A Comparison of Principals’ and Parents’ Perceptions of Family Engagement in Schools

Karen Ash Frost

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The University of Southern Mississippi

A COMPARISON OF PRINCIPALS’ AND PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF
FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

by

Karen Ash Frost

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2012
ABSTRACT

A COMPARISON OF PRINCIPALS’ AND PARENTS’ PERCEPTION OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

by Karen Ash Frost

May 2012

In an age of educational accountability, the ability of a school leader to create a strong community partnership with parents is not only seen as important, but vital for improving school success. School leaders are expected to create an atmosphere conducive for student learning and parent involvement. In order to build a school where families are engaged and eager to participate, the principal must strive to understand what parents think about family engagement in schools, and compare it to their own perceptions in order to create a strong partnership.

The purpose of this study is to compare principals’ and parents’ perception of family engagement as it relates to communication, school culture, and school leadership. This is a quantitative study using a survey created for principals and archived data of parent responses from a district-wide school improvement survey, in order to compare perceptions of both groups. Principals from 56 schools in a large metropolitan school district were surveyed, and data from 11,765 parents was used for the comparison. A Pearson Correlation and Paired Samples t-test were used to analyze the data.

It was found that the correlation was positive and statistically significant between parent and principal perceptions of communication and school culture. The correlation for school leadership was not statistically significant. Paired t-tests indicated the mean
perception of parents and principals differ regarding school culture and school leadership. There was no difference in the parents’ and principals’ perception regarding communication.

Based on these findings, the schools in this study have a good communication system between school and home. These schools need to communicate their vision and goals to stakeholders, and allow parents to give input into school decisions. Principals must take time to analyze parent perceptions and use that information when developing the family engagement plan.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .............................................................................................................. ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................................................................... iv

LIST OF TABLES ...................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1

   Background of the Study
   Theoretical Foundation
   Statement of Problem
   Statement of Purpose
   Research Questions
   Rationale and Significance of Study
   Assumptions
   Delimitations
   Definitions of Terms
   Summary and Organization of the Study

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ................................................................. 16

   Introduction
   History of Parent Involvement
   National Parent Teacher Association
   Federal Legislation Affecting Parental Involvement
   Models for Family Engagement
   Benefits of Parental Involvement
   Barriers for Family Engagement
   Communication
   School Culture
   School Leadership
   Parent Perception
   Summary of Literature Review

III. METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................. 51

   Introduction
   Hypotheses
   Research Design
Sample and Participants
Instrumentation
Data Collection Procedures
Data Analysis
Summary

IV. FINDINGS/PRESENTATION OF DATA/SUMMARY………………..58

Introduction
Presenting the Findings
Summary

V. SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS………………69

Introduction
Review of the Problem
Summary of the Study
Data Collection
Data Analysis
Summary of Major Findings
Conclusions
Implications for Practice
Limitations
Recommendations for Future Research
Concluding Remarks

APPENDIXES……………………………………………………………………………………..85

REFERENCES……………………………………………………………………………………93
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Corresponding Survey Statements for Parents and Principals Regarding</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication Between the School and Parents (N=56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Summary Statistics for Communication Variables for Parents and Principals</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N=56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Corresponding Survey Statements for Parents and Principals Regarding</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Culture (N=56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Summary Statistics for School Culture Variables for Parents and Principals</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N=56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Corresponding Survey Statements for Parents and Principals Regarding</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School Leadership (N=56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Summary Statistics for School Leadership Variables for Parents and</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principals (N=56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In an age of educational accountability, reform and bolder approaches have become inevitable. The role of the principal has taken a new path from a managerial prospective, to one of an entrepreneur in improving academic success. Entrepreneurship is defined as “one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of business or enterprise” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Entrepreneurs are those who are willing to set aside their own agendas and ideas, and gather a team to create a shared vision resulting in remarkable changes for their institution or business. The need for all to share and take responsibility in the academic success of students has caused a need for schools to evaluate their role and success in engaging families. For such an evaluation to take place, the leadership of the school must begin the initiative (Sanders & Harvey, 2002).

A true assessment of principals’ perceptions and parent perceptions is essential before plans can be developed for initiating and improving the involvement of families. Comparing these perceptions will be the focus of this study. Studies have shown the different perspectives of parents and teachers (McGhee, 2007, Smith, 2008), but there was a need to look closely at principals’ perceptions as compared to parents’ perceptions. The success of any partnership programs must have principal leadership (Sheldon, 2005). “Without principal leadership, the implementation of any program is not likely to be successful or sustained” (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009, p. 28).
Background of the Study

“Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.”

National Education Goals - Goal 8)

Extensive research has been done that supports the connection between parent involvement and improved student achievement in schools (Epstein, et al., 2009; Jeynes, 2005a; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; VanVoorhis & Sheldon, 2004; Warren, 2010). Family engagement is defined as “those systems, processes, policies, procedures, and practices that allow parents and family to be a credible component within the academic lives of their children” (Constantino, 2003, p. 10). When families are involved in the school, there is an increase in achievement of the students (Epstein, 2001). “The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence in their children’s achievement in school and through life” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 2).

In an era when the demands for better schools, higher achievement, and school accountability are intense, any factor that directly affects an increase in student achievement must be taken seriously. The No Child Left Behind (2004) law requires that low student achievement be addressed. The law instructs schools to develop plans that help increase parental involvement, an important strategy for improving academic success. The law also gives specific guidelines for parent choice. In fact, due to the strong research in family engagement and NCLB (2004) legislation, Title 1 schools receiving federal funding must implement a plan and show how they intend to strengthen partnerships between schools and families (NCLB, 2004).

Much of the current research on parent engagement compared teacher and parent perceptions (McGhee, 2007; Smith, 2008). Several studies have shown that these
perceptions can be different, which may pose misunderstanding and miscommunication between schools and parents. In order to assess and improve that connection, there was a close look at school culture.

The Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) has determined that school culture involves several important facets. “In their work on culture, they define it as the encompassing attitudes and beliefs of those inside the school environment and outside the school, or the external environment” (Constantino, 2003, p. 10). The beliefs, attitudes, and actions of the administration and staff are indicative of a positive or negative school culture. If those beliefs, attitudes, and actions are perceived to be unwelcoming to families, a negative message is sent to the school community. Families must be involved in developing the culture of the school. Creating a vision that addresses the school community culture is important. There must be a persistent effort to include family involvement in the school vision. Vision must begin with the school leader (Constantino, 2003).

School leaders must have a strong vision of what family engagement should be in their school. “Engaging families with schools is a process; the catalyst for that process is the leader” (Constantino, 2003, p. 18). In reviewing the research on family engagement, it was apparent that there should be a comparison of parents’ and principals’ perception on family engagement. Research literature suggested that if positive school culture was directly related to the vision and beliefs of the school and its leader, then examining leadership perception in promoting family engagement was essential (Constantino, 2003). Hallinger and Heck (1998) stated that principals have a strong influence on the school’s outcomes, specifically in four domains. Those domains are: the school’s purpose and goals, structure and social networks, people, and organizational culture. Studies also
proposed that schools have greater success when leadership includes a variety of stakeholders in the decision-making process (Leithwood, 1994; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

The No Child Left Behind Act (2004) acknowledged the importance of family involvement in schools. The legislation indicated that Title I schools must create a parental involvement policy and this policy must be evaluated for its effectiveness each year by the parents. This type of evaluation helps to find the perception of parents in regard to parental involvement. Because principals have a strong influence on the school’s purpose and goals (Hallinger & Heck, 1998), finding out their perception of family involvement and comparing it to parents’ perceptions is extremely important. In this study, the researcher is interested in finding out the relationship between principals’ and parents’ perceptions about communication, school culture, and school leadership in order to help schools determine factors that enhances or hinder family engagement.

Theoretical Foundation

Historically, the need for parent involvement is not a novel idea. Support for parents to be involved and to participate in their children’s educational careers is compelling. The theories that support the initiatives of family engagement and involvement have been developed from well-established research (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Coleman, 1991; Epstein et al., 2009). These theories have built a framework that explains how organizations work and how they can become excellent institutions.

Theoretical research about parental involvement has been taking place for several decades and continues today (Epstein et al., 2009). Several theories were used in examining the importance of family engagement. These theories are: The Ecological Systems Theory, Social Capital Theory, and the Theory of Overlapping Spheres. The
study of these three human ecological theories helps give support for parental involvement in schools.

*Ecological Systems Theory*

The Ecological Systems Theory was developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and sought to explain the layers in the system that influence the development of a child. The layers of a child’s environment consist of relationships, norms, and rules that have a distinct influence on development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) called these the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem, adding the chronosystem later. The first layer, the microsystem, is the child’s parents, neighborhood, peer group, and school which have the predominant influence. The next layer, or mesosystem, is the family/community environment, connecting with the primary environment, such as connecting the child’s home with school. The exosystem, comprised of the external environments such as the parent’s workplace, indirectly influence the child’s development. The macrosystem, or cultural environment, considers the culture or society (economic, political, subculture, eastern vs. western) in which the child interacts. The last system, the chronosystem is the pattern of environmental events that happen over the course of life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), if the roles, norms, or rules of the microsystem break down, and the relationships are not supportive of the child, the tools and skills to explore other parts or layers of the environment will not be available to the child. For example, if a child does not receive encouragement and affirmation from the parent(s), the child may look for attention in unsuitable places. This theory suggests that the family system is the most influential system in the child’s development; therefore, decisions made by parents concerning school can have a direct impact on the academic
success of their child (Schubert, 2010). Furthermore, the socioeconomic environment can have a dominant influence on the parents’ ability to provide educational resources and support. Middle-income educators may try to implement strategies to engage lower-income families but fail to analyze what these families really need in order to be involved (Smith, 2006). Assessment should be incorporated to gain greater understanding of those needs (Smith, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner (1979), co-founder of Head Start, stated that schools and teachers can provide an important role in the life of a student, but they cannot fulfill the important relational role of the parent. “For the educational community to attempt a primary role is to help our society continue its denial of the real issue” (Paquette & Ryan, 1990, p. 3). Therefore, schools should work to nurture this relationship and to welcome parental involvement in the schools (Paquette & Ryan, 1990).

Social Capital

Using Bronfenbrenner’s ideas, Coleman began to examine the ideas of social capital. Social capital is “the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people with norms of reciprocity” (Claridge, 2004). Social capital can involve several factors. If there is an adult with whom the child can establish a bond and trust, that relationship can become a resource for the student when difficulties or problems with school arise. When the community creates norms and expectations for youth behavior, those resources establish support to protect against peer pressure and provide help for parents in developing character and values in their children (Coleman, 1991). “These are two forms of social capital; more generally, social capital held by a person lies in the strength of social relations that make available to the person the resources of others” (Coleman, 1991, p. 8).
As suggested by Coleman (1991), extensive social capital in the community consists of parents establishing the norms and behavior that is accepted. Furthermore, parents help each other determine the expectations for students within the community and the school. This support can be vital in helping single-parent families with support in raising their children. Social capital in the community can also strengthen and support the school where there is a decline in community and parent involvement (Coleman, 1991).

Coleman (1991) described three components of social capital: (1) the reciprocal relationships based on obligation and expectation; (2) social control and norm; (3) channels of information (Coleman, 1988). He explained that economic status, school, family, and community, all components of social capital, have an impact on the student’s academic success (Coleman, 1988; Lee & Bowen, 2006). According to Lee and Bowen (2006), parents should seek information from the school on how to help their child with homework, attain study guides, books and resources, and parenting tips. Parents who devote more time to helping their child will increase the opportunities for their child to obtain academic success.

*Overlapping Spheres of Influence*

Overlapping Spheres of Influence, a theory developed by Joyce Epstein (1992) involves three spheres that are interconnected (Epstein, 1992). The external model shows that there are “three major contexts in which students learn and grow—the family, the school, and the community” (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 10). In this model some activities are done separately and some are done jointly to impact a child’s development and learning. The internal model shows how the relationships are influenced by each other
and are essential to student success. These relationships can occur between home, school, and the community (Epstein et al., 2009).

At the center of the model is the child. It is essential that all involved focus on the main component, that is, the success of the student. “School, family, and community partnerships cannot simply ‘produce’ successful students. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own successes” (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 10). Equally important is the understanding that students are a critical piece in a successful partnership. They are the ones that link home, school, and community (Epstein et al., 2009).

Epstein et al. (2009) developed overlapping spheres of influence to explain that schools and families share the responsibility for children. When the spheres are separate, there is very little partnership or shared responsibility. Overlapping spheres of the family, the community, and the school revealed shared resources, goals, and responsibilities. Within these three contexts, children can learn and grow, feeling supported in their educational career (Epstein et al., 2009). Within some practices in this model the school, families, and communities work together while other practices are conducted separately. However, all practices work to influence children’s development.

In this partnership, schools create appealing environments that make families feel welcome. In schools that implement this model, students feel special and that they belong (Epstein et al., 2009). Communities create opportunities and programs that recognize and reward student success. Schools and communities are supported by parents and understand the importance of learning communities working together. All of these elements form to make a strong educational path for students (Epstein et al., 2009). Understanding how these partnerships affect each other by studying and analyzing the
perceptions of parents and school leaders was vital for determining the direction in which this relationship can be strengthened.

