

A Qualitative Study on the Parent Participation Strategies found in one
Exemplary Middle School in Texas

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ABSTRACT

Because parent involvement in the education of children has proven to facilitate the academic success of students, it is mandated in both the *Texas Education Code* (TEC) and the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). Texas middle schools need research-based parent involvement strategies that will help in the development of their own parent involvement policies. Epstein has proven that parent involvement begins to taper off quickly at the middle grades and continues to decline into a student's senior year.

If Texas middle school administrators have access to proven parent participation strategies, more effective policies could be implemented in their respective schools. Having research-based parent participation practices available will prevent administrators from reinventing the wheel and potentially deter schools from only going through the motions to meet state and federal mandates. Texas middle schools committed to academic excellence can utilize resources that will assist in the identification of parent participation strategies that have been proven successful. Research-based parent involvement strategies will allow Texas middle schools to increase parent participation in any of the six parent involvement strategies suggested by Epstein and potentially bring about the academic success of every child.

This study addressed the following research questions: What are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary in the years of 2003-2004 and 2004-2005) that are found in the schools' formal campus improvement plans? What are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary between 2003-2004

and 2004-2005) that are found in these schools' parent involvement policies? What are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary in the years of 2003-2004 and 2004-2005) that are found through a case study involving the interviews of parents, teachers, principal, and superintendent.

The research method involved research participants and archival documentation. The researcher interviewed the building principal who was responsible for providing the leadership that allowed the Texas middle school to reach an exemplary status between the years of 2003 and 2005. The archival documentation included the school's campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy that supported the goals related to parent involvement.

The researcher segregated each of the elements of good practice found in the parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan into one of six categorical files. Categorical files provide a way to keep track of useful information and thoughts, and the title file will contain the researcher's effort to capture what the narrative may be about.

After the analysis of the archives was completed, the researcher set up interviews with the principal, three teachers, three parents, and the superintendent of schools for the exemplary Texas middle school. After the interviews were completed, the researcher typed up the dialogue from the interviews in its entirety so the information could be coded. Coding is a process used to sort and define pieces of collected data that are applicable to the research purpose. Once the scraps of the data were amassed into "data clumps," the researcher was able to create an organizational framework that could be broken down into smaller pieces or sub codes. The sub-coded data allowed the

researcher to organize the data from the interviews into meaningful strings of information that were used to contribute and bring together the archival data that was collected by the researcher.

The analysis of the interviews and archival data found there was a correlation between the parent involvement policy and student achievement. The researcher found that the exemplary middle school is truly committed to student achievement and promoted parent involvement. The goals of the school were reflected in the interviews, but were not grounded in the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policies. The information-rich data was used to create and provide a template for middle schools across the state of Texas to use as they create parent involvement strategies to engender the academic success of their students.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

“A research project is an effort to remedy the ignorance that exists about something” (Glesne, 1999, p. 24). These questions are appropriate because there is a lack of research concerning parent involvement policies and campus improvement plans in exemplary schools, particularly in Texas middle schools. The literature in parent participation is lacking in school-based approaches about parent and school partnerships that affect all teachers as part of a school’s sense of community and expectations for good practice in exemplary schools in Texas. There is also a lack of research that investigates meaningful parent involvement policies that are found in exemplary middle schools in Texas.

Parent involvement is mandated in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) Sec 1118 (a) (2)(A) and the *Texas Education Code* [TEC Section 4.001. (a)]. Schools that truly hold parent participation sacred will incorporate their beliefs into their mission statements, campus improvement plans, and parent involvement policies. They will first discuss and then implement policies that will enhance their parent participation programs during their regularly scheduled site-based committee meetings as reflected in the site-based minutes regardless of federal, state, and local policies. It is also mandated in the *Texas Education Code* and the *No Child Left Behind Act* that campuses produce a parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan and have regularly scheduled site-based meetings.

Chapter 11 of the Texas Education Code mandates that schools continually improve the academics of all students.

The board of trustees of each independent school district shall ensure that a district improvement plan for each campus is developed, reviewed, and revised annually for the purpose of improving the performance of all students. The board shall annually approve district and campus performance objectives and shall ensure that the district and campus plans are mutually exclusive to accomplish the identified objectives and at a minimum support the stated goals and objectives under chapter 4. (TEC 11.251 (a))

NCLB has mandated that parents are to be involved with the education of their children.

Each local educational agency that receives funds under this part shall develop jointly with, agree on with, and distribute to parents of participating children a written parent involvement policy. The policy shall be incorporated into the local educational agency's plan developed under section 1112, establish the agency's expectations for parent involvement, and describe how the agency will

- (A) involve parents in the joint development of the plan under section 1112 and the process of school review and improvement under section 1116;
- (B) provide the coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist participating schools in planning and implementing effective parent involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance;
- (C) build the schools' and parents' capacity for strong parental involvement as described in subsection (e);
- (D) coordinate and integrate parental involvement strategies under this part with parental involvement strategies under other programs, such as the Head Start program, Reading First program, Early Reading First program, Even Start program, Parents as Teachers program, and Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters, and State-run preschool programs;
- (E) conduct, with the involvement of parents, an annual evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the parental involvement policy in improving the academic quality of the schools served under this part, including identifying barriers to

greater participation by parents in activities authorized by this section (with particular attention to parents who are economically disadvantaged, are disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background), and use the findings of such evaluation to design strategies for more effective parental involvement, and to revise, if necessary, the parental involvement policies described in this section; and
(F) involve parents in the activities of the schools served under this part. NCLB Section 1118 (a) (2) (A-F)

The TEC 11.253 d (9) states that each campus improvement plan must also contain strategies that encourage parent involvement on the campus. As a school's faculty, administration, and parents create a parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan and have regularly scheduled site-based meetings, its site-based committee would most likely contain and continually develop elements of good practice it feels will contribute to the success of its students.

Several important research problems exist that cannot be overlooked by researchers concerning the relationships among parents, student academic performance, and democratic leaders. First, the dynamics of families have changed drastically over the last forty years in the United States. Today more single-parent families and low socio-economic families exist in the United States. Barton (2004) says that the two-parent family is in decline in the United States and throughout the developed world. As a result an increased need exists for schools to facilitate the participation of parents in the education of their children because research supports the idea that parent participation positively influences student academic achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001; Barton, 2004). "Struggling single-parent mothers, and sometimes fathers, need all the help they can get from the

community and from the school” (Barton, 2004, p. 10). The act of reaching out to parents and making them feel welcome in their children’s schools so they can overcome feelings of reluctance and constructively participate in their children’s education is the responsibility of the schools.

A real problem exists among parents, academic performance, and democratic leaders in Texas middle schools when schools do not create and maintain a positive relationship with the community and parents of their school children. “Comer found that many problems ascribed to students are, in fact, associated with poor relations among school staff and between those adults and parents” (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989, p. 8). In Comer’s twenty-year research it was found that by improving the relationships between schools and parents, better governance of the school and increased performance by the students were created. In order to develop the important relationships between home and school, Barton (2004) suggests that educators need to extend extra efforts with many low-income and single-parent families to set the climate for strong connections between parents and educators. Although educators may feel over-burdened with state mandates and day-to-day affairs, it is imperative that school staffs take the time to coordinate efforts to acquaint themselves with all parents, especially low-income parents.

The relationships developed between schools and parents will open the door for parent participation which will be another variable that can play a key role in student success. Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization dedicated to improving the lives of children by conducting research and providing science-based information to improve the decisions, programs, and policies that affect children and their

families. Barton (2004) found in Child Trends that “differences in parent involvement by race/ethnicity and income tend to show up in situations that require deeper parent involvement. Most parents attend scheduled meetings with teachers, but parents of Black and Hispanic students and low-income parents are much less likely than parents of White students to attend a school event, do volunteer work, or serve on a committee” (p. 11). As White middle-class parents become less reluctant to participate in their children’s educations, educators must find strategies that will solicit and utilize the many resources that low socio-economic and ethnic populations have to offer. By looking at an exemplary middle school in Texas, interested parties could potentially find successful strategies to involve all parents in the education of their children.

Second, with the combination of higher academic standards placed on school districts by the state of Texas through the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test and decreasing budgets, it is imperative that schools have the potential of tapping into an unlimited resource that has minimal costs yet offers potentially high returns on student academic achievement. Doran (2003) says that accountability, a dominant theme of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), requires all states to develop accountability plans that measure the effectiveness of each public school, primarily through student achievement test score data. As a result, the transferability of this study can potentially benefit all middle schools across the country.

Not only are Texas middle schools held accountable for TAKS scores for each specific subject area, but schools must also improve on the specific grade level and subject of the TAKS tests from year to year. “Under the new federal law, all schools within a state, not just those receiving federal financial assistance, demonstrate adequate

yearly progress (AYP) when the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient on achievement tests increases by a certain amount each year” (Doran, 2003, p. 55). The pressure on schools has increased due to accountability and its link to student success and federal funding. Schools have few choices. They either meet AYP and maintain high accountability ratings or risk suffering disgrace from the school community and potentially losing federal and state funding. Doran (2003) says that when schools fail to meet academic targets, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) will trigger a series of sanctions that could lead to school reconstitution. Reconstitution can mean that students have an opportunity to choose to attend a different school or even district if there is only one school within a district. This provides a negative consequence for schools as less average daily attendance (ADA) equates to less funding for those schools not meeting AYP.

Finally, if Texas middle school administrators have ready access to proven parent participation strategies, rather than their merely going through the motions of following state and federal mandates, they could actually implement more effective parent involvement strategies that would improve student performance in order to meet AYP mandates and accountability standards. Middle schools would have a readily available resource to help them identify strategies that have been proven successful by exemplary Texas middle schools thereby helping them to increase parent participation in any of the six areas of parent involvement suggested by Epstein (2001).

A constructive relationship must exist between students, parent participation, and democratic leaders for schools to reach their greatest potential. Democratic leaders must utilize their leadership skills to create teacher philosophies that value and utilize the

influence of parent participation strategies. Epstein (2001) describes the concept of having the school, parents, and community working together for the advancement of children as the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence. “Although there are important differences between schools and families, we also need to recognize the important similarities, overlap in goals, responsibilities, and mutual influences of the two major environments that simultaneously affect children’s learning and development” (Epstein, 2001, p. 86). One of the driving forces in the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence is the philosophy of parent participation held by parents, schools, and teachers. The democratic leaders of our schools are responsible for molding the philosophies of all stakeholders in the school and community who influence the achievement of every student.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study comes from the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 2001) and the Organizational/Supervisory Model of Instructional Supervision (Claudet, 1999). Epstein emphasizes the significance of the overlap of influence in school, parent, and community relationships and their influence on each other and specifically the child. Claudet’s work is significant in this study primarily because he shows how the macro and micro elements of an organization facilitate the end product of the school and how the administration can facilitate the success of a good parent involvement policy.

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence has two major divisions-- external and internal. The external component is perpetually influenced by three

simultaneous forces: the experience, philosophy, and practices of the family, school, and community. These three forces continuously influence the amount of overlap in each sphere--parent, school, and community-- from the time the child enters school until he or she graduates. However, if a child has a learning disability and needs special education services, then the three forces begin interacting even before the child enters school.

The internal structures of the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence consist of the intra-institutional and inter-institutional interactions of the family and school. The internal structure is centered on the communications that evolve among the educational community. The communications between the school, parent, and community should be focused on creating positive relationships between the stakeholders of the district for the purpose of promoting the success of each child. The communications that occur should involve the child, community, parent, and school and every combination of the four stakeholders.

An effective parent involvement policy is facilitated by the development of a climate and culture that welcomes parents from a variety of demographic backgrounds and that creates school inputs that will yield mediating variables that can be engendered by positive macro and micro communicative elements relating to parent participation. Claudet's (1999) Organizational/Supervisory Model of Instructional Supervision, another conceptual framework used for the study, suggests constructive micro and macro communicative elements will produce school outcomes that will create organizational effectiveness and productivity.

As a school implements policies and effective parent involvement strategies, it is important for the school leader to understand how the school inputs (SI), which include

the administrators, teachers, peer professionals, students, and community resources, and the micro and macro elements of these SI evolve to produce the school outcomes. Before a principal can effectively shape the culture of the school and integrate it with the goals of the organization, the instructional and educational leader must have an understanding of how the school variables affect the goals of the school. Chapter II of the dissertation will give a more detailed explanation of the conceptual framework for this study.

Importance of Research

A child's success in school depends heavily on the support and participation of the parents in his or her education. Without optimal support, students will not reach their full academic potential. President George W. Bush and the NCLB have called upon parents to be involved in supporting education in a variety of ways including parent participation. Parent partnerships are a key ingredient to the academic success of a child especially during the early years. Since many parents do not understand how to promote their children's academic success, schools must help facilitate parents' participation by following state and federal mandates through effectively communicating research-based practices in parent involvement policies, campus improvement plans, and site-based meetings.

To promote parent participation in schools, the federal and state governments have mandated that schools involve parents in many different ways in their children's education. According to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Sec 1118(a)(2)(A), the schools are to collaborate with parents. According to the NCLB Act, the schools are to "involve parents in the joint development of the plan under section 1112 and the process of school

review and improvement under section 1116” [NCLB 1118(a)(2)(A)]. Schools are also required to create student/parent compacts that outline how “parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement...” [NCLB 1118(d)]. NCLB also addresses the importance of communication by mandating that teachers hold a conference with each parent (elementary), provide frequent reports of student progress, advertise avenues for volunteering, and, to the extent possible, communicate in the language that parents can understand. The Texas Education Code Mission Statement also addresses the importance of parental involvement: “It is further grounded on the conviction that a successful public education system is directly related to strong, dedicated, and supportive families and that parental involvement in the school is essential for the maximum educational achievement of a child” [TEC 4.001(a)].

Because research has proven that parent participation increases student achievement and both federal (NCLB of 2001) and state laws (TEC) actively mandate parent participation in schools, schools have a moral and legal obligation if research and statutory-based to promote the active participation of parents in their schools. Epstein (2001) states that there are studies which prove, regardless of the socio-economic status of a family, that there are varying degrees of involvement within each social class. The diverse degrees of parental involvement in the schools are the result of how schools involve and inform families. The varying levels of parent participation in schools would indicate that all schools do not equally value the promotion of parents as active partners in education.

Regardless of the varying degrees of involvement, researchers found that most teachers and parents believe that parent involvement is important (Fix-Turkowski, 2003 and Epstein 2001). When teachers and parents have the opportunity to work together, the force that drives each of them is the desire for the other to fulfill personal needs rather than working together in the best interest of kids (Fix-Turkowski, 2003). Schools that promote parent participation have a moral responsibility toward the students to utilize parent participation in the best interest of the all students, regardless of race, culture, socio-economic status, or creed.

The dynamics of a diverse population of families makes is extremely difficult for schools to involve all families in education as required by law. “Equity then becomes ‘bending the rules’ or law to fit the situation” (Beckner, 2004, p. 39). Campuses may not want certain families to be involved with any aspect of the school environment for a variety of reasons such as the confrontational nature of the family, ethnicity of the family, socio-economic status of the family, or familiarity with the family. A representation of diverse families should be included when schools develop academic and campus plans for students. If schools do not act as moral institutions, students will not have an equal opportunity to succeed in school. As children grow up, the inequities they experience in school decrease the likelihood they will succeed in life. “Practices related to equal opportunity may range from the extremes of traditional racial or cultural discrimination to preferential treatment given to certain groups by means of quotas or other arbitrary policies developed as a result of ‘affirmative action’” (Beckner, 2004, p. 39). There are no rules or laws that govern schools in promoting racial equality in parent participation in

schools. Schools again should be “moral institutions” that make the best possible effort to have representation for the diverse population of parents in the school.

Because the TEC, NCLB 2001, and research support the belief that parent participation is effective in promoting academic achievement in students, schools should seek many of the opportunities and strategies offered by Epstein and other researchers to involve parents. Administrators cannot ignore the many obstacles that affect parents’ motivation for being involved and seeking involvement. However, it would be morally wrong to ignore the NCLB Act of 2001, the TEC, and the research that reinforce the critical need for parent participation.

Equity in Education

Administrators should consider several ideas when promoting parent involvement. First, schools have a moral and legal obligation to involve all parents regardless of their ethnicity or socio-economic status. All students have a right to receive an educational opportunity that is of the same quality as that of all other students. Each student should be represented in the development of the curriculum, in school policy through site-based management, and through various committees and parenting clubs. Second, schools should promote parent involvement for the right reasons. If teachers and administrators pursue self-interest as their motivation for involving parents, the focus of that parent involvement would not optimally benefit all students. Third, every parent and every situation is different.

Administrators and teachers have a moral and legal obligation to know each child’s strengths and weaknesses. Before placing precise expectations on a child and holding the parent and child accountable, educators should consider the many variables

that influence the child's ability and desire to meet those expectations. To hold every student to the same academic standard and expect every parent to be equally involved in his or her child's education would not be realistic. "Educators must stop lamenting the challenges of accountability and start making improvements" (Jerald, 2003, p. 14).

Improvement can be made by taking a team approach consisting of parents, school, and the community. The school administrator must be the instructional leader who stimulates and nurtures the relationships and helps the faculty and staff to identify opportunities to involve the participation of parents in their child's education.

"The way children experience life is determined by the families and communities in which they are raised; it falls to families and communities to create a way of life that is healthy, prosperous, and sustainable" (DeVol, 2004, p. 8). The family, school, and community are responsible for discovering the hidden rules (unspoken habits and cues of a group) of economic classes and ascertaining resources that will unlock the barriers for success concerning students from the low socio-economic classes. Devol (2004) says that all hidden rules influence behavior, but one of the strongest influences is that of economic class. Through the research of an exemplary middle school in Texas, the researcher may unveil resources and parent participation strategies to increase the limited resources that schools have at their disposal to help all children succeed, particularly students of low socio-economic status in exemplary schools.

The goal of discovering how to utilize parents as a resource to help children of low-socio-economic families will be difficult for several reasons. Primarily because of what Devol (2004) says, "Parents in poverty expect the schools to give their children the education they need and don't expect much of a role in the children's success in school"

(p. 9). Parents from impoverished families rely on schools due to many complex factors. These hidden factors include the limited amount of food available to the family, family structures, driving forces, money, time, destiny, power, possessions, and language. The key to helping students from low socio-economic families succeed is to understand the dynamics of how poor families operate. That is why it is important that schools and communities understand the hidden rules of low socio-economic families so they can implement parent participation strategies focused on the resources needed to bring children out of their impoverished way of life through education.

Payne (2003) defines quality of life as the degree to which one has ten resources. The ten resources alluded to by Payne (2003) include financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships, integrity, motivation, and knowledge of hidden rules. Because public schools have limited resources, it is imperative that schools build partnerships with their community. Poverty is a variable that cannot be overcome by schools alone. Resources are interlocking not just within families themselves, but within whole communities as well (DeVol, 2004). According to Sowell (1998) as found in DeVol (2004), “if a community allows a group to be disenfranchised for any reason, the whole community becomes poorer” (p. 17).

To exploit student learning, educators must be able to maximize all available resources. Low socio-economic families are important resources that cannot be overlooked. Because low socio-economic families have the potential to be difficult to reach, educators must have cooperative strategies and plans with communities and parents to facilitate the partnerships. By researching the parent involvement policies, campus improvement plans, and site-based minutes of a Texas exemplary middle school,

the researcher can potentially discover plans that can be utilized by districts that have high populations of low socio-economic families. The benefits schools can receive from the development of effective parent participation strategies go far beyond low socio-economic families to positively impact all families within a district. Many of the parent involvement strategies utilized to involve parents of low social-economic families can also be utilized on the many diverse family structures found in today's society. Although family structures and cultures vary from family to family, almost every family yearns for the success of their children.

It is my personal philosophy that all parents love their children and would like to see their children succeed. However, because families are so diverse in their cultures, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, and their everyday way of life, educators do not take the time to acquaint themselves with these many differences. As a result, educators misinterpret parents' actions and do not have the knowledge base or skills to effectively work with diversified families.

However configured, however constrained, families come with their children to school. Even when they do not come in person, families come in children's minds and hearts and in their hopes and dreams. They come with the children's problems and promise. Without exception, teachers and administrators have explicit or implicit contact with their students' families every day. (Epstein, 2001, p. 4).

Epstein (2001) goes on to say that just as teachers are prepared to teach subject matter and administrators are prepared to direct and manage schools and programs, educators must be prepared to draw upon all the resources that will help them with their work,

including families and communities. As a result, the researcher ascertained many conclusions from this study that will contribute to the success of all children.

Conclusions

First, exemplary middle schools in Texas have a diverse set of demographics within their student populations. Some Texas exemplary middle schools have a high population of students who are at-risk of dropping out of school. One of the prerequisites that students can have to be classified as “at-risk” in Texas is to qualify for the free and reduced program (TEC, 33.151 4(B)). There are other schools identified as exemplary which have a high population of students who do not qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. An exemplary Texas middle school was studied to determine which effective parent participation strategies work in a middle school that has the highest percentage of economically disadvantaged students than all other schools that qualified for the study. As the researcher analyzes the campus improvement plans and parent involvement policies, he will identify effective parent practices which can be emulated and utilized as models for other middle schools as they develop their own parent participation policies.

Second, as the researcher analyzed the campus improvement plans and parent involvement policies, he will identify the attitudes and philosophies that the exemplary middle school has developed regarding parent involvement. “If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school” (Epstein, 2001). It is important for the researcher to discern if the exemplary Texas middle school views parents as partners or just as parents. Epstein (2001) tells us that partners work

together for the betterment of their students and school because they recognize their mutual interest and their responsibility toward their investment.

The size of the school and its demographics was considered and analyzed by the researcher along with the attitudes and views exemplary schools have toward the parents of their students. The views the exemplary middle school has toward parents should be reflected in how they speak through their parent involvement policies and campus improvement plans. The importance of parent participation can also be communicated through the decision making involvement of parents, parent participation during the curriculum development process, and parent participation activities found in parent involvement policies, campus improvement plans, and site-based minutes.

Third, it was discovered by the researcher that the school's strategies by themselves are not as influential on student achievement as are the attitudes and philosophy the school has concerning parent participation. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) found that schools and parents who build a strong sense of community and believe that the educational success of the child is the responsibility of a unified parent-school partnership can create and experience greater levels of parent involvement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) research correlates with Epstein's (2001) Theory of Overlapping Spheres. Like Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), Epstein (2001) states that when the experience, philosophy, and practices of the family, school, and community are analogous, then teachers are rated higher by parents on interpersonal and teaching skills, rated higher in overall teaching ability, and students score higher on test scores.

If both Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's and Epstein's research hold true, then the parent involvement strategies and campus improvement plans would show an increased

level of parent participation in the planning and participation of many programs found in the exemplary Texas middle school being studied. The conclusion was made by the researcher that the success of the school is not necessarily found in the strategies for parent participation themselves, but in the attitude of the school concerning the participation of parents. Each individual teacher in the exemplary middle school may have a totally different approach toward parent participation, but they all share the common philosophy that parent participation is imperative for the overall success of the school, and they will therefore strive to create parent involvement policies reflecting this belief.

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this study is to identify parent involvement strategies for Texas middle schools to use as they create their own policies to promote academic success for all students. All middle schools are unique and therefore require policies that fit each school's distinctive needs. There is not a one-size-fits-all parent involvement strategy that would work well for all schools, but a proven strategy can be modified to fulfill the unique needs of each school and to facilitate the creation of an effective parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan. As a school administrator I have learned that it is sometimes easier to investigate the strategies successful schools have utilized and revise those plans to meet the needs of my own students rather than reinventing the wheel from scratch. Further, there is a need for identifying research-based practices to assist middle schools in developing proven strategies that promote and sustain academic success for all students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary between the years of 2003-2005) that are found in this school's formal campus improvement plans?
2. What are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary between the years of 2003-2005) that are found in this school's parent involvement policies?
3. What are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary between the years of 2003-2005) that are found through a case study involving the interviews of parents, teachers, principal, and superintendent.

The quantity of parent involvement research is shallow in educational leadership, so there is the need for new additions to the literature that can potentially facilitate schools as they develop and implement parent involvement policies and campus improvement plans in Texas middle schools. To answer the research questions for this study, the researcher studied the parent involvement policies and campus improvement plans in an exemplary Texas middle school and interviewed parents, a site-based member, principal, and superintendent of one exemplary Texas middle school campus. “To understand the nature of constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk

with participants about their perceptions” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). After learning and understanding the archival documents, the researcher spent time interviewing a site-based member, teachers, superintendent, and the principal to fully understand the premise of the school’s policies, beliefs, and plans regarding parent involvement. To understand the parent policy of a middle school, a researcher should understand the state and federal mandates that schools encounter in order to implement a parent involvement policy.

Legislative Mandates

Parent involvement is mandated in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) Sec 1118 (a)(2)(A) and the *Texas Education Code* [TEC 4.001. (a)]. Schools that truly hold parent participation sacred would likely incorporate their beliefs into their campus improvement plans and parent involvement policies and discuss ways to enhance their parent participation programs during their regularly scheduled site-based committee meetings as reflected in the site-based minutes regardless of federal, state, and local policies.

It is also mandated in the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the *Texas Education Code* that schools produce a parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan and have regularly scheduled site-based meetings. As a school’s faculty, administration, and parents create a parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan and have regularly scheduled site-based meetings, the site-based committee would most likely contain and continually develop elements of good practice they feel will contribute to the success of their students. The campus improvement plan is the document that the school uses to keep the school focused on the strategies the campus has identified to ensure

success. If a school firmly believes that parent participation is a critical component of a school's success, then the researcher could likely draw the conclusion that parent participation would be included in that school's formal campus plan.

Berg (2004) tells us "records are viewed as prepared for the expressed purpose of examination by others" (p. 210). Schools are required through federal, state, and local mandates to keep written records, files, and communications as they develop and build their school's parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan. "Official documentary (archival) records may offer particularly interesting sources of data" (Berg, 2004, p. 210). As democratic schools strive to create and improve parent participation practices as required by the *Texas Education Code*, they utilize their site-based committee or other campus committees. The agenda and the minutes of these meetings are recorded for legal documentation and communicated to the rest of the faculty and parents via memos, meetings, or e-mails.

An archival-driven study is appropriate for this research analysis for a number of reasons. Berg (2004) says that official documents include less obvious, and sometimes less openly available, forms of communication such as inter-office memos, minutes from meetings, organizational newsletters, and so forth. The materials that these resources produce can be used effectively by a researcher as data. By analyzing campus improvement plans and parent involvement policies from identified schools, a researcher can determine which parent participation practices are most effective in exemplary schools. "Records are written communications that have an official purpose" (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). Records from a school containing elements of stimulating parent

participation can uncover a school's beliefs regarding parent involvement practices that most influence their school children's success.

Methodology

An archival study answered the research questions of this study in a variety of ways. First, by studying the school-wide or school-based approaches to parent involvement in policies and campus improvement plans of an exemplary middle school in Texas, the researcher was able to use the information to provide insight into the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches to parent participation practices used by an exemplary middle school in Texas. "Information can be pulled from various traces and records created or left by humans" (Berg, 2004, p. 211). Administrators, professional staff, and parents collaborate to write the documents that lead the actions of the school. If parent participation were a priority of a school, discussions would likely occur in site-based meetings that would potentially enhance a school's parent involvement policy and involve greater parent participation in the development of their campus improvement plan.

Second, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) indicate that in order to fully understand a document or record, the qualitative researcher needs to study the context in which it was produced, the author's purpose in writing it, the author's working conditions, and the author's intended and actual audience. By studying the parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan of an exemplary school, the researcher was able to diagnose the approaches to parent participation in the exemplary Texas middle school.

