDIO

Este proyecto examina como sienten los padres sobre su participación en la educación de su hijo/a. Se trata de determinar maneras para promover la participación positiva de los padres con la escuela, en particular la de los padres español-dominante.

PROCEDIMIENTOS

Si usted es voluntario para participar en este estudio, se le pedirá que haga lo siguiente:

Participar en una entrevista grabada en un grupo de enfoque, que se anticipa endurar por mitad de hora a una hora, en que la investigadora le puede pedir para hablar sobre sus percepciones actuales de su participación en la escuela, para recordar eventos del pasado, o para discutir otros cuestiones relacionadas que le preocupen. Para permitir análisis más extenso, la investigadora transcribirá la entrevista después de habrá ocurrido.

BENEFICIOS POTENCIALES

Este estudio le dará la oportunidad para compartir sus opiniones y experiencias personales. También podría conducir a relaciones mejoras entre la escuela y los padres, en particular los que hablan español como su idioma nativo.

RIESGOS POTENCIALES

Este estudio de investigación no tiene la intención para plantear riesgos a los participantes en cualquiera manera. Sin embargo, se será pedido para compartir opiniones personales y discutir sus interacciones con la escuela, que puede causar la incomodidad emocional.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD

Su participación en este grupo de enfoque no se dará a conocer a cualquier persona fuera de la investigación. Cuando la entrevista esta transcrito, la investigadora usara un seudónimo para todos los participantes. La grabación y transcripción será destruido tras la terminación de la clase para que se lleva a cabo la investigación.

PARTICIPACIÓN Y RETIRADA

Su participación en este investigación es voluntaria. Usted puede optar por retirar de la investigación a cualquier tiempo sin pena. Si opte por retirar, su información no será usado en la investigación en absoluto.

IDENTIFICACIÓN DE INVESTIGADORES

Si tiene algunas preguntas o cuestiones sobre este investigación, por favor póngase en contacto con la investigadora:

Jane Robertson


robe5977@fredonia.edu

Entiendo los procedimientos descritos arriba. Mis preguntas han sido contestadas satisfactoriamente, y estoy de acuerdo en participar en este estudio. Se me ha dado una copia de este formulario.

Nombre escrito del participante

Firma del participante

Fecha

*Appendix B***Interview Protocol Guiding Questions**

Interview Protocol adapted from Pacer Center (2015)

Parent Focus Group Questions on Parent Involvement and Engagement with the School

What grade is your child in?

How long has your child been in school here?

1. What does your child like about school? What do you like about your child's school?

2. Do you feel welcome in your child's school?

- If yes, what does school staff do that shows you that you are welcome?
- If no, what could the school do differently that would make you feel welcome?

3. In what ways does the school communicate with you? Newsletters, phone calls, flyers or letters sent home...?

4. Are you satisfied with how often and in what way school staff communicates with you about your child? About school activities? Give examples)

- If yes, what are they doing that is helpful?
- If no, what would you like them to do differently?

5. What do you consider to be the parent or family's role in a child's education?

(Schools talk about the importance of "Parent Involvement" or "Parent Engagement." Schools use these terms to mean several different things. Some of the main ways parents are "involved"—or participate are by:

- Volunteering in the classroom or at school events or activities;
- Attending school events such as Orientation, Open House, Family Nights and meetings about your child such as parent-teacher conferences;
- Working with your child at home on homework, reading to your child, preparing them for school;
- Being a part of a group that advises the school or helps make decisions such as the school site council.

.6. What do you do to prepare your child to do well in school? (at home or school)

7. How does the school ask you to be involved?

8. How does this work for your family? (the time and location, etc)

9. What kind of school activities do you like to attend?

10. What would you like to do to help your child in their schooling but don't know how to do?

11. What could the school do to help you be more involved?

12. What kind of things has the school done that helped you to help your child more at home? (sent home-based activities for extra practice, communicates with you about grades, etc.)