Within the theoretical framework research, there emerged a critical theme: family involvement in the school is vital for a child’s educational success. The question then becomes, if family engagement has a major influence on student success, can there be specific components of involvement that ensure a successful partnership? If so, what are those components and how are they perceived by principals and parents?

**Statement of Problem**

The demand for school accountability, strengthened by the requirements of the federal government, has intensified the need to examine school and family partnerships (Epstein et al., 2009). Family and community engagement must be seen as an integral part of instruction and learning, not just an added benefit (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Historically, interaction with parents has been seen as the responsibility of teachers. Research has compared the perspectives of teachers and parents but the viewpoint of the school leader is essential (McGhee, 2007; Smith, 2008). If partnerships are to be strengthened and developed, there must be school leadership support. A clear understanding of principals’ perceptions of family-school partnerships is vital because their support is critical to having effective and sustained partnerships (Schubert, 2010). It is also important to compare the principal and parent perceptions and to find ways to bridge any gaps if differences are found.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this quantitative study is to (a) examine principals’ perceptions on family engagement as it relates to communication, school culture, and school leadership; (b) examine parents’ perceptions of communication, school culture, and school
leadership; and (c) determine if there is a relationship between specific types of parental involvement and academic achievement.

**Research Questions**

The following hypotheses will guide the study:

RQ: Is there a relationship between principal and parent perception as it relates to communication between home and school?

RQ: Is there a relationship between principal and parent perception as it relates to the culture of the school?

RQ: Is there a relationship between principal and parent perception as it relates to school leadership?

RQ: Is there a relationship between the academic achievement and the type of parental involvement in schools?

**Rationale and Significance of Study**

Several studies have shown a comparison of the perception of teachers and parents on family engagement, but few have studied the principals’ perception (Haack, 2007; McGhee, 2007; Smith, 2008). The need to determine what principals perceive to be true about parent and school partnerships as compared to parent perspectives was crucial in order to improve family engagement (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). “Principals are essential to this process and need to lead their staff in reaching out and working with students’ families and communities. Through principal leadership, schools can develop strong programs of school, family, and community partnerships and create and sustain cultures of academic achievement and success” (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009, p. 24). In order for these partnerships to be strong, exploring the perceptual relationship between
parents and principals relating to communication, school culture, and school leadership, was essential.

Laws passed by the federal government have explicitly stated what they expect Title 1 schools to accomplish within their Parent Involvement Plans (No Child Left Behind Act, 2004). Various studies have indicated that schools have been compliant in establishing these plans but only in terms of adherence, not in terms of truly engaging families (Darden, 2008). These studies suggested that schools need help in assessing how parents perceive their involvement and how that involvement can be strengthened (Darden, 2008).

When examining the research on family engagement, attention was given to the potential of increasing student achievement. Joyce Epstein, professor at Harvard University, researched family engagement and parental involvement over the past two decades. In her research, she found that when parents are involved, student achievement increases (Epstein, 2001). Henderson and Mapp (2002) also found that parents have a major influence on their child’s academic success. A meta-analysis of 66 studies reviewed by Henderson and Berla (1994) found that students had better grades, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher test scores, fewer Special Education students, better attendance, increased graduation rates, and increased enrollment in post-secondary schools. A study also found that the higher the parent involvement, the higher the test scores on state tests (Griffith, 1996). Another study looking at interactive homework, homework that involved the parent and student working together, indicated higher grades in the course (Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). This researcher did not find any other studies that were specific about the type of involvement and its relationship to student achievement.
Studies comparing the perspectives of teachers and parents have given valuable information to schools (McGhee, 2007; Olgetree, 2010; Smith, 2008). Understandably, teachers have more contact and interaction with parents than administrators, so examining teacher and parent perceptions was valuable. However, this researcher did not find any studies that investigated the perception of principals as compared to parents on family engagement as it related to communication, school culture, and school leadership.

The principal establishes the vision for the school and is the catalyst for change (Constantino, 2003) which justified a close examination of the principal’s perception on family engagement. School districts reported that principals and teachers frequently worked in the school building with families without having a clear understanding of the importance of family engagement, and effective strategies enhancing that involvement (Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez, & Weiss, 2009). Increased resources and training were needed to cultivate that understanding (Westmoreland, et al., 2009).

Research showed that if strong partnerships were to be successful, the principal’s leadership was vital (Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sanders & Simon, 2002; Sheldon, 2005; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004; & Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). Principals continued to be identified as an important factor in effective school reform (Fullen, 2001). Hallinger and Heck (1998) argued that the principal conveys the vision for his or her school, impacts teacher motivation, and brings the staff to consensus in supporting that vision.

A school principal is also influential in the culture of a school (Halleinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 1994; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Depending on that culture, parents may feel very comfortable as a member of the school community, or may feel
disconnected. Giving close examination of the perception of principals and parents in regard to school culture helped obtain a clearer picture of family involvement in schools.

Assumptions

This researcher assumed that those responding to the surveys answered accurately and honestly.

Delimitations

1. No actual data was collected from parents for this research study. The data used for parent perception was archived data.

2. Principal and parent data was collected from a large school district in a metropolitan area.

3. Student test scores were from third, fourth, fifth, sixth, eighth, and eleventh grades only.

4. The information gathered on the perceptions of principals did not include all principals in the district or in the state. Therefore, general conclusions were made with caution.

Definitions of Terms

*Achievement:* The academic success of students in reaching mastery

*Barriers:* Anything that prevents people from being together or understanding each other (Cambridge Online Dictionary, 2011).

*Collaborating with the Community:* Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation (Epstein, 2009).

*Communication (communicating):* Process through which information is exchanged
Community: Individuals, organizations, institutions, and businesses within and outside of school that have a vested interest in the success of students and the well-being of families. This includes parents, students, teachers, administrators, school councils, and businesses.

Decision-making: Including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders (Epstein, 2009).

Family engagement (parent partnerships, involvement): The relationship between home and school that assume responsibility for the success of the social, emotional, and academic development of children (Epstein, 2001).


Learning at home: Providing information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and curricular decisions and activities (Epstein, 2009).

Parent: A mother or father; one who brings up and cares for another (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011).

Parenting: Helping all families understand child and adolescent development, and establish home environments that support children as students (Epstein, 2009).

Principal: The head or leader of a school

School Culture: The beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize a school.

School Leadership: The capacity to lead students, teachers and parents to reach established educational goals.

Volunteering: Recruiting and organizing help and support for school programs and student activities (Epstein, 2009).
Summary and Organization of the Study

Research on family engagement indicated that student achievement increased when parents were involved and connected to the school (Jeynes, 2005b; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). If family engagement had a direct effect on the achievement of students, then it was essential that schools take a closer look at how they can improve parental involvement. In order for schools to be successful in engaging parents, there must be a determined effort on the part of the school’s leadership to examine their perspective as it relates to communication, school culture, and leadership, and compare their perceptions to those of parents. In Chapter I, the researcher introduced the study. The review of literature was presented in Chapter II. Chapter III, explained the methodology used by the researcher.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study is to (a) examine perceptions of principals on family engagement in relationship to communication, school culture, and school leadership; (b) examine parent perceptions on communication, school culture, and school leadership, using archived data from the School Improvement Surveys; (c) and examine the relationship of specific types of parental involvement to student achievement. This chapter reviewed the literature describing the history of parental involvement, federal legislation affecting family engagement, research-based models for engaging families, benefits and barriers of family involvement, communication, leadership and school culture, and parenting and parent perception.

History of Parent Involvement

Historically, parents have been involved in the education of their children at various levels. The late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century explored the ideas of public education and social contract as seen by philosophers John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Spring, 1986). As a result, the idea of shifting the responsibility for education from the parents to public schools began to emerge in Europe. As the local colonies began to settle in America, local control and responsibility for the education of children was considered an important responsibility of local jurisdiction. “For example, as early as 1642, Massachusetts colony, the leading colony regarding educational issues, passed a law which required all parents to provide their children with education in reading, religion, and a trade” (Hiatt, 1994, p. 28). When leaders discovered that a number of parents were not providing this education, a law was passed that mandated a town of 50
or more residents to hire a teacher for the children and to pay the teacher from local funds.

As the Revolutionary War ended, the idea for funding public school through taxes surfaced. George Washington was supportive of using federal and state taxes to support elementary education. Thomas Jefferson was also vocal and supportive in the need to provide education for all children. “His argument was that American’s citizens required certain basic skills in order to function in a democratic society” (Hiatt, 1994. p. 29). Jefferson believed that children should learn to read in order to be able to gather information and to be able to make good, sound decisions about the community and nation. However, parents were not yet willing to let public schools educate their young children. They preferred to teach them at home or to allow private and religious schools assume that responsibility (Hiatt, 1994).

Eisenmann (1998) expressed that in the late 1800s, Horace Mann helped to change the thinking of many. His thoughts assisted in opening the door for the development of public school systems. By 1860, almost all states adopted this idea.

Mann hoped that by bringing all children, of all classes together, they could have a common learning experience. This would also give an opportunity to the less fortunate to advance in the social scale and education would equalize the conditions of men. Moreover, it was viewed also as a road to social advancement by the early labor movement and as a goal of having common schools. Mann also suggested that by having schools it would help those students who didn't have appropriate discipline in the home. Building a person's character was just as important as reading, writing and arithmetic. In addition, by instilling values such as obedience to authority, promptness in attendance, and organizing the time according to bell ringing helped students prepare for future
employment. However, Mann faced some resistance from parents who did not want to give up the moral education to teachers and bureaucrats. The common school movement enabled women an opportunity to become the primary teachers (Eisenmann, 1998, p. 259).

The mass immigration into the United States created another factor that increased the popularity of public school education. From 1820 through 1880, approximately fifteen million people immigrated to America. Among this large number of immigrants were many more children who needed to be educated (Diner, 2008). Many of these children did not have a formal or structured home education; parents often insisted that the children work to help support the family. Immigrant parents were reluctant to send their children to school because of their need for income (Diner, 2008). Nonetheless, community officials began to see the need for these children to receive an education and become a part of the American culture. Compulsory education laws were passed by most states and mandated that all children attend school (Diner, 2008). Many parents continued to send their children to private schools, but public schools were becoming more accepted for all families.

As public education evolved, parental involvement decreased (Hiatt, 1994) parents began to rely on the schools to educate their children and allowed them to make decisions about their children’s educational progress. Decisions over who would govern and control the local schools finally became the responsibility of many states, with local governing boards reporting to them. In turn, the need for professionals to teach children in the public schools became apparent (Hiatt, 1994). States began to draft guidelines for teacher skill development and certification and to hire teachers according to their qualifications. Having a more bureaucratic system supervising and overseeing schools
helped with teacher professionalism and equitable operational efficiency, but resulted in less parent involvement (Hiatt, 1994).

As the public school developed, so emerged the graded school concept wherein students were taught curriculum according to their grade levels. The number of students in these schools increased, creating a need for someone to manage and operate the schools, which led to the development of the school principal. Again, the influence of Mann was seen (Hiatt, 1994). The teacher was considered the one responsible for the child’s education; the parents did not possess the time or skill to teach the child effectively. Therefore, the belief that the parent should relinquish this educational responsibility to the teacher was widely accepted (Hiatt, 1994).

Concern for the separation of public schools and parent control led to National Congress of Mothers (NCM) in 1897. Founded by two mothers, Phoebe Apperson Hearst and Alice McLellan Birney, the organization set out to help mothers become more informed about their children’s education as well as their safety and health. The NCM met with teachers and administrators to bridge the gap, volunteer their resources, and help in improving schools and communities. Much of this work was accomplished through petitions stating their concerns. The group studied child growth and development and school curriculum in order to become more informed. The NCM also actively sought to establish public school kindergarten. This successful organization later became the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

**National Parent Teacher Association**

The National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA, 2009) was established to support public education and protect the rights of children. Created by moms, many of the programs that are in place today are a result of the perseverance and hard work of this
organization (NPTA, 2009). Programs such as hot lunches, mandatory immunizations, the creation of kindergarten, and child labor laws were the outcomes of their efforts. “By whatever name it has been known, National PTA was created to meet a profound challenge: to better the lives of children. Today it continues to flourish because PTA has never lost sight of its goal: to change the lives of children across our great nation for the better” (NPTA, 2009).

Currently, PTA provides a Family Engagement Resource kit that provides information to help local school districts develop plans for parent involvement. The need for schools to be intentional about engaging the community is recognized at the national level, and many districts are using the local school PTA to launch these plans. The National PTA provides information on state statutes as it relates to engaging and involving families. Within the past year, a bill has been introduced in the House of Representatives that would provide monetary funding and incentives to states that require the local educational systems to develop family engagement plans (National Standards for Family School Partnerships, 2009).

Federal Legislation Affecting Parental Involvement

“The field (school, family, and community partnerships) has been strengthened by supporting federal, state, and local policies” (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 9). In 1965, Congress established the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) under President Lyndon B. Johnson (Landsberg, 2006). This act established funding for elementary and secondary schools without establishing a national curriculum. The ESEA authorized funds for instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, professional development, and parent involvement. The federal funding was sanctioned for five years
and was reapproved in 1970. The reauthorization of ESEA continued every five years with the most recent in 2001 entitled No Child Left Behind.