Definition of Terms

The key concepts of this study are defined as follows:

1. Achievement. Achievement is a measurable description of growth in some area. In this study it was defined as academic growth of students over a period of time, and while this is a narrow definition, it is still one of the "most important performance indicators" of a school's effectiveness (Hoy & Miskell, 2001). In the state of Texas, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS, prior to 2003) or the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS, after 2002) measures that academic growth.
2. Accountability. In 1993, the Texas Legislature enacted the statutes that mandated the creation of the Texas public school accountability system to rate school districts and evaluate schools. Each year schools are tested in various subjects at different grade levels to determine student mastery of the TEKS for the current school year. Based on the results of each student's scores on the TAKS test, the school is given a rating of Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, or Unacceptable. In this study, the researcher will focus on a school that has scored the highest rating of Exemplary.
3. Administrator. In this study, the school administrator is the person who is primarily responsible for overseeing all school operations at the campus level. Collins (2002) says that a level 5 executive leader builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. These are the characteristics that school administrators should strive to obtain and should be characteristic of a principal of an exemplary campus.
4. Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). AEIS is a tool adopted by the state of Texas based on the systems theory model. AEIS is used to indicate public schools

that are efficient in the educational process. This is done through a ranking system. Each year a school receives a rank (e.g., Exemplary, Recognized, Acceptable, or Unacceptable) based on student achievement as measured by TAAS/TAKS, attendance, drop-out rate, college admissions tests, and TAAS/TAKS equivalency of all graduates (Vornborg, 1998).

5. Average Yearly Progress (AYP): Each school year Texas schools are expected to improve the scores of the campus and district on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test (TAKS). If schools fail to improve their TAKS scores over two consecutive years, the Texas Education Agency can place sanctions on the school and the district. Doran (2003) says that schools that fail to meet targets will trigger a series of sanctions that could lead to school reconstitution. Reconstitution can mean that students have an opportunity to choose to attend a different school or district if there is only one school within a district. Less average daily attendance (ADA) equates to less funding for schools.
6. Barrier. A barrier is something that prevents penetration. There are at least two environments in which the student participates. For the purpose of this study, these two environments will be the home and the school. A barrier exists when those participants from the home environment cannot effectively exist in the school environment, or vice-versa. An example of a barrier is a student's socio-economic status. "When individuals in poverty encounter the middle-class world of work, school, and other institutions, they do not have all the assets necessary to survive in that environment because what is needed there are proactive, abstract, and verbal skills" (DeVol, 2005, p. 26).

7. Consistent. Consistency means with regular occurrence. In this study, it will refer to the number of years a school is ranked exemplary, which in this study is at least two years between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.
8. Effective. Effective parent participation in this study involves strategies created or implemented by a school's site-based committee and/or administration that would facilitate the success of students on the TAKS test. The idea of effective parent involvement is the question being asked by the researcher in this study. What type of effective parent involvement is found in a Texas exemplary middle school?
9. Middle School. For study purposes, a middle school includes Texas public schools including fifth grade through ninth grade or a combination of any fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, or ninth grade. However, all-fifth-grade learning centers would be considered as elementary schools and will not be considered for inclusion in the study. Middle schools do not go beyond ninth grade, and many do not go beyond eighth grade in the state of Texas. Junior high schools will be used as part of this study. Junior high schools usually consist of seventh and eighth or seventh, eighth, and ninth grades in the state of Texas.
10. Exemplary. Texas middle schools that receive a rating of exemplary meet the highest standards set by the Texas Education Agency regarding academic performance. The rating for exemplary is set each year by the Commissioner of Education of Texas. After all testing in the state is complete, each campus and district is provided with a rating based on a list of criteria set by the state.
11. Expectation. As used in this study, an expectation is a desired behavior or emotional goal for someone set by another person. Teachers, administrators, schools, parents,

communities, and others have expectations for the students in a school and district. Expectations can unfortunately vary from student to student based upon a child's socio-economic status, social status, ethnicity, or gender. "A characteristic shared by most highly effective teachers is their adherence to uniformly high expectations. They refuse to alter their attitudes or expectations for their students—regardless of the student's race or ethnicity, life experiences and interest, and family wealth or stability" (Miller, 2001). For the purpose of this study, expectations for students focus on the academic success of each student on the TAKS test.

12. Low Socio-Economic. In this study, low socio-economic relates to a group of students within the school population who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program in the state of Texas.
13. Obstacle. An obstacle is something that impedes a group from reaching a mutually agreed-upon end point or obtaining a goal. Unlike a barrier that might exist naturally, an obstacle is deemed to be something that is deliberately or inadvertently placed to prevent goal attainment. An obstacle might be a school's or teacher's unwillingness to implement a parent involvement strategy such as efficiently communicating to parents. The teacher refuses because he or she does not agree with the necessity as a key to student success.
14. Parent. The parent is the primary caregiver to the student who is authorized to attend conferences, help with homework, and other various roles as defined by Texas Education Code Chapter 26.
15. Parent Involvement Policy. "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and

academic growth of children." (Goal 8 - National Education Goals). In this study the researcher is referring to the policy that each school in Texas is required by Chapter 26 of the *Texas Education Code* (TEC) to create in order to increase parent involvement within each school. Many schools fulfill this requirement by including their parent involvement policy into their campus improvement plan.

16. Parent participation. Parent participation can take many forms. In the case of this study, parent participation is any activity engaged in by parents in partnership with the school or in a capacity requested by the school as suggested by Epstein's (2001) six-types of parent involvement strategies.
17. Poverty. "Poverty is the extent to which a person does without the following resources: financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules" (Payne, 2003, p.9).
18. Site-Based Committee. The premise behind site-based decision making as established in the *Texas Education Code* (TEC) is to provide ownership in the campus and district-wide decision making process. It is believed that people who are involved at the campus level are better able to identify the needs and problems of the school. As a result, the faculty and staff are better able to develop strategies to resolve the campus problems than are people located off campus. Site-based decision making concepts also recognize that people at the campus level are more likely to buy into change and support its implementation if they are involved in the decision making process.

The *Texas Education Code* states:

The board shall also ensure that an administrative procedure is provided to clearly define the respective roles and responsibilities of the superintendent, central office staff, principals, teachers, district-level committee members, and campus-level committee members in the areas of planning, budgeting, curriculum, staffing patterns, staff development, and school organization. The board shall ensure that the district-level planning and decision making committee will be actively involved in establishing the administrative procedure that defines the respective roles and responsibilities pertaining to planning and decision-making at the district and campus levels. (TEC)11.251(d)

The objective of site-based decision making is to improve student performance and to enhance accountability. Each campus should have the freedom to set its own educational objectives, consistent with the school district's goals.

19. Site-Based Member. A site-based member is a representative of the site-based committee. The Texas Education Agency requires a site-based member be a teacher, administrator, central office representative, parent, business member from the community, or a community member that is selected from the faculty and staff.
20. Student. For the purpose of this study, a student is a child who attends a public middle school in Texas which has a combination of fifth through ninth grades, but not fifth or ninth grade distinctly.
21. Student learning. In this study, while a narrow definition, student achievement test scores (TAKS scores) will be considered equivalent to and indicative of student learning.
22. Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The Texas Assessment of Academic Skills was the assessment test used in the state of Texas through the 2002-2003 school year. The test was designed to monitor student academic growth from year to year based on the state-mandated curriculum, also known as TEKS (Vornborg, 1998).

23. Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills was the assessment test implemented by the state of Texas during the 2003-2004 school year and used to this day to assess whether or not a student has mastery of the grade level Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (Vornborg, 1998) in identified subject areas.
24. Texas Essential Knowledge Skills (TEKS). The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills is the curriculum mandated by the Texas Education Agency for all schools to follow when teaching the appropriate course. After a course is completed, the students should have mastered each TEKS outlined by the Texas Education Agency. At the end of the course each student is tested (TAKS) and their mastery of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for that grade level is determined.
25. Teacher. For the purpose of this study, a teacher is someone who is employed by a school district to assist and oversee development and learning of a middle school student.
26. Texas Education Agency (TEA). The agency in the state of Texas that is responsible for holding schools accountable for their academic, financial, attendance, and Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS)- gathering standards.

This list is not conclusive and will be modified as the dissertation evolves.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study could be far reaching for the academic success of middle schools and potentially high schools across the country. First, Sanders, Epstein, and Connors-Tadors (1999) found in a study by George (1995) that by the junior or senior

year in high school relatively few adolescents have parents who maintain an active interest in their education. It was found that elementary schools enjoy significant amounts of parent participation even with little effort put forth from administration and staff. By the time students reach the middle school grades, parent participation begins to taper off. In fact, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989) found that by middle school, the home--school connection had been significantly reduced, and in some cases had become nonexistent. As a result, schools must be proactive in developing programs that will facilitate parent involvement in middle schools. The earlier schools intervene to educate and facilitate parent involvement, the more significant the benefits for the child become. The sooner schools work to build and implement an effective parent involvement policy, the fewer gaps in the child's learning (curriculum) will develop during the middle and high school grades.

Second, as the amount of research emphasizing the significance that parent participation has on the overall success of children in schools increases, administrators will increasingly pursue proven parent participation strategies for implementation in order to reach out and involve the parents of all students, especially those of a struggling child. "The last 15 years of school reform have focused on course curriculum, instructional methods, and teacher training. Yet these reforms have not accomplished as much as they might because academic achievement is shaped more by children's lives outside the school walls, particularly with their parents" (Bogensneider and Johnson, 2004, p. 27).

Teachers can continue to implement a variety of authentic engagement teaching strategies and schools can produce innovative teachers; however, educators cannot ignore

the value of parent participation. “Putnam said that given a choice between a 10% increase in school budgets or a 10% increase in parent involvement, I would invest in parent involvement” (Bogenschneider and Johnson, 2004). Effective parent participation strategies are not only proven to be effective in developing academic success of students, but are also affordable for even the most financially-strapped school districts. Schools can implement parent involvement strategies that have little monetary expense, but can have a significant impact on the fiscal gain of a district.

Bogenschneider and Johnson (2004) found that the average cost for building family, school, and community partnerships is \$20 to \$30 per pupil. The cost per student remained the same regardless of the age, socio-economic level, and race of the school children. Also, when parents get involved at school, emerging evidence suggests that this involvement can strengthen school reform efforts.

Third, as family demographics change in Texas and the number of low socio-economic students potentially rises in many school districts across the state, schools need a bank of proven strategies from which to draw in order to increase the opportunities for parents to participate in the education of their children both at school and at home. Devol (2005) explains that vulnerability for people in poverty is concrete. When one bad thing happens in the lives of people in low socio-economic populations, it sets off a chain of negative events. For example, a student’s parent of low socio-economic status is driving his or her car around town without license plates. The reason an economically disadvantaged parent does not have license plates is because he or she cannot afford them. The driver gets pulled over by a police officer and is given a ticket for no plates. The driver cannot pay for the ticket and then goes to jail. The person then loses his or her

job. All of these consequences that befall the parent would have a direct impact on the student and potentially the student's academic results. A chain of events like this is commonplace in the lives of low socio-economic families. As a result, "the need to act overwhelms any willingness people have to learn" (Devol, 2005, p. 1). Devol (2005) goes on to say that this chain reaction requires people in poverty to utilize "reactive skills," not the ability to make choices, but to survive, robbing themselves of their commitment to education.

Parents and students of low socio-economic populations survive these harsh environments by developing relationships of mutual reliance and facing down problems with courage and humor. The family and friends of poor families provide them with the provisions they need to survive. By listening and understanding how poor people live and survive, schools can build relationships of mutual trust and work with parents to solve problems for their children as they relate to education and their academic success.

The answers to the research questions could be found in the formal campus plans and parent involvement policies of schools which have actually implemented policies and programs that have used the knowledge gained from listening and understanding families in economic need. Plans developed by schools that have used the programs successfully can be emulated in schools that have students of low socio-economic status and in need of help academically.

All schools likely have a percentage of students who would benefit from programs directly focused on children of poverty. The *No Child Left Behind Act* focuses on the success of all students, and the federal government provides Title I funding for students who are economically disadvantaged and at risk of dropping out of school.

Since the law mandates schools focus on disadvantaged children and schools are given supplemental funding to facilitate Title I students, administrators should pay attention to the successes of other schools and use proven strategies to facilitate the success of their own socio-economically disadvantaged students. Schools are held accountable for the lack of success of any child, and they should therefore take advantage of programs that will facilitate student success.

Finally, Bogenschneider and Johnson (2004) found that parental involvement is strongest in elementary school and, without intervention and special efforts being taken, few families continue as active partners with the school during their children's middle and high school years. Studying an exemplary middle school provided the researcher with data that most likely resulted from the effective planning and implementation of effective parent involvement strategies developed by teachers and administrators. It is important that proven parent participation strategies are made available to all middle schools in Texas. As the research suggests, middle schools have to work harder at involving parents in the education of their students. Without proven strategies in place, middle schools will continue to miss the opportunity of utilizing a most valuable resource--parents.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation was divided into five chapters. Chapter I presented an introduction to the study and gave a general overview. Included is the importance of the research, the research questions, definition of terms, brief description of the conceptual framework, and significance of the study.

Chapter II reviewed the literature that pertained to this study including parent involvement motivators, ethical values of administrators developing parent involvement policies, parent involvement mandates, and positive results relative to parent participation, conceptual framework, and practical application implications. This review helped identify the need for this research, so as to fill a gap in the current knowledge base.

Chapter III described the methods used to collect and analyze the data for this study. The participant and setting were described.

Chapter IV provided a presentation and analysis of the data gathered in the study.

Chapter V presented a summary of the findings and analysis. The findings were compared and contrasted with those found in the literature. Based on the analysis, conclusions related to the study's meaning were shared. Implications for theory building, policy, practice, and research were stated. Suggestions for future research were also reported in this chapter.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

Chapter II will focus on the review of the literature relating to parent involvement. Many situations encourage or deter parents from becoming involved in the education of their children. As schools develop parent involvement strategies, they must consider the moral and ethical dilemmas involved before implementation. The history of parent participation in public education, effective communication practices, and the positive outcomes from effective parent involvement strategies will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with the conceptual framework and practical implications regarding parent involvement.

An increased focus has been made on parent involvement in schools at the national, state, and local levels over the last several decades. The focus on parent involvement stems from the impact of parental participation research in schools. Researchers such as Joyce Epstein have revealed that parent involvement has a vast impact on many variables that affect school climate. The research also reveals how schools can implement strategies for involving parents in the education of their children.

It has been revealed in the research literature that parent involvement has a positive impact on student achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) have written describing multiple ways that parents can become involved in their children's education. It is evident that parent involvement in schools can have a profound impact on the academic gains or losses of a campus or district.

In the literature researchers reveal that schools have developed and maintained positive school climate with the aid of parent participation (Bafumo, 2003; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Xitao, 2001). Claudet (1999) suggests in the Organizational and Supervisory (O/S) Model of Instructional Supervision that campus administrators significantly impact the professional learning environment of the campus. The campus administrator sets the tone for the quality and quantity of the mediating variable of parent participation on a campus. If parent participation is made a priority on a campus by the principal, then increased parent involvement will occur. It can be concluded that increased parent involvement has the potential of producing an organizational/supervisory climate within the school that promotes student learning. Administrators must keep in mind that there are many mediating variables within a school that affect school climate, not just parent participation alone.

It is important to note that the relationship between a teacher and student significantly influences a parent's perception of a school's effectiveness on his or her child's academic success (Thompson, 2003; Esposito, 1999). A parent's perception of his or her child's relationship with the teacher can influence, positively or negatively, the climate of the school and/or district. "Increased parent involvement has been shown to result in increased student success, teacher satisfaction, and improved school climate" (Peterson & Skiba, 2001, p. 4). Further, the principal must be proactive in developing a climate that is conducive to parent involvement and participation to produce teacher feelings that promote parent involvement.

Parent Involvement Motivators

Little research is available to reveal what factors lead parents to decide to become involved in the schooling of their secondary children (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Research does suggest that the foundation of any positive and productive school, parent, and community involvement program begins with a positive relationship (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1992; Epstein, 2001). Providing a positive school climate where parents and community members feel welcome by friendly and courteous faculty and administration would be the basis for a climate of open communication, teamwork, and parent involvement. “The observed linkages seem logically based in dynamic aspects of the relationship between many parents and teachers” (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie, 1992, p. 291).

“The correlational nature of our results suggests that just as efficacy may influence involvement choices, these varied forms of involvement may influence parents’ sense of efficacy” (Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie, 1992, p. 291). Building positive relationships with parents would give teachers the ammunition they need to help facilitate creating the parent efficacy needed to involve parents in the many diverse activities potentially incorporated in middle schools to help in the academic success of all children.

A good parent involvement program should begin with the administration’s creating in-service for teachers that would assist in the communication and relationship building process of all parents regardless of their socio-economic status, race, or gender. Epstein (2001) discovered there is not a single grounding class in university-based teacher preparation programs that focuses on the development of teacher and parent

partnerships. Teachers, parents, and most importantly, students would benefit from in-service directed toward creating positive relationships among all stakeholders. As a result, all parents would feel welcome and be given the opportunity to become a part of their children's learning process at home and at school.

Hoy, Tarter, and Hoy (2006) found that academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust in parents and students are related to student achievement. All three of these variables are strong predictors in schools that sustain academic achievement. "Trust is one's vulnerability to another in terms of the belief that the other will act in one's best interest" (Hoy, Tarter, and Hoy, 2006, p. 429). Cooperation and trust should set the stage for academic success, but few studies exist that support the theory. In order to have a quality parent involvement policy that supports and improves academic achievement of all students and overcomes some of the disadvantages of low SES, schools must strive to develop benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness with all stakeholders of the school campus.

Creating a climate of trust among all stakeholders of the district engenders a positive learning environment in which every student can learn and all teachers can instruct. Goleman (2006) found that a school's climate is the summation of all the positive and negative interactions among all people at the school on a given day. The interaction that faculty and staff have each day is shaped by the school's culture—the unspoken norms, habits, and traditions that influence how people conduct themselves. To be most effective the school's leader must set an example for all faculty and staff by demonstrating a leadership style that energizes people in the organization to do their best. Sociologists have found, neurological speaking, that in any organization emotions rippled

outward, and the strongest concentration of emotions come from the most powerful person in the room (Goleman, 2006). By leading with a leadership style that produces excitement and encourages distinction to flow through the organization and community, the school's leader is able to build a climate of excellence for all students.

“Parent involvement was strongly associated with family socio-economic status (SES); welfare families demonstrated the lowest and professional families the highest levels of talking and interaction with their children” (Zellman and Waterman, 1998, p. 371). Payne (2001) says that the key to achievement for students from poverty is in creating relationships with them. Because people in poverty tend to rely heavily on relationships, as well as entertainment, the most significant motivator for these students is relationships. Administrators and teachers must understand the dynamics of families in low socio-economic conditions before they can intuitively create programs that will facilitate their involvement.

Understanding the hidden rules and the patterns in the formal and casual register of social classes, school personnel will find help in building productive relationships with all socio-economic levels of parents and children. If the teacher is stereotyping a student because of his or her socio-economic status and does not build a positive relationship with a poor child, then that child will not learn up to his or her optimal potential. Because of a negative relationship with the teacher, the student will make complaints to his or her parents about the teacher thereby creating an additional negative relationship between the teacher and parent. Even if the teacher has the ability to build a positive relationship with the parent, there is still a potential obstacle between the student and teacher. Sometimes situations exist where a negative relationship is inevitable, but

educators must be equipped with the knowledge and understanding of the diverse set of socio-economic rules and the differences between casual and formal registers in the varying socio-economic groups in order to ameliorate them (Payne, 2003).

Many unknown variables exist within the school environment that can potentially influence parents in their decision to become involved at home, at school, or not at all with their child's education. Research regarding parent involvement in schools is increasing, but little research is available on the moral and ethical dilemmas administrators must consider prior to creating a parent involvement policy. School administrators, teachers, and site-based committee members should be aware of the ethical dilemmas that are involved before choosing a type or style of parent involvement strategy.

Ethical Decision Making Involving Parents

To be most effective as a principal and moral leader of a school, the instructional leader of the campus should apply objectivist principles when making ethical decisions concerning parent participation in schools. "Moral objectivism takes the position that moral principles have objective validity, independent of cultural acceptance" (Beckner, 2004, p. 49). Principals must seek out and discover the "moral truths" that exist when implementing parent involvement policies and following state and federal mandates in schools. Beckner (2004) believes that there are exceptions to moral norms. As moral objectivists, school leaders must ascertain which moral principle would create the most good for each individual student in comparison to another moral principle.

Schools have many moral dilemmas to overcome prior to their effectively implementing parent participation strategies. First is the issue of teacher time. The amount of time available for a teacher to allocate for parent participation is a moral and ethical dilemma which must be addressed. Teachers have many responsibilities within the educational setting. The amount of time that teachers have to expend instructing and preparing lessons decreases each year, yet the demand for increased test results increases. The decrease in time available is due at least in part to the result of mandated local, state, and federal bureaucratic procedures teachers must follow. Teachers have to ask themselves the question “Is the amount of time put into contacting and working with parents worth the trouble?” Second, educators should also consider the parents’ time when asking them to participate in various learning activities at school. Parents, whether they are from single or dual-parent families, have to work and carry forth the many responsibilities of maintaining a family’s financial and emotional existence. Many educators wonder if parents should be asked to spend at least a short time daily with each child on academic activities (Epstein, 2001). Third, there are few rewards, other than intrinsic ones, to encourage a teacher to spend time working toward the potential benefits of parent involvement (Epstein, 2001). When dealing with parents, teachers confront the issues of lack of dependability, shortened schedules, low commitment levels, and the differing goals and values of parents and schools. The problem again is the time needed for schools to train parents on the value of, strategies for, and tools needed for effectively assisting their children academically.

It is the responsibility of all educators and parents to ensure the safety and emotional and academic wellness of each and every child. Beckner (2004) believes that

there is a responsibility for the educational welfare of the child that both the parents and school authorities must consider. Before students can learn optimally in school, children must feel safe and have their basic psychological needs fulfilled. Some schools share a reciprocal belief that it is the parents' responsibility to send children to school ready to learn. Many schools have not accepted the idea that the education of a child is the shared responsibility of the school, family, and community. Epstein (2001) describes the concept of having the school, parents, and community working together for the advancement of children as the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence. "Although there are important differences between schools and families, we need to recognize also the important similarities and overlap in goals, responsibilities, and mutual influence of the two major environments that simultaneously affect children's learning and development" (Epstein, 2001, p. 31).

As educators, what moral and ethical responsibility do we have toward the students who do not have responsible parents or any parents at all to ensure they come to school ready to learn? Philosophers and educators take different approaches when dealing with students who are not having their physical and emotional needs met. Some philosophers argue that, "One is responsible for the actions taken and for those that are not taken, while others feel that one is responsible for action that is taken, not for those actions not taken" (Beckner, 2004, p. 31). In both cases, a child has the right to come to school and be given the same educational opportunity as every child in the state of Texas. "When we say that a person has a moral (or legal) right in a given situation, we mean that it is ethically (or legally) permissible for him or her either to act in a certain way or to

insist that he or she be treated in a certain way without obtaining anyone's permission to do so" (Beckner, 2004, p. 36).

Children have the right to receive a quality education; and an adult, be it a teacher, parent, community, or government organization, must take the responsibility for every child. "Real leaders concentrate on doing the right thing, not on doing things right" (Lashway, 1996, p. 1). In the "real world" of education, ethical dilemmas (choices between two rights) are very difficult to distinguish at times. Educators face moral dilemmas each day which cause them to ponder which path to follow only to discover one is never clear of uncertainty in moral and ethical terms. However, since children are required to attend school and have no voice in how the school runs its daily operations, it is imperative that schools are moral institutions and the leaders' conduct "...must be deliberately moral" (Lashway, 1996, p. 1).

One area that should receive more focus among educators when dealing with Epstein's Type I parent involvement strategy is helping parents perfect parenting practices so children can be more successful in school. So many times students come to school mentally, physically, and emotionally unprepared to learn because of their home environment. These students may have witnessed violence between parents, homelessness, or lack of running water or electricity, or even neglect. Students come to school with a diverse and unique set of problems so overwhelming that they cannot stay focused on the task at hand. Rather, the children's focus is on survival and what it will take to endure another day after school. Fix-Turkowski (2003) found that 84% of educators sampled believed that meeting a child's basic needs was a parent's role. More than 10% felt schools were as responsible as parents for meeting a child's basic needs.

This information provides us with insight that not all educators believe that a partnership should exist between parents and communities to ensure all students are equipped with the basic life necessities in order to be successful in school. Fix-Turkowski (2003) says that the common belief within schools is that the duty does not lie within the domain of the school, but in the hands of the parents.

Often students come to school unprepared for the intense learning environment of schools. Many educators believe that the learning deficiencies students bring to school is a reflection of the lack of parenting skills for these neglected children. A moral dilemma comes into play when administrators have to determine the academic expectations that educators should place on the child and the families of these children, while determining whether or not Child Protective Services (CPS) should be called.

Administrative Dilemmas

Teachers, parents, and administrators want the best for every child academically and emotionally. At times a parent's ability to be an effective parent is hindered by alcohol, drugs, family violence, or uncontrollable circumstances. In more serious cases of neglect, CPS must be called. However, there are situations when children come to school unable to be effective students. When educators study each student separately, they may find that a single, unemployed, and homeless family is sincerely making the best out of a bad situation. As a result, the child is bringing to school the best he or she has to offer academically at that time.

Kertee (2003) claims through Pfaffer's "Understanding the Role of Power in Decision Making" that power is defined as "force sufficient to change the probability to

change B's behavior from what it would have been in the absence of the application of the force" (p. 25). Regardless of how much force a principal or school places upon children and parents in bad social environments, the force would be unlikely to yield significant academic results for that child. In some cases the pressure placed on these students and parents could yield negative results. Added pressure to an already bad situation can create more problems for the family. For example, a child could be missing too much school due to extenuating family circumstances. The school applies pressure on the student's parents by filing on them for thwarting attendance. The parents are poor and unable to pay the fine or court costs. As a result of not paying the fine, the single parent goes to jail. Now the child has to go live with a relative, a situation that potentially provides less academic or social support for the child, or go into the custody of the Child Protective Services.

The moral dilemma facing principals concerning parent participation is complex. Principals must decide if they should apply legal pressure on the unfortunate low socio-economic parent while maintaining high academic expectations for the student or be content with the quality of work the school is getting from the unfortunate student. First, principals must consider the following:

Justice is not mere strength, but harmonious strength—desires and men falling into that order which constitutes intelligence and organization; justice is not the right of the stronger, but the effective harmony of the whole. It is true that the individual who gets out of the place to which his nature and talents adapt him may for a time seize some profit and advantage; but an inescapable Nemesis pursues him. (Beckner, 2004, p. 37).

Educators must take into consideration procedural justice that “deals with the treatment people ought to receive in connection with the application of rules that govern or control them in some way” (Beckner, 2004, p. 37) in order to accept the child’s current academic ability, rather than pursuing the child’s academic potential.

Educators have moral dilemmas to consider when striving to increase parental participation in schools. First, many families today are becoming more involved with making ends meet and maintaining the family’s financial existence. The time that families can set aside beyond the normal school day for the academic promotion of their children is very limited or even nonexistent. Second, to assist their parents in making ends meet, children are often required to take on many adult responsibilities such as baby-sitting siblings, cleaning, cooking, and earning money. “Parents want to be supportive and help, but they can’t—yet without support; schools cannot make any real difference” (Epstein, 2001, p. 131). Although the child’s basic necessities are being met and the child is in a loving and supportive environment, the child is not performing up to his or her academic potential because of the obligations placed upon him or her by the family.

The moral obligation of the school is to educate all children, but the issue of equity is another moral concept that must be considered. “What creates the problem is that the equitable is just, but not legally just, but a correction of legal justice. The reason is that all law is universal which shall be correct” (Beckner, 2004, p. 39). Schools have a moral obligation to make sure that all students are successful academically. Yet, several obstacles can interfere with a school’s ability to ensure academic equity for all students. First, cultural issues can interfere with a child’s academic success. For example, a

teacher may recognize a child gawking as a sign of disrespect when in actuality the child is behaving the way his or her culture has taught him or her. Constant conflict between the child and teacher can disrupt the teaching and learning process. Second, many public school textbooks are written from a White male perspective. The White male perspective can hinder the learning of students from diverse cultures. Many more equity barriers to learning face schools as they strive to educate all children equally.

Mandates of Parent Involvement

To promote parent participation in schools, the federal and state governments have mandated that schools involve parents in many different ways in the education of children. According to *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) and Title I Section 1118(a)(2)(A), schools are to collaborate with parents. According to both the federal and state law, schools are to “involve parents in the joint development of the plan under section 1112, and the process of school review and improvement under Title I Section 1116” [NCLB 1118(a)(2)(A)]. Schools are also required to create student/parent compacts that outline how “parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement...” [NCLB 1118 (d)]. NCLB also addresses the importance of communication by mandating that teachers hold a conference with a parent or guardian for each child (elementary), provide frequent reports of student progress, advertise avenues for volunteering, and, to the extent possible, communicate in the language that parents can understand. The *Texas Education Code* Mission Statement also addresses the importance of parental involvement: “It is further grounded on the conviction that a successful public education system is directly related to strong,

dedicated, and supportive families and that parental involvement in the school is essential for the maximum educational achievement of a child” [TEC § 4.001.(a)].

