Barriers to Parental Involvement in Schools:

Developing Diverse Programs to Include Unique Demographics

By

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Chapter I: Introduction

Research over the past decade has provided undeniable evidence of the strong

connection that exists between parental involvement and student academic success.

As a result of this, public schools across the country are striving to develop programs

that will effectively increase the amount of parents that actively involve themselves in

the educational process. While some of these programs work very efficiently in

certain school districts, the fact that they are not made for all demographic areas has

become glaringly apparent.

The goal for both suburban and urban school districts is the same when

dealing with parents: Get them involved in order to increase student academic

achievement. Along with this goal comes the hope for a mutually beneficial

relationship between teachers and parents that will further benefit the student. The

problem exists in the reality that the programs that are commonly in place in both

types of districts are essentially the same, regardless of the extreme differences in

demographics. If a policy in place calls for the teacher to email the parent daily with

updates to a struggling student's performance, the policy can only succeed if the

parent has access to the Internet on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the parents who

make up urban districts are much less likely to have this access than suburban parents

of middle-income.

While all parents in general may face a number of barriers when attempting to

become actively involved in their child's academic life, parents of students from

urban schools often deal with unique issues related to their demographics. Policies

and programs aimed at helping parents to become more active in their child's

education need to take this specific demographic into account when dealing with

urban schools. Once these parents have a realistic program in place that shows the

effort of the school to reach out, hopefully the parents will feel inspired to become an

active member of the education of their student.

Problem Statement

Public schools across our country are developing programs aimed at reaching

out to parents in hopes of improving the relationship that exists between the schools

and the families of their students. These programs are developed through the analysis

of vast amounts of research based on the general issues commonly affecting parental

involvement in our public schools. While the data gathered from this type of broad

research is useful and necessary in the process, many urban schools don't realize that

the results may not apply directly to the demographic that they are serving in their

district. Policies and programs aimed at these types of parents need to take the

general knowledge gained from large studies across the country and combine those

with research done within the urban population in order to develop an effective plan

of action.

Significance of the Problem

Programs that are put in place for urban parents are often not realistic for the

population that makes up the district. The plans that work in suburban school areas

with a very different demographic often do not translate into the lives of the parents

in the cities. Due to this lack of acknowledgement on the school's part to tailor

programs to fit their specific population, these parents tend to assume that the school

is not interested in having them involved. The result of this reaction by the parents

leads to students having little or no connection between their academic and home life,

a situation that can very adversely affect a child's academic development.

Furthermore, the discipline issues dealt with daily in many urban schools can be

linked to the fact that the parents have no communication with the teachers or faculty.

Students are not afraid of being punished when they return home because they know

their parents have no contact with the school; therefore these students can behave

however they please without fear of parental recourse.

Purpose

The culminating purpose of this study is to combine prior research regarding

the obstacles that exist for general populations of parents with new and unique

research based on an urban school district population. The resulting data will allow

for a deeper understanding of the need for differentiation when urban schools are

developing parental outreach programs as opposed to implementing generalized

programs as they have in the past. Research outcomes will be used as resources for

developing programs that schools can create and implement to reach all demographic

groups of parents. For the purpose of this study, suggestions and applications will be

aimed at populations that are directly connected to the school: members of

administration, teachers, and students. This narrowing will allow for maximum control and effective execution of programs due to ease of access to the partakers.

Rationale

In order to fully understand the need for revision in parental involvement programs currently in place in public schools, a review of prior research is necessary. Through this early research, my study will help to create a basic comprehension of the overwhelming importance for schools to implement effective programs to build relationships with parents. Once this foundation is created, early research will illustrate the ways in which parents in general have been hindered by the policies in place regarding parent interaction. These studies will also highlight the need for further research in order to develop more detailed and specific solutions to the issues presented. This study will examine the research that shaped the beginning of this movement to get parents involved, as well as discussing the drawbacks in the original research.

The gaps that present themselves in the research will allow a new investigation into the same type of data with a different population taken into account. Through new research focused on the unique issues of the urban parent, it will become clear that the problems of the general population can be more fully understood when taking specific population issues into account. The parents presented in the new research will display the unique obstacles that they face when dealing with their child's school, allowing the contrast to be made between the

previous, generalized research and the new research. This contrast will open up the door to allow urban schools to create unique programs made to address the issues in general, as well as implementing specific policies to address the demographics that they had previously overlooked in their community.

Through the use of this new research along with knowledge of past programs in place to reach out to parents, a set of suggested programs will be developed in order to further illustrate the purpose of the study. These programs will address specific issues that exist for parents in local urban school districts while focusing on ensuring that all parents can be involved. Furthermore, programs will focus on members of the school as the instruments used in the achievement of this positive educational goal.

Definition of Terms

Academic Success – Measure of student performance in school including such factors as high grades, satisfaction in participation with peers, and graduation rates from high school.

Communication – For the purposes of this study, any activity where there is a two-way transfer of information between the school environment and the home environment where there is a shared understanding of that information.

Parent – Any person who assumes legal guardianship of a student in question; the head of household; does not have to biologically related.

Parent Efficacy – The belief a parent has about their general ability to influence their child's educational outcome.

Parental Involvement – Multiple behaviors and practices including: communication with children about school, participation in school activities, communication with teachers, and behaviors at home regarding educational-related topics.

SES – Socio-economic status

Suburban – For the purposes of this study the term refers to public schools in rural settings, often characterized by middle-class families, largely homogeneous populations, and lower crime statistics.

Urban – A designation to differentiate between rural and city schools. For the purposes of this study the term refers to public schools in larger city areas, often characterized by low-income residents, densely populated housing, multicultural residents, and higher crime statistics.

Summary Statement

There is little discourse about the importance of parental involvement to a student's academic success, so this study aims to facilitate the effective creation of programs to promote that goal. Unfortunately, too many programs in schools today are generically made and not at all realistic for the parents that they are presented to. The programs that are made for the suburban school in Dansville, NY won't necessarily work when implemented in the urban school in Rochester, NY. When

this mismatch occurs, parents tend to lose interest or trust in the school system and could end up giving up all participation as a result. The research presented within this study allows for barriers and obstacles in both suburban and urban settings to be presented and analyzed. Using past research on the common practices of suburban schools, problems of the urban parent can be addressed specifically in order to ensure success in the urban school as well.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present research that will highlight the areas where programs can be implemented in order to increase the levels of parental involvement in our public schools. This research will begin with a brief but comprehensive review of studies regarding the overwhelmingly positive relationship that exists between student academic achievement and parental involvement. The basis for future research is outlined due to the results of federal legislation calling for national implementation of programs to enhance parental involvement into public schools across the country. Methods of research are addressed at this point, detailing which types are best suited for the research and data that was subsequently gathered from this push for information. The remainder of the literature review will focus on the impediments that present themselves to parents as well as a discussion as to why these obstacles exist. Parents will be addressed as a broad population in the early research in order to develop a baseline of barriers that all parents can be faced with. Research will then be presented regarding more specific demographics of parents, each with their own set up additional unique barriers. The final piece of this chapter will discuss the impact that students can have on the involvement of their parents; research regarding general and specific populations will be presented.

Benefits of parental involvement. Positive parental involvement has been linked to indicators of student academic success (Fan and Chen 4; Desimone 14;

Hoover-Dempsey et al. 7). The evidence that parental involvement has beneficial

effects on students' academic achievement is so compelling that policymakers, school

board administrators, teachers, and parents all agree that parental involvement is

critical for student's academic success (Fan and Chen 6). According to the U.S.

Department of Education (1997): a sustained mutual collaboration, support, and

participation of school staff and families are required for a successful school-family

partnerships and children's learning. Although the success of this partnership is

difficult to reach, it is important to note that the benefits to students and their

educational success depends on all parties in order to sustain the school-family

partnerships (Epstein et al. 56).

The Public School Review published a research article written by Grace Chen

on the positive results of parental influence on student academics. Chen concluded

that:

> Increase in parental involvement leads to an increase in academic
>
> achievement, better classroom behavior and conduct, greater self-
>
> esteem, increased motivation and attitude towards school, lower rate of
>
> absenteeism, and increased school satisfaction for students (2).

Successful demonstration of this relationship has permeated throughout the

education spectrum, inevitably leading to the inclusion of the issue in current federal

legislation (NCLB 2). The NCLB Act demands that state and local school districts

develop and implement plans to increase the involvement of parents in their schools.

In addition to NCLB, Title I, a federally funded program, requires all schools that receive this federal funding agree to use it in order to foster collaboration with parents. If schools are found in noncompliance with programs like Title I, they could lose their federal funding (USDE 3). The implementation of guidelines such as these has made it essential for public schools to reach out to parents in hopes of developing positive relationships.

Research methods. The emphasis placed on developing programs to foster successful parent involvement in school programs naturally led to the influx of research studies regarding the issue. Multiple methodologies of research have been utilized to examine various phenomena within the topic, helping to cover a broad spectrum of information for all parties involved (Smith 46). This research has not only enabled educators to understand the details within the relationship, it has also identified the most important factors that should be addressed on the path to successful collaboration. Because of the immense amount of information and variables involved in the parental involvement theme, both qualitative and quantitative studies have been useful in the demonstration of understanding about the topic.

Of the research covered within this chapter, qualitative methodology is the predominant form of study presented. Researchers throughout these articles identify their goals in terms of "extending" or "enhancing" prior knowledge on the topic (Urdan, Solek, and Schoenfelder 11). This jargon lends itself easily to an interview-

type of methodology, due to the detailed expectations of the results. These interviews

give the researchers the opportunity to break down specific issues into detailed

subgroups, using extensive information from observation and questioning to draw

meaningful connections that may not have existed through strict statistical data

(Deslandes and Bertrand 166). Additionally, Fan and Chen discuss the significant

advantage to the qualitative methodology when they write about how it allows "more

than a typology for parental involvement, it not only deals with specific types of

parental involvement, but more importantly, it allows an attempt to explain why

parents choose to be involved" (3).   This detailed investigation is only allowed

through the observation and verbal discussion allowed within qualitative research.

Although the majority of the research documented utilizes the qualitative

forms of methodology, research based on quantitative analysis also serve an

important role in the overall understanding of the parental involvement sphere.

Quantitative methods allow for the researcher to use a much larger population in a

much quicker manner; specifically for this topic it allowed for broader connections to

be drawn to larger groups of participants on various topics (Coleman and McNeese

463). Gould discusses the usefulness of the methodology as he applied it to his study

on the relationship between parental involvement and student satisfaction in

academics; these two variables were measured separately and then analyzed through

correlational research to reveal any statistical connection between the two (31).

Correlational research is defined within Gould's study as an investigation of two or

more quantitative variables for potential association and influence on one another

(32). Chohan and Khan also employ the use of correlational research in their study of parental support and academic achievement; the significant correlation that they detail concludes that there is a positive relationship between parental support and the academic achievement of the student (22).