In 1994, President Clinton signed legislation to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Public Law 103-382 called “Improving America’s Schools Act” (A Compact for Learning, 1997). This legislation was designed to challenge every principal, teacher, and parent to have a written compact outlining their expectations and responsibilities in helping every child to learn and to be successful. The law called for specific development in four areas: 1) High academic standards and high expectations; 2) Better training for teachers; 3) Local reform flexibility and accountability; and 4) Close partnership with schools, communities, and families (Stedman, 1994).

In reviewing the fourth element, close partnership with schools, communities, and families, ninety-eight percent of parents indicated in the 1995 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll their willingness to sign a compact or contract with the school demonstrating their shared responsibility. Parents would be required to sign agreeing to specific responsibilities. These responsibilities would involve setting high expectations and standards, providing support for sound instruction, having safe and drug free environments, and effectively using modern technology (Stedman, 1994).

Not only did the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) indicate a need for shared responsibility in the area of high expectations in standards and teaching but also the need for frequent communication between the school and home. “Effective schools recognize that positive attitudes lead to positive communication” (A Compact for Learning, 1997). Building this partnership in which both school and parents communicate often about the progress of their child as well as inviting parents to give input in the governance of the school, was essential in developing a positive partnership.
Also, in this shared responsibility, there should be an agreement for building capacity through providing partnership training and opportunities for volunteering (A Compact for Learning, 1997). It was recognized that often parents want to help but were not sure where they can be the most effective as they volunteer their time. When schools provided training, parents feel more confident in their ability to help the school and students (A Compact for Learning, 1997).

Having community partnerships, not just parent partnerships, was also a part of IASA (A Compact for Learning, 1997). Many community businesses had resources that could provide skill and expertise to the local school, helping to increase volunteerism that supported student learning. A concentrated effort by local schools and their districts to develop these partnerships was an important piece of the shared responsibility between schools, parents, and the community (A Compact for Learning, 1997).

No Child Left Behind Legislation

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act mentions parents over three hundred times in different parts of the legislation. However, Section 1118, Title I of NCLB is the only component that is devoted strictly to parental involvement. Section 1118 is fundamental to all other provisions of parental involvement (NCLB Action Briefs, 2004), and specifically defines the requirements of Title I schools.

Title I schools are instructed to develop a written plan that states how the school will involve families. The plan should be developed with parental input, and must also be approved by parents. Once approved, the plan has to be distributed to the school’s parents and community. This plan must include ways to encourage and continue family engagement in the school (NCLB Action Briefs, 2004). Not only does the plan have to show the policy created to involve families, but also must include coordination with other

The inclusion of a definition of parental involvement was unique to NCLB (NCLB Action Briefs, 2004). The law interpreted parental involvement as “the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities including: assisting their child’s learning; being actively involved in their child’s education at school; serving as full partners in their child’s education and being included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; carrying out of other activities such as those described in Section 1118 ESEA” (NCLB Action Briefs, 2004, para. 5).

Another important element of the legislation involved building capacity for parent involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). This required school districts to ensure that their schools develop a strong alliance between school staff and parents. This component also stated that training may be needed to help teachers, staff, and administrative leadership understand how to develop these partnerships. When a strong partnership is established, academic improvement will increase (NCLB Action Briefs, 2004).

Models for Family Engagement

Throughout the past four decades, many models have developed to help schools embrace and successfully increase family engagement. Three of these models helped to lay the foundation for parental involvement improvement. These models are Comer’s
School Development Plan, Epstein’s School and Family Partnerships, and Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler Model of Parental Involvement.

Comer’s Model

Dr. James Comer, Yale psychiatrist developed a model (1995) to help schools view students holistically. He later opened the Yale Child Study Center, which encouraged schools to use the model to develop an action plan. This model for school reform linked the academic growth of a child directly with the emotional and social wellness (Comer, 1995). Dr. Comer (1995) believed that the culture of the school should be nurturing and provide a climate that was supportive and conducive to learning. He felt that schools should develop an action plan that would encompass social and academic support for learners. His model placed the responsibility on the convergence of administrators, teachers, and parents to develop this action plan. Comer’s School Development Model (SDM) involved four basic components: 1) Management Teams; 2) Holistic Child Development; 3) Parent Volunteers; and 4) Social Workers. Comer felt that the school should be like a community center, with all stakeholders taking part in raising the student (Comer, 1995).

Comer (1995) stated that the SDM was designed to reach several goals the first of which was to improve the school climate, psychologically and socially, in order to facilitate learning. The second was to improve basic skills of reading and math. The third goal was to implement shared decision-making by the school and parents, ensuring that all take responsibility. The last goal was to strengthen relationships between the school and outside organizations, such as clinical and child development services (Comer, 1995). Comer recognized the need for a less authoritarian management style by administrators in order for the school staff and parents to work together. “A
representative group can reduce the distrust alienation and acting-out behavior between home and school and among staff and students which plague the modern school” (Comer, 1995, p. 40).

*Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler Model*

Having developed a model for parental involvement (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007) gave specific guidelines to predict parental involvement. These guidelines include three areas that are sources of motivation for parents to become involved. They are: 1) the parent’s belief about parent role and parent efficacy in helping with their child be successful; 2) the parent’s perception of invitations to be involved from the school, their child, and the child’s teacher; 3) the parent’s personal life variables with regard to time, energy, knowledge, and skills (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The study concluded that parents who hold active role beliefs are more involved because they feel it is an important part of being a parent (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). They found that parents also make decisions based on the belief that their involvement will bring academic success for their children.

Another finding in the research suggested that parents are more involved when they feel welcomed, and when they believe that they have the knowledge and skills to be helpful. The study concluded that parental involvement was influenced by family responsibilities and job demands. In a study examining this model, Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler found that interpersonal relationships emerged as the single most important force behind parental involvement in a child’s education (Green et al., 2007).

*Epstein’s Research*

In her extensive research, Joyce Epstein inquired into teacher, parent, and student views of parental involvement. She and other researchers wanted to know the answers to
many questions including: “What do successful partnerships look like? How can practices be effectively designed and implemented? What are the results of better communications, interactions, and exchanges across these three important contexts?” (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 9). As the results were examined, the development of a theoretical model of what is now called School and Family Partnerships evolved.

“The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children’s families” (Epstein et al., 2009, p.9). Epstein et al., (2009) believed that if schools think of the children as students, they would see the family as separated from the school. In other words, the family left the education of students up to the school, and the family should be supportive in that view. However, if schools saw children as children, they would be more likely to see a distinct partnership in the family and community. “Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students” (p. 9).

In the beginning of her research, Epstein and Becker gave surveys to 3,698 public school teachers in Maryland. These surveys described fourteen specific parent involvement techniques used by teachers (Epstein & Becker, 1982). The results were grouped into five major categories, including those added by the teachers. The categories were: 1) Reading- Parents taking children to the library, reading to them at home, and listening to them read; 2) Discussion- Parents and children discussing television or school programs; 3) Informal activities at home- Parents playing games, encouraging reading, and including the child in daily home activities and jobs; 4) Contracts- Supporting homework and providing rewards and consequences for school behavior and performance; 5) Evaluation- Helping parents understand their child’s progress and how to tutor at home if necessary. “Of all types of parent involvement, supervision of learning
activities at home may be the most educationally significant” (Epstein & Becker, 1982, p. 111).

Using another survey several years later, Epstein (1986) researched 1,269 parents of first, third, and fifth graders, to find out their involvement in four categories: 1) Basic obligations; 2) School-to-home communication; 3) School; and 4) Learning activities at home. Her findings indicated that 94% of parents provided a place in the home to do homework and 97% provided school supplies for use at school. Eighty-four percent of the parents in the survey participated in communication with the school (depending on the type) while 64% attended Parent/Teacher conferences and 84% received memos from the teacher. Thirty percent volunteered in the fund-raising and in the classroom and 12% of the participants helped in the cafeteria, library, or other areas of the school. Four percent of the parents that were surveyed had teachers visit their homes, and 15 to 54% worked on activities at home with their children, using those listed from the fourteen techniques of the 1982 survey (Epstein, 1986).

After analyzing the results of the surveys from teachers, parents, and students, Epstein developed the Six Types of Involvement which became a theoretical model for school and family partnerships. Epstein felt the term partnerships would best describe what should be happening in parent involvement. In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more family-like schools. A family-like school recognizes each child’s individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach. A school-like family recognizes that each child is also a student. Families reinforce the importance of school, homework, and activities that build student skills and feelings of success (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 11).
Epstein's Model

Epstein's Six Types of Involvement model originated from years of researching parents, teachers, and students. The components consisted of: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision Making, collaborating with the community. This framework was developed to help schools have a more comprehensive program for family, school, and community partnerships (National Center for School Engagement, 2005).

The first component of involvement is parenting. “Parenting: Promoting and fostering parenting skills to develop home environments that support children as students” (Epstein et al., 2009, p.1). In parenting involvement, schools assist families in child development, as well as setting home conditions that will support the child at each grade level. It also involves helping schools understand families and their needs. This may require assisting families with responsibilities for health, nutrition, housing, clothing, and safety. Helping parents understand child and adolescent development, as well as making suggestions for the home environment that will support students at their grade level, would be necessary for this type of involvement. It requires schools to train their staff in understanding family cultures, backgrounds, and the goals families have for their children. Challenges for parenting involvement would be to provide and communicate information to all families, not just those who attend informational meetings.

The benefits for students in this type of involvement include a respect for parents and awareness of parent supervision. Parental benefits are an awareness of other parents having the same challenges as they do, the feeling of support from school, and an understanding that changes must occur in the home environment to support the growing
needs of students. The benefits for teachers are a respect for the efforts and strengths of families, and an awareness of their own skills in sharing vital developmental information with parents (Epstein et al., 2009).

The second type of involvement is Communication. Communication is described as informing families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications” (Epstein et al., 2009). Communication enhances parental involvement and promotes academic success. Epstein et al. (2009) suggests that school to home communication should involve memos, newsletters, phone calls, emails, and conferences. Information about state tests, school programs, and report cards as well as choosing or changing schools should also be communicated. Parents should be provided a place to post suggestions and questions. Important information should also be communicated to the community about school programs and events. Openness is defined as “the extent to which the other party welcomes communication and shared information with the people affected” (Brewster & Railsback, 2003, p. 6).

Communication and interaction provide opportunity to build or break trust (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). In fact, Epstein (year) also suggested that parents would be more willing to help their child if there was more communication between the teacher and parent. “Many parents have reported that they would be more involved in helping their children at home if their teachers communicated more with them or requested their cooperation; these reports indicate that home involvement is an underused education resource” (Watkins, 1997, p. 3).

The third type of involvement in Epstein’s model is volunteering (Epstein et al. 2009). He describes volunteering as anyone who supports school goals and children’s
learning and development in any way, at any place, and at any time, not just those coming to the school during the day. Volunteering should consist of giving time to tutor, coach, chaperone, and mentor students (Epstein et al., 2009). Challenges that schools may encounter in this involvement would be providing training and creating flexible schedules for parents. However, the presence of parents at school events, programs, and in classrooms communicates to students how important the school is to parents (Epstein et al., 1997).

The next type of involvement is Learning at Home (Epstein et al. 2009). Teachers may suggest that parents take their child to the library or read to them at home. Parents have indicated that they would feel better about guiding their children’s learning at home if teachers helped them become better informed about the needs of their child (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). What families are most interested in is information on the required skills to pass a subject, and ways to help that student at home to further academic success. (Epstein, 1986). Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) suggest that having parents take their child to a museum, talking about social issues or current news events are also ways to help learning at home. They refer to this as “cognitive intellectual resources” (Haack, 2007, p. 22). Epstein also suggests that interactive homework allows discussion and demonstration of student skills (Epstein et al., 2009).

The fifth type of involvement is Decision Making (Epstein et al., 2009). Parents need to have the opportunity to share views, take action, and give input in solving problems. They may choose to participate in PTA/PTO as well as School Councils and School Improvement Teams (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 15). Epstein describes this as “including families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through the PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations”
Encouraging parents to become involved in local, state, and federal advocacy groups that make decisions concerning funding, curriculum, and resources is also important in decision making (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Networking so that all families are connected with parent representatives helps parents to feel they have a say in what is decided at the local school. The challenge for schools is to make sure that parents know about the opportunities to be involved and offer training if needed (Epstein et al., 2009).

The sixth and final type of involvement is **Collaborating with the Community** (Epstein et al., 2009). This type of involvement includes not only the families of students in the school, but “others who are interested in and affected by the quality of students’ education” (Epstein, 2009, p. 17). The community involves business partners, health services, senior citizens, governmental agencies, faith-based programs, and cultural organizations. In a study completed by Christenson and Sheridan (2001), the research indicated that the quality of the relationships from the community directly influenced the children’s learning in school. Research of the National Center for School Engagement (2005) indicated that crucial to the success of employing community involvement is understanding the health, cultural, recreational, and social needs of families. Collaborating with the community helps students become aware of options for future careers, as well as showing them opportunities for increasing skills and talents through extracurricular involvement (Epstein, et al., 2009).

**Benefits of Parental Involvement**

In reviewing 166 studies on family involvement, Henderson and Berla (1994) concluded that there were many benefits when schools made a conscious effort to involve families. In their review, they found that students had better attendance and homework
completion, more positive attitudes and behavior, higher graduation rates, higher grades and test scores, fewer placements in special education, and an increased enrollment in postsecondary education. They also found that student achievement increased directly with increased duration and intensity of parent involvement.