Because research has proven that parent participation increases student achievement and both federal (NCLB of 2001) and state (TEC) laws actively encourage and promote parent participation in schools, schools have a moral obligation to promote active involvement of parents. Epstein (2001) states that there are studies which prove, regardless of the socio-economic status of a family, that there are varying degrees of involvement within each social class. The diverse degrees of parental involvement in the schools are the result of how schools involve and inform families. The varying levels of parent participation in schools would indicate that all schools do not equally value the promotion of parents as active partners in education.

Regardless of the varying degrees of involvement, researchers found that most teachers and parents believe that parent involvement is important (Fix-Turkowski, 2003; Epstein, 2001). Fix-Turkowski (2003) found that many teachers and parents that work together are self-motivated. The force that drives the parent and teacher is determined by what lies in the best interest of their child rather than do what is the best for all kids. Schools that promote parent participation have a moral responsibility toward the students to utilize parent participation in the best interest of the all students, regardless of race, culture, socio-economic status, or creed.

The dynamics of a diverse population of families makes it extremely difficult for schools to involve all families in education as required by law. “Equity then becomes ‘bending the rules’ or law to fit the situation” (Beckner, 2004, p. 39). Campuses may not want certain families to be involved with any aspect of the school environment for a

variety of reasons such as the confrontational nature of the family, ethnicity of the family, socio-economic status of the family, or lack of familiarity with the family. A representation of both ethnically and socio-economically diverse families should be taken into consideration when schools develop academic curriculum, parent involvement policies, and campus plans for students. If schools do not act as moral institutions, students will not have an equal opportunity to succeed in school. As children grow up, the inequities they experience in school decrease the likelihood they will succeed in life. “Practices related to equal opportunity may range from the extremes of traditional racial or cultural discrimination to preferential treatment given to certain groups by means of quotas or other arbitrary policies developed as a result of ‘affirmative action’” (Beckner, 2004, p. 39). Rules or laws governing schools in promoting racial equality in parent participation in schools do not exist. Yes, schools should be “moral institutions” that make their best effort to have representation for the diverse population of parents within the school.

Because the TEC, NCLB of 2001, and research support the belief that parent participation is effective in promoting academic achievement in students, schools should seek the many opportunities and strategies offered by Epstein and other researchers to involve parents. Parents and schools cannot ignore the many obstacles that affect parents’ motivation for being involved and seeking involvement. However, it would be morally wrong to ignore the NCLB Act of 2001, the TEC, and the research that reinforce the critical need for parent participation in the education of their children.

Educators have several things to consider when promoting parent involvement. First, schools have a moral obligation to involve all parents regardless of their ethnicity

or social economic status. All students have a right to receive an education that is of the same quality as all other students. Each student should be represented in the construction of the curriculum and school policy through site-based management and in various committees and parenting clubs. Second, schools should promote parent involvement for the right reasons. If teachers and administrators pursue self-interest as their motivation for involving parents, the focus of that parent involvement would not optimally benefit all students. Third, every parent and every situation is different. Administrators and teachers have a moral obligation to know each child's academic strengths and weaknesses. Before placing precise expectations on a child and holding the parent and child accountable, educators should consider the many variables that influence the child's ability and desire to meet those expectations. To hold every student to the same academic standard and expect each parent to be equally involved in his or her child's education would not be moral. To ensure that every child receives an equitable education, lawmakers at the state and federal levels must begin implementing policies and laws that ensure that all students are represented by parents at all grade levels.

History of Parent Involvement

Before stakeholders of education can fully appreciate the efforts of federal, state, and local mandates to increase the role parents play in the education of children, the evolution of the development of parent involvement policies should be understood. First, a group of individuals called the Committee of Ten met at Saratoga, New York, in July 1892. The committee did not discuss parent involvement strategies directly; rather they developed the academic template used in public schools today. The committee also

agreed on the implementation of higher expectations for our schools as evidenced by, “The normal schools, as a class, themselves need better apparatus, libraries, programs, and teachers” (Mitchell, R. *The Graves of Academe: The Seven Deadly Principles*: as cited in *Thoughts of School: Bringing Education to Schools*). One of the programs the Committee of Ten could be unconsciously referencing is the agenda that promotes parent participation.

Since the time of the Committee of Ten, the federal government did little to get involved with public education until the end of World War II. After the war the federal government became more involved with shaping educational policy for several reasons. First, the government wanted the United States to become number one in the world in science and mathematics. Second, there was an increased focus on meeting the needs of the disadvantaged. Third, with the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights legislation, the federal government became more involved with defining and legislating educational rights (Yudof, Kirp, Levin & Moran, 2002).

The *Elementary Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) of 1965 symbolized a new era of federal involvement in public education. The ESEA was designed by Commissioner of Education Francis Keppel and was passed on April 9, 1965. This piece of legislation was part of the plan by Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty to level the academic playing field between socio-economic groups (Schugurensky, 2002). The ESEA began a legislative commitment to parental involvement in public education that would not be enhanced until the 1980s.

A more serious approach to improving America’s schools was taken with the release of “A Nation at Risk” to the public sector (Orlich, 2000). The “Nation at Risk”

was a document that was produced in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education that called for more rigorous standards for high school graduation, higher standards for universities, and a longer school day. “The document motivated every state to implement some strategy for educational reform instead of waiting for individual schools to create policies that promoted reform within” (Yudof, Kirp, Levin & Moran, 2002, p. 885). Orlich (2000) emphasized Edson’s observation that “A Nation at Risk” was similar to the report by the Committee of Ten in 1893 in several ways: both groups recommended longer school terms and both groups endorsed a kind of social Darwinism, i.e., survival of the academically fittest. People responded to the “Nation at Risk” in many ways, but one effect of this great paper is the educational reform that is still taking place today.

The first major change in educational legislation since the ESEA came under President George Bush. In October 1989, President Bush set in motion academic reform for the 1990’s that included the direct involvement of parents in children’s education with the announcement of *Goals 2000: Education Strategy* (Orlich, 2000). Goals 2000 endorsed six major national goals that were quickly replaced by President Clinton’s modification of Chapter 1 in the *Improving America’s Schools Act* (IASA) of 1994 that contained eight goals.

The significance of Title I is that it seeks every opportunity to focus dollars on leveraging overall improvement of teaching and learning in schools with the highest levels of poverty (Yudof, Kirp, Levin, & Moran, 2002). The specific objectives called for in the IASA are the following six from the EASA plus two additional objectives: all children starting school being prepared for learning; a high school graduation rate of

90%; all Americans being literate; the absence of drugs, guns alcohol, and violence; a well-educated teaching force; parents involved with their children's education; America being first in the world in science and math achievement; and high world class academic standards for all students. An important aspect of the IASA is that it is built around the premise of partnerships between parents and the school community so that optimum student learning can occur (Campbell, 2001). The EASA was the major educational reform until President George W. Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001.

The federal government has once again made significant efforts to improve the quality of public education in America with the NCLB and the reauthorization of the ESEA. President George W. Bush describes the NCLB as the, "cornerstone of my administration." President Bush believes that the children of America are the future for America and that too many children are left behind. The NCLB is built on four common sense pillars: accountability for results, an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research, expanded parental options, and expanded local control and flexibility (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). A few of the many improvements mandated within the NCLB include more involvement opportunities for parents in decision making, increased communication, and more support financially to implement research-based improvement strategies to assist low socio-economic and ethnic groups.

To review the major efforts of the federal government to improve the quality of education, researchers have investigated how many of these policies have been implemented in public schools and to what extent. "Policies may not always achieve their goals, particularly because they have to be implemented by local individuals who

function as ‘street level bureaucrats’ deciding when and how to interpret rules” (Osher & Quinn, 2003, p. 3). This statement is particularly significant concerning the NCLB for several reasons. First, many administrators fail to implement all aspects of the NCLB. The NCLB utilizes researched practices that have been proven to increase student achievement. If the NCLB is implemented as intended by the Department of Education, schools and districts should see an increase in student achievement. Second, President Bush has given districts and principals more freedom to utilize federal funding without the hindrance of fighting red tape. Allowing districts and schools to implement actual practices is beneficial and practical, but without accountability schools have the potential of not implementing the full scope of the NCLB.

One example of how the NCLB Act is making use of researched strategies to improve student achievement is through the utilization of parent partnerships in schools. Joyce Epstein has been conducting research on teachers’ practices of parent involvement and the effects of family-school connections on students, parents, and teachers for over a decade. Epstein currently works at the Johns Hopkins Educational Research Center and continues to be one of the front-runners in parent participation research. Through research, Joyce Epstein has developed six types of parent involvement strategies that have proven, if used collectively, to build a foundation for student achievement and to be effective in creating school climates that are conducive to student achievement.

The federal and state laws that have been passed since 1965 have emulated, to some extent, the proposals made by Epstein’s six parent involvement strategies. “Widespread support for parent involvement is reflected by its inclusion in nearly every policy proposal aimed at improving the performance of our nation’s schools” (Smrekar &

Cohen-Vogel, 2001, p. 2). From the *Elementary Secondary Act of 1965* to the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001, increasing emphasis has been placed on parental participation.

Types of Parent Involvement Developed

Epstein's six types of parent involvement strategies include the following: Type 1, parenting practices: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at every age and grade level; Type 2, school-home communication: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications; Type 3, volunteering or being an audience at school: Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs; Type 4, involvement in home learning activities: Information for families about how to help with homework and curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning; Type 5, decision-making, governance, and advocacy roles: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations; and Type 6, community collaboration: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community. Epstein emphasizes that if all of these strategies are used together in schools then the probability of student achievement will increase.

A child's number one supporter in the educational arena and for achieving academic success is his or her parent(s) or guardian(s). Without optimal support, students will not reach their full academic potential. President George W. Bush and the NCLB have called upon parents to be involved in supporting education in a variety of ways. Parent partnerships are a key ingredient to the academic success of a child especially in the early years. Since many parents do not understand how to promote their children's academic success, NCLB specifies some ways.

A School's Parent Involvement Plan

Schools are mandated in the NCLB, Sec.1118 (a) (3) (b) to create a parent involvement policy and distribute it to parents of participating children. The plan should include how the school will carry out its plan. The belief of the NCLB is that if parents are aware of how to be involved in their child's academic success, they are more likely to participate. Parent partnerships with schools have proven to have a significant impact on the parent's perception of the school thereby affecting the overall success of the child. "Increased parent involvement has been shown to result in increased student success, teacher satisfaction, and improved school climate" (Peterson, 2001).

While developing the parent participation plan, according to NCLB Sec 1118 (a) (2) (A), the schools are to collaborate with parents. "Involve parents in the joint development of the plan under section 1112 and the process of school review and improvement under Title I Section 1116" [NCLB 1118 (a) (2) (A)]. The research decisively supports parent involvement contributing to student achievement when schools include families as participants in school decision-making (Claudet 1999, Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Many schools utilize the two parents appointed to their site-based team

as the voices for school improvement. A more effective approach for achieving higher academic success for students is utilizing the voices of many parents as a source for policy creation and approval. Communicating with parents should be made a priority by both districts and schools.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) and the NCLB Sec 1118 (c) (1-5) have given emphasis to communication and collaboration between home and school/school and home. The NCLB requires that schools hold annual meetings at various times throughout the day and year to communicate what and how they are going to actively involve parents. During the parent meetings schools may also utilize their Title I funds for “transportation, child care, or home visits, as such services relate to parental involvement” [NCLB section 1118 (c) (2)]. Epstein & Sheldon found that family-school-community partnerships have been found to increase daily attendance, decrease chronic absenteeism, or both (2002). The communication between home and school builds and maintains the partnership with parents and is effective in piloting all realms of student success. Without the support and influence of parents, many students would fall through the cracks and others would not attain their academic potential.

Communication and Parent Involvement

Claudet (1999) points out that all communication, micro and macro communicative elements, is essential in the professional learning environment resulting in school outcomes of effectiveness, organizational effectiveness, productivity, and school holding power. Parents receive communication so they may be involved in all aspects of the learning environment. By involving and communicating with every parent

possible, schools can better ensure that each student can potentially enjoy the benefits of school. For example, Epstein (2001) points out that assisting families with parenting and child-rearing skills is imperative for the success of students. All students could benefit academically from research-based practices that facilitate parenting skills focused on emphasizing education in the home.

The importance of schools' communicating with parents is emphasized in the NCLB. Student/parent compacts outline how "parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement..." [NCLB 1118 (d)]. NCLB also addresses the importance of communication by mandating that teachers hold a conference with each parent (elementary), provide frequent reports of student progress, advertise avenues to volunteering, and, to the extent possible, communicate in the language that parents can understand.

The NCLB Act knows no boundaries when it comes to communication. To increase communication between schools and parents, NCLB requests schools provide literacy training to parents, including transportation, child care costs, and parental training to enhance the involvement of other parents, as well as to teachers to become better parent advocates. To facilitate schools' meeting these communicative elements, NCLB provides schools with additional funding. In order to receive the funding through Title I, schools must meet all mandates in NCLB. As the late Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas noted in a famous case, *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), "the federal government has power to fix the terms on which its money allotments...shall be disbursed" (p. 89-90).

Walsh, Kemerer, and Maniotis (2005) noted that the recodification of Texas school law in 1995 made parental involvement more of a priority by adding Chapter 26 entitled “Parental Rights and Responsibilities” to the *Texas Education Code*. First, in the Public Education Mission Statement it states, “It is further grounded on the conviction that a successful public education system is directly related to strong, dedicated, and supportive families and that parental involvement in the school is essential for the maximum educational achievement of a child” (TEC 4.001(a)). Second, the first objective of public education in Texas is, “Parents will be full partners with educators in the education of their children” TEC 4.001.(b)1. The TEC leaves local control of parent participation strategies to the local school district and provides no specific examples of how to implement parental involvement. Walsh, Kemerer, and Maniotis (2005) noted, “Despite the authority given to local school boards, the Texas Legislature since 1990 has increasingly sought to ‘flatten the decision-making pyramid’ by involving others in district and campus governance.(p.28)” The Texas Legislature’s reference to “others” includes stakeholders of the educational community including professional staff, parents, community members, and business representatives.

To increase productivity of students and to have parents involved with their children’s education, the TEC emphasized communication and decision-making in many areas. First, the TEC required any decision or discussion concerning policy, grades, placement, curriculum, etc., must involve a committee with parent representation. Second, throughout Chapter 28 of the TEC, the progress of a child on any assessment (physical, emotional, or academic) must be communicated to the parents in writing.

Chapter 26 of the TEC emphasizes, “parents are partners” in their child’s education. For a school to be successful, the school’s parents should be encouraged to volunteer in school activities, to attend school functions, and to become members of the school’s parent organization. The individual districts and schools control how each of these goals is accomplished. Control does not exempt schools from accountability. In achieving each of these goals, schools must keep minutes and agendas and create plans to show the state how they will accomplish the state mandates. The ultimate payoff for carrying forth the parent involvement policies and other regulations created by the state is student success on the Texas Assessments of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and an Exemplary rating from the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

Every Texas school district that qualifies for federal funding as a Title I school receives Title I funding from the federal government to help facilitate the **academic success** of underprivileged students. As a result, the programs that each school implements and how the Title I money is spent must mirror the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 legislation. A description of the Title I mandates are found in each district’s Policy Manual under EHBD (Legal). Each district’s Legal Policy is identical and is a highlight of the *Texas Education Code* policies that provides the legal framework for local district policy. To receive and utilize the fiscal support from the federal government, school districts must follow all regulations found in the NCLB Act of 2001. If schools fail to follow the legal policies set forth in Legal policy EHBD and the NCLB, then the district can risk having federal funds withheld or they could be reprimanded by the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

To provide school boards with the power of influencing their schools in accomplishing parent involvement success, states allow boards to create local policies. Policies that local school boards create should not be in conflict with the federal or state policies mandated upon school districts. Most school districts do not have local policies for involving parents in schools. They have taken the Legal policy of the NCLB and have created local policies that stipulate how schools within their district shall carry forth the federal policies of the NCLB. For example, the NCLB Act and the TEC both mandate that schools communicate to parents the academic progress of their children. Irving ISD Board of Education in its EIA Local Policy created district policy for reporting student academic progress. Irving ISD local policy specifies how often the campuses will send out progress reports to their parents. The progress report sent out to parents by Irving ISD in Texas includes subject averages, number of student absences, and conduct grades.

Each local policy for districts concerning parent involvement across the state is similar. The hallmarks used by districts across the state regarding parent involvement policies are the NCLB and the TEC. The Board of Education of every district relies on the leadership of their campus principals to be enthusiastic about creating opportunities for parent involvement and participation activities. As campuses create and implement parent participation opportunities, they must follow their Board of Trustees' legal and local policies. Each principal, faculty, school, and district is unique. The federal government, state governments, and the Boards of Trustees recognize the unique qualities of each aspect of education. The responsibility for planning and implementing parent involvement policies is the responsibility of the building principal.

Principals of each campus must take the responsibility given to them by the NCLB and follow the research practices of Epstein. Principals and schools must also provide parents every opportunity to be involved in their child's education through decision making, collaborating with the community, volunteering, communicating, and assisting their children academically by using the practice of good communication.

Effective Parent Communication Practices

A key component of democratic leadership and the ability to implement an effectual parent involvement policy is effective communication from the school's leader. Clearly communicated goals must be established by the principal. Exemplary schools would hopefully create goals that include strategies that involve the active participation of parents at home, school, or both. The strategies created by the school's site-based decision making committee and principal should be created in collaboration with the parents of the school. The school must be able to communicate distinctly and bi-directionally to all levels of the organization. "Communication goes beyond cognitive knowledge and encompasses the ability to self-examine one's ideals, values, and beliefs and their impact on the communication process" (Villani and Lyman, 2001, p. 2). Before a site-based committee can create an effective parent involvement policy, communication in developing a policy must involve all stakeholders of the policy which would include the parents and community of the organization.

Duemer and Mendez-Morse (2002) state clearly that "a unidirectional communication focus limits access to understanding how a policy is implemented; whereas a bi-directional rather than unidirectional framework expands access to learning

how an individual's values, attitudes, and perspectives—the human factors—impact policy implementation or mutation” (p. 7). It is imperative that the organizational leader understands the formal and informal lines of communication in the district. The principal must use the communication channels to interpret misunderstandings and then clarify the needs of parents and the community back to the site-based committee. Without bi-directional communication, the human element of the organization will hinder or incapacitate the school's effort to create a successful parent involvement policy.

Communication is a key component that schools must utilize as they move toward implementing their parent involvement policy. “The full mix of demands on parents' time and energy, particularly related to employment and other family responsibilities, will serve as the primary influence on the types of involvement they choose once they have made the decision—as a primary function of parental role construction, parental sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school, and opportunities and demands presented by children and schools—to become involved” (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, p. 318). Parents of different social classes are involved in a diverse group of activities that dictates the time and opportunities they have as parents to become involved in their child's education.

To detect the most effective parent involvement strategies, schools must first consider the needs of the stakeholders by utilizing bi-directional communication with the parents. Hoover-Dempsey and Walker (2002) have found that most schools' approaches to communication consisted unilaterally, “schools communicating to, rather than with,” schools. Unilateral communication is helpful in many ways, but it does not allow for the exchange of ideas and information between the home and school. What is needed for

continued student achievement is information that allows teachers to understand the needs of students and learning-exchange crucial to benefiting student achievement.

If a school is primarily located in an affluent district, teachers could anticipate more parent participation at school versus a school with a larger low socio-economic group of parents. “Schools in working-class neighborhoods tend to be regimented and controlled by the school administration; whereas those in wealthy areas favor more participatory forms of governance and pedagogy” (Feuerstein, 2001, p. 31). Parents from different social classes have different demands placed on them, different past experiences, and different levels of efficacy. Siren (2005) found that socio-economic status is not only linked to academic achievement, but also to a multitude of interacting systems including students’ racial and ethnic background, grade level, and school/neighborhood location. Without communicating bi-laterally with the community and getting a good feel of individual needs from parents themselves, schools would likely develop a parent involvement policy that would not reach out to all parents found in a community.

Communication is vital to the success of a parent involvement policy. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) found that specific invitations, opportunities, and demands for involvement conveyed by the child or the school should also influence the parent’s choice of involvement. As schools learn the dynamics of the parents in their community and consider the morality of asking parents to participate in specific activities through effective communication practices, more effective parent involvement policies can be created that allow optimum participation of parents in their child’s education. Because parents and communities are unique, a good parent involvement policy should follow the

advice of Hoover-Dempsey and Walker (2002), “an optimally effective program of family-school communication should offer parents and teachers multiple options for family involvement” (p. 9).

Positive Results Relative to Parent Participation

Feuerstein (2001) says that parent involvement encompasses a broad range of parenting behavior, ranging from discussion with children about homework to attendance at parent-teacher organization (PTO) meetings. Regardless of the type of parent involvement strategies that schools have to offer, the relationship that the student and parent have with their child’s teacher will generate either a positive or a negative impact on each child’s education. If the child thoroughly enjoys the teacher and has a positive relationship with him or her, the parent will most likely appreciate and like the teacher. On the other hand, if the child is not happy and complains to the parents, the child’s parents will not be content with his or her teacher and would be reluctant to participate in any school activity. If the unpopular teacher assigns activities to be done at home, the parent would have the potential of being negative about the project or homework.

School Climate and Culture

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) say that there is proof in the research that students can still be successful without parent participation as a result of positive relationships that students develop with the adults in school. Just because the research says that students can be successful without parent participation does not translate to mean that parent participation programs are not important. Rather, the power of developing positive relationships with the students and parents of a school is increasingly

important. Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) say that whether at home or at school, parents became involved if they perceive that teachers and students expect or desire their involvement and increasingly so if this perception is coupled with an inviting school climate. Before a positive school climate can exist or teachers' and students' actions can be interpreted by parents as being inviting, there must exist a positive relationship between the two entities.

Claudet (1999) emphasizes the significance of the principal's behavior in developing positive school climate in schools. The literature has driven researchers to reveal that schools have developed and maintained positive school climate through the aid of parent participation (Bafumo, 2003, Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Xitao, 2001). Claudet (1999) suggests in the O/S Model of Instructional Supervision that campus administrators are significant variables of school inputs into the professional learning environment. The campus administrator sets the tone for the quality and quantity of the mediating variable of parent participation on a campus. If parent participation is made a priority on a campus by the campus principal, then increased parent involvement will likely occur.

It is important to note that the relationship between a teacher and student influences a parent's perception of the school's effectiveness on their child's success (Thompson, 2003; Esposito, 1999). A parent's perception of their child's relationship with a teacher can influence, positively or negatively, the climate of the school and/or district. "Increased parent involvement has been shown to result in increased student success, teacher satisfaction, and improved school climate" (Peterson and Skiba, 2001, p. 168). Furthermore, the climate produced by the principal toward parent participation is

essential in producing positive feelings supporting parent participation. The benefits gained from parent participation affects all aspects of the school environment, including the monetary gains for the school (Claudet, 1999).

Epstein (2001) has established six types of parent involvement that have proven to be effective in creating school climates that are conducive to student achievement. Through the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001, a tremendous amount of emphasis has been placed on parent participation. The federal law relating to parent participation mirrors the suggestions made by Epstein's six types of parent involvement strategies. Epstein's six type of parent involvement strategies include the following: Type 1, parenting practices; Type 2, school-home communication; Type 3, volunteering or being an audience at school; Type 4, involvement in home learning activities; Type 5, decision making, governance, and advocacy roles; and Type 6, community collaboration.

Fiscal Benefits of Parent Involvement

Conclusive evidence exists to support that parent involvement does increase student achievement and higher average daily attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, Dunlap, Newton, Fox, Benito, & Vaughn, 2001). A fiscal benefit for school administrators promoting a warm school climate and parental involvement is an increased average daily attendance. Communicating with families concerning programs, student success, and home-to-school communication is invaluable in promoting school attendance, and as a result, student success.

Fleet, Conderman, and Lock (2001) discovered that collaboration results in improved attendance and classroom behavior of students, an increased ease in parent-

teacher relations, and a higher level of self-confidence in parents who assist their children in succeeding academically. If a school successfully builds parent involvement policies and campus improvement plans that facilitate the positive collaboration with parents, a warm climate should evolve as well as increased support from the school's parents. If a student desires to come to school and teachers are capable of engaging students in authentic academic work, a student's increased academic achievement would potentially be the final result.

Epstein & Sheldon (2002) found that activities that have proven to positively affect the rates of attendance when involving parents include the following: workshops for parents, home visits, referrals of absent students to counselors, and the use of truant officers in their arsenal of family and community involvement. A more thorough investigation of urban, rural, and ethnically-diverse communities could potentially give administrators a better understanding of which methods of parental involvement would have the most significant impact on student attendance.

Research also indicates that parent involvement is linked to decreased dropout rates in schools (Plevyak & Heaston, 2001). When a student drops out of school, there is a loss in school revenues due to a lower average daily attendance and sanctions that can be placed on the district if the dropout rate is too high. A student who drops out of school can also become a burden on society by being unemployed and relying on the government welfare system for support. The legislature has tried various measures to reduce the dropout rates; however, existing law gives the districts and schools the local authority to deal with at-risk students, those in danger of dropping out of school. The federal, state, and local governments need to continue allocating money to allow schools

to help those students who are at-risk of dropping out of school. With adequate funding levels, schools can create parent involvement policies and programs that target strategies to involve parents early in their children's academic careers and encourage them to maintain age-level appropriate strategies through high school to prevent their children from dropping out of school.

Community Involvement

Parent involvement policies that share an overlap with the community (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002), in Epstein's (2001) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, have demonstrated the ability to increase student achievement. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) suggest that if schools reach out and work with the community in obtaining resources to coordinate school-related services for families and students with businesses, agencies, and other local groups, academic and fiscal gains would result.

Both the federal (NCLB) and the state government (TEA) promote the utilization of parent participation in schools. "Widespread support for parent involvement is reflected by its inclusion in nearly every policy proposal aimed at improving the performance of our nation's schools" (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001, p. 2). "Our education system does not afford children from low income and racial-ethnic minority backgrounds the same educational opportunities, on average, as middle-income non-minority children" (Desimone, 1999, p. 2). President Lyndon B. Johnson's fight on poverty came with the implementation of the *Elementary and Secondary Act* (EASA) of 1965. The EASA advocated parent participation in schools and strived to close the learning "gap" that existed between low socio-economic and middle class families by

creating Title I funds in the sum of one billion dollars a year to schools with high percentage of low socio-economic students (Schugurensky, 2002).

Title I Funding and Parent Involvement

President George W. Bush pushed the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001 through Congress to increase the quality of education for all children. Title I of the NCLB mandated parent involvement in schools and promoted higher academic standards for all students. To stimulate the implementation of policies involving parent participation, Title I funding was made available to school districts and service centers across the nation. The NCLB Act of 2001 addresses the need for site-based committees on each campus to commit to extensive collaborative planning on how to utilize Title I funding directed toward parent participation. Chapter 26.001 of the *Texas Education Code* recognizes parents as partners in the educational process and encourages their participation in “creating and implementing educational programs for their children.” Some site-based committees believe in a “one size fits all” philosophy when considering the involvement of parents in school governance and activities. Do all the parents from diverse ethnic and social economic statues respond the same? Desimone (1999) says that effectiveness of particular parent-involvement practices differs according to race-ethnicity and family income. Therefore, districts and schools must seek multiple methods of addressing the involvement of diverse ethnic parents in the social and academic facets of the school environment.

Conceptual Framework

This section will define and describe the conceptual frameworks discussed within this study. Although legislative and court mandates from the state and federal government exist for parents to become involved in their children's education, few parents may be aware of these mandates. Parents rely upon schools in order for them to become informed about and compliant with the law. Several models of successful parent involvement programs exist that are indicative of what should be involved (Epstein, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). After reviewing those designs, the model of parent involvement described by Epstein (2001) is the one selected for use in this study. This model will provide the basic structural support for this study's design. The second framework discussed is Organizational/Supervisory Model of Instructional Supervision Claudet (1999); it is described as it relates to the micro and macro variables that are incorporated into Texas public schools.

Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Two conceptual frameworks have been identified from the review of the literature of this study. The conceptual frameworks include Epstein's (2001) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and Claudet's (1999) Organizational/Supervisory (O/S) Model of Instructional Supervision. Epstein's theory explains external parent participation as overlapping or non-overlapping spheres representing the family, school, and community involvement. The internal structure shows the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships and influences patterns of primary importance. Claudet's O/S model explains the many micro and macro communicative elements affecting the

professional learning environments of teachers, administrators, and other peer professionals in schools as it relates to parent involvement.

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence is built on two components-- external and internal. The external component is driven primarily by three forces: the experience, philosophy, and practices of the family, school, and community. These three forces influence the amount of overlap in each sphere--parent, school, and community. For example, the more a school believes in the influence of parent involvement, the more likely schools will work to achieve higher levels of participation. A school's belief or practices are heavily influenced by the campus leadership that sets the pace and ideals of how the school should be run. As teachers have positive experiences with parents regarding parent involvement, the more overlap or involvement a school receives from the family and community to assist in the academic growth of its children.

The fourth force in the external component of Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence is the Time/Age/Grade level of the child. Epstein (2001) says that from the time a child is born, the school and family overlap of spheres can potentially occur. At a very early age the overlap is conditional depending upon special circumstances such as if the child has special physical or emotional needs. As long as there is a significant person in that child's life who takes responsibility for the child's education, there is continuous and ever-changing overlap. Optimum overlap occurs when the parents, school, and community act as true partners in a child's education. From the beginning of a child's education through his or her high school graduation, the amount of overlap of the school, family, and community is constantly changing based upon the experience, philosophy, and practices of each stakeholder.

Intuitively, one would think that the higher the grade of the student the more parent involvement would occur. As parents experience and learn how to engage their children's schools, the more involved they would become. Epstein (2001) has found that it currently works the other way. The older the child, the less the parent feels able to help the child in school. Many variables come into play when considering parent involvement, but each would involve the experience, philosophy, and practice of the school, family, and community.

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence involves a second component, the internal structures that drive the conceptual framework of this study. The internal structures consist of the intra-institutional and inter-institutional interactions of the family and school. The internal structure revolves around the communications that evolve among the family, the school, and the family and school. All communication and interactions that occur among the family, school, and the family and school are focused on the child.

Within the family and the school there are interpersonal and intrapersonal communications. The families of school children have interactions among their family members in their everyday lives concerning the education of their child. Interactions would also occur at school among administration, faculty, and staff that occur concerning the educational welfare of every child.

Educators while at school continually have conversations concerning children and the advancement of their educations. Inside the overlapping sphere, there are communications that occur among the family, parent, school, and teacher, or any combination of those entities. Each of the conversations among the family, school, and

community is most likely focused on the child's education when a positive relationship exists between and among all stakeholders of a district. When bi-lateral communication exists between the school and home, positive relationships are developed that enhance the efficacy of parents and their involvement practices (Hooper-Dempsey and Sandler, 1999). As a result of good communication practices between the family and school, the school can develop parent involvement policies and campus improvement plans involving parents that are favorable toward promoting the academic achievement of all children.

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence was developed by Epstein (2001) to introduce a model of family and school relations that accounts for history, development, and changing experiences of parents, teachers, and students as it affects student learning and development. Epstein (2001) says a model of overlapping spheres of influence more completely and accurately depicts and explains the simultaneous influence of schools, families, and communities on students' learning and development and on improving school programs and family support. The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence will enable the researcher to conduct the study based on established theory and take the results and question, challenge, and reformulate the existing ideas of parent and school relationships in an individual exemplary middle school.

One of many goals each school should consider as it implements improvement policies regarding parent involvement into the operation of the campus is to get on a continuum of perpetual improvement of all school programs while reflecting on Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence. Administrators and teachers will learn the significance and the contribution parent participation can have on the education of their

children. Then schools can begin developing policies and a campus improvement plan that can account for the history, development, and constantly changing experiences of the school community toward parent participation and school improvement.

More importantly, as schools and families further recognize their shared responsibilities and interests in children, the activities that schools develop and the attitudes schools and families have toward each other tend to move in a more positive direction. As a result, Epstein (2001) says that schools begin creating more family-like schools and families begin to develop into more school-like families. School-like families recognize each child as a student, and like a school, they reinforce the importance of all school-related responsibilities. A family-like school recognizes each child's uniqueness and individuality, and like a family, helps make each child feel special and included.

When considering the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, the researcher must recognize that there are many variables that influence the amount of overlap in Epstein's model. Epstein (2001) has found that the greatest amount of overlap between the school, parents, and community occurs during the preschool and early elementary grades. The amount of overlap for some children varies due to the differences in philosophies, policies, practices, and pressures of parents, teachers, or both. The more a school and community believe and make parent participation a priority, regardless of the age of the student, the more overlap occurs and the more influence a school can exert on student learning as the school and community strengthen their partnerships.

As Epstein developed the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, each theoretical component of the theory was studied independently in relationship to the

literature and how the theory is connected. For example, in the areas of the external components, no overlap exists in relation to responsibilities, activities, and independent influences of family, school, and community contexts. The literature was explored by Epstein on family environments, school environments, and community environments. In the area of overlap in the external structure of the model, shared responsibilities, shared influence of these contexts, and “forces” of philosophy and practice that increase or decrease overlap were also explored in the literature review in case studies of pervasiveness or the extent of school practices that involve families in their children’s education and the extent of community involvement in education.

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence is a model that every school can use, but the strategies that each school utilizes to create their parent involvement program will be unique to that school. The amount of overlap between the school, parent, and community in the model of the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence will be increased from any one or combination of Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnerships: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Epstein’s (2001) Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnerships evolved from many studies and after many years of work by educators and families of children in elementary, middle, and high schools.

Organizational/Supervisory Model of Instructional Supervision

Claudet (1999) says that a basic function of supervisory leadership involves shaping the culture of the school and integrating it with organizational goals. Students

would likely benefit academically if the culture in the school involves teachers' wanting to utilize parents to help meet the academic needs of all students (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1999). Since principals are the instructional leaders of the school and are held responsible for shaping the culture of the school, resources should be utilized to assist these administrators in shaping a culture that involves parents in an assortment of ways. Involving parents in a variety of ways allows schools to meet the diverse needs of all students and assists in developing a positive culture within the school.

The Organizational Model of School Instructional Supervision (O/S) has developed into three key components: school inputs, mediating variables, and school outcome variables. The mediating variables in the model, "represent a complex set of interacting school social and organizational factors that serve to link model inputs and outcomes in unique ways from one school to the next" (Claudet, 1999). The school input (SI) would come from the administrators, teachers, peer professionals, students, and community resources (parents). The inputs are arbitrated by the many micro and macro communicative elements. Micro-communicative elements would include many of the informal interactions that occur between parents and teachers or administration and parents. Macro-communicative elements would include principals' supervising and participating in teacher in-services regarding the development of a parent participation policy or site-based meetings.

"O/S climate is conceptualized as a perceptual phenomenon involving staff members' individual and collective ongoing affective and qualitative perceptions regarding a school's professional learning environment along six identified dimensions" (Claudet, 1999). In order for a school to optimize the potential effectiveness of parent

participation, each of the six identified dimensions in the O/S model--organizational structure, professional autonomy, collaborative sharing/rapport, district supervisory climate, self reflection, and centralization--are significant aspects of the professional learning environment and are important in the role of schools' involving parents in the education of students.

Researchers have identified what motivates parents to become involved in their child's education (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1999), but research is shallow on how schools evolve and develop effective parent participation strategies. The O/S Model demonstrates the procedural flow that occurs within the macro- and micro-communicative elements that eventually produce or fail to produce effective policies of parent participation that facilitate in various school outcomes (SO) outlined in the O/S Model. The school outcomes would include effectiveness, organizational effectiveness, school effectiveness/productivity (student achievement), and school holding power. Research has found parent involvement is significant in all four of the school outcomes of the O/S Model.

Parent participation alone would not produce these school outcomes. There are many micro and macro variables that influence the effectiveness of a school. However, parent participation can engender many of the variables influential in producing effective school outcomes. Byrd, Edwards, and Biggerstaff (2005) found that successful schools employ the team effort of administrators, teachers, staff, students, and the community. The success of any reform lies in the level of cooperation and participation of all stakeholders in the district. Schools must be the creator of policies and plans that initiate

and facilitate the involvement of all those who can potentially contribute to student success.

The study of the O/S Model by Claudet (1999) was developed to provide a framework for exploring the nature and effects of professional learning environments in schools and the organizational/supervisory climates that shape and infuse these environments. The culture of an organization can be influenced by a diverse set of variables within the school and community. The goals of a school are set by the faculty, staff, administration, parents, and community, and the actions of the organization would most likely be directed toward the goals established by those who have a vested interest. The O/S Model of Instructional Supervision provides the researcher with a tool to monitor the variables that shape and introduce the school learning environment as it applies to parent participation strategies of an exemplary middle school in Texas.

The O/S Model of Instructional Supervision developed by Claudet (1999) evolved initially from a series of refinements of past organizational frameworks from researchers such as Anderson (1982), Parsons (1960), and Tagiuri & Litwin (1968). Eventually Claudet developed a series of pilot investigations of organizational behavior in a number of case study schools. The repetitive development and refinement of the model evolved into the current O/S Model of Instructional Supervision. The refinement of the O/S Model came as a result of an in-depth mixed study consisting of administration and professional staff in 162 schools, kindergarten through twelfth grade, across 14 school districts.

Quantitatively the O/S Model of Instructional Supervision utilized the data from 3,074 professional staff and 238 administrators at a 63% and 78% return rate

respectively. There were six O/S climate dimensions identified in the study: Organizational Structure (OS), Professional Autonomy (PA), Collaborative Sharing/Rapport (CSR), District Supervisory Climate (DSC), Self-Reflection (SR), and Centralization (CEN). From these six O/S climate dimensions, professional autonomy and collaborative sharing/rapport were found to be the most closely associated with personnel perceptions of school organizational effectiveness. Collaborative sharing/rapport could also be closely associated with effective parent involvement policies found in an exemplary middle school.

Qualitatively, open-ended questions were collected from teachers and administrators for three reasons. Primarily, the interviews were used to gather as much context-specific information as possible from administrators and staff concerning their understanding of their school's OSCI quantitative data. Subsequently, the qualitative data were collected to get an inside view of any past history of the school that would skew the quantitative data and therefore the results of the study. Finally, qualitative data would clarify any confusion concerning the quantitative data. Studying the problem from many perspectives provided more reliable insight and results of the study.

The results of the data provided verification into the reliability of the O/S Model and further clarified the views of the faculty and the association of these views to the O/S climate characteristics and the effectiveness of the organization. To provide further verification of the O/S Model and the influence of parent participation as an important influence of the school inputs, the qualitative study established the following results: 1) principal supervisory leadership, 2) the views and beliefs of the faculty relating to supervision, and 3) the importance of the school and the district and school

organizational/supervisory structures. As Claudet (1999) suggests, when school leaders “act not as sole leaders, but as lead members of collegial teams of teachers, schools function optimally.” If school leaders create school inputs through partnerships between the community, school, and parents, the micro- and macro-communicative elements of the school could create a more positive climate for school learning, while creating school outputs that result in exemplary middle schools in Texas.

Practical Application Implications

The practical application implications for current best practice for this study have potentially far reaching results for all middle schools, not just in Texas, but across the United States. By closely examining an exemplary middle school in Texas, the researcher uncovered the archives developed from a school-based team that worked together to develop a formal campus improvement plan and a parent involvement policy. Through studying an exemplary middle school which has team-developed plans including strategies for implementing an effective parent involvement policy and a formal campus improvement plan and through analyzing how the plans were developed, the researcher obtained valuable information and insight to help facilitate the success of other school districts in a variety of ways.

First, the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy in exemplary schools contribute to the high standards of achievement in many ways. Covey (1989) says that organizations should begin with the end in mind while maintaining a clear vision of their destination. An exemplary middle school would likely follow Covey’s advice and begin the school year with a well-written campus improvement plan that

states a clear set of goals and plans that would help guide their success throughout the year. The current research can guide the researcher in unveiling the campus plans of an exemplary middle school in Texas and identifying what effective policies contributed to the success of this school. The research will enable any middle school in Texas or another state to implement parent involvement programs.

Second, although this study was done specifically from an exemplary middle school, the results of this study can potentially assist every school regardless of the school's age level, rating given by the Texas Education Agency, or location. An exemplary middle school that does not have an effective parent involvement policy can further enhance its success by emulating the effective parent involvement practices of other exemplary schools. Schools that are not rated exemplary by TEA could also benefit from the results of the study by implementing proven parent involvement policies or the parental aspects of a campus improvement plan used by exemplary schools rather than reinventing the wheel to develop their own.

The research will assist schools as they search for effective parent involvement policies that are researched-based and that have been proven effective in an exemplary middle school in Texas. A school's parent involvement plan can influence the school inputs that directly affect the micro- and macro-communicative elements that can potentially result in higher scores on the TAKS test and many other variables that influence the accountability rating of Texas schools. Claudet (1999) even suggests future studies to refine the selection and/or definition of various indices of effectiveness included in the O/S model.

Third, a school may be searching for effective parent involvement strategies in one of the six categories of Epstein's (2001) parent involvement areas. The researcher studied the case study middle school's parent involvement policies, campus improvement plans, and any formal parent involvement programs and categorized the plans into one of the six parent involvement areas discussed by Epstein. For example, if a school wanted specific strategies regarding Type 4, home learning activities, the school could look at the current research and find specific strategies that an exemplary middle school has used to get parents involved with their children at home. For each type of specific parent involvement activity, schools would have at their disposal for implementation a list of proven strategies from an exemplary middle school in order to improve any specific area that the school believes is deficient or in need of improvement.

Summary

This chapter discussed pertinent research regarding the present study on parent involvement. The study discussed how the research addressed administrative ethics, school benefits, student achievement, and school activities that are engaging to parents and their impact on student achievement. It then described the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and the Organizational/Supervisory Model of Instructional Supervision as they form the basis for this study. Finally, it discussed parent and school roles as defined by the *Texas Education Code* and *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. In the next chapter, the methodology that was used in the study will be detailed. By addressing how the methodology fits the theoretical framework described previously, the study will be more readily understood. Description of the archival analyses of the data

collected and the interviews that will be performed on the administrators of the exemplary district, advantages and disadvantages of the methodology will be thoroughly explained to equip the reader with the knowledge to understand the results of the study.

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will describe the methodology chosen, its theoretical framework, and the advantages and disadvantages this methodology intrinsically contains. The methodology chapter will then define and discuss how a qualitative archival focus will be considered and used to uncover how an exemplary school involved parents in its success. It will further discuss the context of the study, how the setting was selected, and why the setting is appropriate for the study. Finally, it will explain what qualitative research is and how it is appropriate to this study.

The methodology for this study is developed to answer questions that will add to the literature of parent involvement. The research questions that guided this study are as follows: first, the researcher wanted to know what are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary between the years of 2003-2005) that are found in the school's formal campus improvement plans; second, what are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary between the years of 2003-2005) that are found in these school's parent involvement policies; and, finally, what are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in a exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary between the years of 2003-2005) that are found through a case study involving interviews of selected parents, teachers, principal, and superintendent. By answering these questions the researcher will be able to create a

resource for schools to use to build effective parent involvement policies and campus improvement plans to facilitate the success of their schools.

Building a Single Case Study

Glesne (2004) says that a case study involves systematically gathering enough information about a group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions. In this study of parent participation, the researcher used a qualitative single case study including data collection and interviews of parents, administration, and teachers of an exemplary middle school. By using a single case study and focusing on a number of data-gathering technologies, the researcher was able to triangulate the study and “...uncover the manifest interaction of significant factors characteristic” (Glesne, 2004, p. 251) of an exemplary middle school in Texas.

Berg (2004) suggests five attributes associated with conducting good case studies that the researcher incorporated into the study:

1. An inquiring mind and the willingness to ask questions before, during, and after the data is collected, has happened, or is happening;
2. Ability to listen, including observation and sensing in general, and assimilate large amounts of new information without bias;
3. Adaptability and flexibility to handle unanticipated events and to change data-collection strategies if they do not seem to be functioning effectively and to use alternative sources of data that may be more fruitful;
4. Thorough understanding of the issues being studied in order not merely to record data but to interpret and react to the data once it is collected; and

5. Unbiased interpretation of the data (Berg, 2004, p. 253).

Kaskutas, Schmidt, Weisner, and Greenfield (2000) said that qualitative archival studies involve the coding and textual analysis of documents on the process of policy formation or implementation. Archival data in qualitative research can come in many different forms such as transcripts from governmental hearings, speeches, discussions between teachers that are documented in the campus improvement plans, media accounts of school events, and more recently, internet websites maintained by schools. Archival data can be defined best by the researcher as existing archival materials that provide an authentic and rich source of qualitative data for studying the process of policy information, implementation, and impact on parent partnerships.

Archival data can be particularly valuable in studying the strategies and policies discussed and implemented in an exemplary middle school in Texas because they can provide an in-depth view of the approaches and resources, as well as the underlying conceptual models that stakeholders bring to bear on school policies (Kaskutas, Schmidt, Weisner, and Greenfield, 2000). Archival data in the form of campus improvement plans are a primary resource and a direct channel into the discussions and decision-making process of the exemplary Texas middle school. By closely examining the archival data, the researcher identified facts that brought to light the actual discussions and motions by the site-based members that gave birth to the policies and improvement plans that facilitated the exemplary rating for the Texas school under study. The research questions from chapter one can be used to provide additional research to parent partnership investigations and give schools a basis for developing parent involvement policies and campus improvement plans.

A researcher must be careful to recognize and consider the weaknesses inherent in using a qualitative case study when collecting archival data and performing interviews to answer research questions. Weaknesses have the potential of negatively impacting the reliability or validity of the case study. One weakness of using archival data and interviews is that data collection and analysis are often labor intensive. If a researcher does not have a well-organized strategy for collecting and organizing the data, the researcher can get lost and misinterpret the findings. Second, Kaskutas, Schmidt, Weisner, and Greenfield (2000) explains that one of the most important methodological limitations of archival studies is that the researcher inevitably has access only to an incomplete record of events, one that reflects only what people thought important enough to document at the time. The recommendations made by the site-based committee may never find their way into the campus improvement plan. The principal is the instructional leader of the campus and implements the policies that he or she believes will benefit students. Many other ideas generated by the teachers may have been implemented by the teams but are not a part of the campus improvement plan.

This subjectivity of qualitative archival data could be both a strength and weakness to this study. The subjective writings of the secretary recording the policy discussions potentially reflect the original desire and conceptualizations of the problem the committee is trying to address, thus providing insight into the ideas and strategies that have inspired policy innovations (Kaskutas, Schmidt, Weisner, and Greenfield, 2000). As a result, the researcher must continually be aware that the voices and viewpoints of the entire faculty, staff, and administration of an exemplary school may well be unrepresented in the written record and in individual interviews with a select few.

Interviews

The researcher interviewed teachers, a parent from the site-based team at the time the school received an exemplary rating, other parents, principal, and the superintendent. The researcher was aware of the potential of site-based members providing missing and distorted views of the site-based committee members for several reasons. First, site-based members are not involved in the daily management of the school. The structure of a campus site-based committee in Texas school districts is mandated by the *Texas Education Code* (TEC § 11.251 a-f). The TEC requires a campus site-based committee to consist of minimally two parents, two community members, two business representatives, and a specified percentage of the professional and professional non-teaching staff that create the school. A responsibility of the site-based committee is to make recommendations to the principal regarding school-based policies (TEC § 11.252). The principal is not obligated to follow through with any recommendations made by the site-based committee. Most faculty and staff are so focused on student academic achievement in their classrooms that they do not conceive of the whole realm of variables that impact a campus. The campus principal will therefore take site-based recommendations and implement policies that best reflect the ideas and views of the faculty and staff. Interviewing three teachers in addition to the principal gave the researcher the opportunity to determine if the principal and the faculty were in line with their philosophy and perceived role of parents in the school.

Since all teachers, parents, and administrators are potential stakeholders of the campus, the researcher interviewed the principal of the exemplary middle school, as well as the superintendent and a sample population of teachers and parents. The examination

interview that was utilized during the qualitative case study was a standardized open-ended interview designed by the researcher. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) says that an open-ended interview, “involves a predetermined sequence and wording of the same set of questions to be asked of each respondent in order to minimize the possibility of bias” (p. 240). The researcher developed a set of questions that were utilized in the individual interviews. However, as the interview progressed, the interviewer relied on an informal conversational interview technique in an attempt to maintain a more natural interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. The informal conversational interview sessions between the researcher and the research participants were utilized when the interviewees began to bring up ideas that were not predetermined by the researcher to ask in the form of a question. The informal conversational interviews were utilized so that “...the conversation appears natural” so “the research participants may not even realize that they are being interviewed” (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003, p. 239). The interviews were used so the researcher could better understand and uncover the true beliefs and interpretations of the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy as they related to parent involvement, as well as to affirm the archival documents collected for the study.

The researcher traveled to the exemplary middle school and interviewed the principal, the superintendent, and samples of parents and teachers of the exemplary school in person. Face-to-face interviews with each research participant were used for several reasons. First, face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to experience “social interpretations”. Berg (2004) defines social interpretations as, “the affected messages transferred from one acting individual to another through nonverbal channels” (p. 101). Face-to-face interviews allowed the researcher to hear what the principal was

saying and to interpret the many non-verbal messages communicated during the interview. The majority of a message is communicated through non-verbal communication. With face-to-face interviews, the researcher was able to develop a deeper understanding of the message being communicated to the interviewer.

Archival Records

Berg (2004) tells us “records are viewed as prepared for the expressed purpose of examination by others” (p. 210). Schools are required by federal, state, and local mandates to keep written records, files, and communications as committee members develop and build their school’s parent involvement policy, campus improvement plan, and mission statement. “Official documentary (archival) records may offer particularly interesting sources of data” (Berg, 2004, p. 210). As democratic schools strive to create and improve parent participation practices as required by the *Texas Education Code*, schools utilize their site-based committee and/or other locally developed committee. The agenda and the minutes of these meetings are recorded for legal documentation and are then communicated to the rest of the faculty and parents via memos, meetings, or e-mails. The exemplary middle school did not keep any written records of their committee meetings for analysis by the researcher.

A single case study using archival documentation and interviews was appropriate for this research analysis for several reasons. Berg (2004) says that official documents include less obvious and sometimes less openly available forms of communication such as interoffice memos, minutes from meetings, organizational newsletters, and so forth. The materials that these resources produce can be used as information that a researcher

can effectively use as reliable data. By analyzing the campus improvement plan and parent involvement plan from the identified exemplary middle school, the researcher was able to determine which parent participation practices are most effective in the exemplary school. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) say that records are communications that are written for an official purpose. Records from a school containing elements of stimulating parent participation can uncover a school's beliefs regarding parent involvement practices that most influence their students' success.

A single case study utilizing archival study assisted in answering the research questions of this study in a variety of ways. First, by studying the school-wide or school-based approaches to parent involvement in policies and the campus improvement plans of one exemplary middle school in Texas, the researcher was able to gain information and insight into the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches to parent participation practices used by the exemplary middle school featured in this study. "Information can be pulled from various traces and records created or left by humans" (Berg, 2004, p. 211). Administrators, professional staff, and parents collaborate to write the documents that lead the actions of the school. If parent participation were a priority in a school, policies would be evident in the form of the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy to generate greater parent involvement.

Second, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) indicate that in order to fully understand a document or record, the qualitative researcher should study the context in which it was produced, the author's purpose in writing it, the author's working conditions, and the author's intended and actual audience. By studying the parent involvement policy and

campus improvement plan of the exemplary school, the researcher was able to diagnose the unique approach to parent participation in the different contexts of the school setting. The researcher was able to determine that parent participation practices of the exemplary middle school did indeed influence the campus's exemplary rating.

Glense (1999) states that “interviewing is not simply devoted to data acquisition. It is also a time to consider relationships, salience, meanings, and **explanations of analytic acts** that not only lead to new questions, but also prepare you for the more concentrated period of analysis that follows the completion of data collection” (p. 84). By interviewing the principal, samples of teachers and parents of the exemplary campus, and the stakeholders responsible for creating and implementing all policies, the researcher was able to further diagnose and understand the context in which the policies were written, the stakeholders' purpose in writing the plans, the working conditions, and how the policies influenced the participation of parents in the education of their children

Variables Studied

The archival data for this case study was collected from a middle school in Texas that had been rated exemplary for two consecutive years with the tool used by the Texas Education Agency (TEA)—the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report. Before a middle school can be given an exemplary rating, it must excel in many areas: academics, attendance, finance, student dropout, and graduation rate. The researcher gained consent from the Research Services at Texas Tech University on September 20, 2006 regarding the exemption for human subject research.

An exemplary middle school had been studied for two primary reasons. First, research has found that parent participation is more abundant in elementary schools (Fix-Turkowski, 2003) and begins to taper off as students enter the middle grades (Epstein, 2001). The middle grades for most students become extremely difficult for a variety of reasons. Many students in the middle grades enter into puberty, the curriculum becomes more rigid, and peer pressure becomes more influential. It is during these difficult times that students need continued support and influence from parents as they transition from adolescence into adulthood. Since parent participation has been proven to effectively influence students' academic achievement in schools (Epstein, 2001), it would be invaluable to determine how an exemplary middle school created and maintained effective parent participation programs to promote academic success.

Second, the researcher holds an interest in middle schools. The researcher has been a middle school principal for six years, a middle school teacher for six years, and a superintendent of schools for two years. During the course of the researcher's career, he has realized while working with low socio-economic populations and high minority populations, the development of parent participation in the middle level years is becoming increasingly imperative. The middle school years are the best last chance to make a significant change in the lives of students who are at-risk of failing or dropping out of school. The chance to increase student achievement and keep students in school becomes significantly greater with the joint influence and work of parents and the school. Fix-Turkowski (2003) found that parents and educators did not believe that primary school responsibilities were to be shared between the parents and the school. These

findings verify the urgency of bringing everyone together by creating and uncovering effective parent involvement policies to facilitate the success of all students.

If the variable being studied, an exemplary middle school in Texas, had not been sufficient to provide validity to the study, the researcher would have considered additional or alternative variables to study. Since parent involvement is more common in elementary schools and there are many more exemplary elementary than middle schools in Texas, the researcher would have considered exemplary elementary and middle schools or a combination of exemplary elementary, middle, and high schools. High schools would have been considered due to the lack of effective parent involvement at higher grade levels. A combination of schools with varying grade levels would have provided the researcher with a comparison of different age groups and varying parent involvement policies and campus improvement plans. The researcher could have then ascertained and compared what policies are more effective at varying age levels.

Context of the Study

The researcher sought out all the middle schools in Texas that have received an exemplary rating by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for two consecutive years. The researcher studied the AEIS indicator system for the state of Texas and determined which middle schools had received an AEIS rating of exemplary for the school years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. In the state of Texas during the 2003-2004 school-year there were thirteen middle schools that were given an exemplary rating through the AEIS system in Texas. Only seven of the thirteen schools received an exemplary rating the next year. After the site for the case study had been determined based on their AEIS rating, the

researcher contacted the school district and requested permission for the researcher to do a case study on the middle school. Prior to visiting the campus the researcher wrote a letter to the principal requesting the release of the last two years of their campus improvement plans, parent involvement policies, and any formal parent participation program plans. The various documents from the middle school campus revealed some of the school's formal program plans for increasing parent participation in their school that facilitated their exemplary rating according to the AEIS report.

Many characteristics of the setting proved to be important to the study. It has been revealed in the research literature that parent involvement has a positive impact on student achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001). Schools are mandated in the NCLB, Sec.1118 (a)(3)(b) to create a parent involvement policy and distribute the policy to parents of enrolled children. The parent involvement policy should include how the school will carry out its plan. The *Texas Education Code* in Chapter § 11.251(a) states that the board of trustees of each independent school district ensures that improvement plans for each campus are developed, reviewed, and revised annually for the purpose of improving the performance of all students and that the development of the plans involves the participation of parents.