The importance of both methods of research is clear from the evidence presented, leading to the next logical step in the identification of the most useful and effective form of research: mixed methods. Campbell and Verna utilize both quantitative and qualitative forms of data collection and analysis to present their research on effective parental influence on student achievement. They began their research with a broad inventory survey to collect quantitative data on the everyday practices that parents employ to stimulate their child's academic achievement (505). Once this was completed, the pair acknowledged the need for specific in-depth information and developed a complimentary qualitative interview in response (508). The use of dual methodology not only made the information from each separate study more understandable and relevant, it allowed a scientific connection to be drawn between the two very different studies. This attitude is reiterated when the author's discuss their satisfaction with the methods, "we found that our qualitative work fit nicely within the framework of the inventory. The blending of both quantitative and qualitative data helps to give our studies more substance" (Campbell and Verna 509). Throughout an examination of research conducted within the realm of parental involvement, the most constructive and informative were those that were able to connect quantitative research statistics to meaningful qualitative information.

Need for research into barriers to parental involvement. In order to successfully facilitate a relationship that will lead to improve student academic success, variables that affect the parents themselves need to be identified and explored (Snell et al. 242; Deslandes and Bertrand 166; Harris and Goodall 280). Despite the overwhelming data that supports the need for schools and parents to work together, multiple obstacles stand in the way of convincing parents to get involved. Accordingly, it is suggested by Keane that parents are willing to get involved in the education of their children in theory, but the negative perceptions of parents persist because many times teachers are unprepared to make the effort needed. Any obstacles that may inhibit parents from actively seeking involvement in schools must to be identified and addressed in order to build towards a positive relationship with the school system (2).

General Obstacles Faced by All Parents

Regardless of demographic information, certain commonly observed impediments could present themselves to any parent when trying to become involved in the school system.

Role of the parent. Significant research has pointed to the confusion surrounding parents' differing views of the role they should play in their child's education (Snell et al. 246). This viewpoint directly affects the level and type of participation that parents are engage in when it comes to education. Parents who naturally assume a role as "co-educator" are more likely to pursue interactions and

relationships with their child's school, since they feel personally responsible for their academic achievements. On the other hand, "Parents who believe that their role is only to get children to school, which then takes over responsibility for their education, will not be willing to be actively involved in either school-based or home-based parental involvement" (Hornby and Lafaele 39).   This view was reiterated in a study conducted by Chohan and Khan when they discovered that within the results of surveys distributed some parents share the pervasive belief that the school was solely responsible for the education of their children (24). This attitude leads to the conclusions that these parents would not feel obligated to take an active role with their children regarding education; not because of disinterest, but because of assumed parental role. This obstacle is highly impacted by various demographic aspects within each individual family, a topic that will be researched in further detail at a later point. Harris and Goodall stress the importance of identifying how individual parents' view their responsibility in their child's education and urge educators to develop strategies based on specific cases and incidents (280).

Perceptions of invitation. A second very important factor affecting parental involvement is perceived invitations of both the school and the student to become involved (Hornby and Lafaele 40). Too often teachers are passive in their efforts to involve parents, asking for volunteers instead of actively identifying parents that aren't usually involved. Deslandes and Bertrand point out that if parents do not feel like it is their responsibility to be actively involved in the child's schooling, they are not likely to actively seek out communication with the school, so the school must

invite these parents in order to create a relationship (172). If teachers aren't

proactive in asking for participation, the parent can develop feelings of frustration and

even distrust in the school and staff (Harris and Goodall 281; Deslandes and Bertrand

168; Hornby and Lafaele 49). Harris and Goodall go a step further by noting that this

feeling of disconnect is only furthered by issues with common forms of school

communication such as email and letters sent home; too many incidences have been

noted where parents never received intended correspondence (285). The message

within these studies is clear: schools need to make an active effort to find out how to

best reach out to parents in their communities in order to convey the desire for

collaboration and interaction.

Student invitations were identified as the leading influence on parental

motivation in the qualitative analysis of Deslandes and Bertrand (170). More

specifically, when these parents were personally asked for assistance or input on

schoolwork, they tended to feel that their involvement was expected and desired. If

students aren't vocal in asking for assistance, research illustrates that parents will

most likely assume that they aren't needed to perform in an academic capacity (Harris

and Goodall 283). The evidence that has been shown throughout the research

emphasizes that parents feel the need to be desired and valued when involved in their

child's academics. It should be noted here however, that the data presented did not

address relationships between students and parents where the help wasn't expected or

assumed. Student impact will be discussed in more detail at a later point, but

generally parents need to feel that their student on some level desires their involvement in their education.

Parent efficacy. Perception seems to be the critical term when exploring potential barriers and motivations to parental involvement in student academics, and self-efficacy is another aspect of this perception. Parent efficacy is defined by Hoover-Dempsey et al. as the belief the parent has about their general ability to influence their child's educational outcomes (7). This concept is a crucial force when parents are deciding whether they will involve themselves in their student's work; it is dependent on whether they feel confident in their knowledge or ability to positively help (Harris and Goodall 280). Hornby and Lafaele address the negative potential of this issue by pointing out that parents with low self-efficacy are more likely to avoid contact with schools in general; this stemming from the belief that their involvement will not bring about any beneficial outcome for their child (39). There are many contributing factors to a parent's efficacy including previous educational experiences; the level of education the parent achieved themselves, and multiple social and economic factors.

An excellent example of an instance that would severely affect parental efficacy is when dealing with a child with a learning disability or a child who is gifted and talented (Hornby and Lafaele 43). Harris and Goodall reiterate the thoughts of the previous researchers in exploring the difficulties that a parent could have when trying to feel knowledgeable and confident enough to aid in the education of a child

with a severe learning disability (281). Contrary to this, Hornby and Lafaele provide

data on the topic that shows that having a child with a learning disability could

actually serve to empower the parent in the education process (43). Because of the

federal requirements for parental input in the special education processes, this is an

excellent opportunity for parents to become active in seeking knowledge and

information on the topic. The routine and frequent meetings to discuss the

individualized education programs gives the parents time and opportunity to build

their self-efficacy to the highest level they are able to (Hornby and Lafaele 43).

Gifted learners are another group of students whose parents have similar

opportunities to work closely in collaboration with the school. Harris and Goodall

touch on positive and negative aspects of this situation, noting that parents can choose

to either serve as an additional educational resource for their child or feel inadequate

with their own knowledge in response to their child's (44). Regardless of the specific

situations that present themselves, it is crucial to note that parental efficacy has been

determined to be integral in making parental involvement a reality in public schools,

so proper attention must be paid (Sheldon 306).

Reactions of a teacher or a student. Researchers have identified a potential

barrier to parental involvement as the reaction of the students towards the relationship

that could develop between the parent and the teachers. Fan and Williams fairly

discuss both possible outcomes of the relationship, both positive and negative. The

positive influence revolves around the benefit of having the parent serve as an

additional resource for knowledge and education in connection with the school (Fan

and Williams 54). Since the parent will have direct information from the teacher

regarding everything associated with that class, the parent's self-efficacy increases

and they are more actively involved in the success of the student (Hornby and Lafaele

41). On the other side, there is definite opportunity for this relationship to negatively

affect both the student and parent. Any issues or disruptions in communication have

the ability to create misunderstandings and frustrations for both the parent and

teacher; additionally, these misunderstandings can lead to wrongful criticisms or

punishments to the student by the parent (Fan and Williams 69). The student would

react appropriately to each side of the situation, but the research correctly stresses the

initial reaction of the student to discourage the relationship as a fail-safe.

One of the most discussed and noted barriers for parents is the perceived

reaction from the teacher if a parent tries to exert authority in an academic situation.

After conducting research interviews of parents and across Ontario, Pushor delivered

his results at a National Educational Symposium on the relationship he observed:

> Traditionally, and in most schools today, teachers tend to claim the
>
> ground that is school, and design and enact policies, procedures,
>
> programs, schedules, and routines for the students. Teachers use their
>
> professional education and knowledge to claim this space and become
>
> the decision makers, oftentimes without input from the parents. This is
>
> a dynamic that has implications for creating or maintaining
>
> interactions between parents and teachers. If the parent-teacher

relationship was more of a partnership, it might look more like a

friendship or a business relationship one in which there can be mutual

reciprocity and relatively similar levels of resources. Some

partnerships, however, do involve the domineering pattern of one

person over another and this may not be ideal for the parent teacher

relationship. In some cases, parents and teachers may bring equal

resources to the encounter and these resources should be recognized. If

that happens, both parties can take the lead and they can work together

to ensure that everyone's needs are met in satisfactory ways (10).

A similar study of the perception of teachers' views about parents reiterates the

inequality that exists in the relationship (Long 27). The author stresses the need for

further study on the topic and calls for researchers to address how communication is

occurring at the beginning of the relationship between the teacher and parent. "We

need to study the communication process with recognition that teachers have the

power as to how and when communication occurs" (28). These studies rightfully

point out that if parents have negative first interactions with teachers, they will

oftentimes not return for a second meeting.

Unique Obstacles for Specific Parent Populations

Although all parents face a myriad of hurdles in everyday life as it relates to

becoming involved in their child's school, certain groups of parents have additional

difficulties that are exclusive to their unique circumstances.   These difficulties are

essentially similar to general barriers, but the parents' individual situations allow for an in-depth view of why these obstacles exist. Parents within this classification come from families who are culturally diverse, low-income, emotionally insecure, and non-traditional structurally. One of the worst things that teachers do situations with these parents is to assume that they have the same resources and life experiences as the White, middle class counterparts (Christianakis 159).

Ethnicity. In 2001, it was reported by the Department of Education that in the nation's largest 60 school districts, the population was more than 75 percent non-White with no single ethnic group making up more than 40 percent of the school population. This trend shows the increased need for educators to recognize what this diversity means in regards to parental involvement within our public schools; however, it is not surprising to learn that according to a 2011 study, the overwhelming majority of teachers in public schools are predominantly White and middle class (LaRocque et al. 116). Because of this mismatch in demographics, it is all too common for conflicts regarding cultural misunderstandings to present themselves. For example, when the background of families and teachers differs, parents may not feel that their family's culture is understood or respected by the teacher (Carlisle et al. 156). If parents do not feel like they are connected to the school, there is no reason for them to pursue any sort of involvement within it.

In addition to these issues of the home life of culturally diverse parents, the views of education can be vastly different as well across cultures. "Most parents,

especially bilingual, immigrant, and refugee parents, do not ask about the curriculum or the instructional scheme the teachers use" (Vang 20). The lack of involvement from parents of these specific cultures is usually misinterpreted by the teacher as the parent being "uninvolved and disinterested" (Floyd 127). This ignorance of cultural values can be detrimental to the relationship between parents and teachers in these situations. Teachers convey the negative impression that they falsely extract from the families and make it more difficult for multicultural parents to get involved. Research has shown that contrary to popular teacher opinion, multicultural families want to build positive relationships with the school personnel, but they are unsure of how to become involved in a way that is meaningful to the school (LaRocque et al. 119).

The role of the parent was discussed in a general sense previously, but diversity in culture has a very strong impact on the parent perception of where they fit into their child's education. "Some cultures believe it to be disrespectful to communicate with teachers, fearing that such communication sends the message that parents are second guessing the teachers" (Carlisle et al. 155). This is an excellent of when a parent might not feel comfortable communicating with the teacher out of a cultural tradition, which unfortunately can be misinterpreted as indifference by the teacher. In addition to parental roles, parental efficacy can be severely impacted by the language and education barriers present in culturally diverse families. Parents who are not native to the US are much more likely to feel unqualified to offer

assistance to their children especially if there is a significant language barrier (Vang 26).