In looking at 51 additional studies, Henderson and Mapp (2002) found that students who have involved parents, regardless of the income or background, were more likely to have higher grades and enroll in higher level courses, pass classes and be promoted, have less absences, have better behavior and social skills, and graduate and go on to postsecondary education. Parents of successful students believed that their children could do well in school and they exhibited a positive attitude about the school and the education their child was receiving (Mapp, 1997).

Henderson and Mapp (2002) also pointed out findings that showed specific types of involvement that benefit student academic success. Finding 1: Involvement programs that link to learning improve student achievement, Finding 2: Speaking up for children protects and promotes their success, Finding 3: All families were contributing to their children’s success, Finding 4: Organizing the community gets results. (National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, 2010). They also stated that activities related to each finding should be included in school plans for family engagement.

**Academic Achievement**

In a study of 122 elementary schools representing a large suburban school district in a metropolitan area, Griffith (1996) sought to find the relationship of parental involvement to student academic performance. The results indicated that schools having a higher level of parent involvement also had higher state test scores (Griffith, 1996).
The findings of the present study support the contention that parental involvement is an important element in student academic performance” (Griffith, 1996, p. 40).

A study done for the U.S. Department of Education by Westat and Policy Studies Associates (2001) examined 71 Title I elementary schools. They used an advanced statistical method to analyze the relationship between test scores and certain school practices. These practices were: Visibility of standards and assessments, teacher preparation and skills for instruction in math, basic or advanced techniques in teaching, low and high ratings (by teachers) of professional development, district standards policies, assessment and accountability focus, and parent outreach (Westat and Policy Studies Associates, 2001). The study also measured the extent to which teachers communicated with parents of low-achieving students through sending home ways to help the student, conferencing with parents face-to-face, and telephoning often. It was found that when teachers reached out to families, student academic achievement improved in both reading and math (Westat and Policy Studies Associates, 2001). Test scores grew at a rate of 40% higher in schools that reported a high rate of teacher outreach to parents. Regarding the other practices, the only practice that was consistently linked to student gains was highly rated professional development.

In a study completed in a suburban middle school, teachers assigned homework to six classes using the Teachers Involve Parents in Homework (TIPS), created by Joyce Epstein (2009). Four classes were assigned non-interactive homework. In analyzing the grades after two marking periods, (controlling family background, prior grades, and amount of homework), the students who had the interactive homework earned significantly higher grades (Epstein).
Rebecca Marcon (1999) reviewed 700 African American preschoolers in Washington, D.C. to compare students whose parents were highly involved and those whose parents were not. The parents who were consistently involved tended to have children with higher grades than those who were less involved. Income levels and backgrounds did not influence the significant difference.

In his meta-analysis, William Jeynes (2005a) reviewed 77 studies to determine the effects of parental involvement on K-12 academic achievement. His analysis involved over 300,000 students using 36 studies of only secondary students, 25 studies using elementary students, and 16 studies using both secondary and elementary students. The measures used in these studies involved standardized test scores, grades, ratings by teachers, and a variety of other measures. Jeynes (2005a) states: “This academic advantage for those parents who were highly involved in their education averaged about .5 – .6 of a standard deviation for overall educational outcomes, grades, and academic achievement. In other words, the academic achievement score distribution or range of scores for children whose parents were highly involved in their education was substantially higher than that of their counterparts whose parents were less involved” (Jeynes, 2005a, p. 9).

A more recent study of 150 students was conducted to determine the effect of parental involvement and at-home reading activities on student achievement in the elementary schools (Warren, 2010). Warren’s study revealed that reading levels improved by sixty-six percent regardless of the parent education level or the language spoken at home. The research suggested that schools should provide training opportunities for parents to help them become more comfortable and proficient in helping their children at home (Warren, 2010).
Nonacademic Benefits

Improving student achievement is a significant result of high percentages of parent involvement, but there are other benefits that should be noted. In a study done by Leslie Gutman and Carol Midgley (2000), students moving from fifth to sixth grades were asked what helped them through this transition. Gutman and Midgley (2000) found that a combined effect of parent involvement and school support had a significant impact on the students. They reported three main influences:

1. Parent involvement: attending events, talking to students about school, checking homework, and volunteering at school;
2. Belonging at school: Feeling respected, accepted, and included in school;
3. Support from teachers: Being supportive rather than critical, and taking time to help students. “In examining the interaction between parental involvement and teacher support or feelings of school belonging, students whose parents are involved in their school may be better able to take advantage of the benefits of supportive teachers or school environments for their academic achievement” (Gutman & Midgley 2000, p. 230).

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) revealed an additional benefit of parent involvement, an increase in student attendance, which is a major focus for many school districts. Poor attendance can be a predictor of dropping out of school, so it is important that schools give attention to student absenteeism. “Students who are not in class have fewer opportunities to learn the material that enables them to succeed later in school” (Epstein & Sheldon 2002, p. 308). Research also indicated that students who have better attendance are inclined to have higher scores on achievement tests (Lamdin, 1996).

In a study conducted with the National Network of Partnership Schools, researchers found the average daily attendance to be 0.12%. The schools were asked to implement a school-family-community partnership to help improve school attendance. After focusing
on attendance and implementing the partnership, the average daily attendance increased to 0.71% in just one year (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). This study also noted that awards to students, better communication with parents, school contacts for families, and after school programs to help with child-care were important factors in the school and family partnership. “The study also suggested that schools were more likely to improve student attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism with three broad strategies: (a) taking a comprehensive approach to attendance with activities that involved students, families, and the community; (b) using more positive involvement activities than negative or punishing activities; (c) sustaining a focus on improving attendance over time” (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009, p. 20).

In Messa County Valley School District, a study was implemented to gain an understanding of truancy and absenteeism. An analysis was done of the attendance policies, building level practices, and district procedures. The data indicated that there was a 21% habitual truancy rate with an 80% average daily attendance. The study also revealed that a major area of concern was the transition to sixth grade and ninth grade. After changing board policies and building level practices, the next year’s analysis showed a 91% reduction in elementary school absenteeism, an 83% reduction in middle school rates, and a 43% reduction in high school rates (Bolton, 2009). Several things were done that facilitated an improvement in the attendance for the district. First the district completed an accurate data analysis and made the necessary changes. In addition, schools invited parents to meet face to face with teachers to plan how to best meet the needs of their students and how to decrease absenteeism. Director of Attendance conducted home visits, as well, and a collaborative community assessment team was developed to help families that were in crisis. Placing priority for involving families and
Barriers for Family Engagement

The benefits of involving and engaging families are abundant, yet schools should also consider that there are barriers that keep families from being involved. The National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC) suggested that schools need to respond to challenges, such as a parent’s comfort level with involvement, the time they have to devote to involvement, their language and cultural background (NDPC, 2009). All these impediments can hinder parents from communicating with the school.

Parents may have a history of negative experiences in school. This experience may have happened when they attended school as a student, or it could have been the result of past difficulties with a school staff (Center for Collaborative Education, n.d.). Schools need to recognize when this may be a factor in communication, and they should help the parent identify those fears, and feel accepted and welcomed (Center for Collaborative Education, n.d.). Along with the challenge of negative experiences, there may be mistaken assumptions that lead to miscommunication. One of those assumptions on the part of the parent could be that as their child get older, parental involvement is unnecessary (Center for Collaborative Education, n.d.).

Many teachers sited the lack of time when asked why they failed to contact parents (Ramirez, 2001). They expressed that often, the only communication was when they were concerned about a student’s academic performance. Also, several teachers explained that they would like for parents to stay home, raise their children, and leave the academics up to the school (Ramirez, 2001). Teachers also expressed a need for improvement in the home-school communication.
In the creating partnerships between family and community, the Turning Points Guide for Transforming Middle Schools states that challenges for building family involvement can be narrowed down to five areas: diversity, power, history, assumptions, and time, resources, and logistics (Center for Collaborative Education, 2010). When looking at diversity, cultural differences and family background can have an immense impact on the way parents and teachers communicate. It is vital that teachers become responsible for learning about home cultures and the languages that are spoken. “Schools must acknowledge that there is an imbalance of power between educators and families, particularly when teachers represent one culture and families have lower incomes and are from different cultures” (Center for Collaborative Education, 2010, p. 7)

The challenge of power means that parents may feel the school is judgmental if families have a lower socio-economic status and staff members have another (Center for Collaborative Education, 2010). Often, parents will perceive their input is not valued and their voice is not heard. Parent efficacy is important in the academic well-being of a child. Parents, who feel they do not have the power to influence their child’s academic performance, will eventually ascertain that their involvement in the educational process is unnecessary. Harry, Klinger, and Hart (2005) found that when schools dealt with families of poverty, often the views and comments by of parents were often ignored and decisions were made that were not always in the best interest of the child. “When schools take such an approach to families, they miss the opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of children and adults” (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009, p. 94).

Many parents feel that due to the demands of their jobs and careers, they do not have time to be involved in their child’s education. In single-parent homes, finding time for involvement is extremely difficult but is not indicative of their attitude regarding it.
Low-income parents often have jobs that give inflexible schedules, pay hourly wages, and have few benefits, which increase the potential for a lack of involvement (Newman & Chan, 2007; U.S. Department of Labor, 2005).

More research indicated that there are also other barriers to family engagement. “According to McCaleb (1995), the desire among most parents is ardent to actively participate in the education of their children, although they often feel ill-equipped to give the needed support at home and many times feel ignored or criticized by the school when they try to advocate for their children” (Wilson, 2010, p. 59). Wilson states there are four common barriers:

(1) Attitudes- Teachers and parents do not feel comfortable talking to each other. Staff members sometimes think families are too overwhelmed to participate. Often, teachers do not feel the need to build a relationship with parents, especially in middle and secondary schools.

(2) Logistics- Childcare is not provided or parents do not have transportation. Meetings are held at a time when most parents cannot attend, or they cannot leave work because they will not be paid.

(3) System Barriers- Staff members may not be willing to stay long hours after school when it is convenient for parents to have parent-teachers conferences. Parents cannot be paid for their contribution and leadership.

(4) Lack of skills- Teachers and staff may not be ready to work with parents in a different way than is typically used. Families may not have served on committees and do not feel qualified. (Martinez, 2009).
Communication

Studies have shown communication to be an area that is essential in developing a strong school and family partnership and influence student success (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). Building a strong communication system can overcome many negative perceptions that parents may have. In a study involving interviews with teachers, administration, and parents at an urban high school, the subject of communication was a popular topic. Ramirez (2001) found that parents felt there was a strain in the relationship with teachers due to a lack of communication. Concerns from parents also revealed that it was easier to communicate with counselors than with teachers. Parents felt there would be repercussions for their child if they approached the teacher or administration (Ramirez, 2001).

Hudley & Barnes (1993) indicated from their research that parents had to repeatedly ask for more communication between home and school. In the study on the effectiveness of e-mail as a tool for home-school communication, Blackerby (n.d.) found that 16.5% of parents indicated that they rarely contacted the school, while 32% indicated that the school rarely contacted them. Blackerby (n.d.) also found that the majority of parents surveyed preferred school visits, written communication, and telephone calls.

Marzano’s research (2003) reported that student achievement improved when parents had communication about their child’s learning goals and progress. In a Florida study, Freytag (2001) indicated that ninety percent of the parents surveyed stated that the number one need for home and school communication was to obtain information about the progress of their children. Parents also indicated that if there were academic problems, they wanted to know immediately so that they could help. In the final analysis,
Freytag (2001) stated that the main thing that parents wanted in the home-school communication was “collaboration, consistency, and specificity” (Freytag, p. 9).

In another study, parents indicated they were satisfied with the level of communication at their school with regard to the skills their child needed to learn each year (Smith, 2008). Smith suggested that schools find ways to disseminate that important information, such as sending home the specific learning goals and expectations each grading period. In a study by Olgetree (2010), parents and teachers in an elementary school were surveyed regarding their perspective on parent involvement as related to Epstein’s model. When 372 parents were asked specifically about the school’s communication, Olgetree reported that parents felt the communication system used by their school was effective and working well (Ogletree, 2010).

Epstein et al., (2009) shared that consistent and regularly scheduled newsletters, website information, and phone calls help improve family partnerships. She also suggested that comprehensible information about school policies, safety, and programs should be a regular part of communication (p.16). If communication between school and home is consistent and meaningful, communication will positively influence the overall school culture (Epstein et al., 2009).