“Schools that believe strongly in parent involvement as a way to improve student academics will seek parent involvement as a problem-solving component even without being compelled to do so from legislative mandates or other external influences” (Fix-Turkowski, 2003, p. 21). Achieving an academic rating of exemplary is not an easy task for any middle school. Many variables come into play and are considered as the school and parents collaborate to develop a campus plan and parent involvement policy.

For middle schools to receive an exemplary rating from the TEA, it is most likely the result of effective team-based planning from the school's site-based committee and the development of quality plans and policies of the middle school. As a result, the researcher was able to uncover the elements of good practice concerning school-wide or school-based approaches in the exemplary middle school which were identified in the school's formal campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy.

Study Participants

“Qualitative researchers tend to select each of their cases purposefully. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Glesne, 1999, p. 29). Selecting an exemplary middle school in Texas provided the researcher with an information-rich sample. Glesne (1999) writes that researchers will select homogenous samples in order to describe some subgroup in depth. “An exemplary middle school” is a subgroup of all the other middle schools in Texas, and they are separated by their distinction in academics and performance under the AEIS report system.

The researcher analyzed the last two years of their information-rich, formal campus improvement plans and parent involvement policies for the exemplary middle school in Texas chosen for the case study. The information gave the researcher a clear view of the elements of good practice used by the exemplary middle school. Once the elements of good practice are identified, other schools can potentially emulate what the exemplary school has utilized as effective in involving parents in their children's education.

The researcher is examining an exemplary middle school for the two consecutive school years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 for a variety of reasons. First, the school year 2002-2003 was a pilot year for the state and was not included in the study. Also, during that school year, the TAKS test replaced the TAAS test and school rank was unaffected during this time. Second, the researcher was looking for a school that was consistently exemplary for two consecutive years. The researcher would have preferred more than two years, but due to the accountability system in the state of Texas, two years will satisfy the consistent requirement for the study.

Several characteristics of the participant exemplary middle school are important to this study. First, it is necessary that the participant school follow the guidelines set up by TEC § 11.253 (a-d) and utilize its site-based committee for the development and approval of its campus improvement plan and that minutes are kept to record the participation within the meetings. Furthermore, it is imperative that the school included in the study follows the TEC § 11.253 (d)(9) to create a program to encourage parental involvement on the campus. Each Title I school is required to follow these guidelines and ensure that these items are included on the agenda of each campus site-based meeting. If the participants of the study do not follow state guidelines to keep the required documentation in a form that can be understood by the researcher, the documentation, or lack of, will hinder the results of the data.

Second, many variables contribute to the academic success of students: quality of teachers, curriculum, time on task, climate, security, communication practices, etc. As the research supports, parent participation is connected to the academic success of students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong,

& Jones, 2001), but the exemplary middle school may already have an abundance of parent participation without school planning and development of effective parent involvement practices.

Fix-Turkowski (2003) found that 84% of educators sampled believed that meeting a child's basic needs was a parent's role. However, more than 10% felt schools were as responsible as parents for meeting a child's basic needs. This information provides us with insight that not all educators believe that a partnership should exist between parents and schools to ensure all students are equipped with the basic life necessities to be successful in the pursuit of their education.

The common belief within schools is that the duty does not lie within the domain of the school, but in the hands of the parents. If educators believe that parent participation is truly important to the success of their school, they will strive to create effective policies. If educators of exemplary schools are not advocates of creating effective parent participation policies, they will be insincere regarding state mandates concerning parent participation policies. As a result, the researcher will not be provided with viable elements of good practice for parent participation in schools.

Primary strengths and weaknesses of this study depend upon several important factors. First, the exemplary middle school in the study must believe that parent participation is important for the educational benefit of its students. If the school does not hold parent participation sacred, it is unlikely to build effective parent involvement policies to enhance its academic programs. Rather than creating effective policies, the school would produce a watered-down version to meet state and federal mandates. Second, the school must follow state mandates and collaborate with its site-based

committee to develop and implement elements of good practice into its parent involvement policies and formal campus improvement plan. If the school does not follow state mandates regarding parent participation, then the researcher's results could potentially be hindered.

Data Collection Methods

The case study of an exemplary middle school focused on documents and interviews from a public school setting that have been related to elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches to parent participation in an exemplary middle school. Glesne (1999) writes that the method of triangulation is not the simple combination of different kinds of data, but the attempt to relate them so as to offset the threats to validity identified in each. The researcher collected archival data in the form of campus improvement plans and parent involvement policies from the exemplary middle school chosen for the case study. After collecting the archival data, the researcher related each of the documents toward elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches of parent participation in the exemplary middle school. Collecting the documents of the exemplary middle school provided an adequate representation of an exemplary Texas public middle school.

To further triangulate the data collected the researcher interviewed various stakeholders of the exemplary middle school campus, including the campus principal who facilitated the development of the campus improvement plan while serving on the site-based team and assisted in the implementation of the parent involvement policy. Glense (1999) says that there are three primary data-gathering techniques: participant

observation, interviewing, and document collection. The researcher utilized interviewing and document collection data-gathering techniques to add to the trustworthiness of the study and triangulate the results.

From the TEA website, the researcher obtained a list of all the exemplary middle schools in Texas that received the highest rating during the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school-years. After reviewing the scores and demographics of the seven schools, the researcher narrowed the study down to one school for several reasons. First, the middle school selected by the researcher had a more diverse low social-economic population when compared to the other exemplary middle schools. The success of the low socio-economic population of the school and how they involve their parents into the academic success of their students will contribute to the knowledge base of effective parent participation policies in the exemplary middle school. Second, the campus principal of the middle school chosen for the study had been the instructional leader on the campus for seven years. His experience, stability, and the understanding of the history of parent involvement policies on that campus contributed to the success of the study.

Berg (2004) informs us that official documentary records often convey important and valuable information that a researcher can effectively use as data. By collecting the campus improvement plans and parent involvement policy documents from the middle school, the researcher had the information needed to answer the questions that drive the research study in the following ways. First, each document provided some of the elements of good practice that the school used to collaborate, plan, and implement parent involvement policy through site-based decision making to improve the level of parent participation within the school. The parent involvement policy is more specific because

it is a direct line of communication to the parents of each school. The TEC requires schools to produce and disseminate their parent involvement policy to parents in all Title I schools. The parent involvement policy and the campus improvement plan should reflect some commonalities concerning elements of good practice regarding parent participation strategies.

Second, the campus improvement plan included a plan developed by the site-based committee members concerning improving the school by actively involving parents in the education of their children. Duemer and Mendez-Morse (2002) clearly states that “a unidirectional communication focus limits access to understanding how a policy is implemented, whereas a bi-directional rather than unidirectional framework expands access to learning how an individual’s values, attitudes, and perspectives—the human factors—impact policy implementation or mutation” (p. 7). The campus improvement plan provided the researcher with the results of bi-directional communication between the faculty and the principal. By analyzing the campus improvement plan and interviewing the principal, site-based members, parents, the superintendent, and teachers, the researcher was able to discover how the school’s values, attitudes, and perspectives impacted the elements of good practice regarding parent participation strategies in the school.

Berg (2004) defines interviewing as simply “...a conversation with a purpose” (p. 75). The purpose of interviewing many stakeholders in the school is to further understand the philosophy behind the campus improvement and parent involvement plan and to determine if the campus plan and the parent involvement policy are actually implemented. The interviewer will be able to determine if the policies are “mutated” or

are embraced by the faculty and staff and actually contribute to the exemplary status of the middle school campus.

Third, the campus improvement plan distinguishes between what the school perceives as the elements of good practice and what the school actually believes are the elements of good practice. “Mutation can also occur as policy is processed through the levels of an organization’s hierarchy” (Duemer and Mendez-Morse, 2002, p. 4). The different ideas the faculty and staff have regarding parent participation most likely would be found in the parent involvement policy and the campus improvement plan. The campus improvement plan is a document that is approved by the district’s board of education and then mailed to the TEA for auditing. The site-based committee is also required by the TEC § 2.252(a) to do a summative evaluation of its campus improvement plan. The site-based committee will review the strategies of the campus improvement plan and then determine to keep, amend, or delete the policies. The committee’s decision would likely be based on the effectiveness of the policy. Ineffective policies would be deleted or modified, and effective policies would be evaluated and possibly improved. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) enlightens us to the fact that hermeneutics is the process by which individuals arrive at the meaning of any text. The analysis of the documents by the researcher provides insight into the elements of good practice that the exemplary middle school utilized to earn their academic rating by TEA.

By comparing two consecutive years, the researcher would gain further insight to the modifications of the policy from one year to the next. If the policy was not manipulated or deleted, then the researcher concluded that the policy was deemed effective by the school and used again the next year. On the other hand, if the policy is

not found during the consecutive year, the researcher concluded that the policy was evaluated as ineffective and re-written or deleted altogether.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis done simultaneously with data collection enables you to focus and shape the study as it proceeds” (Glesne, 1999, p. 130). Once the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy were received from the exemplary middle school, the researcher analyzed the data and then organized the information to enable the researcher to efficiently reflect on the data and optimally discover what each of the documents had to contribute to the elements of good practice concerning parent participation strategies in the exemplary middle school. The researcher followed the suggestions made by Glesne (1999) and Creswell (1998) on how to effectively analyze data for the most advantageous results of the study.

Archival Data

Once the archival information was collected from the exemplary middle school, the researcher read through all of the documentation to get a sense of how the information related to effective parent participation strategies. As the researcher read through the information, he made reflective notes and memos in the margins of the text in the initial sorting out process. Creswell (1998) suggests using this phase as an opportunity to call the author of the documents to task for clarification as a process of verification and analysis of the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy. Furthermore, the researcher was able to look closely at the words and metaphors used in the documents, and then translate the participants’ ideas into meaningful texts.

The process of reducing the amount of data was followed by creating displays of information in the form of a table as a means of visualizing the information and representing it by theme. Creswell (1998) suggests this is an important approach to reducing the large amounts of data gathered by the researcher. The researcher developed codes or categories and began sorting text or visual images into categories. The researcher utilized six categories or analytic files to separate each of the elements of good practice exercised by the exemplary middle school in Texas. Dr. Joyce Epstein broke parent participation down into six major analytic files.

Epstein's (2001) six types of parent involvement strategies include the following categories: Type 1, parenting practices—Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at every age and grade level; Type 2, school-home communication—Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications; Type 3, volunteering or being an audience at school—Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs; Type 4, involvement in home learning activities—Information for families about how to help with homework and curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning; Type 5, decision-making, governance, and advocacy roles—Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations; Type 6, community collaboration—Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the

community. Within each of these categories are an unlimited number of potential elements of good practice that can be utilized by schools.

The researcher segregated each of the elements of good practice found in the parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan into one of the six categorical files. “These files provide a way to keep track of useful information and thoughts” (Glesne, 1999, p. 131), and the title file contained the researcher’s effort to capture the essence of the narrative. As the information was categorized into files, the researcher was able to focus and give form to the data that was collected. The categorical files allowed the researcher to store and organize his thoughts and the beliefs of the exemplary middle school. Collection and analysis continued until all data was collected from the exemplary middle school and placed into categorical themes.

“Data transformation is of course an invariable aspect of all types of research, qualitative or otherwise. It is the effort of researchers to manage and make sense of their data, to transform it from its acquired form—at which point it is perhaps of a study’s findings” (Glesne 1999, p. 151). After reading through the collected archival data several times and becoming familiar with the information at hand (description), the researcher broke down the data into categorical themes and took the information and assembled the data into a database so that concluding thoughts and action-taking ideas could be more easily visualized and manipulated (analysis).

Glesne (1999) informs us that the third means of data transformation is interpretation, and this happens when the researcher “transcends factual data and cautious analysis and begins to probe into what is to be made of them” (p. 150). The researcher was able to interpret the data from voluminous categorical data after an extensive period

of time doing a thorough review of the literature and methodical analysis of the data. Through prolonged engagement of the literature and data, the researcher was able to substantiate recurring themes in each of the documents of the exemplary middle school as elements of good practice concerning parent participation.

“The credibility of your findings and interpretations depends upon your careful attention to establishing trustworthiness” (Glesne, 1999, p. 151). The researcher worked hard to make the interpretations of the data trustworthy. By carefully describing, analyzing, and interpreting the data collected from the exemplary middle school in Texas, the researcher invested an extensive amount of time in prolonged engagement and persistent observation of the data to produce trustworthy findings when triangulated with the principal interviews from the exemplary Texas middle school.

Interviews

After the researcher completed each of the interviews, he transcribed the recorded interviews and typed them out in their entirety. The purpose of typing out the interviews was to allow the researcher to study each comment and statement made by the research participant as he coded the dictations. “Coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose” (Glesne, 1999, p. 135). Once the scraps of data were clumped together into “data clumps,” the researcher was able to create an organizational framework that could be broken down into smaller pieces or sub codes. The sub coded data allowed the researcher to manage the interview data into meaningful strings of information that were

used to contribute and bring together the archival data that were collected by the researcher.

Glesne (1999) suggests that sub codes should identify a concept or a central idea of the dissertation. The sub codes were in-line with Epstein's (2001) six types of parent involvement strategies: parenting practices, home-school communication, volunteering, home learning activities, community collaboration, and decision-making, governance, and advocacy roles. The sub-categories created by the researcher will not be derived strictly from Epstein's six types of parent involvement strategies. "Creating categories triggers the construction of a conceptual scheme that suits the data" (Ely, 1991, p. 87). Other sub-categories were developed as the researcher probed the information-rich transcribed interviews to determine if the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy were actually being implemented as the site-based committee and administrator had intended, to what extent, and if the administrator believed that the plans had influenced the school's academic achievement of being rated exemplary.

Validity

Validity is defined in the work of Eisner and Peshkin (1990) by Pertti and Peltoas as the degree to which scientific observations actually measure or record what they purport to measure. Eisner and Peshkin (1990) explains in their work, "On Seeking—and Rejecting—Validity in Qualitative Research," that he goes to great measure to keep the question from being raised at all concerning the validity of his work. The validity of qualitative data depends on the variety of methods used for gathering data, and it is of the

utmost importance when conducting research. Creswell (1998) describes eight verification procedures when utilizing qualitative methodology:

1. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation—extended time in the field so the researcher is able to develop trust, learn the culture, and check out hunches.
2. Triangulation—use of multiple data-collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives.
3. Peer review and debriefing—external reflection and input on the work.
4. Negative case analysis—conscious search for negative cases and inclusive evidence so that the working hypothesis can be refined.
5. Clarification of researcher bias—reflection upon the researcher’s subjectivity and how it will be used and monitored in the research.
6. Member checking—sharing interview transcripts, analytical thoughts, and/or drafts of the final report with research participants to make sure the researcher is representing them and their ideas accurately.
7. Rich, thick description—writing that allows the reader to enter the research context.
8. External audit—an outside person examines the research process and product through “auditing” field notes, research journals, analytic coding schemes, etc.

From these eight it is recommended by Creswell (1998) that a researcher incorporates at least two verification strategies into any given study. The researcher for this study employed five of the eight to build trust and increase the validity of the study. First, the researcher achieved triangulation through multiple data collection techniques--archival documentation and interviews. Second, member checking was utilized during the

interview process to verify interpretations of the archival data that had been collected from the exemplary middle school. Third, clarification of research bias was utilized by the researcher. Fourth, negative case analysis was studied to verify and assess the applicability of the researcher's hypotheses of the exemplary middle school. Finally, the researcher sought to incorporate rich, thick description—writing that allowed the readers to enter the research context.

“The purpose for methods triangulation is not ‘the simple combination of different kinds of data, but the attempt to relate them so as so counteract the threats to validity identified in each’” (Glesne, 1999, p. 31). The researcher achieved triangulation by collecting at least two different types of archival data from the exemplary middle school case study: the parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan. Triangulation was also achieved by interviewing the principal, a site-based member, teachers, superintendent, and parents to verify the researcher's interpretations of the archival data and determine the effectiveness, beliefs, and philosophies of parent involvement in the exemplary school.

Second, Creswell (1989) explains that triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it. Ely (1991) says that many experts indicate that triangulation characteristically depends on the convergence of data gathered by different methods. The researcher increased the validity of the research by utilizing the technique of triangulation.

Ely (1991) warns qualitative researchers to be on the look out for data that stands out like “sore thumbs” that are sometimes called negative cases. By having the ability to

recognize cases that are left winged, the researcher was able to re-examine the findings and refine and revise the framework. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) says that a researcher's interpretations are more credible and useful if he demonstrates sensitivity in how he related to the situation being studied. The researcher of this study spent time clarifying any professional biases based on the researcher's subjectivity and how he monitored the biases when analyzing the research.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) recommends that researchers utilize member checking when doing qualitative research because it potentially reveals factual errors that can be easily corrected. "In member checks, the researcher solicits informants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations" (Creswell, 1999, p. 39). After analyzing the parent involvement policy and any formal program plans of the exemplary middle school, the researcher took the written narrative back to the campus principal for clarification in order to gain a deeper understanding of the schools' policies and formal program plans on the elements of good practice concerning parent participation if any policy or plan was unclear to the researcher.

Finally, the researcher wrote a detailed, thick description of the elements of good practice concerning parent participation practices used by the exemplary middle school in Texas. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) recommends the researcher's writing style utilize verisimilitude, which is a style of writing that draws the reader so closely into subjects' worlds that these can be palpably felt. The researcher sought the advice of Wolcott (2000) by striving to use descriptive terminology concerning the parent participation program plans in order for the reader to relate and understand the school's practices of involving parents in the education of their children. Eisner & Peshkin (1990)

also recommend recording as accurately as possible when reviewing the plans, policy, and site-based minutes in order to avoid any misinterpretations by the researcher.

Recording the interpretation of the researcher as soon as possible prevents inaccurate recall of the data as a result of subjectivity entering into the interpretation.

Glesne (1999) suggests that the qualitative researcher is sometimes described as a “translator of culture” while making the point that the researcher should remain an objective middleman, rather than someone whose viewpoints and personality affect the depicted account. The researcher wrote to enable the readers of the study to make meaning of the elements of good practice found in the parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan in the exemplary middle school in Texas. At the same time Eisner and Peshkin (1990) says that it is important, to the extent that his feelings and personal reactions seem relevant to a case, that the researcher tries to reveal them. The more that the researcher is aware that his subjectivity can influence the flow of the research, the more attention his subjectivity receives.

It was the researcher’s goal to provide a valid research paper that will contribute to the literature of parent involvement studies and provide middle schools in Texas and across the country an insight into the possibilities of effective parent involvement strategies. As my personal subjectivity as a principal, teacher, coach, and superintendent influences my interpretation of the policies of the school being studied, my subjectivity will be made known in chapter five. However, as Eisner & Peshkin (1990) suggests, if my feelings and personal reactions seem relevant to the study, they will be revealed in the results of the study.

Reliability

The researcher believes it is important that the dissertation is viewed by peers as being reliable. Reliability is defined by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) as the extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures as the first researcher. Eisner & Peshkin (1990) explains that they preferred that their work be regarded as provocative rather than as persuasive; but, on the other hand, they felt honored when someone described one of their accounts as reliable. The researcher worked hard to ensure the reliability of the data and, in turn, the depth of the interpretation or analysis.

The use of an unobtrusive measure, which is characterized by the fact that the data are collected in a natural setting and the individuals are unaware that they are being observed, will enhance the reliability of the study (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003). The researcher did not enter into the actual setting where the archival data was being developed. Collecting the archival data after it had been developed allowed the site-based team and/or administration to act and speak freely without the presence of the researcher in the room distorting the attitudes and views of the committee. The archival data was collected and examined to decipher the actual accounts or decisions that were made in the site-based meeting that resulted in the school's policies.

Eckberg (1984) warns us that bureaucratic documents, as well as bureaucratic behavior, can have rhetorical, often political purposes and effects. Schools are bureaucratic organizations, and creating a campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy and keeping site-based minutes are all bureaucratic processes mandated by the Texas Education Agency. "A main purpose of such productions is the

maintenance of the ‘appearance of legitimacy’” (Eckburg, 1984, p. 341). To validate the reliability of both the parent involvement policy and the campus improvement plan, the researcher deepened the understanding of the content and the extent of its use by analyzing the general content of each document and interviewing the key stakeholders of the campus.

Some schools believe in the purpose and results of the mandates by TEA, while other schools follow bureaucratic procedures only to remain in compliance. The population sample may include documents that acquire a “throw away” quality. Eckburg (1984) believes that each of these documents with a “throw away” quality may still be significant in conveying images of the organization. The question then can be asked if the school values parent participation or if it is merely fulfilling bureaucratic procedures by developing the parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan. The interviews unveiled the priority level the school held regarding parent participation. The content analysis strategy allowed the researcher to seek out common themes while scrutinizing the policies and minutes to determine the level of value given to each of the parent involvement documents. The interview with each of the key stakeholders also provided insight for the researcher regarding the values the exemplary school held regarding parent involvement.

Providing the need for additional support of the parent participation documents, Berg (2004) recommends collecting additional sources from the exemplary middle school in order to further explain the patterns that arise. For example, if a school is seeking to improve the communication practices of its campus to better inform parents, the researcher could acquire the newsletter, visit the school’s website, or ask the school for

generic letters or memos that are sent home to the parents. The acquisition of additional documents can validate the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy and foster the reliability of the study.

Generalizability

Eisner & Peshkin (1990) said that many ideas and feelings are evident among qualitative researchers regarding the process of sampling from a population of sites in order to generalize to a larger population. The difficulty lies in the ability of taking a non-random sample of a population, usually a single-case study, and generalizing back to the population. Taking multiple sites across the state of Texas in order to increase the generalizability of archival qualitative research is referred to as performing a multi-site study (Eisner & Peshkin, 1990). The researcher in this instance took one exemplary middle school and did an in-depth single case study. Performing a thorough research of a single exemplary middle school in Texas could potentially enhance the generalizability of the findings in this study to other school settings.

As with any method of inquiry, clear advantages and disadvantages to the design of the research study become evident. One advantage of the single case study is that the researcher is a current school administrator who has a deep understanding of the many facets of the daily operation of a school and how school organizations communicate to develop and implement school-based policy. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) said that the more inclusive the researcher's contextualization, the more credible are his or her interpretations of the phenomena. Between the years 2001-2005, the researcher as an administrator worked consistently and passionately to incorporate parent involvement

strategies into his middle school by experimenting with effective parent involvement strategies from successful schools in the region and proven researched strategies identified by parent participation researchers such as Epstein.

Second, the researcher followed the advice of Eisner and Peshkin (1990) and generalized to three domains: to what is, to what may be, and to what could be. Studying “what is” involves studying a school because it has achieved an exemplary status. The researcher studied the different approaches the exemplary middle school took in regard to parent involvement and looked for patterns or themes in the exemplary school. Studying the typical is far better than studying a site that was merely convenient. The researcher looked for data from the exemplary middle school regardless of its geographic location. Studying “what may be” involves learning about an exemplary middle school because the educational goal of the state and federal government is to leave no child behind. If no child is left behind, it could be implied that all schools in Texas would be exemplary. Therefore, there are many strategies mandated by the state and federal government to facilitate the growth of students including the utilization of parent involvement strategies. The population sample included an exemplary middle school in Texas that had taken state and federal mandates seriously and utilized parents optimally to help achieve its exemplary rating. The sample of the research study included an exemplary school that has a good representation of a low socio-economic population, is in a suburban area, and is a Chapter 41 school district. Finally, Eisner & Peshkin (1990) says that by studying “what could be” means locating situations that are known or expected to be ideal or exceptional on some “a Priori” basis and then studying them to see what is actually occurring. Studying the archival data and interviewing a sample of stakeholders from a

school that had experienced first-hand success will enlighten the researcher to how an exemplary middle school actually involves parents in the education of their children.

Socio-economic factors can have both a positive and negative impact on parent participation in schools. Texas is a very diverse state in many aspects, including the state's economic diversity. Wealthier communities potentially have more stay-at-home moms who can afford to contribute and participate in schools. School districts found in poorer communities may target low-income parents and work harder to facilitate parent participation. Wealthier schools may have policies that are less focused because of the automatic abundance of parent participation within the schools. Rural districts may also focus more on parent participation at home and school than do urban schools with large student populations. The economic status of the community and school can impact the school's approaches to developing parent participation strategies. The researcher has provided demographic information on the school included in the study as provided by the AEIS reports.

The exemplary middle school does not provide a diverse representation of all the demographics represented in Texas, so the generalizability of the research is possibly restricted to schools similar to the population being studied. The state of Texas' accountability requirements fully expect schools to be successful in educating all students in Texas. The state requires AYP to be met in all subgroups of the population including White, Hispanic, African American, ESL, and disadvantaged students. Representation from each of these groups would have optimally generalized the research to all Texas schools. The lack of representation of the school studied without the high populations of these student groups potentially limits the transferability of the study, but Becker (2004)

reminds us that researchers can develop generalizations by seeing how each case potentially represents different values of some generic variable or processes.

Third, due to the uniqueness of Texas' schools, the external validity of the results of this study is potentially limited to schools in the state of Texas. The Lone Star State has unique accountability standards and legislative mandates involving the participation of parents. In an attempt to externally validate the findings, the researcher attempted to "create a strong chain of evidence, that is, clear, meaningful links between research questions, raw data, and findings" (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003, p. 507). By creating a strong chain of evidence, the researcher was able to externally validate the findings of the study. However, the results of this study could be an excellent starting point for middle schools to consider when developing effective parent participation policies or formal school program plans to successfully involve parents in the education of their children at home and at school.

Finally, a limitation of this study is that the researcher worked independently on the analysis of the data collected. Glesne (1999) says that the document's author, to increase the validity of his or her findings, should check the results of the research. As a result of time and financial constraints, it was not practical for the researcher to discuss the interpretation of campus improvement plans and parent involvement policies with all the committees and administrators who were involved with their development. Exclusively the researcher will do the analysis and interpretation of the research documents, which is another potential limitation to the generalizability of the results in this study.

Qualitative Research Defined

Berg (2004) says that qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definition, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things. What makes qualitative research so invaluable is taking real life objective observations of archival data and interpretations of interviews and then creating a detailed description of the event or phenomenon in a form that can be recreated in the minds of individuals who read the research. Recreating an event in the form of writing can bring forth memories and a deep understanding of the situations that created the phenomenon. Before a qualitative researcher can create a deep understanding of an observed phenomenon, he or she must be able to “observe how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through social structures, social roles, symbols, and so forth” (Berg, 2004, p. 7). In the context of this study, symbols will be observed by the researcher in the form of archival data. Having the ability to observe how subjects react in a setting allows a qualitative researcher’s methods to be, as Berg (2004) suggests, extremely systematic possessing the ability to be reproduced by subsequent researchers. The ability to achieve reliability by leaving a “chain of evidence” in the research design is the backbone of testing research. It allows the researcher the ability to sustain the challenges from the scientific community.

A qualitative researcher in this instance was able to interpret the meaning of the symbols (communicative documents of the site-based team) and attach significance or meaning to the document (Berg, 2004). “Blumer thereby suggests that meanings derive from the social processes of people or groups of people interacting” (Berg, 2004, p. 9). Campus improvement plans and parent involvement policies are created through the

social interaction of committees (representatives of a school) that collaborate and create policies that the group believes are important and that will assist the organization in achieving its established goals.

The researcher must interpret the meaning of the primary resources for the archival study in the form of various documents (campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy) and interviews of key stakeholders and then attach meaning that can be understood and recreated to test the validity of the researcher's interpretation. The purpose of the research is to interpret the archival data of the exemplary middle school in the form of the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy and answer the research questions posed in the first question. In an attempt to answer the questions dictated by the research questions in question one, the researcher collected the archival data and performed interviews from an exemplary middle school in Texas that achieved exemplary status two consecutive years between 2002-2005. This archival collection and interviews were done in an attempt to understand the policies concerning parent participation in an exemplary middle school.

CHAPTER IV
PRESENTATION OF THE DATA AND
ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Introduction

This study used a single case study involving different types of data from an exemplary middle school that consisted of the campus improvement plan, parent involvement policy, and an interview of the school principal, teachers, parents, and the school superintendent. The data that was collected enabled the researcher to study the parent involvement policy and practices implemented by an exemplary middle school in Texas for two consecutive years, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005.

Findings from Interviews

The exemplary middle school that was studied by the researcher should not be identified or described in even the simplest form due to the possibility of a breach in confidentiality. As a result of having only a few schools in Texas that were rated exemplary for two years in a row increases the possibility of identifying the school that has been studied.

