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# Parental Involvement in a Northwest Georgia School District

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Parental Involvement in a Northeast Georgia School District

By

VERONICA T. BEASLEY HUNTER

(Under the Direction of Linda M. Arthur)

ABSTRACT

For decades, parental involvement has had a direct impact on the success of children.

Portions of the No Child Left Behind Act include important requirements for schools,

districts, and states to organize programs for parental involvement and to implement

ways to communicate with parents and the public about student achievement and the

quality and performance of schools. According to Gonzalez (2002), teachers and

administrators struggle with the lack of parental involvement on a daily basis. He

concludes that finding ways to make parents feel more comfortable and welcome would

improve the communication and relationship between parents and schools.

The purpose of this study was to explore what prevents and promotes parental

involvement in schools. It was the intent of this study to determine whether the school is

implementing practices that promote parental involvement. This study provided data that

helped the school district adhere to the parental involvement portion of NCLB that

encourage schools to work with parents on becoming and staying involved with the

education of their children.

The methodology employed to collect data in this study was a focus group, parent

interviews, and student surveys with open-ended questions. The pool of twenty-one

purposive sample participants in this study included two from each of the following

categories: the elementary schools, the middle and the high schools; administrators and

county office personnel; six parents and six students from elementary, middle and high school in a Northeast Georgia school district.

The analysis of data in this study revealed the following themes; communication, reliability, accountability and responsibility, and emotional support promotes parental involvement; and lack of time, lack of education, lack of language proficiency, lack of maturity, and lack of active involvement are the barriers revealed that prevented parental involvement. The result of these findings indicated schools, parents, and students recognized the importance of home-school relationships and were willing to work towards establishing partnerships.

The data from this study correlated with the research questions and indicated that promoting parental involvement would aid in the success of schools and students in a Northeast Georgia school district. When schools promote parental involvement by action and not just in word, no child will be left behind.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN A NORTHEAST GEORGIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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VERONICA T. BEASLEY HUNTER

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Committee: Cherry Brewton
Saba Jallow

Electronic Version Approved:
May 2009

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my children and grandchildren Cory, Yolanda, Aishia, Aiyana, Brandon, Cordre', Cordell and Jayden. As your children grow, stay involved in their educational life. Be persistent and with your faith in God all things are possible. As William Faulkner said, "Always dream and shoot higher than you know how to. Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries or predecessors. Try to be better than yourself." Reach beyond the break and hold on to your ability to be all that God would have you to be.

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I give God all the praise and glory for allowing me the courage to pursue this task. You were there with me during the difficult and trying times of this voyage.  I always count on You to guide my footsteps.

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I thank the participants of my study. You were a great help. Your cooperation was truly appreciated.

I truly thank my friends for their support and encouragement.  Even though I did not start with you guys (Ernestine and Vickie), I have gotten to the finish line and crossed. Angeline, Carol, and Valerie thanks for the phone calls of encouragement and I look forward to seeing you cross the finish line. Judy, although you made me tired in this race, you set the pace; thanks for the challenge, the rides and the encouragement. Allison O., Mrs. Faye, my roommate Ms. Mac, Mr. Boggs, My Angel, Jamie, Ashley, Cynthia H., Marilyn W., Ms. Marie, and my GAE Buds; Elaine, Rena, and Brenda along with my posse; Chanda, Tracy, Sherry, Michelle, and Vicki -thank you, thank you, thank you. My friends, Addie for the late nights helping me stay awake to type, Janice for your support throughout all the degrees.

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To my husband, Reginald, I finally finished school. Thanks for seeing me through all those years. I will always remember my party and my trip to Hawaii. Love ya!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Parental involvement in education seems to be a more important influence than poverty, school environment and the influence of peers."
**DfES,** *Every Child Matters* (Green Paper)

In its sixth year of implementation, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has received a vast amount of attention. Portions of its agenda include important requirements for schools, districts, and states to organize programs for parental involvement and to implement ways to communicate with parents and the public about student achievement and the quality and performance of schools. One of the barriers that impeded student progress was the lack of parental involvement in the education of students (Ballen & Moles, 1994). Parental involvement, a national goal, has proven to be necessary for maximum effectiveness in learning as mentioned in the Goals 2000: American Education Act.

According to Gonzalez (2002), teachers and administrators struggled with the lack of parental involvement on a daily basis. He concluded that finding ways to make parents feel more comfortable and welcome would improve the communication and relationship between parents and schools. Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, & Whetsel (2005) stated that when parents helped and encouraged their children to learn at home, their children developed positive attitudes toward school, which resulted in the personal growth and academic success of their children. There was a national effort to increase meaningful family involvement in education, the goal of which is to enhance positive educational and developmental outcomes for children (Child, Youth, and Family Consortium). Richard Riley, U. S. Secretary of Education, announced in 2004 the

formation of a nationwide partnership to support the goal of greater family involvement in children's learning. The U. S. Department of Education joined with the 45 member National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education to promote the central role of the family in inspiring children to learn and achieve (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, & Whetsel, 2005). These efforts represented the importance of building an infrastructure for educational outcomes (Rich, 1980).