School Culture

The connection of family engagement and improved academic success is supported by sound research (Warren, 2010; Epstein et al., 2009; Jeynes, 2005a; Sheldon, 2005); Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004; Marcon, 1999). Yet, there must be strong leadership that supports a positive school culture and helps parents understand their role in the academic success of the school. If the leader is a catalyst for a positive school culture (Constantino, 2003), what are key elements that promote a strong positive school culture?
Culture is sometimes defined as the perceptions that an organized group shares. Culture can be derived from values which are often interpreted subjectively. Schein (1985) claimed that culture springs from three sources: beliefs and values from the founders of the organization, learning experiences among the members, and new values and assumptions brought in by new members and leaders. Therefore, it is important that the principal understands the beliefs and values held by his school and by parents. Understanding the culture enables an administrator to make a better decision about the best way to accomplish the educational objectives for the school. When there are opportunities for people to share in decision-making, when trust barriers are removed, and when stakeholders feel at ease, school leadership builds trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

In his book, *The Shaping School Culture Field Book* (Peterson & Deal, 2002), Dr. Kent Peterson, Director of the Principal’s Leadership Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, shared some key elements for creating a strong and positive school culture. There must first be a sense of purpose and values that are widely shared among staff members. These values must be defined as what is important to the school staff. “People attend to what they feel is important” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p.14). Constantino states that in order for a school to move forward, the school leader must provide vision, communicate it, and convince parents that it is worthy of their support (Constantino, 2003). Next, Kent suggests that group norms should be established and consistently used as the school focuses on continuous improvement. These norms help everyone to understand what is expected. Subsequently, a sense of responsibility for student academic improvement is vital, so that everyone is involved in helping to insure student success. “Teachers and students are more likely to succeed in a culture that fosters hard
work, commitment to valued ends, an attention to problem solving, and a focus on learning for all students” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 11). Finally, collegial relationships and collaboration among staff and teams ensure that all working together will build a better school. A school staff will be more motivated to work hard and reach goals when accomplishments are recognized, commitment is supported, and efforts are appreciated. “Positive, professional cultures foster productivity” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 11).

When developing a positive culture, the school leader must establish strong relationships with families and the community. Understanding the role that parents play in promoting and encouraging student learning and academic success is vital to these partnerships (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Relationships must begin with trust, and trust begins with positive interactions among the school staff and families. “In areas where schools have not traditionally promoted student achievement and success, principals and other leaders need to build programs that bridge home and school, enabling families to have faith in their children’s school and to support academic excellence” (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009, p. 11).

In the book, In Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement (2002), Anthony S. Bryk and Barbara Schneider researched the impact of relationships in schools and the impact on student achievement. In their 10-year study, they concluded that schools that show a high level of trust make positive and significant changes that effect student achievement. Teachers are more likely to work together in planning activities that will challenge their students. In fact, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that schools with weak levels of trust have a one in seven chance of improving student skills and academic success, whereas schools with high levels of trust have a one in two chance (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).
Adams and Christenson (2000) reported in a survey of 1,234 parents and 209 teachers that parents and teachers believed that improving communication was a major way to build trust between the school and families. They also discovered that the types of interaction between teachers and parents better predicted levels of trust than the frequency of interactions. There was significant correlation between high school students’ grade point average, attendance, and credits earned, and the parent-school level of trust (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

Brown (2004) stated that in order to build a solid and positive school culture, the following ingredients are essential: (a) a clear vision and mission; (b) Curriculum and instruction that are tied to the vision and mission; (c) Allowing time for teachers and students to do their work; (d) Focus on student and teacher learning; (e) Supportive relationships between teachers, students, and staff; (f) Opportunities to celebrate accomplishments; (g) Leadership that trusts and encourages risk-taking; (h) Data-driven decision-making; (i) District flexibility and support. The goal in using these ingredients is to create a strong school culture that promotes academic success. Everyone is involved and everyone takes responsibility.

Covey describes small levels of trust as acting as a “tax” on performance, decreasing positive influence and productivity while increasing costs and timelines (Covey, 2006). However, when there is a high level of trust, those involved are likely to have positive interactions, increasing productivity and decreasing costs and timelines even when communication may not be strong (Covey, 2006).

Tschannen-Moran (2004) explained that with relational trust, there is interdependence. Their study revealed that when a reliance on each other exists, there is a willingness to be vulnerable. When there is vulnerability, each party has confidence
that the other will be considerate, reliable, competent, honest, and open. “The presence, or relative absence of trust, becomes a prerequisite for how open and collaborative the communication climate can be” (Arlestig, 2008, p. 2).

If the culture is positive, the families will want to be involved. Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davis (2007) have indentified four core beliefs providing the basis for working with parents and building relationships. The first of these core beliefs is that all parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them. School leaders are urged to provide a time for parents to share their dreams for their children with other parents. Lists may be collected and teachers and parents can work together to create action plans that will help develop those dreams. Parents might also be given ways to support their children academically so that goals could be set for their children (Henderson et al., 2007).

The next core belief is that all parents have the capacity to support their children’s learning (Henderson et al., 2007). Parents may not have the formal schooling that assists them in feeling adequate to help their children academically, yet they have many talents and skills that can be used. Those talents are identified as capacity. When teachers and principals understand how important using those skills gives confidence to parents, relationships and partnerships grow. It is important that the school staff encourage parents by letting them know the positive differences they can make. One way to promote this parent support is to develop the school’s expectations for their involvement (Henderson et al, 2002).

The third core belief is that parents and school staff should be equal partners. Often, teachers are much more involved and are seen as the professionals, needing little help from parents. It is important that involvement be shared between the school and
parents. Principals and teachers should be trained in how to meet the expectations of high academic achievement and involving parents in partnerships. “We suggest that the power should be shared. Every person who is interested in supporting children’s development should have equal status, value, and responsibility” (Henderson et al., 2002, p. 37)

The final core belief deems that the responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders (Henderson et al., 2002). Establishing a welcoming environment for parents and the community begins with the leader of the school. Setting expectations of those who will meet and greet families and community partners is essential. Sharing ideas of how to create a warm and caring environment is extremely important for a school staff. Soliciting input from parents helps to sustain a positive climate (Henderson et al., 2002).

School Leadership

“Leadership is walking the walk, engaging and believing in people, selling ideas and concepts, listening to customers, and creating a school where students achieve and where families are an integral part of the process” (Constantino, 2003, p. 17). The ability by the school leader to use interpersonal skills to influence the staff and parents are important for school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 1994). Constantino (2003) stated that the vision for what a school can be must begin with the leader. The leader should truly believe that engaging families and parental involvement is essential for a successful school. Consequently, they must have a strong belief that there is a need for family involvement.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Constorium (ISLLC) was revised in 2008 by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to provide standards for school
administrators. According to ISLLC Standard 4, a school leader should collaborate with staff members, families, and community stakeholders to promote the success of all students in the school. A school leader must have a clear understanding of the community resources, problems that may affect the school community, and successful models for family involvement (CCSSO, 1996). School leadership must believe that families are partners, that parents must be involved in decision-making, and that collaboration and communication are crucial for a successful school (CCSSO, 1996).

Research of Sanders and Sheldon (2009) suggested that principals can affect interpersonal relationships and influence social networks at the school. Studies indicated that when there are a variety of stakeholders involved in the decision-making process of the school and when leadership is more dispersed, the school experiences better performance (Leithwood, 1994; Marks & Printy, 2003). Through organizational culture and interpersonal relationships created by the principal, staff members and parents can feel their input is valued and needed (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). A culture that involves parents, teachers, students, and leaders communicates to stakeholders that they are serious about becoming a great school. Because of the magnitude of building relationships and a caring environment in schools, Sanders & Simon (2002) have determined that the principal’s perception and evaluation in determining the level at which the school truly embraces and develops partnerships with families and the community is crucial. The importance of creating partnership teams, developing strategic plans to increase family engagement, and supporting a regular assessment of the plan has created the need for the principal to act as a coach. Principals play a critical role in the success of parent involvement (Sanders & Simon, 2002).
Often leaders know the importance of family involvement but do not take the time to assess their schools and their own understanding of family engagement. Parent perspectives can also be very different from the principal’s perspectives. Studies done by McGhee (2007) and Smith (2008) have compared the teacher and parent perspectives in family engagement in schools, but none can be found that analyze the principal’s perspective. “Past studies have focused on the teachers’ role[s] regarding parent involvement and the reasons for an increase in such involvement, but few deal with the principal’s role in facilitating parents’ involvement” (Angelucci, 2008, p. 3).

Studies have determined that if the administrator of a school is the catalyst for these partnerships, administrators need to understand their roles in establishing an effective community of involvement (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Schools must begin with a clear assessment and from that analysis, develop ideas, goals, and strategies for improvement. “Through principal leadership, schools can develop strong programs of school, family, and community partnerships and create and sustain cultures of academic achievement and success” (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009, p.24). The analysis must begin with the principal.

Parent Perception

School leadership cannot assume that they know parent perspectives. In fact, Title I policy indicates that an annual evaluation and review of parent involvement in regard to the content and effectiveness of parental involvement policies, assessment at improving the academic quality of schools, and identification of barriers to increase participation in activities, paying close attention to parental needs, and designing more effective strategies based on the results of the evaluation must be implemented (NCLB Action Briefs, 2004).
Although legislation is specific on the expectation of family involvement, there may be differences in parent and school staff perceptions. In an age of school accountability, parents are knowledgeable about the policies that affect their children. (Kaplan, Lui, & Kaplan, 2000) discovered that parents expect educators to be responsive to their concerns. They do not accept that school officials may find their concerns to be meddlesome or a nuisance, but view their interests to be protecting their children (Kaplan et al., 2000). As stated earlier, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1995) found that parents’ beliefs about their parental role effect their perspective and level of involvement. When they perceive their child wants them involved, they will be more involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

Parental involvement is influenced by efficacy, the feeling of value or worth. When parents have efficacy, they feel that they can have an impact on the success of their children. A study completed by Shumow and Lomax (2002) looked at parents’ feelings of success in directing their children. The results indicated that parents have a sense of efficacy when they can: (1) Help their children be safe, do well in school, and be happy; (2) Keep children away from troublemakers, overcome negative influences that may lead to drugs and alcohol; (3) Make the neighborhood a safer and better place and improve the quality of the school. Studies proclaimed that when parents feel that they have an influence and a contribution in making the school a better place for their children, they are more inclined to be involved (Shumow and Lomax, 2002).

Summary of Literature Review

In reviewing the literature on family engagement, historically, dating back to the beginning of public education in our nation, the involvement of parents has been pursued by educators. Federal legislation has promoted and required Title I schools to develop
initiatives and plans that would encourage parents to be more involved in their child’s education. Many research-based models have been developed that help give schools practical ways to increase family engagement. Compiled data suggested that as schools develop plans to increase this involvement, they must look closely at the benefits of family engagement and the barriers that hinder involvement. Research information has determined that developing plans to strengthen these partnerships must begin with the school leader, who sets the vision for school partnership with parents. Chapter II’s review of literature sets the foundation for this research. Chapter III will provide the research method used in this study. Chapter IV will present the findings. Chapter V will give the data analysis, findings, conclusions, implications of the study, and provide recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Developing and sustaining family partnerships with schools can be a daunting task. Typically, teachers have been the main catalyst for inviting, recruiting, and soliciting parent involvement (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). In examining the research related to developing strong family school partnerships, numerous studies indicate that strong school principal leadership is vital to its success (Sanders & Harvey, 2002; Sanders & Simon, 2002; Sheldon, 2005; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004; Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004). School principals play a very important part in school success (Purkey and Smith, 1985). Therefore, it is imperative that principal perception be examined and compared to parent perception as it relates to family involvement.

The purpose of this quantitative study is to (a) analyze the relationships that exist between parent and principal perspectives on communication, school culture, and school leadership; (b) examine level of various types of involvement in schools and determine if there is a relationship between the types of involvement and student achievement. It is also the goal of the researcher to make recommendations to school principals and school leadership that will increase and strengthen parent and family engagement in schools throughout the United States.

Hypotheses

H\textsubscript{1}: There is no relationship between principals’ and parents’ perception as it relates to communicating with families. (A3.1, Q 1A; A3.1, Q1B; I1.3, Q1C; SFC 1.1, Q1E; SFC 1.1, Q1C; SFC 1.1, Q1G)
H2: There is no relationship between the principals’ and parents’ perception as it relates to the overall culture of the school. (PO 1.1, Q1D; SFC 1.4, Q1H; SFC 2.1, Q1K; SC 1.1, Q1O; SC2.1, Q1P; SC 2.4, Q1Q)

H3: There is no relationship between the principals’ and parents’ perception of school leadership. (SFC 2.1, Q1I; SFC 2.1, Q1J; L1.2/1.3, Q1; L2.3, Q1M; L3.1, Q1N)

H4: There is no relationship between academic achievement and the various types of parental involvement in schools. (Q2 a-f)

Research Design

The researcher utilized the quantitative research analyses to compare the principals’ and parents’ perspectives on parent and family engagement in schools and the variables (communication, school culture, school leadership, and student achievement) that influence family engagement. In a quantitative study, assessment of whether certain factors predict a certain outcome is addressed (Creswell, 2009). This type of research seeks to determine why something occurs and the relationship between variables. Quantitative research also explains observable or inferred behavior when the hypotheses are analyzed (Muijs, 2011).

The survey used was created by the researcher (Appendix A) to determine principal perspectives on family engagement. A panel of experts on family engagement was asked to examine the survey and give feedback as to the design and format, lucidity of items, and the time needed to complete the survey. The researcher used this information to improve and establish face validity of the survey instrument. The pilot study survey was then given to a group of administrators not participating in the study to determine reliability. When the surveys were returned, the researcher used the
Cronbach’s Coefficient alpha and found internal consistency for communication to be $\alpha = .884$; for school culture $\alpha = .774$, and for school leadership $\alpha = .751$, which indicates that the survey created should produce reliable scores. The alpha ($\alpha$) is an estimate of reliability because there is always some error associated with survey measures.