Success of the exemplary middle school came as a result of many variables. The basis of the success came as a result of the ability of the school to develop and maintain a climate and culture of mutual trust and respect between the faculty, parents, and the community. The relationships and trust that exist on the campus could be traced back from past principals and superintendents who initiated and made personal relationships a priority in the district for many years. The current superintendent, Mr. Black, has been in

the district for thirty years. The superintendent has served in many capacities including the curriculum director for twelve years, elementary principal for thirteen years, high school counselor for four years, and a math teacher for one year. Mr. Black said in an interview:

When I interviewed here 30 years ago, the HS principal of the time and who later served as superintendent for 14 years, spent a lot of time with me to explain to me what it was to be a (school mascot). What it meant to be here and how to make yourself available for parents even if they were far out in left field, listen to the parents even if they were far out in left field, listen to the parents. Do what you have to do in the right manner. That was the expectation that existed when I came here and it has progressed like that.

The mutual trust that was established between the school and community years ago still exists in the exemplary middle school today. All of the parents who were interviewed by the researcher communicated the strong sense of trust they have for the faculty and administration. One parent who had been in the community and has had many of his own children and foster children in and out of the school for twenty-three years communicated the following:

The teacher has to keep peace in the classroom, and she did what she thought was best. That was the end of it as far as I was concerned. That is what the teacher is in there for. Control that classroom and do what she thinks is best. I have already given them my allegiance because I believe in them. I know she is not going to mistreat my daughter. I know that my daughter will come home and tell a lie. I know that. It is always “poor me.” That is the kind of trust they have instilled in me.

Another parent said: “I can tell that they are not here for the pay. Like, some teachers say they do not get paid enough, not here, they do this because this is what they love. I see

the love and the caring and the honesty from the teachers. They truly care about each and every child here.” The third parent interviewed has her second child going through the middle school and has also experienced many positive relationships with the teachers and administration of the exemplary middle school. When asked how comfortable she feels about coming to the middle school, she responded:

I don't have a problem with that. I think they really are interested. When I do talk to them, it is like they are interested only in my daughter. Which they have so many. That is how they make me feel. My child is the only one here. That is who is important, and we are going to take care of that.

The expectation to treat parents respectfully in order to earn their trust was established many years prior to the exemplary middle school earning the highest academic rating given by TEA. First, in order to maintain that mutual trust and respect, the current administrator believes that communication with parents is vital to the academic success of his students. “Parent involvement is very important...We have to make sure we have the communication with the parents.” In order to effectively communicate with parents, the principal has nurtured effective parent involvement policies implemented by past administration and has created many effective communication practices of his own for parents, teachers, and community members to collaborate, exchange ideas, and work as a team for the academic success of all students.

Subsequently, the principal has communicated an expectation to his faculty that they place parent communication at the forefront to facilitate the academic success of students and build collaborative relationships with the parents. That expectation has been taken to heart by many of the faculty and staff. During an interview one teacher shared,

“If those people move to our community, they move out if they don’t want to be involved. Our expectations are that is your child. You will be involved because we will not make all the decisions for you.” Another teacher shared the following, “Obviously we have a lot of successful kids, and I think that comes from the parents. I think we are a very good school, and we expect a lot, and if you don’t have that support, you will not be as successful as we have been.”

Third, the middle school provides a plethora of parent involvement opportunities. The faculty and administration strive to involve more parents and community members at each of the campus and district functions. Although many parents choose not to attend, the parents see the invitation as enhancing a positive, open, honest, and nurturing school climate that values their children’s academic achievement and builds trust. One teacher exclaimed after being asked what she thought the middle school should do to improve parent involvement in the middle school, “We do everything else we can do short of dragging them out of bed.” While a parent said, “They have all these open programs where they want us to come in and get involved. They sponsor and they foster the parent teacher organization. This is where they work closely with the teacher, and they use that to communicate and to get us involved.” The parent went on to say that, “I do not do a lot of attending.” Afterward, they were asked whether they feel welcome. All the parents interviewed responded that they always feel welcome even though they are unable or choose not to attend.

Types of Communication Practices

The middle school utilizes a variety of methods for communicating to parents in order to accomplish specific and multiple goals for the middle school. The goal that is primarily being targeted in all the communication practices of the middle school is its attempt to build positive relationships. Building positive relationships involves building and maintaining the trust and respect of the parents in the community. The secondary reason for communicating to parents is situational. The situation is based on the needs of the school or individual child. Once the need has been established by the school or parent, the practice is utilized to create an optimum opportunity to accomplish the objective.

The objective that almost every faculty at the middle school would like to accomplish is to ensure the success of every student. As one teacher said, “Last year we were the only exemplary middle school in the region. That is 96 or 97 school campuses. The one thing that has helped us do all that is high expectations regardless of where that kid comes from.” The middle school principal feels that the utilization of the academic teams is responsible for meeting many of the needs of every student. He says:

Our school, we are considered the MS, but we have academic teams; a sixth grade team, seventh grade team, and an eighth grade team. They do a great job of visiting with parents. They have parent conferences on a regular basis. They will come in, and I spoke with a seventh grade teacher and he could count only two or three parents that just refused to come in for a parent conference. We have parent conferences for numerous reasons, whether they are struggling, looking for different types of placements for them, or if they are doing a great job. I think it is important to have those parents come in because we are fortunate. They will show up, but after school they have to watch kids, but we have a high rate of success of having parents come and talk with us which is awesome.

If parents refuse to show up, the teachers and administration will not accept the lack of responsibility of the parents. When the principal was asked what they did when a parent was not willing to show up, he responded, “We keep calling.” A teacher also said, “That the principal has gone to parent’s house with the counselor before with a few issues if we could not get the parent to come up here.”

After all the opportunities to reach those few parents who refuse to attend teacher and parent conferences have failed, the teachers know they will eventually catch the parent or guardian at an extracurricular activity. As one teacher expressed:

If you can’t get them to show up at parent conferences at the same time, but they can show up at a pep rally. Catch them, pull them off to the side, and this is what we need to talk to you about. It’s not a huge number we have to do that with, but we have done it. Couple of weeks ago at a football game I went down about twenty rows and sat down behind the parent and talked into their ear the whole time. I had a captive audience; they were not going to leave. So we have pretty much done all of that.

One parent verified the extent that a teacher at the middle school will go to talk to a parent about a child, “On a personal level we see them in the community and at games and we talk.” The parent went on to say, “The thing I like the best is the personal, is most of these people we see them at football games, basketball games, and functions, and we talk to them there, and that allows us to see how things are going.” Another parent talked about how adamant the teachers are about discussing both the negative and positive aspects of his child: “As a matter of fact, I was a little bit resentful at one time because they require too much parent attention. Like most parents I suppose, I wanted to dump my kids off and forget about them.”

The middle school rarely has to pursue many of the parents with such perseverance. The principal and faculty cite several reasons they claim contribute to the school's having a high rate of attendance at parent meetings. First, at the beginning of the year, the middle school administration and teachers communicate their expectations to the parents and explain what they can expect from the middle school throughout the year. When the principal was asked what he believed contributed to their success he said:

I think it is an expectation. We send letters home at the first of the year. We have the academic teams. There are core teachers on each team. We let the parents know that there are times in the year we will visit with you and if we have discipline problems, academic problems, or if they just want to visit. The good thing about the team is that if a parent has a concern about one class. When we have that team meeting all the core teachers are in there. So all the teachers can talk to the parents and say "hey, your child is doing great in English, but struggling in math." That way the parent knows exactly what is going on in all their classes. They are willing to come up and visit with us about it.

Second, the superintendent and the middle school principal always have an open door policy. The administrators believe that parents should not meet any obstacles when they feel the need to come to school and address a concern they have about their child. When the superintendent was asked what he did to promote parent participation in the district and middle school, he replied, "Having a total open door policy. In the past there were concerns about the lack of ability to communicate with the superintendent." The superintendent went on to say, "Again, it has to do with personal relationships." One parent who feels very comfortable about coming to middle school said:

I have known the principal for a long time, and he is about as straight up as you can get. He is going to tell you like it is. If it is not in the program, he is going to see that it is

out. If it is in the program, he is going to see that it is enforced. Just like you and me talking. He allows you that latitude; he does not have the superior attitude and things of that nature.

A teacher also said, “We always have an open door policy; the principal has always been good about if a parent can only meet one time during the day, and if he has to find a way to cover four classes, then he will do that.” Finally, a teacher shared, “Everything we do, we invite parents. If it is a field trip or contest or a GT trip with my kids, I always have a handful of parents that want to go. If I have thirty kids going, I have a handful of parents that want to go with us.” The result of so many parents attending field trips and activities would be the result of an open door and open invitation to attend any or all student activities. The flexibility of the school to meet the schedules of parents, communicate clearly, open door policy, and personal relationships allows parents to feel welcome. Camaraderie between parents and teachers increases the level of parent participation in called parent/teacher meetings.

Types of Parent Involvement

The middle school over the last nine years has developed many effective parent involvement activities. According to those interviewed, no single parent involvement activity facilitated academic success more than any another, with the exception of the academic teaming. The combination of having a diverse set of parent involvement activities contributes to the positive climate and culture found in the middle school. The climate, culture, and trust continue to build and maintain positive relationships that directly influence academic success of all students. The principal shared, “The more you get parents involved, the more communication is open and the more they are willingly to

help.” The principal also stated, “I think as teachers we need to create the bond with those parents to let them know that we are not the bad guys. We need your help, and we want to help you.” The researcher found different types of parent involvement strategies to fit all but one of Epstein’s six types of parent involvement strategies.

The first type of parent involvement is parenting practices. Parenting practices assist families with parenting and child rearing skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level (Epstein, 2001, p. 43). The middle school utilizes several different Type I involvement activities. First, the middle school will periodically have a father and son breakfast. The purpose of the father and son breakfast is multifaceted. One purpose is to open communication lines between the school and parents that will facilitate the father and son relationship. A teacher commented, “We had a male figure breakfast. On a Saturday morning twenty-five men showed up. Some were parents and some were not. Some just showed up to see what was going on and to see what they could do to help out, and the vast majority volunteered to sponsor fishing or camping trips. Things like that are used to pull in those kids. The single parents.” The principal responded to the father and son breakfast by saying, “We have a dad’s breakfast at the first of October, it was just the dads that were involved. We talked about how to be more involved with their sons by going to different events like a minor league hockey game. So the parents can meet or sit with their kids at any time.”

The middle school also provides lunch for the parents each six weeks. During the lunch meetings the administration has outside speakers and teachers attend and provide parenting tips to the parents. Different teachers within the middle school also provide

information about upcoming events and how parents can help their children become more successful. A parent commented on having the opportunity to attend one of the luncheons:

I had the opportunity to attend several of the luncheons several times. I thought they were very informative. They make the most out of it. Not just come in and socialize. They give everyone the opportunity to gather, and then they give you information that parents need to know about. At one of them, I was a member of their leadership program. I came away with several ideas of things that they used at school that I could use at home.

The parent luncheons are successful at opening the lines of communication, but one teacher shared the following, “Other than educating parents on some stuff, but again the parents that come to that stuff that we have are already educated parents and their children already do well and are successful. You will have very few parents that attend anything you have that their child is not already successful.” The principal of the middle school felt very positive about the parent luncheons:

We provide a parent luncheon and called it a brown sack lunch that the school purchased. We discuss what is going on, and we did this, but we decided to showcase a group of people, it may be the superintendent and central office the first time, the different teams, then the electives. By the end of the year everyone on this campus had been introduced that has come to the meetings. They are pretty well attended. These are the times when we have thirty to thirty-five parents that attend which is about ten percent of our population. Then there are times when we may have ten to fifteen.

The parent luncheon and breakfast allows the middle school to give information to the parents, but at the same time creates bi-lateral communication between the school and the parents.

The second type of parent involvement activity initiated by the exemplary middle school is its communication practices. Communication is used by the middle school to inform the families, stakeholders in the school, and the community about school programs and student progress with school-to-home and home-to-school communications. This type of parent involvement activity is the most widely used by the exemplary middle school and appears to be the tipping point for their success. The exemplary middle school uses many different types of communication practices, but they all have one common feature—they are genuine. The principal shared:

We send tons of stuff home with our kids, obviously. Teachers call parents on a regular basis. Rather they call and talk to them individually, or they call and talk to them about the team problems. Parents come up; we don't have a lot of individual team conferences and the reason behind that the parent can know what is going on behind the entire team. If they struggle with just one class that is great, but we like the parent to know what is going on with all the classes. We have things on our marquee, we have things on the bank marquee, in the community newspaper, on the website, we send tons of things home with kids. Some parents say they don't get anything that goes home. I don't think it is not from the lack of trying. We try to let them know what is going on. Anything that goes on, we let them know. On the back of our report cards for the last four years we put concerns or let them know what is going on. Parents likes the idea, but asked them to make an extra copy so they could keep a copy. We put anything on there that is going on or expected to go home, and parents really appreciate it and put it on the refrigerator so they know of the different things that are going on. We try to put as much as we can in the newspaper.

A teacher responded when asked what types of parent participation strategies she found to be most successful at the middle school in impacting the academic achievement of students, and she said, "I think just parents being aware of what their child is doing. I

mean just that awareness of what they are doing in class and what they are involved in extracurricular.” Another teacher shared the following about the types of communication practices used to correspond with parents:

We can do quick report cards off of our computers which is really neat because we can break it down and put notes on the back. We can have parents sign it and return it, and when our phone system is working, we have phone systems in the room, and a red light flashes when we have voice mail so we can generally call right back and the parents can go to the voice mail. It only rings directly to the classroom before 7:30 and after 3:30, after school. I have been in my room after 7:00 at night and received calls from parents while I was sitting there working and left a message, and we could have a conversation then and that is really handy, but I think the email has been the strongest for us.

Each of the parents who were interviewed was asked about the different ways the middle school communicates to the family and community. A parent responded:

Fliers, the marquee at the community center, the bank, newspaper, they do announcements, football games. If you attend those things, you will know; if you don't attend, you won't hear it. If you pick up the newspaper, you will read about it, or drive by the marquee and just look up and read about all the information you need. Enough fliers are sent home. Sometimes she does not bring back her back pack, and I don't get it until next week. So I make sure I read the newspaper or I ask someone.

Another parent answered, “One way is telephone, and they ask me to come down when they need something.” The parent went on to say, “Progress reports, yes, I get a progress report if (student's name) is not doing well. Sometimes when she is doing well, I will get a note from her teachers that says she is doing very well in this. That gives me the opportunity to brag on her and tell her she is doing good, you know. Encourage her to keep doing well.”

The third type of parent involvement is volunteering. First, the middle school utilizes Type III strategy to train, work, and create schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs. One of the most interesting programs initiated by the middle school was its beautification project. The superintendent said, “Here at the middle school, they had a beautification project. Parents came out here with tillers, shovels, hoes, and all kinds of ground equipment and worked like Trojans with the kids, and that was very neat to see. All the parents helping up here with their kids, too.”

Second, the middle school has an active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). The principal was asked what role he has in the operation of the PTO. He shared, “I don’t have much to do with that. That is a district-wide parent teacher organization. My role is just to show up for those meetings and to let parents know. We meet at the high school the second Tuesday of each month. I don’t have a big role in the PTO organization. We have a lot of volunteers that come in, and they do a lot of things for the middle school. I am not in the middle of the PTO.” The parents were asked how each of them is involved with the PTO. One parent who represents the minority population in the community said about her PTO membership, “Yes, by membership only. I do not do a lot of attending.” The parent also said, “Oh yes, I always feel welcome. In fact they ask us at the beginning of school. Sometimes, passed out packets, extended membership privileges. They ask us to raise funds. Selling fireworks during certain seasons, to raise money to support the PTO. They want us involved.” Another parent stated, “I don’t get to attend a lot of their meetings. We either have football or volleyball.” The parent added, “The PTO does not ask her to do anything.” When asked why the parent responded, “Because I don’t attend

the meetings. They do have sign up sheets. They know everyone is so busy. They don't call people on the sign up sheets. I know I would not unless they were in a bind."

Third, the middle school has sponsored activities like the "Pride Day" to get parents involved and create a sense of honor about the middle school. One teacher responded, "We had a pride day, and everyone came out on campus and spelled out words. A lot of parents came to that. A lot of parents come to (name of school) because they know that we are going to push them. When they come to activities and see all that, they are as proud of our school as we are. A lot of people come here because of the school."

Type IV parent involvement at the middle school engages families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curricular-linked activities and decisions. The teachers and administration that were interviewed communicated that learning activities at home, including homework and other curricular-linked activities, were teacher-driven and not initiated by outside forces. One teacher said, "The math is part of the wetland project we are doing this week. They are doing surveys throughout and have students go out and ask adults questions. That will get parents involved. Parents are going to wonder to know how come you are asking me about the wetland." The teacher added, "The science projects that the students are doing can be accessed at home. Occasionally in writing we will interview a parent or grandparent." A parent responded to the same question by saying, "Lot of times I will teach her the way I learned. She will tell me that is not the way that she was taught and cuts me off real quick. We sometimes don't hit it off. It is up to the teacher to do her thing and let me do mine. I can appreciate that because that means she is listening to that

teacher. She is learning somewhere, maybe not well enough as she should, but she is listening to it.” The interviews lead the researcher to believe there are few type four parent involvement activities being initiated at the exemplary middle school.

Type V parent involvement would include decision making that includes families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through the PTO, committees, and other parent organizations at the middle school. The teachers, parents, and administrators that were interviewed were asked if the middle school involved parents in Type V decision making. A teacher shared:

SBM is a little different at (Name of School). We have a lot of parent involvement in it by the way. Here we develop our district plan and then that falls back down into our campus plan. We have five or six community members that serve on the committee regularly. That has to be one of the most boring committees to serve on because you are sitting discussing numbers, targeted strategies in the district you have to put in place. We have a lot of involvement there, but as far as the campus level. He had, and I was not on that one because maybe I was on the district plan, and he did not want me on both. Ours seems to be an evolving committee. What decision we make as a committee is not always the decision that comes out. I know what the law says, but there are consequences. So you deal with whatever comes out of it. There are some things that we necessarily do not agree with on there. I am trying to remember any parents that have even talked with me about that. I can't say that I have.

A parent responded when asked if he had been asked to serve on a decision making committee by the administration, “They may have, but I can't recall them having done that at all.” Another parent responded a little differently:

I have been a part of their leadership program for two years. It has been a combination of the principal, assistant principal, several teachers, business people, community members, and some parents. We did not make any

particular policy changes, but we discussed what has happened with the school year, what they are going to be doing, and they are always open to our ideas that we have. They asked us if there is anything that they need to be doing in addition to what they are already doing.

A second teacher was asked if she was familiar with the parent involvement policy at the middle school, and she responded, “I don’t guess so!”

The principal believes that the parents’ involvement with the decision making of the school is focused primarily on their own children’s academic development during the academic teaming period. The principal stated:

One of the things that we looked at was changing the schedule from an eight period schedule to a modified block. We did that in the year 2001. Because we know the TAKS was changing expectations, we are going to change and go from a traditional schedule to a block. We wanted to get parents involved and let them know about what is going on so when we changed over they knew at least what was going on. The one time they don’t want to squeeze any time out of is their team time. They talk discipline, students, parents, everything they can during that time and try to get parents involved. That is their time, and I don’t infringe upon it. I would have a riot if I said we are going to do away with the block and go to a seven period day and you will teach six of those periods and you will not have a team; they would not like that because it is a planning time and it gives them time to visit with their parents. This morning when we came in they were meeting with a team. Regularly there are parents visiting with their teachers about different things. Some of those are generated by the parents and some by the teachers for those meetings.

The process the principal utilizes to create a parent involvement policy involves the participation of the parents and the academic team of the child, as the principal explained:

The parents know about the academic teams and since they know about the academic teams, they have the expectations and know if there is a problem, the team will contact them, or they can contact the team, and they will find a way to

work together to fix the problem. The policy is set up more the meeting of the team and that is what they do and they do a great job. They have a team leader and they rotate that every year. Sometimes it is every two years. They function as the liaison to the parents and contact them. The team leader acts as the communication to the parents and the rest of the teachers.

The teaming concept is utilized to involve the parents in the decision making process thereby perpetuating the academic success of the middle school child.

Type VI parent involvement at the middle school involves collaborating with the community. Collaboration at the middle school involves coordinating the work and resources of community, businesses, and other groups to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. The middle school used Epstein's Type VI parent involvement strategy in several ways.

First, Type VI parent involvement strategy is initiated at the father and son breakfast. A teacher said, "On a Saturday morning twenty-five men showed up. Some were parents and some where not. Some just show up to see what is going on and to see what they could do to help out and a vast majority volunteered to sponsor fishing or camping trips." Second, in both the Campus Leadership Committee and the Educational Improvement Committee there are community members that are involved with both the district and campus level. On each of the committees there are both parent and community members that collaborate to make the middle school good for kids. A teacher responded, "Here we develop our district plan and then that falls back down into our campus plan. We have five or six community members that serve on the committee regularly."

The middle school utilizes each of the six types of parent involvement strategies as suggested by Epstein (2001). By offering many different types of parent involvement opportunities, the middle school is able to accomplish several objectives. Primarily it is able to build a climate and culture of team work and collaboration between the school, parent, and community. Second, optimally the school involves as many parents as are willing and able to participate.

Parent Involvement of the Economically Disadvantaged

The primary reason the researcher selected the exemplary middle school was the percentage of economically disadvantaged students found in the school. As a teacher stated, “Not enough room to make our school a commercial community where you have your own plant and people move here for work. Unless they are pastors, we have about eleven churches in our community, and that is about the only industry we have here.” In regards to the same issue the principal said:

Economically disadvantaged students we are pushing about 30%. We are land locked. Not many houses being built. The houses that are being built are very expensive and in different areas. One extreme to another. New people moving in live in apartment complexes or mobile home parks. People that are moving in have to live in these parks. The mobility rate is 14%. We have kids that come in to our community and are in their sixth school in three years. They are hopping from one place to another. When the rent comes due, they are moving. More and more of that and now we are pushing close to 30% economically disadvantaged.

A teacher added to what the principal said regarding the economically disadvantaged families in the district:

Most parents don't have time to be involved because they work. They don't have time during the day. Then they

don't have time after school because they are working. Majority of our parents have minimum wage jobs. A lot of them work over time, have to stay at home because they have two or three kids. They can't just come up and help out when they want to. Or else you have more kids running around in the hallway.

Another teacher said, "We have had a long history of high rate of successes, but we are struggling with that, and academics are starting to slow up because they do not know how to work those kids."

When the researcher asked the participants of the study what they are going to have to do differently as their number of economically disadvantaged students increases the principal replied:

Administrators and teachers are going to have to do some things differently to make sure their needs are being met, and they are successful. Now with the changes that are coming into our district, we will have to find new ways to help our kids be successful. Get more parents involved. Some parents did not want to come to school because they did not have good experiences when they were in school. But, we have a pretty good knack of having parents coming in and talking to us. That is a good thing.

When the teacher was asked how the economically disadvantaged increase is affecting the school's success, she shared:

We have high achievement and high scores. I think our scores would be higher if they paid more attention to the education of their children. We had a parent say last year that we were too driven toward education because these kids have more going on than education. So that seems to be the attitude, parents want their children to do school work at school and not to take it home. That seems to be the trend. My parents told me it is Halloween, and it is a national holiday, and we should not have homework on Halloween. That kind of comment is happening more and more.

The researcher asked the following question,. “How does the exemplary middle school involve parents of the economically disadvantage?” The principal began to answer the question by making the following statement, “So the involvement on something like that is district wide, and it targets all the parents whether you’re upper, upper class or lower class; sometimes you end up with the same problems like kids not turning in their work, discipline problems, and things like that.” One teacher believes that these parents should be treated with the same respect as all parents when she said:

We call them up for conferences and tell them, “Your kids are great.” What we usually suggest to the parent is to have the student write their assignment down, and then we will initial their assignment folder. Some parents are interested in that and some parents are like any thing else. Do it for a few days or week and won’t write their assignment down. All you can do is assume that every parent will. Talk to them and ask them for help. Thank them for being here and tell them that your kid is really a good kid. Try to turn the negative around because some of them are pretty negative about it. A lot of them their grand parents are raising them and such as that and have a hard time you know.

Another teacher said, “I have been on this campus for nine years and two of those nine years we have not been exemplary.” The teacher went on to say:

The one thing that has helped us do all that is high expectations regardless of where that kid comes from. If we struggled with some of the subpopulations, it was the ESL kids. We where not ready for the dyslexic kids; we have just got into that. Like our Black kids; we have always had just a small percentage. They are not treated any different that any other kid regardless of financial background. I would say the only subpopulation we have had to adjust for is the ESL. That is it. We have had some Asian students and a few Hispanic students come through; we don’t change classroom instruction for any of them. For those students it has been how much influence they have on their language. We may have to give additional

instruction through tutoring. I have yet had someone come into class and work with them. So all the ones I have had have been very mild, but they are in ESL because of their background.

The parents who were interviewed represent a diverse set of demographic backgrounds. All of the parents who were interviewed felt that they were treated well, their child was a priority, encouraged to participate, and made to feel welcome at school. The first parent said, “I found out among the teachers there was no discrimination, and my kids enjoyed the school. They never felt they were picked on or ignored or intimidated in anyway.” Another parent shared, “We feel very comfortable. We have had very good relationships.” The parent also revealed:

There was one time, her weakness was math; we thought we were on scale on one of the first semesters. We did not find out until after the first six weeks when we had to come and visit. We do not want to know at report card times that our child is failing. We had to communicate that we wanted to know right then that she was failing not at six weeks. After that we started getting emails, extra work, tutorials and all that. Since the sixth grade then we have been on the same page and do what we needed for her.

A third parent corresponded, “If there is ever a problem, I just have to call them or email them, and they will email be back the same day.”

Archival Data Findings

After a review of the archival data for the last two years, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, that the middle school achieved an exemplary rating, the findings were established by the researcher. The Campus Plan of Action for the exemplary middle school was developed by the campus site-based committee as a result of a comprehensive needs assessment using the following data:

1. Longitudinal AEIS data
2. Longitudinal academic performance information for no-AEIS student groups
3. AYP, SDAA/LADD
4. Program evaluations
5. Staffing needs
6. Professional/paraprofessional training needs
7. Benchmark tests, teacher checklists
8. Discipline data
9. Promotion/Retention rates
10. Stakeholder surveys
11. Informal evaluations

Findings by the site-based committee revealed the following:

1. Though narrowing, a gap in performance scores continues between economically disadvantaged students and other student groups.
2. The number of sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students passing TAKS continues to be at 90% or higher.

The 2003-2004 campus plan Goal I is to promote continuous progress for all students as measured by the TAKS instrument. Objective three under Goal I states that the middle school will offer training opportunities to parents, guardians, and community members and increase the participation of parents in the middle school by ten percent. The summative assessment states, "Increased parent/guardian involvement." The strategies found in the 2003-2004 campus plan to be initiated by the school to achieve Goal I Objective three include the following:

1. Provide parents information regarding appropriate parent workshops
2. Parent/guardian meeting for incoming sixth grade students
3. Parent/guardian awareness session for the gifted and talented
4. Open House for parent/guardians
5. Parent/guardian meeting concerning FACTS curriculum
6. Monthly luncheon for parents/guardians of middle school students to discuss (School Name) Middle School “WOMS” activities.

The principal was made responsible for the implementation and success of each of these activities in the campus improvement plan. By increasing the percentage of parent involvement the middle school was hoping to increase their average daily attendance “ADA” to 97%. During the 2003-2004 school year the middle school had an attendance rate of 96.3 percent. The following school year, 2004-2005, the attendance rate was 96.6. The middle school was unable to meet their goal, but did not have the data to assess their effectiveness of increasing parent participation by ten percent.