13. Is there anything else you would like us to know about what is important to you as a family about your child's education?

Additional questions:

Interview Protocol adapted from Pacer Center (2015)

Protocolo entrevista adaptado de Pacer Center (2015)

Padres del Grupo de Enfoque Preguntas sobre la participación de los padres y el compromiso con la escuela

¿En qué grado es su hijo?

¿Por cuantos años ha asistido esta escuela?

1. ¿Qué le gusta su hijo de la escuela? ¿Qué le gusta usted de la escuela de su hijo?

2. ¿Se siente bienvenido en la escuela de su hijo?

- En caso afirmativo, ¿qué personal de la escuela hacen que demuestra que eres bienvenido?
- Si no, ¿qué podría hacer la escuela de manera diferente que le hará sentirse a gusto?

3. ¿De qué manera la escuela se comunice con usted? Boletines, llamadas telefónicas, folletos o cartas enviadas a casa ...?

4. ¿Está satisfecho con qué frecuencia y en qué forma el personal de la escuela se comunica con usted acerca de su hijo? Sobre las actividades escolares? De ejemplos)

- En caso afirmativo, ¿qué están haciendo esto es útil?
- Si no, ¿qué le gustaría que hicieran de manera diferente?

5. ¿Cuál consideras que es el papel de los padres o de la familia en la educación de un niño?

(Escuelas hablan de la importancia de la "participación de los padres" o escuelas usan estos términos para significar varias cosas diferentes Algunas de las principales maneras que los padres están "implicados" -o participan son por "Participación de los padres."..:

- El voluntariado en el aula o en eventos o actividades escolares;
- Asistir a los eventos escolares tales como la orientación, casa abierta, noches familiares y reuniones sobre su hijo, tales como conferencias de padres y maestros;
- Trabajar con su hijo en casa haciendo la tarea, leer a su hijo, y los prepara para la escuela;
- Ser parte de un grupo que asesora a la escuela o ayuda a tomar decisiones tales como el consejo escolar.

6. ¿Qué hace usted para preparar a su hijo a hacer bien en la escuela? (En casa o en la escuela)

7. ¿De qué manera la escuela le pide a participar?

8. ¿Cómo funciona esto para su familia? (el tiempo, la ubicación, etc)

9. ¿Qué tipo de actividades de la escuela le gusta asistir?

10. ¿Qué le gustaría hacer para ayudar a su hijo en sus estudios, pero no sabe cómo hacerlo?

11. ¿Qué puede hacer la escuela para ayudarle a ser más involucrado en la educación de su hijo?

12. ¿Qué tipo de cosas ha hecho la escuela que le ayudó a ayudar a su hijo más en el hogar? (Enviado actividades en el hogar para la práctica adicional, se comunica con usted acerca de las notas, etc.)

13. ¿Hay algo más que le gustaría que nosotros sabemos acerca de lo que es importante para usted sobre la educación de su hijo?

Additional questions:

Appendix C

CITI Course Completion Report

**COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS REPORT***

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Jane Robertson [REDACTED]
- **Email:** robe5977@fredonia.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** SUNY - College at Fredonia (ID: 273)
- **Institution Unit:** Education
- **Phone:** [REDACTED]

- **Curriculum Group:** Human Research
- **Course Learner Group:** Group 1.
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Report ID:** [REDACTED]
- **Completion Date:** [REDACTED]
- **Expiration Date:** [REDACTED]
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 91

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED
Introduction (ID: 757)	[REDACTED]
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	
Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)	
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	
International Research - SBE (ID: 509)	
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	
Avoiding Group Harms - U.S. Research Perspectives (ID: 14080)	
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees (ID: 483)	
Conflicts of Interest in Research Involving Human Subjects (ID: 488)	
SUNY Fredonia State College (ID: 587)	

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI Program
 Email: citisupport@miami.edu
 Phone: 305-243-7970
 Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>