The survey was sent through the mail to the district elementary, middle, and high school principals. Principals were provided a copy of the Family Engagement Survey for Principals (Appendix A), an informed consent letter (Appendix B) stating the purpose of the study, and a stamped addressed envelope for returning the completed survey. Archived data from the district School Improvement Surveys was examined to determine parent perceptions about communication, school culture, and school leadership. School Improvement Surveys were sent in February 2011 to every school in the district. A random sample of staff, students, and parents completed the surveys, and data was compiled by the school district. The results of this survey was sent to each school and posted on the district website. Answers to the questions used the rating of Consistently = 5, Often = 4, Infrequently = 3, Never = 2, No Basis to Judge = 1. Therefore, this archived data of parent perceptions, using statements from Assessment, Instruction, School Culture, School, Family, Community, and School Leadership sections of the School Improvement Survey was used.

Data from the state Criterion Reference Competency Test was also used for student achievement scores. The parent perception data was compared to the perceptions found in the principal survey data. Approval from the University of Southern Mississippi, the Institutional Review Board (Appendix C), and the local school district’s research offices (Appendix D) was requested before proceeding with the study.
Sample and Participants

A convenience sample from 110 school principals was used for this research study. Principals were sent a cover letter (Appendix B), indicating the importance of the recipients and the value of their response, the purpose of the study, the assurance of confidentiality, the institution sponsoring the research, survey completion time, and the procedures for returning it (Creswell, 2009). The Family Engagement Survey for principals was sent through U. S. mail with a return envelope. Assurance was given to the schools and school district that the information obtained was confidential and protected, with district name, school names, and participants remaining anonymous.

Permission to use archived data of parent responses from the School Improvement Surveys 2010 for the purpose of this study was obtained from the school district (Appendix D). Examination of these responses allowed the researcher to compare and analyze parent responses with those of school principals.

Instrumentation

A survey designed by the researcher was piloted and used to determine the perceptions of principals on Family Engagement in elementary, middle, and high schools. Survey questions asked for the professional judgment about parental involvement and specific ways schools involve families, based on the following components of family engagement:

1. Communication: Providing effective means of home-to-school and school-to-home communication

2. School Culture: Overall beliefs and values held by school staff, administration, parents, and community
3. **School Leadership**: The capacity to lead students, teachers and parents to reach established educational goals.

4. **Academic-Achievement**: Academic progress based on state curriculum standards’ annual testing.

Each question consisted of statements and responses chosen by the respondent. The responses used a rating system with a numeric value for each response. In Question 1, with 18 subcategories, the ratings used were: Consistently=5, Often=4, Infrequently=3, Never=2, No Basis to Judge=1, and were compared to the archived data of parent responses using the same rated responses on the School Improvement Plan surveys.

Question 3 asked the principals to record the percent of students meeting/exceeding standards and the percentage not meeting standards on the Georgia CRCT (Grades 3-5, 6, and 8), and the High School Graduation test (Grade 11) in English/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Question 4, Parts A and B, included open-ended questions which allowed the principals to provide the most successful practices used by schools to involve parents, and ways in which partnerships could help schools. Question 4, Part C and D, requested principals to choose one of four factors contributing to the success of the school’s family and community involvement, and factors contributing to the limited success of the school’s family and community involvement. For the purpose of this study, Question 4 was not used in the data analyses. The researcher decided that this information was not pertinent to the analysis of each hypothesis. It should also be noted that after receiving IRB approval, the researcher combined two of the Hypotheses in order to have a more defined variable.
Data Collection Procedures

Elementary, middle, and high school principals from schools within a large metropolitan school district were sent letters explaining the purpose of the study and were asked to participate in the research. Surveys were sent to principals who consented to participate, and this consent was kept on file. Each principal who consented to participate was sent a copy of the survey through the mail and provided a return address stamped envelope. All participants were assured that their responses will be kept anonymous. Fifty-six principals were used for this study. Archived data from the district 2011 School Improvement Survey was analyzed to determine the perception of parents on parental involvement and family engagement as it relates to communication, school culture, and school leadership. Responses from 11,765 parents were used from the 2011 School Improvement Survey.

Data Analysis

When surveys were completed, responses were analyzed SPSS, Version 20, to conduct analyses. Inferential analysis allowed the researcher to examine the scores from a sample and use the results to draw conclusions and make predictions about the populations (Creswell, 2009). A Pearson Correlation test was used to determine the relationship between parents’ and principals’ (grouping variable), perceptions of family engagement relating to communication, school culture, school leadership. The No Basis to Judge rating was dropped from the analysis in order to clearly determine the perceptions of parents. A Paired Sample t-test was used to determine differences in means of principal and parent perceptions. Means from the specific statements from the survey for each variable were found in order to determine specific differences in the means of parent and principal ratings. Academic achievement was compared to different
types and levels of parental involvement as indicated on the principal survey. For this study, the significance level was set at .05, which was the maximum risk the researcher was willing to take that any observable differences were due to chance (Creswell, 2009).

Summary

Chapter III examined the data from the surveys to determine perceptions of principals and parents on family involvement relating to communication, school culture, and school leadership. The data was also used to establish if there was a specific type of parent involvement in schools that influenced student achievement. The researcher used the research design, hypotheses, participants, instrumentation, collection procedures, and data analysis for a thorough investigation. Chapter IV gives the findings, presentation, and analyses of the collected data. Chapter IV contains the summary, conclusion, implications, and recommendations from the research study to add to the body of knowledge as it relates to family engagement.
CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS/PRESENTATION/ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study is to (a) examine perceptions of parents and principals on family engagement; (b) analyze the differences, if any, that exist between parent and principal perspectives on communication, school culture, school leadership, and student achievement; c) examine level of various types of involvement; and d) determine if there is a relationship between the level and types of involvement, and student achievement. This chapter will present the findings, statistical data, and summary.

Presenting the Findings

The following hypotheses were analyzed:

1. \( H_1 \): There is no relationship between principals’ and parents’ perception as it relates to communicating with families.

2. \( H_2 \): There is no relationship between the principals’ and parents’ perception as it relates to the overall culture of the school.

3. \( H_3 \): There is no relationship between the principals’ and parents’ perception of school leadership.

4. \( H_4 \): There is no relationship between the academic achievement and the percentage of various types of parental involvement in schools.

As stated above, the first hypothesis to be analyzed was the relationship between the perceptions of principals and parents in communicating with the families of students.
Surveys for both the parents and the principals contained seven corresponding statements regarding communication of the school with families. Each of the statements and their means and standard deviations are shown in Table 1:

Table 1

*Corresponding survey statements for parents and principals regarding communication between the school and parents (N=56)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ Survey Communication Statements</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>Principals’ Survey Communication Statements</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I receive feedback on my student’s progress on a regular basis</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>Parents at this school receive feedback on their child’s progress regularly</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My student’s teachers adequately communicate with me about his/her progress</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>Teachers at this school contact parents adequately about their student’s progress</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning goals are communicated to me by the teacher</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>Teachers communicate learning goals to parents</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the level of communication from this school</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>Parents are satisfied with the level of communication from this school.</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for communication exist in both directions between the home and school.</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>Opportunities for communication exist in both directions between the home and school.</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This school keeps parents informed about school programs and activities.</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>This school keeps parents informed about school programs and activities.</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (M) 2=Never, 5=Consistently
To measure the relationship between the perceptions of the parents and principals regarding communication, the Pearson correlation test was applied to the data. The correlation was positive and statistically significant ($r = .326$, $p = .014$), therefore, the first hypothesis was rejected. It was determined that a positive relationship as measured by correlation did exist between the perceptions of parents and principals as it related to communicating with families.

While the positive correlation did indicate a relationship between the parent and principal perceptions, it was of interest to the researcher to also measure whether the means of parent perception and principal perception were different. Using the variables for communications, a Paired $t$-test was applied to the data. Table 2 presents the summary statistics for each of the variables:

Table 2

*Summary statistics for communication variables for parents and principals (N=56)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Variable for Parent Responses</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Variable for Principal Responses</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. ($M$) 2=Never, 5=Consistently

The results of the Paired $t$-test indicated that at a .05 level of significance, the data did not support that the mean perceptions of parents and principals differed regarding school communications ($t(55) = .941$, $p = .351$).
It is interesting to note that while the sample means are similar, there is a large difference in the standard deviations for parent responses ($SD = 0.152$) and principal responses ($SD = 0.390$). The relatively large standard deviation for principals indicates that there was more variation in their responses. The parents had more consistent responses with less variation.

The second hypothesis analyzed the relationship between principal and parent perceptions of school culture.

The surveys for both parents and principals contained six statements regarding school culture. Table 3 presents each statement and its mean and standard deviation:

Table 3

*Corresponding survey statements for parents and principals regarding school culture (N=56)*

| Parents’ Survey School Culture Statements | $M$ | $SD$ | Principals’ Survey School Culture Statements | $M$ | $SD$
|------------------------------------------|-----|------|---------------------------------------------|-----|------
| The overall school culture provides support and practices that provide for the academic achievement of all learners. | 4.59 | .15 | The overall school culture provides support and practices that provide for the academic achievement of all learners. | 4.64 | .52 |
| At this school, people are treated fairly and with respect. | 4.57 | .16 | At this school, people are treated fairly and with respect. | 4.84 | .37 |
| There is at least one adult in the school I can talk to. | 4.65 | .18 | There is at least one adult in this school parents can talk to. | 4.93 | .26 |
| A current school vision and mission is communicated to parents. | 4.34 | .18 | A current school vision and mission is communicated to parents. | 4.29 | .71 |
Table 3 (continued).

| I feel welcome at my student’s school. | 4.66 | .13 | Parents feel welcome at this school. | 4.79 | .46 |
| A wide variety of opportunities exist for me to volunteer and assist in the educational program. | 4.43 | .20 | A wide variety of opportunities exist for parents to volunteer and assist in the educational program. | 4.57 | .57 |

Note. (M) 2=Never, 5=Consistently.

To measure the relationship between the perceptions of the parents and principals regarding school culture, the Pearson correlation test was applied to the data. The correlation was positive and statistically significant ($r = .294, p = .028$), therefore, the hypothesis was rejected. It was decided that a relationship exists between parent and principal perceptions regarding school culture.

Using the variables for school culture, a Paired $t$-test was applied to the data. Table 4 presents the summary statistics for each of the variables:

Table 4

Summary statistics for school culture variables for parents and principals (N=56)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Culture Variable for Parent Responses</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture Variable for Principal responses</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (M) 2=Never, 5=Consistently
The results of the Paired t-test indicate that at a 5% level of significance, the mean perception of parents and principals differ with respect to school culture ($t(55) = 3.19, p = .002$). In fact, the mean score for principals is greater than the mean score of parents for school culture.

Similar to the communications variable, there is a notable difference in the standard deviations for parent responses ($SD = 0.157$) and principal responses ($SD = 0.308$). The relatively large standard deviation for principals indicates that there is more variation in their responses. The parents had more consistent responses with less variation.

The third hypothesis to be analyzed considers the relationship between principal and parent perceptions of school leadership.

The surveys contained five statements for parents and principals regarding school leadership. Each of the statements along with their means and standard deviations are noted in Table 5:

Table 5

*Corresponding survey statements for parents and principals regarding school leadership ($N=56$)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ Survey Leadership Statements</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>Principals’ Survey Leadership Statements</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have opportunities to give input into school decisions.</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>Parents have opportunities to give input into school decisions.</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To measure the relationship between the perceptions of the parents and principals regarding school leadership, the Pearson correlation test was applied to the data. The correlation was not statistically significant \( r = .147, p = .280 \). Based on a lack of significant correlation, it could not be determined that there was a relationship between parents and principals regarding school leadership. Therefore, the null hypothesis failed to be rejected.

Using the variables for school leadership, a Paired \( t \)-test was applied to the data. Table 6 presents the summary statistics for each of the variables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I am encouraged to play a role in helping this school to be a better place.</th>
<th>4.48  .18</th>
<th>Parents are encouraged to play a role in helping this school to be a better place.</th>
<th>4.59  .60</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School administrators keep the school focused on student learning and promote sustained and continuous improvement.</td>
<td>4.64  .13</td>
<td>The principal and other school administrators keep the school focused on student learning and promote sustained and continuous improvement.</td>
<td>4.88  .33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal and other school administrators are accessible to parents when needed.</td>
<td>4.53  .15</td>
<td>The principal and other school administrators are accessible to parents when needed.</td>
<td>4.95  .23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School leadership has created an environment in which staff, parents, and community are in partnership to promote student achievement.</td>
<td>4.53  .16</td>
<td>School leadership has created an environment in which staff, parents, and community are in partnership to promote student achievement.</td>
<td>4.61  .53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( (M) \ 2=\text{Never}, 5=\text{Consistently} \)
Table 6

Summary statistics for school leadership variables for parents and principals (N=56)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership Variable for Parent Responses</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Leadership Variable for Principal responses</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. (M) 2=Never, 5=Consistently

The results of the Paired t-test indicated that at a .05 level of significance, the mean perception of parents and principals differ regarding school leadership (t(55) = 3.12, p = .002). In fact, the principal mean scores for school leadership are greater than those of the parent means.

As is the case with both communication and school culture, there is a sizable difference in the standard deviations for parent responses (SD = 0.149) and principal responses (SD = 0.350). The relatively large standard deviation for principals indicates that there was more variation in their responses. The parents had more consistent responses with less variation.

It was hypothesized that various types of parental involvement would be a predictor of student achievement. Several types of parent involvement were studied in correlation to student achievement.