In the second year of exemplary status the middle school’s campus improvement plan added Goal II focusing on parent involvement specifically. Goal II states that the school will promote continuous communication for all family members (parent/guardian/student) focusing on the development of positive attitudes. In addition to making parent involvement a specific goal, the campus improvement committee created two objectives under Goal II. The first objective under goal II is to offer opportunities for involvement to parents/guardians and increasing parent participation by ten percent. The second objective under Goal II involves creating a conducive and safe learning environment so that discipline referrals decrease by ten percent and student

attendance will reach ninety seven percent. The strategies found in the middle school's campus plan to accomplish Objective I under Goal II, the second year the middle school received an exemplary academic rating during the 2004-2005 school-year, involve the following:

1. Parent/guardian meeting for incoming sixth grade students
2. Investigate programs to address character development, positive behavior, and attendance issues
3. Open House for parent/guardians
4. Provide periodic luncheons for parents/guardians of middle school students to discuss WOMS activities

Objective II under Goal II of the campus improvement plan for the 2004-2005 school year that involved the following:

1. Review and periodically practice the campus and district Crisis Management Plan
2. Periodically discuss discipline procedures with academic teams, as well as students
3. Review acceptable behaviors of students with parents/guardians during meetings

The formative assessment of Objective II under Goal II of the campus improvement plan for the 2004-2005 school year is to decrease the number of student discipline referrals as measured by the Local Disciplinary records, PEIMS accountability, and DAEP placement. By increasing the percentage of parent involvement the middle school was hoping to decrease the number of student referrals. The improvement

committee anticipated that by decreasing the number of student referrals would help increase the academic success of all students. The improvement committee's goal was to have the classes within the middle school being disrupted less frequently by inappropriate student behavior and therefore having fewer students being sent to the office to be disciplined by the principal. By accomplishing both goals it was believed that the academic success of every child in the school would be improved over the course of the 2004-2005 school year. The middle school did achieve an exemplary rating. The exemplary rating gave the improvement committee the confirmation that the objectives of the goal were achieved.

No site-based minutes were available from the exemplary middle school for the researcher to investigate. When the data was requested by the researcher, the principal communicated they did not keep minutes of their site-based meetings. Evidence was found in the interviews and from the campus improvement plan that the middle school had a campus improvement committee, but did not call their committee site-base. There is also evidence from the interviews that would indicate that the middle school improvement committee did collaborate to advance the academic performance of their students.

Summary

The data that was analyzed from the interviews and the archival data demonstrated that the middle school utilized a diverse set of parent involvement strategies. The parent involvement strategies were successful in assisting in the development of a positive climate and a culture of success. An ambiance that encourages, nurtures, and creates a climate of collaboration and success for the parents, teachers, administrators, and students

was evident. The academic success of the middle school's TAKS scores for the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years also reflects the impact on student achievement when the teachers, administrators, and parents collaborate and work together to ensure the success of every student.

The primary purpose of this study is to identify parent involvement strategies for Texas middle schools to use as a middle school works together to create local policies that promote academic success for all students. All middle schools have some similarities, but there are also unique differences that require local policies to meet their individual needs. The interviews and archival data has provided a good template for other schools to use as they search for new and innovative ways to increase their level of parent involvement in their pursuit of academic excellence for all students. The interviews have also unveiled the significance of creating mutual trust and respect between the teachers and parents. Without mutual respect, a good parent involvement policy will not on its own produce the collegiality that is necessary to stimulate academic success.

The final chapter will summarize the literature review; evaluate the research design, data collection, and analysis; and discuss the findings and interpretations of the data. In addition, Chapter Five will discuss evidence, implications, suggestions, and future research on parent involvement in middle schools.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS,
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study focused on a single case study of an exemplary middle school in Texas for two consecutive years, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, and what parent involvement policies and practices were implemented during this time that may have contributed to the school's exemplary rating. Minke and Anderson (2005) said that parent involvement in education is strongly associated with substantial benefits, including greater academic success for children and increased support for teachers and schools. To determine the impact of parent involvement in the exemplary middle school, the researcher interviewed numerous stakeholders of the district including the principal, teachers, superintendent, and parents and studied archival documentation including the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy. "Thus each observation (case) is understood to constitute a concrete realization of a possibility that exists at the collective level (population). Each observation therefore is simultaneously particular and universal, concrete and abstract, or specific and general" (Erickson and Roth, 2006, p. 15).

The uniqueness and the benefits of the study were derived from the difficulty of becoming an exemplary middle school in Texas and maintaining that AEIS academic rating for two consecutive years. The Texas AEIS indicator system grades campuses on many different variables: attendance, dropout, test scores, AYP, etc.,. In order for a school to maintain academic excellence, parent, school, and community support are required. A case study of an exemplary middle school gave the researcher the

opportunity to unveil the policies and practices in order to provide other middle schools and potentially all schools an opportunity to emulate as they strive to achieve academic success for their own students.

The following questions guided this study.

1. What are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary between the years of 2003-2005) that are found in this school's formal campus improvement plans?
2. What are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary between the years of 2003-2005) that are found in this school's parent involvement policies?
3. What are the elements of good practice concerning school-based approaches toward parent participation in an exemplary Texas middle school (rated exemplary between the years of 2003-2005) that are found through a case study involving the interviews of parents, teachers, principal, and superintendent?

The purpose of this study was to find proven parent involvement practices or policies that promote the academic achievement of all students in a exemplary middle school in Texas. The researcher reviewed individual parent involvement strategies used by the exemplary middle school that involved any or all of Epstein's six parent involvement strategies and explored variables that included the school's focus on positive relationships with parents and the impact on school climate and teacher efficacy.

Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1992) found that teacher efficacy was strongly related to teacher reports of parents' involvement in conferences, volunteering, and home tutoring, as well as teacher perceptions of parent support. The more confident a teacher was in his or her ability to teach and interact positively with parents, the more parent involvement was initiated by the teacher.

Literature Review

The literature review examined research pertinent to the many strategies and variables involved and those variables that should be considered by schools as they develop and implement an effective parent involvement policy that will help guide a school toward academic achievement for all students. Many of the parent involvement variables that should be considered include federal and state mandates, economically disadvantaged factors, ethical decisions, relationships, and the potential academic impact that sound parent involvement policies can have on the success of middle school students.

In Chapter I the researcher discussed important concepts regarding the history, legal mandates, ethical considerations, and parent involvement practices. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, federal and state mandates have increased regarding parent involvement and accountability that have impacted public education. George W. Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001. As a result, the state of Texas mandated that schools increase parent involvement policies at the local level. The state mandated policy, Chapter 26 of the *Texas Education Code*, mandates schools to implement parent involvement policies and communicate to parents in a variety of ways.

The local campus maintains local control in determining what specific types of parent involvement strategies are used.

Parent involvement is a concept that has been researched and been proven to help improve the academic achievement of all students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001; Barton, 2004). Epstein (2001) identified six types of parent involvement strategies that schools can use to create parent involvement policy: parenting practices, school-home communication, volunteering or being an audience at school, involvement in home learning activities, decision making, governance, and advocacy roles, and community collaboration. The exemplary middle school under investigation by the researcher utilized each of these types of parent involvement, but at different levels.

This study involved a case study of an exemplary middle school in Texas. Interviews with the principal, teachers, several site-based members, and parents were studied along with archival data from the campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy. The archival data was used to determine the policies and practices geared toward parent involvement in reference to Epstein's (2001) Overlapping Spheres of Influence and Claudet's (1999) Organizational/Supervisory Model of Instructional Supervision. As school teams create parent involvement policies, they must consider the economic status and the ethical dilemmas that certain parent involvement policies can place on parents of their children.

In the literature review the researcher found that the influence that parent involvement strategies have on student achievement is significant, but potentially the social climate and teacher efficacy can have even more profound impacts on student

achievement if parents are treated with respect, made to feel welcome, and are allowed to contribute to the school. As Goleman (2006) is quoted as saying:

Taking time to forge that human connection gave this leader more leverage than she had thought possible. The new field of social neuroscience suggests why a personable leadership style makes sense. The person-to-person climate created by positive interactions can make principals more effective leaders—which in turn helps both teachers and students learn better. The improvement touches all students, from gifted youth to those most at risk of dropping out. A rising tide, an old saying goes, lifts all boats (p. 76).

Principals are leaders of the school, but the teachers lead the parents and students toward academic excellence. If teachers strive to create positive relationships with the parents, as modeled by the principal, then what is created is an academic haven that makes possible the success of every student despite a child's background, ethnicity, or social-economic status.

Research Design

Berg (2004) says that a case study method involves systematically gathering enough information about an organization to permit the researcher to effectively understand how the subject operates or functions. The researcher utilized several data gathering techniques, archival data and interviews, to gather the information necessary to reach a deep understanding of the exemplary Texas middle school as it related to parent involvement and to answer the research questions designed for the study. A case study is not a data-gathering technique but a methodological approach that incorporates a number of data-gathering measures (Berg, 2004).

The researcher looked at all exemplary Texas middle schools between the years of 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 and considered the schools' demographics to determine the middle school that was most likely to answer the researcher's questions and benefit middle schools that were struggling academically. The most diverse exemplary middle school with the highest percentage of ethnically and economically disadvantaged students was targeted to assist in the generalizability of the study to other middle schools in the state of Texas. "When case studies are properly undertaken, they should not only fit the specific individual, group, or event studies but also generally provide understanding about similar individuals, groups, and events (Berg, 2004, p. 259). The researcher wanted to identify the parent involvement policies and practices in an exemplary middle school established to assist in developing academic success of all students on campuses that are represented by diverse demographic backgrounds.

Data Collection and Analysis

The case study utilized two methods of data collection in an attempt to develop a deep understanding of the parent involvement policy and practices of an exemplary middle school in Texas. Data sources included principal, teacher, superintendent, and parent interviews, and the last two years of campus improvement plans. Individual analysis of each data set was provided in Chapter IV. The findings across all data sets are discussed below.

Analysis Among Data Sets

The case study of the exemplary middle School was an attempt to follow the suggestion made by Berg (2004) in which he defined the systematic gathering of enough

information about a particular organization to allow the investigator insight into the life of that organization. The researcher gathered information in a variety of ways to uncover the variables surrounding parent involvement that facilitated an exemplary rating for two consecutive years. First, interviews were performed on various stakeholders within the district. Each of the interviews was recorded and then transcribed in its entirety. During the transcription of the interviews, the researcher used open coding to open the investigation to any potential ideas, themes, or reasons for student success in relation to parent involvement. Second, axial coding was performed in search of a single category to compare with categories from the other interviews and archival data. The last step was selective coding which was used to integrate and refine categories from each of the interviews and the archival data.

Several themes emerged as the researcher worked through each of the three coding processes while simultaneously analyzing the interviews and archival data. The themes that became clear to the researcher were communication, trust, and collaboration between the teachers and parents, accountability that parents and teachers have for each other, and a diverse group of parent involvement activities in each of Epstein's (2001) six types of parent involvement strategies. Some types of parent involvement strategies were evident more than others, but the exemplary middle school does utilize each of the six types of parent strategies.

The first theme that emerged from the interviews and the archival data was the successful use of communication by the middle school. The middle school was committed to communicating to parents in a variety of ways. The school understands that in order to effectively communicate with parents, the school must present the

information in many different formats. The middle school communicates everything from the academic progress of the student to the many extracurricular activities that the school hosts. The middle school communicated with parents in many ways about what is going on by placing information in the community newspaper, publishing school calendars, sending out progress reports, and posting on school and community marquees. If parents make any attempt to find out what is going on in the middle school or by chance drive downtown, the parents will find themselves informed. This consistent communication to parents and community serves the middle school and students in other ways.

The commitment the middle school has toward communicating information to parents opens the door for many more elements that are important to the success of the middle school. Many parents are not able to participate or attend many of the school-sponsored activities. Many of the parents interpret the open and constant communication by the middle school as an open door policy where parents are made to feel welcome and a part of their children's education. The feeling and spirit of the middle school that is shared by the parents builds a foundation of mutual trust and respect among the middle school family.

The second theme that emerged from the study of the exemplary middle school was trust. Trust is a very important element that drives the daily success of the middle school. All the parents that were interviewed felt very strongly that the school had the best interest of their children in mind. The parents that were interviewed represented a diverse set of demographics of the community and school. Regardless if the parent was

from a Black, White, or economically disadvantaged background, the feelings of trust were still apparent in the words and actions of those interviewed.

The teachers and principal who were interviewed had mutual feelings of trust for the parents, but they were a little apprehensive of the motives of a very small percentage of parents. The teachers credited much of their students' academic success to having good parents who truly care about the success of their children. The belief of having sincere parents who truly support their children and their teachers as shared by those interviewed is supported by several factors. Primarily, parents rarely refuse to attend meetings initiated by a student's teacher. Anytime there is an academic reason for a called meeting, parents are there. Another reason for the mutual feeling of trust weighs on the fact that the school has been successful academically for many years. The teachers who were interviewed believe that academic success of their students would not be possible without the support of the parents, something that has been sustained by teamwork and positive collaboration.

Another theme that emerged from the analysis of the data is the collaboration between the parents and the teachers. The mutual feeling of trust and respect has allowed the parents and teachers to come together and create opportunities for the children to be successful. The parents feel that they can call a meeting with the teachers any time there is a problem or a potential problem with their child. Furthermore, the principal will accommodate their work schedules to meet with their child's teachers at a time that is convenient for them. After the meeting the parents believe that the issues addressed will be taken seriously by their child's teachers and strategies will be implemented that both the teachers and parents mutually agree upon. If either the teacher or parent does not

follow through with his or her agreed-upon role, then the other stakeholder will hold that person liable for his or her actions or lack of responsibility.

The trust and relationships that contribute to the success of the district can also be accounted for due to the stability and years of tenure of the principal, teachers, superintendent, and parents. All the parents who were interviewed had been residents in the school's community for many years. If they were not born and raised in the community, they had moved to the community years before their children entered the school system. The principal of the middle school has been in his current position for many years. A significant number of the teachers at the middle school were also native to the community or have been at the middle school for a very long time. The AEIS report submitted by the middle school indicates that the average duration of employment for the teachers at the middle school is 12.1 years.

Trust that evolves in a school must be built over time. Epstein (2001) says that trust and respect are not mere words, but actions that are a necessity for successful partnerships. These qualities cannot be legislated or mandated but must be developed over time within school communities. A combination of the actions and tenure of the middle school has evolved into trusting relationships that involve mutual trust and respect between the teachers and parents. The mutual trust that the teachers and parents share in the middle school was revealed in the interviews of both parties and is supported by the number of years that teachers have chosen to stay. The superintendent also mentioned that many of the surrounding districts pay much better than their district, but teachers choose to stay because of the atmosphere of the school.

The accountability component that each stakeholder, the parent and teacher, has for the other originates from the expectations that have been developed in the middle school over time. For many years the middle school has been exemplary. The parents and the administration expect and believe the middle school will maintain academic excellence. The interviews have also made it evident that the highest of expectations are held for the students, parents, and teachers, and each stakeholder holds the other accountable. Holding parents to high standards is difficult for teachers and administration. If parents do not follow through on a task set by the team of academic teachers and parents, then the team will persevere at communicating and encouraging parents to follow through with their responsibility until one of three things happen. First, the parent complies and follows through with the request of the academic team of teachers. Second, the principal is called by the team to take over the issue if the team has exhausted its available resources. Finally, the parent gets frustrated from the perpetual bombardment of calls and requests for a meeting and finally surrenders by moving the student to a surrounding community.

With all the time and resources that are put into requesting support from parents by the middle school, there is evidence that suggests that no matter what the administration or teachers do as professional educators, there are very few parents that will not support their children at a level necessary to succeed academically. The teachers and administration that were interviewed communicated the frustration they feel from uninvolved parents. The lack of parental support from even a small portion of the parents is frustrating and detrimental to the academic progress of the student. The teachers find the lack of parent involvement frustrating after the academic teams and administration

work so diligently in doing their utmost to help a student be successful. The last two years of TAKS scores at the middle school indicate that a very small percentage of students are not academically successful.

The last concept to be discussed that eventually emerged from the analysis of the data is the wide variety of parent involvement strategies implemented by the exemplary middle school. From the list of parent involvement strategies, no single tactic could be credited for heavily influencing the success of the students. The combination of all the different types of parent involvement strategies target the spectrum of parents found in the middle school. Together the parent involvement strategies build a climate and culture of collaboration, mutual trust, and respect for all the stakeholders in the middle school.

The interviews with the teachers and principal conveyed to the researcher that the academic team representing a student has a significant influence on their scholastic achievement. For example, if a child is having a difficult time in a class, then the parents will meet with their child's academic team. The child's academic team consists of a teacher from each academic class the student is taking. At the team meeting the academic team and parents work together to create a plan to overcome the problem or obstacle the child is having. The plan usually involves the parents, teachers, and child communicating and working together to overcome the obstacle the child is facing. The academic team concept is highly favored by the teachers and principal, but the researcher found a slight amount of resentment from some of the parents regarding the academic teaming.

Interviews with the superintendent and at least one parent indicated that there is the feeling of umbrage from some parents regarding the academic teams. The superintendent

explained that there are some parents who sense they are being ganged up on when confronted by the entire academic team. During a parent interview, the parent expressed that she felt the academic team pushed her child too hard. The feelings of resentment could be the result of several factors. First, the parent may not want to be bothered by her child's teachers regarding the problems the child is having at school. Second, there are potential moral dilemmas that the school should consider before approaching the child's parent. For example, a school employee should be careful before confronting a parent in an open forum regarding an academic or social concern a teacher has for a child. Discussing confidential issues in an open forum could result in sanctions for a school or a teacher.

Research on Ethical Decision Making Compared to the Research

Educators have a moral and ethical responsibility to provide the best education for every child in their school. Schmoker (2006) says:

When administrators 'go along' instead of leading, they perpetuate mediocrity. Subtle institutional forces urge them to accommodate or wink at inferior practice, while implying to their communities that instruction is effective or 'good enough.' We can only imagine the psychic toll this takes on many of the parents. But there is a logic here: it is imperative for professionals entrusted with people's children to inspire confidence in parents and communities, to project an image of quality.

The exemplary middle school observed by the researcher does not wink at mediocrity. Based on the results of their TAKS scores over the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years, the middle school is only one of seven in the state that has maintained AEIS excellence for two consecutive years. Excellence is difficult to accomplish and maintain.

Ethical decisions have to be made to overcome the many obstacles and complexities that schools face on a daily basis.

Most would agree that all children have the right to learn. Beckner (2004) expresses that, “Rights and freedom, of course, carry responsibility—responsibility for the consequences of the actions that may result from exercising various rights and freedoms” (p. 31). The researcher found at the middle school that the principal, superintendent, and teachers are aware of the percent of economically disadvantaged and at-risk students on their campus. The parents who were interviewed were represented by the different sub-populations that make up the middle school’s student population. All parents interviewed communicated to the researcher that they always feel welcome and are invited to participate and attend every school function and feel strongly that their children’s academic needs are being met by their teachers. The parents also believe that they trust their children’s teachers and their children are treated and held to the highest of academic standards.

The teachers and principal that were interviewed also feel that all students are held to the highest of academic standards. Regardless of a child’s background, economic status, or ethnicity, he or she is expected to be successful in all classes, and the parents are expected to facilitate that success. The teacher and principal did not acknowledge that they ever intentionally treat one student any more special than another, but they would hold extra tutorials, create different learning opportunities, hold additional parent conferences, or make extra parent contacts if a child was not being academically successful. The principal and teachers did communicate to the researcher that the lack of success by a student was as much or more of the parent’s responsibility as it was their

own. At the same time, the teachers and principal credit their success to the parents for their support and involvement in their children's education.

The principal and teachers are fully aware of the obstacles that schools face when dealing with economically disadvantaged and at-risk students. The increase of the economically disadvantaged students is a target area during the Comprehensive Needs Assessment for the middle school. The middle school's student population has remained consistent over the last few years, but the percentage of economically disadvantaged and at-risk population has increased. The principal felt that the students would benefit if the teachers had a better understanding of the conditions in which many of the students live. Every teacher in the middle school loaded a bus and drove the district to see the houses where many of their students reside. Specific names of students were not mentioned. The premise of the bus ride is to provide teachers with the knowledge and information that would allow the teachers to make better informed and ethical decisions when working with both the students and parents that represent the diverse sub-populations of the middle school. If a student acted or responded in an unusual manner, the teacher would be able to understand why and respond accordingly.

The vision and goal of the principal was effective because the teachers who were interviewed shared the understanding that all students do not come from the same backgrounds and have obligations, responsibilities, and difficulties they must overcome before and after coming to school. First, the teachers had differing philosophies and feelings about how the students and parents should be dealt with when the child was not academically successful. Second, all the teachers interviewed felt that they do everything within their scope of time and financial resources to facilitate the academic

success of their students. Finally, the teachers interviewed all agreed that there is more that could be done to involve parents and hold accountable the students and parents who refuse to work with the school. The teachers feel that there is not enough time or resources to accomplish additional objectives and strategies if they were developed and they were assigned responsibility for implementation.

Research on Communication Compared to Findings

It is imperative that organizations must communicate bilaterally as suggested by Duemer and Mendez-Morse (2002) before they can be perpetually successful. The middle school effectively communicates to the parents and community and is very committed and open to the parents as they communicate back to them in the form of notes, emails, meetings that are formal or informal, and parent and teacher conferences. Since the communication is two-way, the teachers can better understand if there are situations going on at home that would impede the student's success. At the same time the teachers can effectively communicate areas of concern to the parents and give them tips on how to work with their struggling children at home.

“Communication goes beyond cognitive knowledge and encompasses the ability to self-examine one's ideals, values, and beliefs and their impact on the communication process” (Villani and Lyman, 2001, p. 2). The middle school also strives to communicate bi-laterally with its parents in order to meet the educational objectives of the school. The communication takes different forms in different types of settings. First, the academic team setting provides an opportunity for all of a student's teachers to meet with that student's parents and discuss the individual child's learning objectives. During the team

setting each stakeholder has a time to collaborate with one another and set common goals and objectives and develop a plan of action to meet the academic needs of the student.

Second, the middle school has an open door policy. Parents are encouraged and made to feel welcome to come in and visit with the principal, assistant principal, or teachers to voice ideas on how to improve the school or the academic success of their children. The middle school tends to follow the advice of Covey (1989) when he said, “Although it’s risky and hard, seek first to understand, or diagnose before you prescribe, is a correct principle manifest in many areas of life. It’s the mark of all true professionals” (p. 243). The principal gave examples of the ideas that came from parents regarding how to better communicate to parents or improve the middle school. A parent of the middle school can initiate a meeting at any time he has a legitimate concern or request. The teachers, administrators, principal, and parents shared that conversations around the community occur periodically, if the need arises and they come into contact with one another. The parents and teachers may see one another at extracurricular activities, the grocery store, or at various places in the community.

Third, the middle school communicates to parents by using the traditional styles used by most schools. Epstein (2001) found that virtually all teachers report that they talk with children’s parents, send notices home, and interact with parents on open-school nights. Epstein also found that 90% of the teachers ask parents to check and sign their children’s homework. These traditional styles of communication and many more are utilized at the middle school as effective ways to bridge the information gap and the sense of distance felt by teachers and parents who share a common interest in the same

children. More specific types of parent involvement strategies at the exemplary middle school can be identified in Table D.1.

Finally, the middle school does an outstanding job of communicating upcoming events to parents and the community. The purpose of the middle school expending so much energy in communicating to parents the calendar of upcoming events and schedule of every upcoming event is two-fold. The primary reason for informing the parents is to make every effort to ensure parents are knowledgeable of the event and can make the necessary arrangements to attend if they are available. Another reason is to keep the communication lines open between the home and school by keeping the information positive. The middle school is committed to taking advantage of every opportunity to send positive information home to the parents.

Sending positive information home to parents helps the middle school accomplish its objective of ensuring each child's success. When positive information is sent home to the parents, the parents have the opportunity to reinforce the child's positive behavior and success. Therefore, when the middle school faculty or administration is forced to call for a negative reason, the parents are more receptive to the incoming call. Several of the parents who were interviewed mentioned and welcomed the positive notes sent home by the school. The trust and the relationship between the parent, student, and the school is strengthened as a result of effective and bi-lateral communication practices. Children are encouraged by their parents to keep up the good work which aids in the development of a positive school and classroom climate.

Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence is built on two components-- external and internal. The external component is driven by three forces: the experience, philosophy, and practices of the family, school, and community. These three forces influence the amount of overlap in each sphere--parent, school, and community. The middle school's belief and practices are heavily influenced by the principal. The middle school principal has established parent involvement as a priority essential to the academic success of the students. As teachers have bought into the utilization of academic teams and have experienced positive encounters with parents, relating to parent involvement, the more overlap or involvement with parents the middle school has received from the family and community to assist in the academic growth of all children.

The fourth force in the external component of Epstein's Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence is the Time/Age/Grade level of the child. The middle school receives an optimum overlap of partnerships with the parents, middle school, and community when all stakeholders act as true partners in their child's education. For middle school aged children, based on the researcher's experience as an administrator and teacher, the exemplary school has a tremendous amount of parent participation. The interviews from the parents, teachers, and administrator strongly support the amount of active parent participation.

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence involves a second component, the internal structures that drive the conceptual framework of this study. The internal structures consist of the intra-institutional and inter-institutional interactions of the family and school. The internal structure revolves around the communications that evolve between the family, the school, and the family and school. All communication and

interactions that occur between the family, school, and the family and school are focused on the child. The middle school has made it evident in the interviews and the archival data that its primary focus when communicating to parents is the child. Evidence in the teacher interviews suggests that when parents are unwilling or unable to have a conversation that centers on the child, the teachers will persevere communicating to the parents until the teachers are able to close the information gap between the teacher, child, and the parent.

Organizational/Supervisory Model of Instructional Supervision Compared to Research

Claudet (1999) says that the basic function of the principal involves molding the culture of the school and creating organizational goals for success. The principal of the middle school is responsible for integrating parent involvement as an organizational goal. The parents felt according to their interviews that parent involvement is a big part of the middle school and their presence is welcomed by their children's teachers and the principal. The teachers also felt that the principal expected them to contact parents on a regular basis and utilize the parent resource to meet academic objectives.

The organizational model of school instructional supervision (O/S) is developed into three key components: school inputs, mediating variables, and school outcome variables. The mediating variable in the organization model of school instructional supervision, "represent a complex set of interacting school social and organizational factors that serve to link model inputs and outcomes in unique ways from one school to the next" (Claudet, 1999). The school input (SI) at the middle school is developed by the principal, teachers, students, and parents. The inputs are mediated by the many micro-

and macro-communicative elements. Micro-communicative elements would include many of the informal interactions that occur between parents and teachers or administration and parents at the middle school. Examples would include conversations that teachers have with parents at extracurricular activities, the grocery store, or the courthouse. The macro-communicative elements would include the middle school principal's supervising and participating in teacher in-services regarding the development of a parent participation policy or at site-based meetings. There was evidence in the interviews indicating the principal influenced the macro-communicative element in leading the way for parent involvement.

Parent Involvement Policy and Campus Improvement Plan

The parent involvement policy for the middle school is incorporated into the middle school's campus improvement plan for both school years 2003-2004 and 2004-2005. The campus improvement plan addresses five of the six types of Epstein's parent involvement strategies. Many of the parent involvement activities serve multiple types of parent involvement strategies. The parent involvement activities that are targeted consist of Type 1: Parenting, Type 2: Communicating, Type 3: Volunteering, Type 4: Learning at Home, and Type 5: Decision Making. Type 6 was not concluded as a primary focus for the district by the researcher.

The types of parent involvement activities found in the parent involvement policy and campus improvement plan were also discussed in the interviews with the parents, teachers, and principal. The 2003-2004 campus plan had more activities listed than were included in the 2004-2005 school-year plan. All the activities that were mentioned in

both plans were being implemented and had been implemented in the last two years of the middle school according to the interviews.

Many of the parent involvement strategies mentioned in the interviews were not found in the campus improvement plan. The interviews with the principal and teachers suggested that many of the parent involvement strategies implemented were developed by the individual academic teams and not by the middle school leadership committee. The middle school did implement many school-wide strategies that can be found in Table D.1. None of the parents or teachers interviewed remembered having any conversations on the leadership committee regarding the development of school-wide parent involvement strategies. No site-based minutes were available or kept by the middle school to validate if any discussions had taken place regarding parent involvement.

Implications for Practice and Research

According to the results of this study, middle schools across Texas can utilize many of the strategies used by the exemplary middle school to create a parent involvement policy to help build academic success. Middle schools can learn from this study the many variables that are necessary to build a positive culture and climate of trust, collaboration, and team work. A positive culture and climate is essential in developing an effective parent involvement policy. At the same time, a valuable parent involvement policy that facilitates student academic achievement cannot exist without a positive climate and culture where trust, collaboration, and teamwork are evident between teachers, parents, and administrators. Five conclusions can be drawn from this study.