Economic circumstances. Parents who struggle with poverty are some of the least involved in their child's school of all populations discussed.   The barriers that exist for this group, including work schedules, lack of transportation, and lack of child care, may prevent families from attending school events or volunteering within the school (Freeman 193). Unlike their middle-class counterparts, low-income parents do not have the options available to put forth a strong effort in getting involved with their child's school, simply because of the economic restraints. The result of this unfortunate situation is evident in a study by Coleman and Churchill, which found that parents with higher SES status are significantly more active in their children's education (146).

The employment situations of low-income parents often inhibit their ability to meet with teachers or participate in organized school activities. Hourly wages, lack of health insurance, and odd hours are all commonly cited reasons that these parents are not able to participate in the amount of ways that their fellow parents with salaried, more stable jobs are able to (LaRocque et al. 116). Additionally, parents who work hourly may find it too detrimental to the economic welfare of their family to take time off to be involved in their child's school (Carlisle et al. 160). For these parents, coming to an open house or parent-teacher conference may mean losing an entire day of pay, something which greatly affects low-income households.

The unfortunate result of these economic handcuffs, like the result of parents' cultural issues, is too often a misinterpretation by the teacher as a lack of interest in the student's education. Lott explains the mentality that has emerged from this mistreatment of the situation, citing interviews with low-income parents in her 2001 study: "What educational professionals interpret as disinterest and apathy, low-income parents see as poor communication and discouragement of their efforts to participate in a world in which they have little influence" (254). The result of this is a feeling of distrust and wariness on the part of the parents to make any attempts at becoming involved. As the cycle continues this way, low-income parents report receiving less warm welcomes in their children's schools; they also feel that their suggestions are less respected and often ignored (Soute-Manning 86).

This attitude from teachers leads to an even wider gap between themselves and low-income parents, all stemming from an ignorance of the actual circumstances involved.   Parental efficacy can be severely adversely affected by this attitude, as these parents may begin to believe that their opinions and concerns about their child's education are of no importance or significance.   This effect can be magnified even greater if the parent had a negative view of the education system while they were a child, as it reinforces their past negative experiences. "The demeaning treatment low-income parents receive from their children's teachers' mirrors too well what they remember from their own experiences as students" (Lott 252).

Family structure. The makeup of a typical family unit has drastically

changed since the days when the majority of homes were made up of only a mother, a

father, and their children. This shift from this structure to the diversity in household

makeup has presented unique challenges in the context of parental involvement.

Schneider defines the "traditional family structure" as "households consisting of two

married parents and their biological children" (3). The reality of today is that this

structure is becoming more and rarer; according to the US Census Bureau, the

percentage of children living in two-parent homes decreased from over 85 percent in

1968 to less than 70 percent in 2009. Similarly, the proportion of children living in

single-parent homes has more than doubled, from less than 12 percent in 1968 to

more than 28 percent in 2009. The decline in two-parent households has had a

significant adverse effect on the amount and quality of parental involvement that

public schools are seeing. Among other factors, the structure of a family can

constrain the availability of economic and social resources such as parents' ability to

spend time with their child, be involved in educational activities, and expend

monetary resources to support the child's education (Schneider et al. 1).

With only one parent in the household, schools are much less likely to be able

to facilitate effective collaboration due to economic factors, childcare factors, and

other influences that are brought about due to the household composition. Studies

have been conducted across the country to determine if the altering of family

structure has a concrete negative impact on parental involvement, and they have

reported numerous findings that confirm this belief. In 2008, the National Center for

Education Statistics presented the findings of a survey conducted on this topic; the data showed that children from intact homes are about twice as likely as those from single or stepparent homes to have a parent participate in school activities (parent volunteer, school conferences, school events, etc.). The negative effects that are seen from this change are not limited to attendance at school functions; parental involvement at home is negatively impacted as well. A brief published by FamilyFact.org presented research that showed children of single or stepparents had lower academic expectations compared to their peers from intact families. In a similar study conducted by Holly Heard, children in these situations reported that their parents were less likely to monitor their schoolwork and provided less overall supervision of academic activities (437). While this information is troubling, it is not surprising that the stress and time demands of single parenting has a serious impact on the ability of these parents to be involved in their child's academic life.

The economic implications that arise when discussing changing family structure, more specifically single-parent households, are similar to those experienced by low-income parents. One of the most challenging obstacles that single-parents face is the limited economic resources that they have to work with. If a parent was used to having two incomes in the household, the elimination of one of them can cause a financial burden that most people would not be prepared for. Research has shown that when there are two parents contributing incomes to the family, the additional income is often dedicated to improving children's educational outcomes. When the second income is removed, educational funding is usually the first cost cut

as a result (Page and Stevens 2).   Even more concerning is that fact that single

parents, particularly single mother, experience higher rates of poverty than any other

type of family (Schneider et al. 28).

Today's society is one that contains more types of family structures than ever

before; public schools need to be aware of the implications that come with these new

family arrangements. These changing family structure are marked by an increase in

parental working hours and mobility, greater numbers of families in which both

parents work, accompanied by an increasing number of divorces and separation,

which result in the increase of single-parent homes and homes with stepparents

(Hornby and Lafaele 48). The result of all of this information is that parents are now

faced with higher stress levels, less free time, and increased economic struggles, all

which make it more difficult to become involved in their children's academic

activities.

Student Influence on Obstacles to Parental Involvement

While it is widely accepted that parents have a strong influence on the actions

and attitudes of their children, it is sometimes overlooked that the inverse is also just

as valid. Realizing that children contribute to parents in the same meaningful and

complicated ways is an important step when beginning to explore the barriers to

parental involvement and the strong influence of students (Snell et al. 252).

Student perceptions of parental involvement. Substantial research has been

conducted that specifically focuses on the point of view of the student in the

discussion of parental involvement; more specifically how the attitude and actions of the student can influence the involvement of the parents. Urdan, Solek, and Schoenfelder identify family influence as having one of the strongest impacts on students' behaviors in their qualitative analysis (11). The study goes on to describe some of the patterns discovered within the realm of family influence, the most important being the family pleasing pattern (12). Urdan et al. present this pattern as having a largely positive influence in the lives of the students; focusing mainly on the desire to make parents proud and offer metaphorical repayment for sacrifices their parents made (12). These actions translate into displays of positive academic achievement and attitudes by the student, both of which will encourage the parents to take notice and involve themselves in the process (Coleman and McNeese 472). Family patterns are important to note because they are based on student perception of their parental figure's involvement in their academic activities; but they can be a negative impact on parental involvement as well. Urdan et al. explains the family obligation pattern, which occurs when students feel they have an obligation to succeed because they basically "owe it" to their parents. Students who reported this pattern described "they felt a sense of family obligation that was created by pressure exerted on them by their parents"; the authors noted that this description had a strongly negative tone (13). This pressure to excel and demand to "repay" could force students to develop a negative perception of their relationship between school and their parents; this would of course negatively affect how the parent involves themselves in the child's academics.

Students who come from low-income families can deal with a unique set of

circumstances surrounding their perception of their parent's involvement in school.

As discussed previously, the stereotype that low-income parents are uninterested in

their children's academics is quite common in public schools across the country.

Even though these conclusions come from lack of knowledge about the family

situation, they are still a large part of the way these parents are viewed, and their

children are aware of this. If a student believes that the teacher has this mindset, it

can be embarrassing and uncomfortable to try to explain the situation or even address

the issue at all. Lott conducted a study where low-income parents and students were

interviewed about the impact that this perception has on both parties:

> Parents of students have a perceived powerlessness when dealing with
>
> school; they felt that they had little control over their children's fate.
>
> Their children felt and understood this and did not expect their parents
>
> to actively involve themselves with school personnel. Low-income
>
> students saw their parents as powerless in influencing school
>
> circumstances (253).

Because of these negative experiences and viewpoints, these students are not going to

try to involve their parents in anything involving the school; they may even

discourage involvement if necessary.

Students' views of parental involvement change over time, and it is widely

acknowledged that parental involvement decreases as children get older and is at its

lowest levels when children are in high school (Hornby and Lafaele 42). At this age, children are pulling away from their parents and trying to gain independence and freedom. Coleman and McNeese explain that when this begins to happen, students will begin resisting the support their parents provide by involving themselves in school events or projects (468). Parents witness this transition in their child's life and respond by distancing themselves from the school and giving the child the independence that they feel they need. The attitude that these parents develop can unfortunately do more to hurt their involvement with the child than help it, however. Research has shown that although students will begin to resist parental involvement with social aspects of school, they still very much desire and benefit from their parents being involved in other ways. Unfortunately, parents can misinterpret the situation and assume that their older children do not want them involved in any way in their education, and this is a large barrier to parental involvement (Hornby and Lafaele 43).

Students as "gatekeepers".   In today's society, students are the main source of parent information about anything regarding their school. When parents have limited interaction with teachers or administrators, they are forced to depend largely on students' attitudes and feelings toward school as a type of "proxy" for their own perceptions (Adams et al. 19). For this reason, students have a great amount of influence on parents' conclusions regarding their need for involvement in their education.

The information presented by students to parents can be tailored in any way they wish depending on the desired outcome. Students who do not wish for their parents to become actively involved in school events can easily "forget" to inform them about it or "mess up the date", just as an example. While this may seem that it may not be that common, a report on student motivation and parental involvement concluded that students were "far less engaged in school when parents initiated contact with school personnel frequently" (Fan and Williams 56). This report gives evidence that students want to be in control of their parent's interaction with the school, and they have the ability in many situations.

Students can further utilize their role as "gatekeepers" of their parent's relationship with school when there is a situation that they don't want their parents to find out about. This scenario sounds much more common, but it is a bad habit for these students to get into. Gonzalez and Walters discussed the issue when identifying a situation where a student did not want their parent to find out about their behavior during school functions: "From this perspective, parents' participation in school activities may be perceived as a hindrance on the part of the student" (208).

Furthermore, students can discourage interaction between teachers and parents as well, hoping to secure that parents don't find out information that could be negative about the student's behavior. Communication between the parent and the school concerning the student's school problems can easily lead to reprimanding conversations, criticisms, or punishments from parents (Fan and Williams 69). If the

parents are not in contact with the school themselves regarding issues like these, the student can use their influence to convince their parents that the teacher is unreliable or incorrect. For reasons such as this, students have the ability to strongly discourage any relationship, let alone active involvement, between their parent and their school.

Impact of negative behavior. Students can dissuade their parents from becoming involved in their academics without even making an active effort in some cases. If parents are only contacted when there is a negative issue or problem, they are going to be much less likely to want to be involved.

Parents who have limited interactions with the school to begin with are going to be more sensitive and less trusting when it comes to any issues or problems regarding their student. In a case study on trust between parents and their children's school, it was reported, "behavioral problems, absenteeism, and poor performance could lead to parental distrust of the school" (Adams et al. 19). Unfortunately, this may be the only type of reporting that the parent is receiving in regards to their child's education. The results of this interaction only cause a larger gap between the parent and the school, making the relationship more negative.