1. Percentage of parents who join the Parent Teacher Association (M=.576)
2. Percentage of parents who attend PTA meetings (M=.382)
3. Percentage of parents who participate in workshops designed to improve student learning ($M = .215$)

4. Percentage of parents who attend parent-teacher conferences ($M = .822$)

5. Percentage of parents who volunteer to help with school activities ($M = .353$)

6. Percentage of parents who participate in committees including PTA committees, school committees and school council ($M = .524$)

The total percentage of students who met or exceeded standards in English and Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies was used as a measure of achievement. The individual percentages for each subject were averaged to achieve one overall measure for each school. Each type of parental involvement measures was compared to student achievement using the Pearson’s correlation coefficient.

The percentage of parents who attend parent-teacher conferences had a positive correlation to student achievement that was statistically significant ($r = .579$, $p \leq .001$).

The percentage of parents who joined PTA had a positive correlation to student achievement that was statistically significant ($r = .503$, $p \leq .001$).

The percentage of parents who volunteered to help with school activities had a positive correlation to student achievement that was statistically significant ($r = .390$, $p = .005$).

The percentage of parents who participated in committees including PTA committees, school committees, and school council had a positive correlation to student achievement that was statistically significant ($r = .352$, $p = .011$).
The two measures of parental involvement studied that did not have a statistically significant correlation to student achievement were the percentage of parents who participated in workshops designed to improve student learning ($r = .057, p = .696$) and the percentage of parents who attended PTA meeting ($r = .209, p = .145$).

**Summary**

Four hypotheses were tested using correlation as a measure of relationship. Summary statistics using the Pearson Correlation test and Paired $t$-tests were used to further explore the relationships between parent and principal perception of communication, school culture, and leadership in the schools.

It was found that while a positive correlation existed between parent and principal perceptions related to school communication, there was no statistically significant difference in means.

It was found that a positive correlation existed between parent and principal perceptions related to school culture, and at the same time, the means were significantly different. In fact, the principals had higher school culture scores than did the parents.

There was no evidence of a correlation between parent and principal perceptions regarding leadership. There was, however, a statistically significant difference in the mean scores. Principals had higher scores than parents in the area of leadership.

The fourth hypothesis was that specific types of parental participation would be a predictor of student achievement. In four out of six types of parental involvement, there was a significant positive correlation to student achievement. The correlated measures were the percentage of parents who attend parent-teacher conferences, the percentage of parents who join PTA, the percentage of parents who volunteer to help with school
activities, and the percentage of parents who participate in committees including PTA committees, school committees and school council.

The following chapter will give an introduction of the study. The summary will share findings from Chapter IV and conclusions about the findings. Chapter V will conclude with implications for practice, recommendations for further research and concluding remarks.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between principal and parent perceptions of family engagement as it relates to communication, school culture, and school leadership. The following sections show a summary of the study, including a brief overview of the problem, the purpose of the study and research questions, a review of the study design, and a summary of major findings. This chapter also includes conclusions, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks.

Review of the Problem

This type of study has been researched to determine the relationship between teacher and parent perceptions on family engagement (McGhee, 2007, Smith, 2008), but this researcher has not found studies that compare the principal and parent perceptions relating to the specific variables used. In order to build a successful partnership, school leaders should assess the perception of parents in regard to communication, school culture, and school leadership. Determining the relationship between the principal and parent perception and differences will give important information on family engagement and help leaders find ways to improve family involvement in schools.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study is to (a) examine the relationship of perceptions between parents and principals on family engagement; (b) analyze the differences, if any, that exist between parent and principal perspectives on communication, school culture, school leadership; c) examine level of various types of
involvement; and d) determine if there is a relationship between the level and types of involvement and student achievement. This chapter will present the findings, statistical data, and summary.

The following hypotheses were addressed:

H<sub>1</sub>: There is no relationship between principals’ and parents’ perception as it relates to communicating with families.

H<sub>2</sub>: There is no relationship between the principals’ and parents’ perception as it relates to the overall culture of the school.

H<sub>3</sub>: There is no relationship between the principals’ and parents’ perception of school leadership.

H<sub>4</sub>: There is no relationship between academic achievement and the various types of parental involvement in schools.

**Data Collection**

Surveys were sent to 110 principals in a large metropolitan Georgia school district. Completed surveys were returned by 56 principals within the school district indicating a return rate of 51%. Of the 56 principals returning the survey, three were high school principals, 10 middle school principals, and 43 elementary principals.

Principals were allowed two weeks to complete the survey. These surveys were collected in a notebook and kept in a safe and secure area by the researcher. The parent perception was collected from archived data of the district’s 2011 *School Improvement Survey*. It was determined that the parent database consisted of 11,765 parents from the participating principals’ schools.
Data Analysis

The researcher utilized a quantitative research analyses to compare the principals’ and parents’ perception on parent and family engagement in schools as it relates to variables (communication, school culture, school leadership, and student achievement). A Pearson Correlation test was used to determine if a relationship between parents’ and principals’ (grouping variable) perceptions existed. A Paired Sample t-test was used to determine differences in means of principal and parent responses. The means for each variable statement were also analyzed to determine the specific relationship among statement ratings from principals, matched with statement ratings from parents. This allowed the researcher to closely look at the statements receiving the highest mean within the variables, and the statement for the lowest mean. Academic achievement was compared to different types and levels of parental involvement. The levels for the types of involvement were taken from the completed principals surveys.

Summary of Major Findings

It was found that while a positive correlation existed between parent and principal perceptions related to school communication, there was no statistically significant difference in means.

It was found that a positive correlation existed between parent and principal perceptions related to school culture, and at the same time, the means were significantly different. In fact, the principals had higher school culture scores than did the parents.

There was no evidence of a correlation between parent and principal perceptions regarding leadership. There was, however, a statistically significant difference in the mean scores. Principals had higher scores than parents in the area of leadership.
The fourth hypothesis was that specific types of parental participation would be a predictor of student achievement. In four out of six measures of parental involvement, there was a significant positive correlation to student achievement. The correlated measures were the percentage of parents who attend parent-teacher conferences, the percentage of parents who join PTA, the percentage of parents who volunteer to help with school activities, and the percentage of parents who participate in committees including PTA committees, school committees and school council.

Conclusions

*Parent and Principal Perceptions of School Communication*

Hypothesis 1 states: There is no relationship between principals’ and parents’ perception as it relates to communicating with families.

When analyzing the principal and parent perceptions of School Communication, it was found that there was a significant relationship between the two groups; therefore the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. This finding is supported by a study conducted by Ogletree (2010) in analyzing the perception of parents on school communication. When surveying 372 parents, they indicated that they were satisfied with the level of communication from their school.

In further examining the communication variable, it was determined that there was not enough evidence to indicate that the perceptions of parents and principals significantly differ in regard to school communication from the Paired Samples t-test. Based on this finding, principals and parents have similar perceptions as it relates to communication in the schools. While the mean between the two groups was not found to be significantly different, when analyzing the specific statements rated for the communication variable, parents gave their lowest rating to *I receive feedback on my
student's progress on a regular basis. This lower rating was supported by the research by Freytag (2001) who stated that 90% of parents surveyed indicated their number one need was to receive information about their child’s progress and to know immediately if there was a problem so that they could help their child. In comparison, principals rated this statement differently, indicating that principals feel that the schools communicate with parents about their child’s progress as they should.

Principals’ lowest rating for communication was the statement, *I am satisfied with the level of communication from this school*, while parents rated this statement higher. Principals recognize the importance of communication from school to home and home to school. In fact, they realize that with any initiative to be implemented efficiently, it must have their support. Therefore, principals may have been more critical in their ratings.

The success of any partnership programs must have principal leadership (Sheldon, 2005). “Without principal leadership, the implementation of any program is not likely to be successful or sustained” (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009, p. 28). Due to this responsibility, principals may have a more critical view of the satisfaction parents have in regard to school communication.

It is interesting to note that the means for parent responses overall for communication are similar, while the means for principal responses are more varied. This finding could be the result of having input from principals in various types of schools. The perception about communication in a Title I school may be different from the perception about communication from a non-Title school. Data was not collected to determine which schools were Title I and which were not, therefore, this is only speculation by the researcher. Parents may not recognize the communication challenges
that their school faces, and therefore, their responses were similar regardless of the type of school.

**Parent and Principal Perspectives on School Culture**

Hypothesis 2 states: There is no relationship between the principals’ and parents’ perception as it relates to the overall culture of the school.

When examining the relationship between parent and principal perceptions of school culture, it was determined that a positive correlation does exist. Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis. When analyzing the mean differences using the Paired Samples t-test, there was a significant difference (p=.002) between the perception of parents and principals. However, in further examination of the survey items, both gave the lowest ratings to the statement, *A current school vision and mission is communicated to parents.* This finding may indicate that principals and parents do not feel that schools communicate the goals and future direction of the school as well as they should. Constantino (2003) stated that the school leader must provide the vision, communicate that vision to stakeholders, and convince them that it is worth following. Brown (2004) suggests that the first ingredient in creating a positive school culture is to have a clear vision and purpose. He states that building relationships and having conversations with school staff and community help to develop and solidify a school’s purpose.

The statement *There is at least one adult in the school that I can talk to* had the highest rating from principals, but a lower rating from parents, and in comparison to the other variable statements, the largest difference between the principal and parent ratings. Studies show that parents need to feel welcome and develop a high level of trust with the school staff and in order for them to feel comfortable (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).
Although ethnicity was not considered in this study, research does show that cultural differences may cause parents to feel unwelcome and even misunderstood (NDCP, 2009). These feelings may directly impact the level of involvement by these families. “Schools must acknowledge that there is an imbalance of power between educators and families, particularly when teachers represent one culture and families have lower incomes and are from different cultures” (Center for Collaborative Education, 2010, p. 7).

Principals feel that there are many adults with whom parents can talk. Yet, parents feel differently. Principals must ensure that parents feel that their concerns are important. Schools should recognize that negative experiences, based on past history may influence a parent and make them feel that no one will listen or value their input. Schools should help the parent identify those fears, and feel accepted and welcomed (Center for Collaborative Education, 2010).

*Principal and Parent Perception of School Leadership*

Hypothesis 3 states: There is no relationship between the principals’ and parents’ perception of school leadership.

A significant relationship was not found between parent and principal perceptions or school leadership ($p=.280$). Therefore, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis. This finding was not in agreement with Oberst’s study on stakeholders’ perceptions of school administrator competencies in Washington State Public Schools (Oberst, 2009). It was found that parent and administrator groups had statistically significant different perceptions on the ISLLC indicators used for school leadership evaluation.

In further examination of school leadership from the Paired samples t-test, a significant difference was found ($p=.002$). However, when looking at the statements
rated for the variable School Leadership, both parents and principals rated *I have an opportunity to give input into school decisions the lowest*. While examining this perception, it is important to note that research from Leithwood (1994) and Marks & Printy (2003) suggests that decision-making should involve a diverse group of stakeholders rather than one person (principal). In another study, Riordan (2003) states that “distributive leadership” should be used and decisions made should be from the input of formal and informal leaders. Comer (1995), when developing the steps for his SMD model, recognized the need for a less authoritarian management style by administrators in order for the school staff and parents to work together. “A representative group can reduce the distrust alienation and acting-out behavior between home and school and among staff and students which plague the modern school” (Comer, 1995, p. 40). Based on the findings of this research, the need to include parent, business leaders, and students in the decision-making process was recognized by both groups.

Another interesting finding was that the highest rated statement from principals was, *The principal and other school administrators are accessible to parents when needed*. However, this statement was rated lower by parents. It should also be noted that this statement had the greatest difference between the two groups within the School Leadership variable. This suggests that principals may feel they are accessible when needed, however, parents do not. An explanation for this difference may be that parents want to be able to meet with the principal whenever they want, and due to extremely busy schedules, principals must prioritize their time, especially in their duty as the instructional leader. Due to these busy schedules, principals may not be able to see parents in the timeframe that parents would like. It is also interesting to note that the perception ratings on School Leadership by principals were overall higher than the perception ratings of
parents. Because this variable was directly rating the principals’ actions, it may have been difficult for the principals to objectively and honestly rate the statements.

**Types of Parental Involvement and Academic Achievement**

H4: There is no relationship between academic achievement and the various types of parental involvement in schools.

As hypothesized, there was a correlation between academic achievement and various types of parent involvement in the participating schools. Significantly related to academic achievement, the strongest predictor was attending parent-teacher conferences. The next highest predictor was joining PTA, and in subsequent order, volunteering to help with school activities, and participating in PTA committees, School Council, school committees. Two types of parental involvement, attending PTA meetings regularly, and participating in workshops designed to improve student learning, were not found to be significant.

The highest correlation, attending parent-teacher conferences, supports the findings of Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1995) who stated that parents will become involved if they believe they have a very important role in the success of their child. However, it is interesting to note that Epstein (1986) in her study surveying 1,625 parents found that only 64% of parents attended conferences with teachers, while 84% regularly communicated with the teacher.

In the analysis of the next two types of parental involvement, the importance of joining PTA is noted. This finding supports the primary purpose of the National Parent Teacher Association which is to influence and change the lives of children across our nation for the better (NPTA, n.d.). It should also be noted that while Warren’s (2010) research suggested the need to involve parents in training to better help their child at
home, the finding of this study indicates that this type of involvement was not significant in its relationship to academic achievement for the study schools.