The first is that an effective parent involvement policy must offer a variety of parent involvement opportunities in each of the six types of parent involvement strategies suggested by Epstein (2001). Several goals can be accomplished by having a diverse set of parent involvement strategies. Each parent has different schedules, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and interests. If a parent is willing to become involved and has different options of parent involvement opportunities from which to choose, the parent will most likely find an area of interest and convenience. Next, a variety of different parent involvement strategies a school offers communicates openness and a sense of acceptance to all parents and newcomers. Schools must back up an invitation made to parents with sincerity and politeness to any parent who comes through the doors of the school regardless of ethnicity or social-economic status.

The second implication evident in the study is that schools must be effective at communicating to parents. Effective communication involves communicating bi-laterally to parents. Bi-lateral communication increases the school's pool of knowledge while keeping the lines of communication open. Teachers and the administration at the middle school communicate regularly to parents that their number one priority involves doing what is best for their children. Each of the parents interviewed truly believe that his or her child is the most important person at the middle school. As a result the parents have developed a sense of trust and support for their children's teachers, administration, and the school. The middle school must also be effective at communicating in the many traditional ways to parents. Parents expect to be kept informed by the school regarding their children's academic progress and available extracurricular activities. Schools must also employ the utilization of affirmative types of communication. Positive

communication enhances the relationship between home and school. Finally, schools can potentially benefit from communicating to their students' parents important information and upcoming events in many different formats. The more ways that a school communicates to parents, the more the parents will read the information and develop a feeling of sincerity and trust toward the school.

These different forms and types of communications are a part of the many micro- and macro-communicate elements described by Claudet (1999). The school inputs (SI) come from the administration and teachers at the middle school. The school inputs must consist of elements that build and sustain a positive culture and climate. All of the micro- and macro-communicate elements work together, but independently as Sergiovanni (1990) suggested in his Clock Works II scenario. Clock Works II is an example of how a school operates. All the gears and pins are spinning independently of one another, but at the same time are working together to accomplish a common goal. The "cultural cement" holds the organization together. The cultural cement must consist of ingredients that sustain healthy relationships between the parents, teachers, and administration.

The third implication of the study found in the research involves the responsibility for schools to create high academic standards for all students and then hold the parents and students accountable. A school could easily say that parents are uncooperative and allow the parent not to be bothered with their children's education. Contacting parents requires additional time and effort from teachers, but without the parent involvement, many children fall through the cracks. The teachers that were interviewed believe that the teachers and community at the middle school are committed to involving parents. The teachers and principal contact parents by phone, email, and notes sent home to

respectfully convey the needs of the middle school child. Most of the time the school's efforts will get the parents involved and to an extent the parents will take the initiative to become more responsible for their children's academic success. Demanding parent involvement by persevering can have potential repercussions if the teachers are not respectful and sincere in their requests.

The fourth implication for the study is the importance of having campus and district leadership that is devoted to parent involvement. Without the support of the administration creating a vision of the school that involves parents working together, then mandated parent involvement policies and policies that are created collectively by academic teachers and parents have the potential of being unsuccessful. At the middle school the principal regularly communicates to the teachers that he expects a high level of parent involvement. The teachers work together during the academic teaming time with parents for the success of the child. The vision and goal must be shared by the entire community before the highest level of parent involvement becomes the standard and high expectations are held for each of the stakeholders.

The fifth implication for the study is the value of stability within the school and district. Parents have a difficult time developing trust when there is a revolving door of administration and or teachers within a school system. Developing healthy and trusting relationships takes time and effort on the part of the principal and teachers. The more stability a school can have, the more relationships can be nurtured and evolve into mutual respect, collaboration, and teamwork. Stability can also bring potential hazards to a principal or teacher. Many parents expect that since they have known a teacher or administrator for a long time, then they should be given special privileges or

considerations. The superintendent of the middle school had parents that wanted him to change certain situations at the middle school just because they had a long-standing relationship. The superintendent refused to interfere with the principal's decisions unless a district policy was being violated.

In conclusion, to develop a parent involvement policy and strategies that have a large overlapping sphere of influence to help a school become exemplary takes time, collaboration, teamwork, and a morally strong faculty, staff, and administration. A site-based team cannot write a policy and implement a single strategy or a string of activities and expect to become successful the next day. The principal must facilitate the creation of a shared vision and goal of working with all parents as a team to strengthen and build a culture and climate of trust and respect with all the stakeholders in the school. Creating the foundation of a culture and climate that welcomes positive relationships will create opportunities where parents and teachers can work together constructively for the benefit of children. All of the parent involvement strategies used by the middle school can be used by any school to help build a list of strategies or to target a specific type of parent involvement strategy. The list must be considered along with the many other variables found in successful schools.

Future Research

This study is qualitative and utilizes the case study approach to learn about the parent involvement strategies used by an exemplary middle school for two consecutive years. A case study of a school can be defined by the systematic gathering of enough information about a particular organization to allow the investigator insight into the life

of that organization (Berg, 2004). The collection of the data was accomplished by the researcher interviewing multiple stakeholders in the middle school. The researcher interviewed the superintendent, principal, teachers, and parents. The campus improvement plan and parent involvement policy were also collected.

Scholars and practitioners will gain insight into how an exemplary middle school utilized parents to facilitate its academic success. The findings of this study were that parent involvement is essential in developing the academic success of a school. Future studies should be done to replicate the findings of this study in other middle schools that have maintained an exemplary status for at least two consecutive years. The literature needs additional information on the specific variables that established the foundation for a positive culture and climate in an exemplary middle school. The subject in this study was a mid-sized middle school with an economically disadvantaged and at-risk population of approximately 24%. More studies need to be done on larger exemplary middle schools and schools with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged and at-risk students. This type of qualitative study in Texas will have to wait until exemplary schools with higher percentages of economically disadvantaged and at-risk students exist.

The research of the exemplary middle school unveiled that even some of the most successful schools in the state of Texas are unsuccessful involving the parents of economically disadvantaged students. Research could make available to other schools options that the schools could have as they attempt to hold parents accountable for their children's lack of academic success. Future research could be done that would determine if holding parents accountable for their lack of parent involvement would facilitate the academic success of students when parents violate the student, parent, and school

compacts. Academic growth of all students could be possible if parents were required by the state to come to parent and teacher meetings and sign off on important student and parent activities. When the parents failed to comply with school and parent compacts, then the school could hold the parents accountable in ways that could be similar to the laws of thwarting in the State of Texas.

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APPENDIX A

DISSERTATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FOR THE SUPERINTENDENT, PRINCIPAL,
TEACHERS, AND PARENTS

SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Throw Away questions

1. How long have you been a superintendent in your current assignment?
2. What do you like most about being superintendent?
3. What are your future plans after retirement?

Essential Questions:

1. What role do you believe parents have in the academic success of their children and school?
2. What is the over all feeling that most parents share in the community of (School) that the schools have toward the involvement of parents in the school?
3. Does that feeling vary from what the school actually believes is the role of parents in your schools? Middle School?
4. Does the role parents have vary from campus to campus?
5. What have you done to promote parent participation in your district, primarily the middle school?
6. What does (School) do to involve the economically disadvantaged or minority parents in the (School) district?
7. What parental issues have you dealt with at (School), but more specifically at the middle school?
8. What types of conversations have you had with your principals/staff regarding parent involvement?
9. What do you believe is the key to facilitating the academic success of your district/middle school?
10. If you could do anything differently over the last thirty years at (School), as an administrator, what would it be?
11. Do you have anything else to share regarding the involvement of parents or keys to success of a district that I could take with me?

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Throw Away Questions:

1. How long have you been an administrator and in your current assignment?
2. What do you like most about being a principal?
3. What are your future professional plans?

Essential Questions:

1. What is the socio-economic and ethnographic representation of your school?
2. Do you feel that parent involvement is important in your school? Why?
3. Do you think that parent involvement facilitates the academic success of your students? How?
4. What role do parents have in the education of their children?
5. What are the different ways that you and your school communicate to parents?
6. What do you do to promote parent participation in your school?
7. What role does the principal have in the operation of the parent/teacher organization?
8. What types of diversity does (School)'s parent involvement policy offer regarding parent participation strategies?
9. How committed is your faculty and staff toward involving parents in the education of their students?
10. What does your school do to focus on specific sub populations in your school?
Example: Low socio-economic populations.
11. What process does your school use to create a parent involvement policy?
12. Have you provided any staff development for your faculty and staff regarding parent participation? What types?
13. What types of parent participation strategies have you found to be most successful in the academic achievement of students?
14. How successful do you believe the administration and teachers have been to involve parents that represent all your student sub-groups?
15. Do you perceive the mandates regarding parent participation in the NCLB and TEC as an obstacle or a tool for academic success? What is your rationale?
16. What do you think (School) Middle School could do to improve parent involvement?

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Throw Away Questions.

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. How long have you been a teacher at (School)?
3. What do you like most about being a teacher?

Essential Questions:

1. As a school, does (School) Middle School make parent involvement a priority? How?
2. How do you feel about parent involvement in your school and the influence it has on academic success?
3. What role do parents at (School) have in the education of their children?
4. What are the different ways that you and your school communicate to parents?
5. What do you do to promote parent participation in your class?
6. How committed do you believe the faculty and staff are toward involving parents in the education of the students at (School)?
7. Does your philosophy change pertaining to how you deal with parent involvement regarding specific sub populations in your class? Example: Economically disadvantaged populations, ethnic groups, etc.
8. What process does (School) use to create a parent involvement policy?
9. What kind of discussions have you been a part of with teachers at (School) Middle School, one-on-one, team, faculty, regarding parent involvement?
10. What types of parent participation strategies have you found to be most successful at (School) Middle School in the academic achievement of students? In the classroom and as a school?
11. How successful do you believe you and your school are at involving parents representing all of your student sub-groups?
12. What level of support do you have from the majority of parents at (School) Middle School?
13. What have you done to gain the support of those who you do not fully support you?
14. What do you think (School) Middle School could do to improve parent involvement in your school?

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Throw Away Questions.

1. Please tell me a little about yourself.
2. How long have you and your child been in the Spring Branch District?
3. What do you like most about (School) ISD?
4. What do you like the least about (School) ISD?

Essential Questions:

1. How comfortable do you feel about coming to visit your child's teachers at (School) Middle School? Principal? Attending a school-sponsored event?
2. Does (School) Middle School make parent involvement a priority? How?
3. What role do you believe parents have in the education of their children? The school?
4. What are the different ways that your school communicates to you as a parent?
5. Do you believe that your school effectively communicates to you regarding the academic progress of your child? Upcoming activities at (School)?
6. How does (School) Middle school promote parent participation in your child's class? Home? Attendance at activities? Policy development? Parenting tips?
7. How committed is the faculty and staff at (School) Middle school at involving parents in the education of their students?
8. Has (School) administration invited you to participate in any type of decision making in the past several years?
9. What type of parent involvement activities has (School) Middle School promoted at home?
10. What do you think (School) Middle School could do to improve parent involvement at home or at school?
11. How are you involved with the parent organization at (School) Middle School?
12. What do you do to help promote the involvement of other parents in the parent teacher organization at (School) Middle School?

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEWS RAW DATA
FOR PRINCIPAL, PARENTS,
SUPERINTENDENT, AND TEACHERS

Table B.1: INTERVIEWS OF PRINCIPAL, TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND SUPERINTENDENT

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
Principal	<p>90-93% white, 5% African American, 1% Asian</p> <p>Mobility rate is 14%</p> <p>30% economically disadvantaged</p>	<p>We have to make sure we have the communication with the parents.</p> <p>They do a great job of visiting with parents.</p> <p>They have parent conference on a regular basis.</p> <p>We have parent conferences for numerous reasons. Struggling, placement, doing a great job.</p> <p>There is an expectation for success.</p>	<p>I don't think you can have the success we have had over the years without having the parents involved (p. 10).</p>	<p>Scheduling kids in their electives.</p> <p>Team creates plan for child and parent expected to continue that plan.</p> <p>Parents sign off to ensure student success.</p> <p>Attend open house at first of year Dad's breakfast to talk about how to be more involved</p>	<p>We send tons of stuff home with our kids, obviously.</p> <p>Teachers call parents on a regular basis.</p> <p>Marquees, bank and school</p> <p>Community newspaper</p> <p>Website</p> <p>Back of report card</p>	<p>Academic teams.</p> <p>Outside speakers.</p> <p>Communication by multiple means.</p> <p>Different types of parent meetings. Dad breakfast, parent luncheons,</p> <p>Position notes (p. 12)</p> <p>Recognizing student of the week (p. 12).</p>	<p>I don't have much to do with that.</p> <p>My role is to show up for the meetings.</p> <p>Let the parents know.</p>	<p>Speakers come in and talk to the parents as part of a district-wide initiative.</p> <p>Parents meet with the upcoming sixth grade kids prior to the first day of school</p> <p>Targets all students because all students end up with the same problems like turning in their work.</p>
	Question 9	Question 10	Question 11	Question 12	Question 13	Question 14	Question 15	Question 16
Principal Continued	<p>Communicated throughout the interview how important parent participation is to the school and community of (School).</p>	<p>They are very committed.</p> <p>During their team time they discuss discipline, student, parents, everything they can during that time and try to get parents involved.</p> <p>Generated by parents and teachers.</p>	<p>The academic team works together to resolve individual issues of students with the parents.</p> <p>The team leader acts as the communication to the parents and the rest of the teachers.</p> <p>As a faculty we discuss parent involvement issues and involvement.</p>	<p>Different types of meetings with parents that tell us what they want to see.</p> <p>Licensed counselor that came in and did a district wide in-service.</p> <p>Loaded up a bus and drove the community to see where kids live.</p>	<p>The academic teaming time.</p>	<p>We have a high success rate of having parents come and talk with us which is awesome. (p. 3)</p> <p>We have 30-35% parents that attend the parent luncheons which is about 10% of the population.</p> <p>Teachers call parents on a regular basis.</p>	<p>As a tool.</p> <p>The more you get parents involved the more communication is open and more willingly to help.</p> <p>Teachers need to create that bond with those parents to let them know that we are not the bad guys.</p>	<p>More opportunities for outside speakers.</p> <p>Pick up parents and bring them to meetings.</p>

Table B.1 Continued.

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
Teacher 1	<p>We always have an open door policy.</p> <p>Teachers meet when the parents can meet.</p> <p>Everything we do we invite parents.</p> <p>There is not an option for parent involvement.</p> <p>Had a male figure breakfast.</p>		<p>They should have as much accountability as we do.</p> <p>We try to get the parents involved early on in a positive way.</p> <p>We do try to give them that positive outlook before the year ever starts.</p> <p>Our teaming tool is one of the best ways we get parent involvement.</p> <p>You get more volunteering parent involvement because you are getting better information from us that way.</p>	<p>Progress Reports.</p> <p>Emails</p> <p>Report cards</p> <p>Report cards with notes and schedule of events</p> <p>Phone system/message</p>	<p>100%</p> <p>Communicating both positive and negative</p>	<p>The one thing that has helped us do all that is high expectations regardless of where the kids come from</p> <p>The only subpopulation we have had to adjust for is the ESL.</p> <p>They are going to be successful</p>	<p>Team time is when we do that.</p> <p>WE coordinate our efforts in email to find out when we can meet and what weaknesses we will address.</p> <p>SBM is a little different at (School) and we have a lot of parent involvement in it.</p>	<p>Expectations for both the children and parents and holding them accountable for their actions.</p> <p>If they get frustrated with our level of accountability, they move (p. 15)</p>
	Question 9	Question 10	Question 11					
Teacher 1 Cont.	<p>We hold all kids to the same level of accountability no matter where they come from (p. 8).</p> <p>We have had some Asian and a few Hispanic kids and we don't change classroom instruction for any of them (p. 8).</p> <p>Economically disadvan-</p>		<p>We do everything else we can do short of dragging them out of bed.</p>					

	taged parents will be contacted at athletic events or in town if they refuse to come to school (p. 9).							
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Table B.1 Continued.

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
Teacher 2	<p>No, I think we try more than most schools.</p> <p>Middle school would like more parent involvement.</p>	<p>I think one of the reasons we are successful is because for the most part parents are involved in their kids' life.</p> <p>Most parents have their children doing what they are supposed to be doing and what they are responsible for.</p>	<p>The student that is successful is because the parents are involved.</p> <p>They support their kids by turning off the computers.</p> <p>Doing homework after school</p> <p>Attending athletic events, dance events, and extracurricular activities.</p> <p>You can't get parents involved that do not want to be involved with the school or their children.</p>			<p>You need to get them involved, but they are working minimum wage jobs and don't get home until 8, 9, or 10 o'clock. (p. 2).</p> <p>Most parents don't have time to get involved because they work.</p> <p>Lot of them stay at home because they have 2, 3, or more kids. (p.2)</p>	<p>Yes, when we have students that are falling behind.</p> <p>We make phone calls.</p> <p>In our team meetings we do.</p> <p>We try to contact parents.</p>	<p>We will send home assignment sheets.</p> <p>We will have parents in and we will give them an assignment list. (p. 5)</p> <p>I think just parents being aware of what their child is doing.</p> <p>I mean just the awareness of what they are doing in class and what they are involved in extracurricular.</p>
	Question 9	Question 10	Question 11					
Teacher 2 cont.		<p>Obviously we have a lot of successful kids and I think that comes from the parents.</p> <p>I think we are a very good school and we expect a lot and you don't have that support you will</p>	<p>Educating parents on stuff. (p. 7)</p> <p>Create more parent involvement that is administrative driven.</p>					

		not be as successful as we have been.						
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Table B.1 Continued.

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
Teacher 3	<p>Mr. Hinkle requires we call parents if the child is not doing well.</p> <p>We have a few parents that come in and PTO that think it is great.</p> <p>We have to call when a child is not doing well.</p> <p>After a few bad calls I like to call and make good calls.</p> <p>When we have an educational improvement committee parents are involved.</p> <p>The campus leadership committee has parents that serve.</p>	<p>I think if parents were more involved than they are our academics would go up.</p> <p>If parents saw what we are doing they would understand where we are coming from.</p>		<p>Notes home and they have to be signed to have documentation.</p> <p>We try to have more if there was a way of training them</p>		<p>Call them up for conferences like all children.</p> <p>Tell them how wonderful they are.</p> <p>Talk to them and ask them for help.</p> <p>Try to turn the negative around because they are pretty negative about it.</p>	<p>We have lunch with parents that want.</p> <p>I want to make sure the conversations ends up very positive</p>	
	Question 9	Question 10						
Teacher 3 cont.		<p>We had a pride day and everyone came out on campus and spelled out words.</p> <p>A lot of parents come to (School) because they know that we are going to push them.</p> <p>When they come to activities and see all</p>						

		that they are proud of (School) as we are. A lot of people come here because of the school.						
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Table B.1 Continued.

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
Parent 1	<p>I found out among the teachers there was no discrimination and my kids enjoyed the schools. (p. 1)</p> <p>Yes, I do!</p> <p>I can't name specific ones, but I see what is happening.</p> <p>I was a little bit resentful at one time because they require too much parent attention.</p> <p>I was called out for parent conferences.</p> <p>I see love and caring.</p>		<p>I believe my role may be greater that I can facilitate.</p> <p>The teachers send home a schedule of the activities that are going on and of course I believe my role is to work with my child within that schedule.</p> <p>Try to encourage her and motivate her to do the best that she can do.</p>	<p>One way is telephone.</p> <p>The teachers ask me to come down when they need something.</p> <p>They have open programs where they want us to come in and get involved.</p> <p>They sponsor and foster the parent teacher organization.</p> <p>They encourage us to be at football games or whatever they have.</p> <p>Progress reports.</p> <p>Notes when my daughter is doing well.</p>	<p>Yes, gave specific examples of different ways the school communicates in previous question.</p>	<p>I know that my daughter will come home and tell a lie. I know that. That is the kind of trust they have instilled in me. (p. 8)</p>	<p>I have made a point to get to know my daughter's teachers. Now, I don't know if it is a front or what, but I see genuine interest.</p> <p>The principal I have known for a long time and he is as straight up as you can get.</p> <p>He allows you latitude; he does not have the superior attitude. (p. 7).</p>	<p>They may have but I can't recall them having done that at all.</p>
	Question 9	Question 10	Question 11	Question 12	Question 13			
Parent 1 cont.		<p>By membership only. (p. 5)</p> <p>I do not do a lot of attending.</p> <p>I have always felt welcome, but choose not to attend. (p. 5).</p>	<p>I don't believe in networking unless we are trying to accomplish a goal.</p>	<p>I have not tried to second guess the district what they have done. (p. 5)</p> <p>I have not tried to figure out what they could do better. I guess they do such a great job.</p>				

Table B.1 Continued.

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
Parent 2	<p>Certainly, very comfortable.</p> <p>The teachers are very open and willingly to meet with us.</p> <p>WE have had very good relationships.</p>	<p>I think try to.</p> <p>Have meetings that work out with the schedule of parents.</p> <p>Have functions like the parent dinner, parent luncheon.</p> <p>Try to get the parents to come in, visit, discuss, and talk about topics the community has.</p> <p>Communicate to everyone by gathering and giving you information you need to know.</p>		<p>On a personal level we see them in the community and at games and we talk.</p> <p>Technology, emailing, faxing, use the web (web page.)</p> <p>I like best is the personal.</p> <p>They bring notes home from kids at school and things of that nature.</p> <p>They let us know if they are doing something that is really good.</p>			<p>I feel like they are very committed.</p> <p>Provide us good tutors, other kids that make good tutors for them to work with.</p> <p>Are willingly to change their schedule to meet the needs of the parents.</p> <p>Parents were concerned about child's grades in the sixth grade, communicated to parents and the changes were implemented even presently two years later.</p>	<p>I have been a part of their leadership program for two years.</p> <p>We did not make any particular policy changes, but we discussed what happened and they are always open to our ideas that we have.</p>
	Question 9	Question 10	Question 11	Question 12	Question 13			
Parent 2 cont				<p>That is pretty tough.</p> <p>They seem to go out of their way to get the parents commitment.</p>				

Table B.1 Continued.

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
Parent 3	<p>I don't have a problem with that.</p> <p>I think they really are interested.</p> <p>When I do talk to them it is like they are interested only in my daughter. Which they have so many. That is how they make me feel. My child is the only one.</p> <p>If there is ever a problem I just call them or email them and they return the call/email.</p>	<p>I don't know about a priority, but they are always encouraging us to come.</p> <p>Sign up here, parents welcome.</p> <p>Have lunch once six weeks and they tell us what is going on.</p>	<p>A priority.</p> <p>They are number one.</p> <p>They are their basics their.</p> <p>(School) does a great job of backing up what we, at least what I, try to do at home.</p> <p>They are doing a great job.</p>	<p>Fliers, the marquee at the community center, the bank, newspaper, they do announcements, football games.</p>	<p>I can tell that they are not here for the pay.</p> <p>I see the love and the caring and the honesty from the teachers.</p>		<p>Always inviting parents to come to school.</p> <p>Respond to needs of parents about their children.</p>	<p>Yes, but sometimes it is fragmented between the new and experienced teachers. 13H</p>
	Question 9	Question 10	Question 11	Question 12	Question 13			
Parent 3 cont.	<p>I don't attend a lot of the PTO meetings because we are involved in so many activities.</p>		<p>I spend time talking with the other kids and getting to know each of them. (p. 5)</p>					

Table B.1 Continued.

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Question 6	Question 7	Question 8
Superint.	<p>They have the most important role, in some ways the very most important role.</p> <p>Set the attitude of the child.</p> <p>The parents have always revered and respected the school what it stands for and what it is trying to do.</p> <p>For the most part parents come and we work very closely together.</p>	<p>I think most feel welcome.</p> <p>I think some parents feel a little bit intimidated as a result of the team academic approach to academics.</p>	<p>Elementary participation in pairs, reading program.</p> <p>As kids get older more of chaperone type roles.</p>	<p>Having a total open-door policy.</p> <p>Since I have been here so many years there is a line of communication.</p> <p>We promote the success of all children by not leaving anyone out of an extracurricular program.</p>		<p>The campuses keep me informed surrounding parent involvement.</p> <p>Principals have already been established</p> <p>Always has been mutual respect between parents and teachers.</p> <p>Predecessor spent a lot of time with me before he hired me years ago, regarding what it was to be a roughneck surrounding the community and parents.</p> <p>Make yourself available to parents.</p>	<p>Today's kids have emotional needs, but if can make them feel like that we trust them out of love and concern.</p> <p>District has philosophy we have to capitalize on making the kids feel wanted and will increase academic success.</p>	<p>Listen more and don't make predetermined decisions, but listen to every side, collaborate more on particular problems.</p>
	Question 9							
Superint. Cont.	<p>I would like to see much more parent involvement in the sense. So much going on in a kid's life.</p> <p>I would like to see more involvement in the PTA/PTO.</p>							

APPENDIX C

ARCHIVAL DATA

FOR CAMPUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN
AND PARENT INVOLVMENT POLICY

Table C.1: PARENTS INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES FROM INTERVIEWS AND ARCHIVAL DATA FROM CAMPUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Type 6
<p>Campus Improvement Plan (03-04)</p> <p>Campus Improvement Plan (04-05)</p>	<p>Monthly luncheon for parents/guardians of middle school students to discuss WOMS activities. (03-04) (04-05)</p>	<p>Provide parents information regarding appropriate parent workshops. (03-04)</p> <p>Parent/guardian meeting for incoming 6th grade students. (03-04) (04-05)</p> <p>Parent/Guardian awareness session for GT. (03-04)</p> <p>Open House for parent/guardian. (03-04) (04-05)</p> <p>Parent/guardian meeting concerning FACTS curriculum (03-04)</p> <p>Monthly luncheon for parents/guardians of middle school students to discuss WOMS activities. (03-04) (04-05)</p>	<p>Monthly luncheon for parents/guardians of middle school students to discuss WOMS activities. (03-04) (04-05)</p> <p>Provide parents information regarding appropriate parent workshops. (03-04)</p> <p>Parent/guardian meeting for incoming 6th grade students. (03-04) (04-05)</p> <p>Parent/Guardian awareness session for GT. (03-04)</p> <p>Open House for parent/guardian. (03-04) (04-05)</p> <p>Parent/guardian meeting concerning FACTS curriculum (03-04)</p>	<p>Parent/guardian meeting concerning FACTS curriculum (03-04)</p>	<p>Monthly luncheon for parents/guardians of middle school students to discuss WOMS activities. (03-04) (04-05)</p>	
	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Type 6
Site based minutes	None	None	None	None	None	None

Table C.1 Continued

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4	Type 5	Type 6
Interviews	<p>Parenting Dinner (Provide parenting tips from various speakers)</p> <p>Parent Luncheon (Provide parenting tips from various speakers)</p> <p>Father/Son Breakfast (set up father/son activities like hunting and fishing)</p> <p>District-wide speakers that provide parenting tips.</p>	<p>Fliers</p> <p>Marquee at community center and bank</p> <p>Newspaper</p> <p>Announcements at football game</p> <p>Phone calls</p> <p>Capability of leaving messages</p> <p>Website</p> <p>Progress reports</p> <p>Report cards (schedule of events on back of report card)</p> <p>Assignment sheet for parents</p> <p>Activity calendars</p> <p>Newsletter</p> <p>Emails</p> <p>Academic Team of teachers</p> <p>Send home positive notes</p> <p>Communicate High expectations to parents and students (Hold parents accountable to the extent possible for the child)</p> <p>Request parents sign documents, attending conferences, return phone calls, etc..</p> <p>Welcome back to school night</p>	<p>Beautification project at the middle school (parents bring equipment and work with students)</p> <p>Parent/Teacher Organization</p> <p>Pride Day</p> <p>Invite parents to all student activities (Athletic, UIL, Band, Choir, etc.)</p> <p>Student recognition activities to get parents to attend school functions.</p>	<p>Specific activities set up by teachers.</p>	<p>Campus leadership committee</p> <p>Educational improvement committee</p> <p>Open Door Policy</p>	<p>Father/Son Breakfast set up father/son activities like hunting and fishing (Community members show up to see what is going on and volunteer to sponsor activities)</p>

SIX TYPES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT FRAMEWORK

- Type 1: Parenting
- Type 2: Communicating
- Type 3: Volunteering
- Type 4: Learning at Home
- Type 5: Decision Making
- Type 6: Collaborating with the Community