Families that are low-income or culturally diverse have a greater probability for producing students that present behavior problems, unfortunately. Schneider's research on family structure points out that students in non-traditional families are 30 percent more likely to be tardy to school, skip class, and have unexcused absences (17). Parents in these situations are already dealing with a myriad of obstacles on

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their own in regards to their children's school, this is simply another one that makes it that much more difficult. In the same vein, some parents come to identify visits to school with only bad news; this makes them actively distance themselves from it. Hornby ad Lafaele explained this relationship in a study they conducted: "…the more disruptive the behavior the less parents are inclined to be involved with the school; additionally, parents will become reluctant to communicate in any way with the school for fear of getting more bad news" (44).

Chapter III: Solutions and Applications

Introduction

Research has provided concise evidence of the importance of parental

involvement in student academic success, as well as issues that may threaten this

beneficial relationship. The next logical step in the process would be to outline

strategies and methods for addressing these issues and improving the possibility of

success for getting parents more involved with schools. In order to provide pragmatic

suggestions to combat the barriers presented in the prior chapter, I have chosen to

discuss programs based on the three major populations present in our schools:

administrators, teachers, and students. By classifying these three groups of

individuals, I am able to tailor suggestions and programs to their specific strengths

and roles in the parental involvement process, hopefully making success more likely

to be achieved. The origin of my suggestions is based upon the assumption that

public schools need to address *all* parental groups when developing programs for

parental involvement, to be sure that no demographic is inadvertently excluded.

Once each group has been addressed, examples of programs will be presented that are

directed towards specific populations of parents that were identified in the research as

being the least likely to have a relationship with the school due to unique barriers that

they face.

Application of Research for School Administrators

Development of school policy. The success of any program in a school is highly dependent upon the support and involvement of the members of the administration; programs regarding parental involvement require extra attention and effort. The beginning stage in the development of an effective program to increase parental involvement in any school should be an explicit and detailed policy that portrays the acknowledgement by the administration of the importance of getting parents involved. LaRocque et al. suggest that administrators should be sure to highlight the different roles that members of the community and school will play in this process, for the purpose of encouraging shared responsibility of the task (120). This policy should convey the seriousness and necessity of the issue, while making sure to explain the beneficial reasoning behind the manifesto. While the policy itself should be general enough to be retainable over a few years, individual programs, specific goals, or any other detailed subset of the policy should be revisited and revised frequently based on changes or results that are reported throughout the school year. Administrators should be sure to distribute copies of the policy to all school staff as well as providing copies for students to take home to parents. Additionally, the policy should be in clear view on the school website as well as being published in a community newspaper if possible. Utilizing multiple communication strategies will help to increase the odds that all parents, regardless of demographic, will have an opportunity to read the policy and hopefully appreciate the effort that the administration put forth.

Teacher education. One of the most obvious ways that administration can impact parental involvement is through the successful implementation of their policy by their teachers. Teachers serve as the main form of contact between the school faculty and the parents, so it is vitally important that they are in sync with the goals of the administration's parental involvement policy. In addition to explaining and discussing the policies and programs with them, administrators can provide supplemental education opportunities that would further the teachers' understanding of the topic. One such opportunity for teachers to learn is when a parent volunteers in their classroom, but the teacher does not utilize the parents' knowledge or skills. In a study by Adams et al, the majority of teachers in a public high school in California reported that they did not know how to use parents to effectively impact the education of the students, much beyond asking them to make copies or acting as a monitor (17). This situation could have a very negative impact on the parental involvement programs overall, since parents who voluntarily come in to school are not having a productive or gratifying experience. Administrators could rectify this situation by bringing in an expert on parental interaction in the classroom and having that person conduct a workshop for the teachers. This would provide the teachers with the confidence and knowledge necessary to develop successful roles and activities for parents who wish to get involved in their child's school day.

Teachers can also benefit from education specifically tailored to their school's demographics, such as multicultural education for a school that is highly diverse. As discussed in the previous review of literature, parents from different cultures have a

large variety of barriers and misunderstandings regarding communication with their child's school. Administrators have the opportunity to analyze the demographic information within the school and provide educational resources to teachers that will aid in their understanding of their students' families. In a situation where teachers do not have a clear understanding of the differences in cultural attitudes regarding education, the administration can set up a class that will educate the teachers on the specific cultures that they are struggling with. With this education, teachers may be able to craft their interactions with multicultural parents differently in order to create successful communication based on their new knowledge. These classes do not have to be limited to cultural education however, they can include socioeconomic issues, family structure situations, and any other area where teachers could benefit from learning more about their students' home lives and circumstances that impact their parent's relationship with the school.

Going above and beyond. One of the most common barriers that parents report when discussing why they aren't involved with their child's school is the fact that they don't feel like the school cares are their participation. Administration has the opportunity to develop programs that will combat this belief by being proactive and enthusiastic about reaching out to parents in the district. One program that would serve this purpose would be one that utilizes home visits, preferably done by a designated counselor or group of counselors. Rule and Kyle stress that home visits begin the process of establishing a solid home/school connection (292), in addition to showing the parents that the school is eager to develop a relationship that will be

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beneficial for their students. In the past, and even currently in many cases, home visits were reserved for discipline issues and truancy, therefore creating a very negative image for parents and students alike. While these types of visits may still be necessary, they should be a very small percentage against home visits that are meant to strengthen the connection between the parents and the school.

In order for these types of home visit programs to be effective; I believe that there should be specific counselors that are tasked with making these visits on a scheduled basis. The reason for this is that allowing parents and families to see only two or three different people over the course of the school year will help to create a sense of loyalty and trust, as opposed to having to meet a new staff member every time a visit is conducted. The goal of these visits is to build a mutually beneficial relationship between the counselor and the families, all in the hopes of encouraging those parents to be more involved in all aspects of their child's schooling. As the counselor learns more about the parents and students, they will be able to discuss specific issues with administration that may be inhibiting active involvement with the school. For example, a counselor may find that their district has a large number of Chinese-American families whose parents speak very broken English and have no knowledge of the expectations involved in the American education system in regards to parents' roles. This information will allow the administrator the opportunity to set up programs for parents from throughout the community that would provide translators, multicultural information on parental involvement, and any other resource that would aid these parents towards understanding their value in the education of

their children. Meetings such as these would also allow administrators the opportunity to create a sense of community between parents who share similar backgrounds or circumstances.   These parents could find a sense of camaraderie and support in their struggles to become more involved in their children's education (Bower and Griffin 12).   If nothing else, home visits have the potential to serve as a plethora of information for administrators and teachers regarding the home situations of their students; this can only serve to enhance the understanding of these families and students by the school.

Although the hope for any program regarding parental involvement would be that it could be universally translated across demographics and cultures, public schools have unique obstacles that they sometimes must address individually in order to overcome them. Administrators should be aggressive in developing programs that will ensure that these barriers do not get in the way of programs in place to increase involvement in the schools. For example, there are an increasingly high percentage of Spanish speaking students and families in public schools across the country; this is a fact that has the potential to negatively affect communication between parents and schools. Administrators need to be aware of the language demographics in their school and develop programs accordingly. If the families within the school district are 48% Spanish speaking, the administration should have a bilingual advocacy program in place to meet the needs of the students and parents (LaRocque et al. 119). A bilingual program is something that administration could put into place early,

hopefully allowing parents to feel welcomed and acknowledged early on in the school year.

Redefine "parental involvement". The increasing diversity within our public schools has led to the need for a reinterpretation of what is traditionally considered "parental involvement". In the past, administrators have developed programs that ask for parents to volunteer at the school during the day, accompany children on field trips, engage in frequent conferences with teachers, or provide monetary assistance to the school just to name a few. The problems with these old guidelines are that they do not reflect the demographic or socioeconomic statistics that are overwhelmingly present in our public schools. The literature reviewed in the previous chapter highlighted the changes to family structure, cultural diversity, and economic status that we have seen over the past decades in our public schools. With these changes, administrators have the task of reinterpreting what parental involvement can mean for families in today's very diverse and changing society. The need for change is urgent, as parents who are looking at the old expectations can become "disenfranchised and feel that their efforts are unrecognized and unworthy" (Bower and Griffin 4).

Parent-teacher conferences are probably the most widely known ways for schools and parents to share information and ideas, however, they need to be updated to address the current climate in our schools. While it was acceptable for conferences to be held in the middle of a weekday in the past, administrators must acknowledge

that the rise in single parent homes will remove a large percentage of parents from being available to attend due to work obligations. Similarly, the economic situation faced by many families has removed their access to reliable transportation, making it very difficult and costly to try to make a trip to the school. Administrators need to provide multiple options for parents to discuss student progress with teachers, even if it means holding a set of conferences in a community center or church for the sake of convenience for parents. Parents need to know that these communication activities are essential to the success of their student; administrators have an obligation to do their very best to ensure this communication takes place.

The structure of formalized communication and scheduled meetings can create a sense of frustration with parents who have unique situations to overcome. In cases like this, teachers often misinterpret their inability to participate for lack of interest in their child's education. Furthermore, when these do reach out for informal conversations or unscheduled visits, they are too many times viewed as obtrusive by schools and teachers (Christianakis 158). The administration needs to be aware if a large number of parents are reaching out in this informal manner, and use this information to create a program to encourage this type of involvement. Instead of setting up a two-day block for parents to come in to meet teachers or faculty, spread the timeframe to a week and vary the hours that parents would be welcomed. This not only allows more parents to fit the visit into their work or home schedule, but also shows them that the school is flexible and willing to change policies if necessary for the betterment of the parent-school relationship. In the same vein of communication

types, administrators should utilize a variety of media and methods in order to reach parents of varying demographics. Not all parents will have email accounts, cell phones, computers, or even home phones in some cases. Administrators should put policies in place to ensure that there is at least one successful way to reach each parent if the need arises, providing multiple forms of communication will help to implement this policy.

The bottom line when discussing any programs tailored to specific demographic groups of parents is that administrators have the obligation to their teachers and students to do everything in their power to facilitate a successful relationship. As Kochanek writes, "Schools that can successfully manipulate structures to allow parents and school authorities to connect within a relational context supportive of trust formation are better positioned to engage parents in meaningful and purposeful ways" (33). Parents need to know that they are needed and wanted in their child's school, administrators need to be diligent in conveying this message at all times.

Application of Research for Teacher

As the bridge between school and home, teachers arguably have the most profound responsibility when it comes to developing relationships with the families of their students. Due to the overwhelming consensus of the importance of parental involvement in the education of children, teachers feel a lot of the pressure to try to encourage parents to become actively involved in any way possible. While this task

is already a challenging one to say the least, the increase in diverse populations in public schools has made it even more difficult for teachers to maneuver. While administrators have the ability to create programs that will apply to many different populations of parents, teachers need to craft their own policies based on whom they see in their classrooms. As diversity increases in our schools ever year, teachers should learn to become proactive in expecting these changes and have programs in place that can adjust accordingly. Parents need to be confident that their children are being acknowledged and accepted in the classroom regardless of their economic or cultural background; otherwise the parent would never consider trying to develop a positive relationship with the school.

Know your classroom "family". A review of research of the population and demographic changes in the previous chapter sets the stage for teachers to be conscious of the unique faces that will walk into their classrooms every new school year. In order for each teacher to begin to create what is commonly referred to as a "culturally responsive classroom" (Ford 29), they have to become knowledgeable of the demographics of the students they will be instructing. This information will allow the teacher to investigate the differences that may exist between the home environment and the school environment, ensuring that the student can make a successful transition between the two. Christianakis furthers this thought when suggesting that teachers need to be aware of the learning practices and methodologies that are in place in the students' home according to specific cultural or familial ideals or circumstances (173).