This study’s findings also support Marcon (1999) in her study comparing students’ academic achievement whose parents were highly involved and those whose parents were not. She found that the parents who were consistently involved tended to have children with higher grades than those who were less involved. Income levels and backgrounds did not influence the significant difference. Based on this study and the findings by this researcher, an assumption may be that no matter the type of school, encouraging parents to attend parent conferences and to join PTA may have an impact on student achievement.

Implications for Practice

This study found that there are significant relationships between parents’ and principals’ perceptions as it relates to communication. There is a relationship between the two groups, but in looking at the mean difference, there was not enough evidence to suggest that the perceptions of parents and principals differ. Of the variables researched, this was the one most surprising. Often, parents are extremely critical and complain about the lack of communication from the school, especially from the classroom teachers, in spite of the diligent efforts of the school to ensure good communication. Because we live in a very rich informational climate, communication is not as difficult as in the past. The ability to email parents, post information on blogs and websites, and to contact by cellular phone has greatly enhanced a school’s ability to keep parents informed. Perhaps the rating of the communication construct is a result of the ever changing communication tools that are available in our society.
Due to the ability to communicate quickly and easily, caution must be used to make certain that we do not overload the home with our school news. Schools and teachers walk a fine line when deciding how much or how little information should be sent home. If parents receive too much, they will begin to pay little attention to the communication, and due to this overload, begin to complain that there is too much. It would be important for schools to consider having a group comprised of staff members, parents, and possibly students to monitor school communication so that a healthy balance is given to this important tool. Too much of anything can become a hindrance rather than a help.

It is also important for the school principal to regularly communicate with the school community. This can be in the form of a monthly or biweekly newsletter, phone call-out, or blog. The principal should also ensure that the school website is kept up to date and is appealing. Often, these sites become cumbersome with too much information that can frustrate the user. It is also vital that these sites be maintained and updated often so that information is current and timely.

Based on this research and the research of others, it is extremely important that principals communicate with their staff about the importance of regular communication with parents. Parents want to know and should be informed about their child’s progress and the instruction the child is receiving in the classroom. It is also important that parents hear regularly from administration. This communication may be in the form of a phone call-out or a posted blog. It is also important to consider surveying parents yearly to find out which communication tool is the best for stakeholders.

It is the belief of this researcher that there is nothing more important than creating a positive school culture. Beginning with the front office and greeters, as people enter the building, they should feel welcomed. Expectations from the principal should be explicit
as to how those who enter the doors of the school are treated. Staff members should be expected to treat each other with respect, and to work through conflicts and difficult situations. Teachers should create a community of respect in their classroom, so that students understand how to work together and encourage each other. The classroom expectations should be communicated to parents, and in turn perhaps parents will create the same positive atmosphere at home. It is important that students and staff feel that they belong and they can contribute to make the learning community a wonderful place.

One specific way to create a positive school culture is for teachers to have class meetings. These meetings could begin with students compliments to each other, and then helping to solve problems as they arrive. This is a great way to teach students how to problem solve and help each other. The more the students are exposed to this type of community, the more confident and capable they will feel.

A positive school culture should begin with the principal. Principals should seek to get to know the parents and community members. They should strive to build relationships that are genuine and strong. Principals need to create a group of stakeholders, comprised of parents, community business leaders, staff, and students to help give guidance and make decisions concerning the school. If a principal will lead the school toward a positive climate, encouraging staff and students each day, it is the belief of this researcher that the school will be known for its optimism and inspiration and the difference it makes in the lives of students.

A strong school leader is vital in today’s schools and must strive to create a positive culture in the learning community. Parents want leaders who cast a vision for the school. They want to know that the leader has a strong determination and resolve to set goals and reach them. Parents also want to be assured that the leader of the school can guide the
staff in improving instruction and providing a strong academic foundation for its students.

Based on the findings of this study, it is of great importance that the school’s vision, mission, and goals be evident to parents. Parents need to be aware of the direction in which the school is moving, and invited to be a part of helping the school move toward those goals. However, it is also important that the leadership build relationships and trust among all stakeholders. Parents will be involved when they feel connected to the school and are encouraged to participate.

It is also critical for parents to be able to talk with an administrator when needed. As stated earlier, this can be a daunting task for the school leadership, and perhaps explaining the protocol and reasons that an administrator may not be available exactly when needed would be helpful. In any partnership, both parties must see the other willing to meet, willing to communicate, and willing to be supportive. Principals should look for ways to be available to parents and the community. Constantino (2003) suggests that organized gatherings by parents in which principals are invited to discuss and answer questions about the school, and should help create a sense of partnership. Although this may be time consuming, it is an interesting idea for a principal to be seen and reach out to the school community.

The importance of allowing parents to participate in making decisions for the school has been strongly supported by family engagement researchers. Georgia law requires each school to have a School Council, comprised mostly of parents, but also includes staff members and community business leaders. The purpose of the council is to give guidance and suggestions to the school administration. The council is required to meet at least four times a year and the meetings are open to the public. The School
Council can serve as an incredible asset, giving perspectives that may not otherwise be seen. When schools have developed their vision and mission statements, this group could give input and feedback in order to make those statements well-defined and easily understood by all stakeholders.

The connection of parent-teacher conferences to higher academic achievement is also an interesting finding of this research. As stated often in this research, families who are involved and engaged in a school can have an incredible impact on academic achievement. When schools make it a priority to encourage parents to attend conferences, students will profit. It is important for a school to solicit input from parents, and find ways to increase attendance to these conferences, especially if that is a challenge for the school. Hopefully, parents would have a clearer picture of what is expected of their child, and perhaps be better prepared to help students at home.

Parent expectations alone may help a school improve, but when parents give their time and effort in becoming a contributing member, schools benefit. A parent group that has long supported schools is the Parent Teacher Association. The National PTA has been very supportive and instrumental in promoting the need for families to be engaged in their schools, and have parental involvement kits that schools can use to enhance their plans for family engagement. It is very important for the school leader to support this group and promote their efforts. Based on the findings of this study, a strong PTA membership base can be of great benefit to schools.

Limitations

1) The principals and parents used in this study were a part of a large Georgia school district. Although there were elementary, middle, and high school principals
that have parent involvement in their schools, this study includes only those perceptions from participating principals and parents.

2) Demographics of schools were not collected on the principal survey. Therefore, this study does not reflect specific types of schools.

3) Principal responses may have been less than honest due to surveys returned with principal signatures on survey participation agreement.

4) The study did not include teacher perspectives, due to many previous studies that had compared teacher and parent perspectives.

5) The conclusions were recommendations only for those schools that participated in the school district.

6) This study was conducted in only one large metropolitan school district and results are only indicative of the participating principals’ schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations are made for future research:

1) An examination of Title I schools and the effect of their required Parental Involvement Plan on family engagement and academic achievement.

2) An examination of school culture and its effect on academic achievement.

3) An examination of community leader partnerships and their involvement in schools.

4) An examination of the impact of economic changes on parental involvement in schools.

5) An examination of leadership training for engaging families in schools.

6) A comparison of parent and principal perspectives on decision-making in schools.

7) An examination of student perspectives on family involvement in schools.
8) A state-wide study of the academic impact of specific types of family involvement in schools.

9) A comparison of schools requiring a parent involvement contract and those not requiring it, the level of involvement, and the impact on student achievement.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to look at principal and parent perceptions of family engagement as it relates to communication, school culture, and school leadership. The findings of this study indicate that there are many ways that the local school can improve parental involvement and family engagement.

The impact that family engagement can have on schools cannot be ignored. Parents want the best for their children, and schools want to be successful in preparing students for the future. The beliefs and values that are established by the school community are foundational for success. A strong leader understands the importance of communicating with families. A strong leader realizes how essential it is to create a vision for the school. A strong leader will take the time to assess, evaluate, and thoughtfully develop better ways to engage parents. A strong leader will solicit and encourage parental input for school decisions. A strong leader will take the time to build relationships with staff, students, and parents. Not every method will be the same, nor will every school have the same level of involvement, but every school should be extremely aware that raising students in our schools and helping them grow socially requires support from parents. It takes a school community with strong partnerships to give each child the best educational foundation possible and the brightest future imaginable.
APPENDIX A

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT SURVEY FOR PRINCIPALS

This survey is about a principal’s perception of Family Engagement in schools. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. All information you provide is completely confidential.

Q-1 The first question asks for your professional judgment about family engagement in your school CIRCLE the one choice for each item that best represents your opinion and experience. (*In all questions in this survey, “parent” means the adult in the family who has the most contact with the school about the child.*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Consistently</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Infrequently</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>No Basis to Judge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>Parents at this school receive feedback on their child’s progress regularly.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>Teachers at this school contact parents adequately about their student’s progress.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>Teachers communicate learning goals to parents.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td>A current school vision and mission is communicated to parents.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e)</td>
<td>Parents are satisfied with the level of communication from this school.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f)</td>
<td>Opportunities for communication exist in both directions between the home and school.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g)</td>
<td>This school keeps parents informed about school programs and activities.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>h)</td>
<td>Parents feel welcome at this school.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td>Parents have opportunities to give input into school decisions.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j)</td>
<td>Parents are encouraged to play a role in helping this school to be a better place.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k)</td>
<td>A wide variety of opportunities exist for parents to volunteer and assist in the educational program.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l)</td>
<td>The principal and other school administrators keep the school focused on student learning and promote sustained and continuous improvement.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m)</td>
<td>The principal and other school administrators are accessible to parents when needed.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n)</td>
<td>School leadership has created an environment in which staff, parents, and community are in partnership to promote student achievement.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o)</td>
<td>The overall school culture provides support and practices that provide for the academic achievement of all learners.</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q2: Please estimate the percent of your students’ families who did the following THIS YEAR:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Participate in PTA, School Council, committees</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>O</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>NB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>0% 5% 10% 25% 50% 75% 90% 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>Joining PTA</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>0% 5% 10% 25% 50% 75% 90% 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>Attend PTA meetings regularly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>Attend parent-teacher conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Understand enough to help their child at home with grade level skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>Volunteer to help with school activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **p)** At this school, people are treated fairly and with respect.
- **q)** There is at least one adult in this school parents can talk to.
Q3: Approximately what percent of your students based on overall school scores met or exceeded standards?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Total % Meet/Exceed</th>
<th>Total % Did Not Meet</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English/Language Arts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q4: The following questions will give you an opportunity to share your opinion and ideas on family engagement:

a) What is the most successful practice to involve parents that you have used or that you have heard about?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

b) In what ways could better partnerships with families help your school?

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

________________________________________

c) What do you feel contributes to the success of family engagement and parental involvement? (Please choose only one.)

___ Socio-economic status

___ High level of communication between school and home

___ Parent concern for high achievement

___ Relationship with teacher
d) What do you feel contributes to the lack of success in family engagement and parental involvement in schools? (Please choose only one.)

   ____ Lack of communication between school and home
   ____ Lack of time for teachers to communicate with families
   ____ History of parents having negative experiences at a school!
   ____ Parent job demands

Thank you for completing this survey
Dear Participants,

I am conducting research on principal and parent perceptions of family engagement and parental involvement. I am seeking to compare the perceptions of these two groups, the level of involvement, and its relationship to academic achievement. Please take a few moments of your time to complete the questionnaire. The survey should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire contains six questions, each with subcategories.

The data collected from the completed questionnaires will be compiled and analyzed. All data and information gathered will be kept completely confidential. As the researcher, I am very grateful for your participation; your completed questionnaire will serve as your consent to participate. However, you have the option to decline to participate. If you decide to withdraw from participation at any time there is no penalty or risk of negative consequence.

You will provide valuable information about family involvement in schools from your experience as a principal. The data collected by me, the researcher, will be used to add to the body of research on family engagement and parental involvement in schools. If you have any questions, please contact me at: karen.frost@cobbk12.org This research is under the supervision of the supervising professor, Dr. Rose McNeese, University of Southern Mississippi, email: rose.mcneese@usm.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that all research fits the federal guidelines for involving human subjects. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266 6820.

Sincerely,

Karen Ash Frost
APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5747 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6620 | Fax 601.266.4877 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the “Adverse Effect Report Form”.
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 11082904
PROJECT TITLE: A Comparison of Principals’ and Perspectives on Family Engagement in Schools
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation
RESEARCHER(S): Karen A. Frost
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Approval
PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: 10/24/2011 to 10/23/2012

[Signature]
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

[Signature]
DATE 10.26.2011
October 4, 2011

Ms. Karen Ash Frost
2253 Briarcreek Bend
Kennesaw, GA 30152

Dear Ms. Frost:

Your application to conduct research in Cobb County School District has been administratively approved. You may now contact the individual schools/departments about their participation in the study. Listed below are the schools identified in your application, along with the name and phone number of the principal. A copy of the Principal Agreement To Participate Form is included. After gaining approval from school principals, submit the original form to the Office of Accountability. Once the form has been received in the Office of Accountability and Research, a final letter of approval will be sent to you.

Should modifications or changes in research procedures become necessary during the research project, submit changes in writing to the Office of Accountability and Research. If you have any questions regarding the final approval process, contact our office at 770-426-3407.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr. Judith A. Jones
Chief Academic Officer
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(Publication No. AAT 3390655)