At the beginning of a new school year, teachers should take the initiative to reach out to parents early on in order to try to develop a productive relationship. An example of this would be a "Meet and Greet" during the first week of school where teachers invite parents to come in any day during the first week between specific hours, giving them flexibility but also conveying a sense of excitement about the new school year. For parents that are not able to make it into the classroom, teachers can reach out through email or by making phone calls to parents in order to gain information and feedback. In an article regarding this topic, Soute-Manning suggests setting up "Help Us Get To Know You and Your Child" nights, where the teacher takes the role of the learner and the parent is in control of the conversation (6). By allowing the parent to drive the discussion about the student and their family, teachers have the ability to not only gain useful insight into the situation through the point of view of the parent, but they also can build trust with the parent for valuing their input and thoughts. The distribution of an introduction survey for parents to fill out and bring back to school is also an excellent way to learn information on student's home lives. As seen in Appendix A, parent surveys can ask for very specific, detailed information regarding the parents' views of the student and the school. This information can be invaluable when a teacher is trying to develop a program to encourage parents to involve themselves, since they will have personal views on the matter already in their possession. It is important in surveys such as these to be careful of the amount of personal information that is asked for; especially if it is the first communication you are having with parents. Keeping questions general and

positive will allow parents to share information more freely and with less apprehension.

Although it is the best-case scenario for teachers to be able to interact directly with parents at the beginning of every year, the numerous barriers that have been previously discussed tend to inhibit this connection too often. Therefore, students need to be utilized as a resource to gain information regarding their parents and families; teachers can accomplish this through the development of activities or lessons that address this task.   Introduction lessons that ask students to tell a little about themselves can easily be altered in order to include pertinent information regarding their background and home life. Appendix B is an example of a student survey that would give the teacher information on both the individual student and the environment that the student calls home. As with the parent surveys, it is important to tread gently on the topic of parents and families, as you want students to feel free and safe to share any information that they would like to. By keeping the questions general and voluntary, the teacher can gauge where more information would be useful or warranted depending on the student's answers. In addition to surveys, personal essays can also serve as an excellent source of information on student's backgrounds and families. Appendix B shows an example of a prompt for a student essay that could be given during the first week of school; this essay could be either collected for teacher use only or shared with the class depending on the nature of the information that the students decide to share.

While teachers need to be aggressive in seeking as much information as

possible regarding the diverse demographics of their classroom family, they also need

to be keenly aware of the historical stereotypes that have followed different types of

families throughout the educational system. As discussed in the previous review of

literature, low-income and minority parents are often viewed as being unconcerned

and apathetic toward their children's education due to the large amount of obstacles

that present themselves for these families (Lott 253). Although these views are based

on false assumptions and ignorance of circumstances surrounding these families,

teachers need to be cognizant of any bias or previous judgments they have regarding

these populations. When teachers first begin their careers, they tend to define the idea

of parental involvement based on the experiences they had when they were in school:

usually a traditional middle-class suburban ideal of doing whatever the teacher asked

the parents to do (Young et al. 2). Because of the changing demographics of the

public school system and family structure, these ideals simply cannot be the basis for

parents in today's society. Families that fall into low-income demographics and

those who are from different cultures cannot be lumped into the same groups as

middle-class white parents who have very different lives. The fact of the matter is

that a great majority of teachers today, as highlighted in the previous chapter, are still

from this middle-class population, setting them up to harbor these engrained

stereotypes that they may have had without even being aware. Polakow explains this

struggle for teachers in his book on the struggles of single parenting in America:

"…teachers do not live above their culture" (146); he goes on to explain that they

have to actively fight the ideas that have been held within their culture throughout their lives. While I am sure that most teachers would like to consider themselves free of these types of bias and unphased by the predominant opinions regarding these families, I urge all teachers to remain mindful that many people still hold these views, and they need to be addressed and negated. Parents in these minority groups have circumstances and challenges that many middle-class families will never have the opportunity to know or understand; it is the job of the teacher to actively help these parents to try to overcome these challenges in any way they can.

Develop a malleable policy of parental involvement. As teachers begin to develop policies or programs for their classroom in regards to the involvement of their students' parents, they must be sure to keep their specific classroom demographics in mind. Just as with administrative policies, teacher-created programs need to take into consideration the unique interpretations of what constitutes "parental involvement" in diverse populations. Defining what it means to be involved in their child's education is going to significantly differ among individual demographic groups within a school; middle-class families, culturally diverse families, and low-income families may all have their own interpretation of the phrase. If a teacher develops a program that only works for one of the specific groups, it has the possibility to alienate the other groups as a result. The solution to this problem is for teachers to create a broad and flexible definition of what parental involvement will look like in their classroom throughout the year; this will allow all parents to feel like they are able to contribute in some way to their child's education. In addition to this

larger concept of involvement, teachers should be willing to acknowledge the ways that different types of parents are already involved in their child's schooling, regardless of how trivial or small the activity may be. For example, in her study on low-income parents, Smith pointed out that one of her participants was a single-mother who would get up every morning at 6:00 am with her son to ensure that he got on the bus for school, even though she didn't get home from work at night until 2:00 am (50). This mother was doing the best she could to be active in supporting her son's education, even if all she was able to do was wake up with him early in the morning. These types of actions need to be acknowledged and encouraged by teachers in order to build a relationship that allows parents to feel valued at any level they are able to participate.

While some parents may have different views of what it means to be involved in their child's schooling, the increasing demographic diversity in our classrooms means that there are going to be a great deal of parents who are not going to have any experience with parental involvement at all. A way that teachers can effectively address both of these groups of parents is by developing and presenting specific guidelines as to what is expected in that specific classroom from parents who would like to be involved. Research has shown that parents from low-income and culturally diverse backgrounds respond most effectively when they are given specific expectations or guidelines in relation to their role in the educational process (Fields-Smith 131). Teachers can work individually with parents who want to get involved and develop tasks and goals that are suitable for each parent's specific circumstances

as well as utilizing any talents or interests they may bring into the classroom. Through working with specific parents, teachers will hopefully be able to instill confidence and trust in the families that are involved, promoting continued participation in the future.

Specific expectations and guidelines are important when parents begin involving themselves in their child's education, but getting parents to want to participate is one of the most difficult tasks teachers will face. As noted earlier, parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds deal with many stereotypes against them in relation to their involvement in the education process. As a result, parents in these groups need to be actively pursued in order to feel that they are wanted or needed in their child's school; teachers should be leading the charge in these cases. In the past, many parents report that they only heard from the school when there was a discipline or academic problem with their child, reinforcing the idea that their only role would be to take blame for these negative problems (Robinson and Fine 13). Since these parents are already hesitant of their role in the school system, it is the responsibility of teachers to actively reach out to show them that they are wanted and valued as members of the classroom community. Through the use of home visits, personal phone calls, or other individualized communication; teachers can use the information that they have gathered on these parents to appeal to them in a realistic and positive manner. If one of the mothers of a student is originally from Mexico and therefore became bilingual in Spanish and English, the teacher could ask her if she would come in to help the students with a Spanish reading lesson. The mother would

feel like she was valued as an expert in her field and useful to her child's educational life; all because she spoke her native language fluently.   This is just one example of how a teacher can seek out parents to show them that they are a crucial part of their child's academic success, regardless of how they view themselves due to demographic circumstances.

The development of trust and mutual respect is something that teachers have to work extremely hard at when trying to get these "hard to reach" parents involved in the school system. Their diverse experiences of struggling with their child's past teachers and administrators as well as any negative memories of their own school days are constantly working against the teachers.   It is essential that one of the most important aspects of communication with these parents is that it be consistent and reliable from the very first interaction. Teachers need to show parents that regardless of whether they are willing or able to participate in activities, they will still remain a valued member of the school community and therefore be kept up to date with communication and news. Reese suggests that utilizing newsletters as a means of on-going communication has been shown to be one of the most effective tools for establishing parent/teacher relationships (27). Teachers can use this newsletter to report on current projects, upcoming events, praise individual students for achievement, and announce any upcoming ways for parents to become involved in activities regarding the school or classroom. Creating monthly open-hours after school is another excellent way in which teachers can provide consistent support to encourage parents to attempt to participate in their child's education. At the

beginning of the year the teacher can choose any two days during the month to stay after school ends for a few hours to allow parents to "walk-in" and interact with the teacher. By announcing the dates early on, teachers give the parents an opportunity to plan ahead in order to try to make it to one of the sessions. The openness of the invitation is also much less intimidating as it isn't a "required" conference, but a voluntary opportunity to seek out a relationship with the teacher.

It is absolutely crucial that regardless of how teachers decide to address the diversity in parental demographics in their classroom, they remain aware of the unique barriers that are present in these families and as a result they remain as flexible as possible in their interactions. Like the example of the monthly open-door conferences above, informal meetings have been shown to be far more effective with parents in lower income and culturally diverse homes. In a study of low income parents, it was discovered that they were far more interested in casual meetings, since they are less likely than middle-class parents to ever "run into" teachers in an out-of-school community setting (Rule and Kyle 293). These parents need to feel that they are welcome into their child's classroom at any time, not just at scheduled times where they may not have the opportunity to attend. By making themselves available to parents more often, teachers are showing their understanding and appreciation for the unique situations that may present themselves in these people's daily lives that could be detrimental to a relationship with the school.

Acknowledging some of the common barriers to involvement that these

parents face in their everyday lives is also an excellent way for teachers to reach out

to families.   For example, families with parents who are low-income or single parents

have a great deal of trouble with the scheduling of activities and meetings that schools

present. Because these parents cannot take time off of work or do not have childcare

available, they often don't have the option of attending after-school meetings or

during-school activities. Teachers can accommodate these types of parents by

providing a variety of meeting times and days, giving them a wider opportunity to

work the appointment into their schedule. For parents who struggle with

transportation to school events, teachers can set up meeting times around local bus

routes or provide alternate locations for meetings if that is a feasible option.

Allowing parents to bring other children to school events will combat the issue of not

having childcare while also showing parents that their entire family is welcome into

the school community.

Cultural obstacles must also be a priority to teachers when trying to involve

all families in the education process. The more teachers are able to discover about the

cultural background of their students the easier it will be to develop programs to aid

these families when needed. Morrell and Morrell detail an excellent example of a

teacher being proactive with her students' families in an article:

…the teacher became aware the Daniel spoke mainly Spanish

at home due to the fact that his parents were unable to speak English

fluently enough to communicate. She immediately began to pull all

readings and homework from the past weeks and for the next month

and found copies of them all in Spanish to send home with Daniel

(13).

Daniel's family would be able to actively follow along in his education due to the

efforts that the teacher made after she found out about the cultural implications that

were at play when Daniel went home from school. The parents will hopefully

understand the effort put forth by the teacher and gain a sense of confidence and

responsibility towards their son's education.

Utilize parent empowerment models. Many of the strategies and policies

that are generic to public schools across the country tend to rely on the concept of

creating a teacher-parent partnership in hopes of increasing parental involvement in

student academics. Ferrara defines this model as one that aims to "help all families

establish home environments to support children as student" (79). While this model

may be plausible for a certain percentage of parents, the unique populations that have

been identified previously have little success with this type of relationship. The

concern that exists with the partnership model is that it assumes that parents not only

want to change their home lives to reflect classroom practices, but that they also have

the time, skills, and desire to actively partner with teachers in order to make this

venture successful. As discussed in great detail in other sections of this research,

parents who are from diverse backgrounds with unique obstacles to participation

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greatly from a lack of time and resources needed to maintain any sort of consistent relationship with teachers, let alone being able to meet frequently to develop a "partnership".   Unfortunately, many teachers feel comfortable relying on this model due to their tendency to base their views and assumptions on typical "middle class parental involvement strategies" (Graue 159), as discussed previously in this chapter.

Teachers need to alter their perceptions of how to most effectively utilize parents as "educators" in their home setting. Instead of relying on the parent partnership models, parent empowerment models should be implemented when dealing with parents in diverse demographic groups. Parent empowerment models are similar to partnership models in that the primary goal of both is the increased involvement of parents in students' education in a constrictive and effective manner. However, unlike the partnerships models, the parent empowerment models don't rely on balanced power between parents and teachers, anticipate misunderstandings and problems, and incorporate children's home cultures into the development of policies (Sheldon 309). Basically, empowerment models give the parents the tools and resources that they need to educate their children in their own unique method. The cultural experiences and life skills that these parents have acquired throughout their lives are viewed as positive assets in the educational development of their children. Additionally, teachers who encourage parents to share their personally successful home practices will see increased participation by these parents due to their feeling of acceptance and importance in the school. Teachers who utilize empowerment models do not take a role of "expert" when trying to influence parents to continue academic

activities at home; instead they acknowledge the need for cooperation and participation of the parent in order to ensure the student's academic success.

Parent empowerment models allow teachers to develop homework and activities that are suited specifically to get parents involved in the process. Instead of calling a parent in for a conference to explain what the week's lessons have consisted of, the teacher can send home an activity packet that has the student demonstrating what they have been learning in order to complete the work. Bower and Griffin when after a unit on measurement give a great example of this empowerment strategy, students were sent home with a list of activities that asked them to find specific quantities and measurements throughout their homes (8). This activity was structured in such a way that it positioned students to ask a parent to help measure a certain quantity of something or describe a measurement of something else; the parents were an integral part of the final piece of the unit. Additionally, the questions were posed in such a way that they could be answered over a dinner conversation or any other short period of time the parent has to offer. Assignments like this one incorporate parents into the "teaching" role while the student is extending the knowledge that was given in their classroom at school. This is an excellent way to show parents that they have the ability to engage their children academically regardless of how small an amount of time they have to spend or how insecure they fee l with their own educational ability.

An excellent way to help parents to feel like they can be successful educators from home is by providing them with specific resources to help them learn about the possibilities. Parents who are not able to actively participate in school activities are usually some of the most interested in how they can help their child during the times they are available at home. One of my favorite books that addresses this topic is "20-Minute Learning Connection: A practical guide for parents who want to help their children succeed in school" by Douglas B. Reeves. This book is a wealth of knowledge for parents who want to know what is expected in school and what type of programs are in place at different levels to help students in the classroom. In addition, it gives a great deal of attention to the issues surrounding students who have special needs, as well as the resources that are available for their benefit in their schools. Parents can use this book to look up specific questions about how their child needs to perform on standardized state tests or just browse the many suggestions for promoting academic success while they are at home. Appendix D is another example of a great resource that teachers can provide to empower parents to become active in education at home. The homework tips sheet was something that was created by myself during a student teaching experience; I wanted a quick reference sheet to give each parent as they left a parent-teacher conference night at the school. This guide can be distributed in many different ways however, regardless of whether parents are able to make it to the school or not, they can pull it off a school website or it can be mailed to them as part of a beginning of the school year packet.

Along with providing suggestions and resources to help parents find their own ways to involve themselves with students, teachers also have the opportunity to create assignments and lessons that can be tailored to aid parents in this struggle. Appendix E was taken from a grammar lesson plan that I created to help students learn parts of speech in a fun and meaningful way. The activity in this lesson centers are multiple "Mad Libs", which are pre-constructed paragraphs or stories with specific words missing that are to be filled in by the participants. Instead of completing all of the worksheets in class, the teacher could send home a packet for students to do with parents at home. By including the "cheat sheet" with the Mad Libs, parents would be able to participate in the activity and help continue the lesson that was given during the school day. Additionally, students could help parents if they were unfamiliar with the parts of speech by explaining or giving examples; furthering not only the educational value for the student but also for the parent.

In addition to this larger concept of involvement, teachers should be willing to acknowledge the ways that different types of parents are already involved in their child's schooling, regardless of how trivial or small the activity may be. This is especially important for marginalized parents, who already may have negative or uneasy feelings about the school because of the stereotypes surrounding their demographic. This concept is illustrated in a study of low-income parents; the researcher pointed out that one of her participants was a single-mother who would get up every morning at 6:00 am with her son to ensure that he got on the bus for school, even though she didn't get home from work at night until 2:00 am (Smith 50).

Although the first reaction from middle-class teachers would probably be to shrug this effort off as being trivial and just "part of the parent's job", it is crucial that this act is put into the context of the circumstances surrounding the individual parent's situation. After working for 8 or more hours and getting home very late, the parent is making the conscious decision to sacrifice sleep in order to ensure that the student gets up, is fed, and goes off to school in the morning. In the context presented, that is a very big deal for a single parent who is overworked and overwhelmed with responsibilities; this effort needs to be acknowledged by the teacher as the important act that the parent feels it is. Parents need to feel like they are wanted and appreciated by the teacher, regardless of the type of participation they are able to contribute. Teachers need to understand and embrace this concept if they hope to develop any sort of positive relationship with these parents in order to reap the possible benefits of increasing their student's academic success.

Application of Research for Students

The impact that students have on the participation of parents is not something that can be overlooked when trying to develop new opportunities to increase parental involvement in education. As outlined earlier in research, students have a significant impact on whether or not their parents become an active player in school-related activities. Parents need to feel that they are wanted participants in their child's education in order to serve as effective positive influences on their academic endeavors. In addition, students have the opportunity to help both parents and

teachers develop beneficial mindsets when trying to build relationships between each other.

Provide explicit invitations. Hornby and Lafaele were discussed earlier as researchers who identified the strong impact that perception of invitation had on the desire of parents to become involved with their child's education (41). Because this issue was so substantial, one of the most essential actions that students can take to improve parental involvement is to actively ask for help and participation. Students need to understand that parents may be less proactive in providing assistance and feedback for schoolwork as time passes, leaving the responsibility on the student to drive participation. Especially in adolescence, parents feel the need for "space" from their children, leading to the connection to less involvement in school activities or assignments (Deslandes 165).

If students are going to contribute to the increased participation of their parents, there will need to be specific invitations and opportunities presented to them. In addition to simply asking parents for answers to multiple choice questions or ideas for essay topics, students can try daily to include their parents in the activities they participate in while at school. If there is a test coming up that can be reviewed for, the student can bring old worksheets or study pages home and ask a parent to go over it with him. Essays or reports can be read to parents in order to ask for feedback on editing for content or mechanics. Even small things like quizzes or weekly homework assignments can be shared with parents in order to help them feel like they

are part of the student's educational spectrum. The hope as students begin to share more and more is that their parents is that they will begin to take initiative with other facets of their education. This will allow parents to feel confident and empowered to take on a larger and more permanent role in their student's academic life.

Acknowledge parent obstacles and efforts. Students have the opportunity to observe the trials and tribulations that their parents' go through as a result of unique demographic circumstances. Because of this, students also have the opportunity to acknowledge the effect that these circumstances may have on their parents' attempts to participate in their education. The study conducted by Urdan et al. highlighted the different patterns of influence that students report when dealing with their parents; one of the most important being the Aversive Family Influence pattern (18). This pattern more or less identified failures of parents or other close relatives as showing students what "not to do" when dealing with their education. Another aspect of this pattern can be seen when allowing students to identify the reasons that their parents are unable to constructively contribute to their academics, therefore identifying specific barriers and obstacles for individual family members. Students can convey their compassion and understanding to their parents in the hopes of encouraging them to continue to seek solutions for the specific obstacles they may face.

Research has shown that student's perception of their parents' level of involvement and effort is linked directly to the impact this involvement has on

academic success. Unfortunately, studies have also shown that it is far too common

for students to be in the dark about the amount of involvement their parent's actually

have in their education. In a study conducted surrounding this topic, 42% of the

students surveyed perceived their parent's involvement to be lower than the parents

did (Barwegen et al. 54). The problem here is that parents are failing to communicate

instances of participation with the school, usually because they don't understand the

importance of this participation in their child's perception of their involvement. For

example, if a parent reaches out through a phone call or an email about their child's

progress or grades, the parent may not think it is of any consequence to tell their

student of the interaction if nothing out of the ordinary was discussed. Similarly,

parents sometimes consider information discussed with teachers in conferences or at

meetings at school to be useful only to their understanding about the student; unless

something was specifically brought up to be shared, parents often keep those

interactions to themselves. The research regarding the issue of student attitudes

towards their parents' involvement highlighted the concern that parents have with

becoming overly involved as their child grows through adolescence. As a result,

parents can believe that attempting to communicate with teachers without the

student's knowledge will give the student the sense of freedom that they want at this

point in their development. This attitude is a large barrier to encouraging parents to

share interactions with their students. Regardless of the reason, the problem with this

breakdown in communication between the parent and student is that it directly

contradicts the goals that parent's are striving for when they participate in these situations.

In order to combat this unintended consequence that some parents are not aware of, students need to take the opportunity to actively seek information about specific interactions with educators. Instead of relying on their parents to inform them, students can question parents about this based on scheduled meetings or school-wide activities that they may have participated in without the student knowing. Students should encourage parents to attend events when they are presented in school, this will allow parents to feel that they are valued and wanted as active participants. Developing a habit of sharing daily or weekly information about the general goings-on of the school day will allow students to very strongly convey their desire for their parent to be involved in that part of their life. Whether it is a ten-minute conversation on the way home from school or a half and hour discussion over dinner, this type of regular communication will encourage parents and show them they are needed. Students need to take the initiative when it comes to developing an open dialogue with parents regarding academic issues; parents need to understand this is an essential part of the parental involvement equation.

Communicate with teachers regarding parental involvement. One of the more important ways that students can positively impact parental involvement is through their communication with teachers and administration. When discussing the outcome of their study on factors effecting parents' perceptions, Deslandes and

Bertrand poignantly stated that the most effective way for schools to enhance parent involvement at home but elsewhere was to utilize adolescents as partners in the process (173). This conclusion makes perfect sense considering that these students are the ones who know the most about the parents and their specific situations and attitudes.

As members of unique households and families, students need to be proactive in conveying information that would be useful for teachers when trying to build parental involvement programs. For example, if a student knew that a teacher was planning to hold conferences with parents after school on one night, the student should be sure to explain any issues or conflicts that they may know of that would prevent their parent from attending. If the student has a single-mother who works an evening shift, the teacher can use this information to set up an alternate meeting time more conducive to the parent's schedule. By communicating this type of useful information with the teacher, the student is helping to ensure that the teacher doesn't attribute special circumstances that hinder involvement into disinterest in the student's education. This will help to promote a more positive and understanding relationship between the teacher and student as well as the parent and the teacher. Students can additionally suggest ways that they know their parent would be willing and able to participate based on their own specific talents or knowledge.

Along with sharing information regarding specific family demographics and circumstances, students have the opportunity to help create programs or projects that

will actively include their parents. Students can suggest opportunities for assignments that will require the input and involvement of their parent, such as a family tree project or a report on the student's heritage. By making the assignment contingent of the parent's cooperation, the student can convey the importance of their input as well as the effort of the teacher to reach out for this type of support. Students should proactive in discussing new programs or policies that could potentially give different parent demographics the opportunity to become an active participant in education. All of these examples work to increase the sense of community and trust between parents and school faculty, and students can be the key to all of them.

Example Programs to Target Specific Demographics Identified in Research

The research that has been presented previously can be used to create unique programs designed specifically to help increase the involvement of parents who have the most obstacles to overcome. In order to help illustrate the ways in which this information could be applied, three specific programs will be outlined that have been created based on just that data. These programs will allow for a clear understanding of how specific groups are addressed and benefited as a result of policies that reflect the research.

Cultural workshops. The program highlighted in Bower and Griffin's study of Hawk Elementary School is the result of administrators discovering that their community was far more culturally diverse than they ever could have imagined (11). Once it was acknowledged that a serious impediment to parental involvement was

due to cultural differences and nuances, the school officials decided to task school counselors with developing cultural awareness workshops for parents throughout the community. The goals of these workshops was to spread information that was gathered on the various cultures that made up the community as well as helping these parents to connect with each other through the common thread of education. Counselors offered translators in multiple languages and information regarding ESL classes that were available to parents if they wished. The workshops were to be held weekly to allow parents to develop relationships with each other and build a sense of community surrounding their child's education.

The program did a remarkable job of identifying a major struggle for parents in large cities or in multicultural communities: lack of effective methods of communication and understanding. By providing translators to parents at the workshops, they have eliminated a major source of confusion and frustration for parents who may not be able to speak English fluently or even at all. Parents can learn through demographic information on their community that they are not the only parents that may be struggling with these types of barriers. Furthermore, they have the ability to build bonds with other parents because of these commonalities in their struggle. These parents can become support systems for each other and provide help and knowledge when they need it. More importantly, these cultural workshops will convey to parents that they are an invaluable part of their child's academic success, and that the school is determined to help them get involved and become an asset to their child.

Family resource centers. Low-income parents were the focus of study for Smith's research when she outlined the "family resource center" developed by a school to address this population (51). The advisory committee responded to reports of parents being unable to participate in any academic endeavors due to lack of money, odd work hours, lack of childcare, and other income-based obstacles. The resource center began as an idea much like the cultural workshop design, but the committee wanted to include services that would specifically benefit economically struggling parents. In addition to a library and work area for parents and students, the resource center housed a donation room where clothes were provided for free from the local Goodwill and church groups. A food kitchen supplied by similar charitable agencies distributed food to the needy parents and children who struggled with being able to provide for their families. More mainstream resources like computers with Internet connections and public phones gave parents the ability to use technology that the may not have had access to elsewhere.

A program such as the family resource center is crucial when trying to reach out to parents who are burdened by monetary difficulties. Parents who have little or no money are rarely concerned with scheduling a parent-teacher conference when they may not have any idea how they will feed their family that night. The committee who developed the programs for this center identified the basic needs that would be weighing most heavily on parents' and students' minds: food, clothes, and shelter. The kitchen provided an excellent way for social interactions between parents and students to take place, while still fulfilling their basic need to eat. Parents who also

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took donations of food or clothing home would hopefully begin to develop a sense of trust and respect for the school since they were in charge of facilitating the program. Providing communication resources to parents such as a computer or telephone will not only allow parents to develop skills and relationships, but it will also encourage communication with the school itself. Parents can send emails from these computers to teachers whenever they wish, and teachers can utilize this opportunity to develop a relationship with the parent. Parents are able to come to this center whenever they can with their students and feel that they are a valuable member of the school family. With the changes in family structures and decline in economic prosperity all over the country, more and more parents will struggle with resources and time in the battle to remain an active part of their child's schooling. The family resource center is an excellent way to reach out to these parents and help them in ways that will increase their desire to become more involved with their child's academics; another excellent way to show parents that the school really does care.

Neighborhood representatives. The neighborhood representatives program was identified in Epstein's study on the Comprehensive School Reform model in 2005 (161). The main goal of the program was to develop methods of communication and interaction for the diverse community that could benefit all parents in respect to involvement in the school district. Instead of assigning a school faculty member to visit families around the district, the school officials wanted to identify actual parents of students who would be willing to serve as "representatives" of their community. These parents were chosen because of their diversity and in

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some cases because of specific experience with unique obstacles to the involvement process. One such parent had recently begun to take ESL classes at night due to her frustration with her child's teacher's lack of effort to provide assignments and correspondence in Spanish as well as English. Other parents were culturally and linguistically diverse, all having their own barriers that they have had to acknowledge and deal with throughout the school year. These parents were all made representatives of their neighborhoods, and were tasked with connecting with as many fellow parents as possible over a few weeks.

The parents who volunteered to be representatives for this program were all able to contribute very unique skills and mindsets that would have not been possible for a faculty member to do. Parents who spoke other languages while at home were able to connect to other parents with the same situation, allowing these parents to be informed and educated about the program by one of their peers in their native language. Similarly, culturally similar families were able to discuss issues related to cultural differences within education, communication issues, or just general information about how they can involve themselves more. By allowing these parents to develop these peer relationships within the context of increasing involvement in the school, they effectively developed a feeling of trust and confidence that the school was invested in their value as a parent. Even more important, parents who had struggled with specific issues or obstacles in the past could now discuss these with a fellow parent who can relate on a level totally different from that of a faculty member in the school. These representatives were building relationships with parents based

on mutual understanding and collaboration. As time goes on with this program, the

representatives can serve as liaisons between teachers and parents who may never

have even considered getting involved in their child's education in the past.

Chapter IV: Conclusions

The benefits for students that can be derived from a parent's active involvement in their education cannot be overstated enough. Research has provided a plethora of data and evidence linking positive academic achievement to increased parental support across grade levels and school types. The issue that educators need to address has moved from whether parents can positively impact their child's education to how do we get parents involved in order to facilitate this positive impact. The focuses of the solutions that have been presented were very purposefully aimed at groups of people who are part of the physical school community. While there is an enormous amount of research and literature goaled specifically at helping parents find ways to involve themselves in their child's education, I think as educators we have a responsibility to put for the most aggressive effort we possibly can from our side of the issue.

As educators, we have been taught that our students are unique individuals that need to be treated as such; we must also understand that their families need to be addressed in the same manner. The best way to encourage and support the involvement of our students'' parents is to get to know their specific circumstances and how they effect the daily lives of the family (Carlisle et al. 161). It is essential that we not only identify but also strive to understand the differences that exist among different cultures and communities. The most important thing to keep in mind is that family involvement is critical to students' educational development and progress,

even when conceived of differently across cultures and family structures (Soute-Manning 88).

As differences among our students' families are explored, it is crucial that the traditional definitions of parental involvement be allowed to be altered and modified according to changing family identities. The literature that typically defines parental involvement as either directly supporting student academics or participating in school functions can overlook parents of differing demographics, such as low income and minority parents. Redefining what it can mean to be "involved" in a student's education is a key part of the struggle to get more parents to participate in any way possible. Along with this redefinition needs to be a strong effort on the part of educators to help eliminate any obstacles we are able to; some solution may require cooperation of community groups, churches, non-profit organizations, or local government. Local government could be asked to offer small tax advantages to businesses that allow flexible work schedules for parents in order to encourage participation in school events (LaRocque et al. 119). City transportation authorities can help to provide transportation for parents when there is a need to attend meetings or other school functions. Teachers and administrators should reach out to their community with the importance of supporting parental involvement, the more people who are willing to be involved the easier the task will be.

Teacher education is one of the most important topics that has been addressed within the research; as they are the frontline of communication between students and

families the majority of the time. It is essential to begin introducing future teachers at the earliest levels of education to the very important concept of interpersonal communication with parents and families. Teacher educators should make it a priority to examine how these students can learn to work alongside parents as partners, instead of just considering them "add-ons" in the educational process (Christianakis 174). It is too common that teachers in diverse schools are not equipped with the knowledge and resources to reach out to families of differing cultures and demographics, and this is incredibly detrimental to the goal at hand.

Through appropriate education and experience, teachers can begin to understand the need to construct parental participation models according to the population of parents they are serving in their classroom family. Teachers should be taught that they can't assume that single parents who have two jobs and take a bus everyday to work have the same ability to attend a parent-teacher conference at the school in the afternoon on a weekday. We need to understand that these parents do not have the option to "take the day off" in order to have a 30-minute conference on a Tuesday at 1:00 pm; their job may not have the stability to allow this. Creating flexible schedules and variable forms of communication will give parents the greatest opportunity for successful participation in their child's education. In addition to these strategies for reaching as many diverse parent populations as possible, I feel very strongly that we need to be aware of the fact that we may not be able to help every family to become more involved. There will always be circumstances and situations beyond our control that will prohibit certain parents from being able to find a way to

participate in our classroom families. This is not in any way a failure, as long as we have done as much as we can to try to overcome these obstacles.

Studies on parental involvement have endless possibilities for future research, from specific demographic studies to research on success rates of policies across the country. Since parental demographics are so diverse from one school district to another, researchers are constantly developing new techniques to try to find common solutions to unite parents in any way possible. I am particularly interested in research regarding the result of failed parental involvement policies; in other words, what do we do if we cannot get parents to engage in their child's education? While I understand that this is often considered a "pessimistic" view, I feel it is absolutely necessary to develop policies that will protect our students' education regardless of outside influences. Research of this kind is invaluable to teachers across the country, as it is a very common occurrence to deal with.

The remarkable benefit that increased parental involvement has been observed and documented to have on student academic achievement is undeniable.

> The more engaged parents are in the education of their children the more likely their children are to achieve academic success (Harris and Goodall 278).

I strongly believe that teachers need to lead the charge on pursing policies and programs that will facilitate this type of increased involvement regardless of demographic data across specific districts. Teachers need to actively pursue

relationships with parents of their students in order to fully be able to build a

constructive partnership with them. We cannot expect parents of diverse cultures and

populations to reach out and engage the school system in the same ways; these

parents need to be identified as individually as we do with our students everyday.

Only then do we have the chance of learning and building positive and mutually

beneficial relationships for our students and ourselves.

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Parent Teacher Communication

Parent Survey

Student's Name_____Preferred Nickname_____
Parent(s') Names_____

Hello! Welcome to our classroom family! It has been my pleasure getting to know your child over the 1st week of school. Every child has unique strengths, talents, or gifts; you have a wealth of knowledge about this that I hope you will share with me so that I may be able to reach and teach your child in the best way possible. I appreciate your assistance helping me to learn about your child as a unique individual.

Your responses to the questions below are much appreciated, but please do not feel obligated to share anything you may not be comfortable with. Along with information about your student, please let me know anything about yourself or your family that would be useful to your relationship with the school. The more I am able to learn about each student's family the more I will be able to customize a unique method for interaction that is beneficial to everyone. I am also very curious about your level of interest in becoming involved in our classroom or other school activities, so please share any views you have on this! Please know that any information your share with me will be confidential and used only to develop positive

interactions in the future. Thank you and I look forward to communicating with you as often as possible!

Parent Survey

1. What does your child do in his/her spare time? Interests? Hobbies?

2. Has your child expressed any concerns about school, activities or school friends?

3. What do you perceive your child's strengths to be?

4. Are there areas in which you feel your child could improve?

5. Does your child have access to a computer at home? Internet access? Printer?

6. What languages are spoken at home?

7. How would you like to be involved in your child's education?

8. Have you had any past experience with interacting with school faculty or volunteering on any level?

9. Do you have any restrictions or concerns about becoming involved in school that you would like to share?

10. When is the most convenient time that you would be free to discuss any issues or concerns?

Are there any other comments or information that you would like to provide? Please include anything else you feel I should know about your child so that I can work effectively with him/her.

~~~~~~~~*Student Survey*~~~~~~~~~

1.) My full name is _____

    I like to be called_____

2.) The month I was born in is _____

3.) Do you have any pets? What are their names?

_____

4.) My favorite color is _____

5.) Do you have any siblings? If so how many? _____

6.) What language is spoken in your house most of the time? _____

7.) What is your favorite food? _____

8.) My favorite activity is _____

9.) If I were an animal I would be a _____

10.) What is your favorite subject and why?

11.) What is the subject you like the least and why?

_____

12.) Places you have traveled

_____

13.) What is your favorite book? _____

14.) Do you like to work in groups or by yourself?_____

15.) Have you been to a history museum, other museums, or historical site? What was it? _____

16.) Do you talk to your family about school when you go home?   If so what do you like to talk about? _____

17.) What would you like me to know about you and how you feel about school? _____

Personal Introduction Essay for Students:

Welcome to an exciting new school year! In the hopes of getting to know each of you a little better, I would like our first assignment to be a personal essay. Below you will find examples of questions that you can respond to or use to get your thoughts formulated in a more structured manner. You do not have to answer any of these questions specifically, please just use them as a basis for the type of information I hope you will share with me during your essay. This essay doesn't have a required length or word count, but I would like it to include as much useful information as possible to help me understand you better as a student and member of our classroom family.

- ➢ What is your favorite part about going back to school? Least favorite?
- ➢ What does your family do on the first day of school?•
- ➢ Do you walk to school, take the bus, or get rides? Which method would you prefer? Why?
- ➢ How do you feel about homework? Is it fun? Hard? Educational?
- ➢ Do you do most of your homework on your own? Who helps if "no"?
- ➢ Have you always lived in this town/city/area? If not, where else have you lived?
- ➢ What are three hobbies that you have?
- ➢ What do you want to do or be when you get older?•
- ➢ Why do you think it is important for kids to go to school? Why is it not?

Appendix D

The Top Ten Homework Tips for Parents

1. Establish a Routine

The first step in creating a positive homework pathway for your child is by primarily creating a routine. This may mean that parents may have to compromise with their child on the working conditions for homework time. If a child is comfortable independently working in his or her bedroom, then parents may need to allow this freedom and choice of the child; however, if a

child's homework is incomplete or if their grades drop, then parents should immediately step in and enforce a different homework strategy and routine.

2. Create Boundaries

As the homework routine is clearly outlined and consistently enforced, parents should simultaneously create clear boundaries for their child as well. This may entail that a teenager's cell phone must be turned off during homework time, or a child's television or radio must be off until assignments are complete.

3. Get Organized

For younger children, a parent may need to create a homework calendar that both the parent and the child can clearly access and see. This may help a child learn how to plan ahead and create a schedule for long-term elementary and middle school projects. For high school kids, this may mean that a parent talks with their teen about setting progress goals for assignments each day.

4. Accountability and Responsibility

Regardless of a child's age or school grade, a parent must immediately require their child's personal accountability for homework and assignments. Parents should have clear rules about writing down assignments in a notebook, or remembering to bring all necessary homework materials, such as books or calculators, home each night. If a child fails to hold up their end of the bargain, then the established consequences should be enforced.

5. Create a "Learning Space"

For many children, a "learning space" that is specifically set aside for homework can allow them to mentally enter into a "school mode" when they are at home. This may mean that a small office is stocked with pens, paper, and necessary tools for assignments; however, on the other hand, this also may mean that a child may need to access the library each day for homework (if they are too distracted at home). Regardless of a child's needs, a parent must create a free space for a child to complete assignments without disruptions or distractions.

6. Teach Prioritization

Children are gradually assigned more homework tasks as they progress through the school grades, and parents can intervene and teach children how to prioritize their homework assignments. If a project is due in a week or if a child is feeling overwhelmed, a parent can help their child make a list of everything that must be done, and then number each task in order to prioritize the academic responsibilities.

7. Check Your Child's Progress

While public schools send out report cards and progress reports, many schools now post grades and homework assignments online. Parents can <u>speak with their child's teacher(s)</u> about the best ways to check in on the student's progress throughout the semester and school year, so that students are able to consistently perform to their potential without falling behind or struggling.

8. Allow Freedoms When Earned

If a child successfully meets all of the outlined homework rules and expectations, parents can allow certain appropriate freedoms if their child seems to be excelling in their tasks and schoolwork. For example, if a child asks to change their homework time or change their "learning space," parents should experiment with new freedoms as the child gradually excels with their own academic responsibility. As long as the child seems to be successfully comprehending and excelling in academic pursuits and assignments, parents can consider new privileges and rewards for their child's achievements.

9. Be a Study Buddy

Many times, especially when a child feels overwhelmed with a task or assignment, parents can offer support by simply helping their child study. This involves quizzing a child, teaching a child study strategies, or also just helping a child get organized. Sometimes the simple act of giving a child attention during difficult tasks can boost a child's morale and effort.

10. Encourage and Support

Most importantly, a parent should serve as a <u>motivational</u> academic cheerleader. Homework should not be a punishment or a time that's dreaded. Approach homework with a positive attitude, and consistently reward the child with positive verbal feedback. Children do not require material treats or presents for their success; moreover, children thrive on verbal support and encouragement. For example, if a child consistently does their homework without complaining, remind them each day, "I love how you always do your assignments with such a great attitude. I admire your ability to do what's assigned with such an adult work ethic!" When compliments are specific and meaningful, a child will feel more confident and motivated to continually follow through with his or her responsibilities and performance

Appendix E

At-Home Activity for Parents

PARTS OF SPEECH CHEAT SHEET

<u>Nouns</u> are words used as names, so a noun names something:

people, animals, places, objects, substances, qualities, actions,

and measures.

Example: Jane, dog, airport, stapler, dirt, courage, reading, centimeters

Pronouns are substitutes for names; they take the place of a noun or name.

Example: he, she, it, them, mine, yours, these, those

Verbs make statements about nouns; they express actions, conditions, or states of being.

Example: Sue was very happy. The soldiers charged the enemy.

Adjectives are words that modify a noun or pronoun; they describe nouns or pronouns.

Example: talented writers, beautiful dancer, ugly lapdog

Adverbs are words that modify a verb, an adjective or another adverb.

Adverbs usually answer the questions where, when, how, in what manner, or to what extent or degree.

Example: You must do this now. Tom speaks elegantly. Jay lives far.

Prepositions are words that show a relationship that exists between certain words in a sentence; they connect a noun or pronoun to some other word in a sentence.

Example: The troll lived under the bridge. We went over the hill. He bought groceries from the store.

**Conjunctions** are words that connect or link other words or a group of words.

Example: Jamie and Ethan, one or two, slowly but steadily.

**Interjections** are exclamatory words; they express strong feelings or sudden emotion.

Example: Ouch! I hate coffee!

http://www.madglibs.com/createyourown.php

A DAY AT THE ZOO

Today I went to the zoo. I saw a _____ _(adjective)_

_____ _(noun)_ jumping up and down in its tree. He

_____ _(verb: past tense)_ _____ _(adverb)_ through the

large tunnel that led to its _____ _(adjective)_

_____ *(noun)*. I got some peanuts and passed them through the cage to a gigantic gray _____ *(noun)* towering above my head. Feeding that animal made me hungry. I went to get a _____ *(adjective)* scoop of ice cream. It filled my stomach. Afterwards I had to _____ *(verb)* _____ *(adverb)* to catch our bus. When I got home I _____ *(verb past tense)* my mom for a _____ *(adjective)* day at the zoo.

<u>CLASSIFIEDS</u>

Wanted: _____ (adjective) person with _____ (adjective) organizational skills and willing to work _____ (number) hours a week. Duties include _____ (verb ending "ing"), _____ (verb ending "ing), and _____ (verb ending "ing"). Starting pay is _____ (number) dollars per hour. Please apply in person at:

_____ (a direction (north, south, etc.)) _____ (number adverb) street.

Lost: Our _____ (animal), _____ (female name) was lost on the corner of _____ (noun) and _____ (noun) streets. She is _____ (color) and _____ (color) and very _____ (adjective). Reward of _____ (number) dollars is offered for her safe return.

Employment: _____ (adjective) _____ (occupation) looking for work. I am willing to _____ (present tense) and _____ (present tense verb) for _____ (number) dollars per hour. I am very skilled at _____ (verb ending "ing") as well. I can provide _____ (adjective) character references.

Football Fans

Uncle Cheesey was _____ (adjective) one Friday night so he decided to go to the local high school _____ (sport) game. He dressed in his best _____ (article of clothing) and _____ (article of clothing) and hopped in his _____ (vehicle) for the short drive over. When he got there, he paid _____ (number)

dollars to get in and being hungry, he bought a _____ (food) and a

_____ (food) and a _____ (adverb) ate them both. Uncle

Cheesey sat down in the stands next to some cute _____ (plural

noun) and soon the game started. The home team went by the name

"the _____ (adjective) _____ (plural noun)" and they were

playing "the _____ (adjective) _____ (plural noun)". The home

team was losing by half time and the crowd was rather _____

(adjective). Uncle Cheesey thought he'd liven up the party so he took

off his _____ (article of clothing) and began shouting "_____

(verb)!!" The crowd turned on him and started throwing _____

(plural noun) and _____ (plural noun) at him. An especially

_____ (adjective) _____ (noun) hit him on the _____ (body

part) and he started _____ (verb ending "ing). This caused

_____ (proper noun) to show up and throw him out of the

stadium. Poor Uncle Cheesey. He had to go home and he hadn't even

finished his _____ (food).

Infomercial

Is your _____ (noun) making a mess of

your_____ (place)? Try _____

(adjective) _____ (noun)! It will _____

(verb) your whole _____ (noun) and _____ (verb) to unbelievable levels! Watch, as we demonstrate, the _____ (adjective) capabilities of this _____ (adjective) product! Everyone should have at least _____ (number) of these!

To order, call the number on your screen. _____ (adjective) phone attendants will _____ (adverb) take your request. _____ (adjective) and _____ (adjective) service will be yours! Call within the next _____ (number) _____ (measurement of time), and you will receive a _____ (adjective), _____ (adjective) _____ (noun) as a bonus, absolutely free for an additional value of _____ (number) dollars. You will of course be asked to pay the shipping and handling cost of _____ (number) dollars on the free product). Act Now!!