Background of Study

*Parental Involvement*

Traditionally, parental involvement has been defined as parents providing support for education by making sure that their children attended school, arrived ready to learn, and received help with homework (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001).  Parental involvement grew out of a desire to include parents in their children's education, but in school prescribed ways. This approach was often considered to be aligned with traditional, middle class values about education. Educators viewed parents and school staff members as fulfilling separate roles and responsibilities for educating and socializing children and youth (Trotman, 2001).

Parental involvement was seen as an important strategy for the advancement of the quality of education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Hoover-Dempsey and others further stated that when parents assisted and encouraged their children to learn at home, their children developed positive attitudes toward school, which resulted in the personal growth and academic success of their children, which in turn benefited the schools. Direct parent involvement in instruction seemed to be the single most powerful approach for developing achievement benefits (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001).

Lezotte, an educational consultant and commentator, compiled a book that reinforced the concept that parents should be involved in education. He found that children were profoundly impacted by the way home and schools interconnect. Gonzalez (2002) and Trusty (1998) agreed that children of parents who were actively involved in their education reaped many positive benefits. Improved attitudes toward school, increased achievement, and higher self-esteem were examples of the positive benefits that these students reaped.

While schools can operate without parents, for schools to achieve maximum effectiveness, parental involvement was important (Trusty, 1998). A network of caring adults, working together to achieve a common goal, formed a powerful learning community (Gonzalez, 2002). This learning community became powerful as parents, teachers, administrators, faculty and staff, and students worked together to form an alliance to promote parental involvement.

*Benefits of Parental Involvement*

As Cotton & Wikelund (2001) and Trusty (1998) noted, there are many benefits for school systems, and for parents themselves, when parents became involved in their children's education. School personnel benefited from the improved relationship that generally accompanied increased parental involvement. This relationship was often articulated in parents' increased willingness to support schools with their labor and resources during fundraising activities, special projects, and/or emergency situations. Ballen & Moles (1994) agreed that there are many ways in which parental involvement benefited students' achievement, attitudes, and behavior, all of which had a positive impact on school staff.

Walberg, Bole, & Waxman (1980) investigated parents of students in grades 1-6 in 41 classes in Chicago and recorded the results. Children of actively involved parents made significantly greater academic gains than children of non-involved parents. Dornbusch & Ritter (1988) conducted a study with six San Francisco Bay Area high schools and reported that students whose parents attended school events and engaged in contacts with teachers experienced higher achievement than those whose parents were minimally involved or uninvolved. These authors were in concordance with Cotton & Wikelund (1989), who stated that when parents are involved in their children's education, all stakeholders benefited.

Through a research project, Epstein (1986) devised a list of benefits associated with parental involvement in a child's education. Benefits for students included improved academic performance, improved school behavior, greater academic motivation, and lower dropout rates. Benefits for parents included enhanced sense of adequacy, self-worth, and self-confidence, new ideas for helping their children learn as a result of working in the school environment, increased knowledge of child development, strengthened social networks, expanded community-involvement opportunities and networks, increased feelings of control over their environment, and positive rapport with schools.

Several researchers have documented the effectiveness of parental involvement (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). They suggested strategies such as maintaining open channels of communication with the teacher(s) and continued monitoring of children's progress in school as benefits of promoting parental involvement. The benefits of parental involvement were not limited to students and

parents; parent participation had a lasting impact on teachers and schools as well (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Helping parents understand the needs of schools, and helping schools understand how to optimize parents as resources were key factors. Bringing the two sides together to form a strong partnership was challenging, but when achieved, immeasurable benefits resulted (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997).

*Barriers that Impede Parental Involvement*

One common barrier to the development of partnerships was narrow conceptualization of how parents can be involved (Weiss & Edwards, 1992). There was a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities between families and educators. According to Rich (1980), there were some barriers that impeded parental involvement. He stated that time, culture/language, lack of a supportive environment, attitudes/misperceptions, training, inability to help with schoolwork, lack of responsiveness to parental needs, and negative experiences with schools for teachers or parents were all barriers hindering parental involvement.

A study by Shartrand, et. al. (1977) comparably stated that there were barriers that impede parental involvement. The study concluded that it is not uncommon for the same small group of parents to show up to volunteer or participate in school activities. It also was not uncommon for parents to find themselves wanting to be involved, but feeling unwelcome in the school and unsure how they fitted in. The study also stated that helping parents understand the needs of schools, and helping schools understand how to optimize parents as resources, were key to bringing the two sides together to form a strong partnership. Trotman (2001) identified other barriers that included family structure,

parental socio-economic status, parents' schedules, parental educational level, and teacher expectations.

Bracey (2001) supported the view that parents' working schedules limited their participation in their children's education. The study consisted of 1,280 mothers who completed a Behavior Problem Index. Five hundred eighty-two mothers had children in the top and 280 had children at the bottom of the Peabody Individual Achievement Test in reading. Forty percent of this sample above the poverty line had no paid sick leave, 67% below the poverty line had no paid sick leave, 46% had no paid vacation, and 67% could not leave their jobs to be involved in their children's education. This resulted in a problem for teachers when scheduling conferences, even outside of school hours.

In recent years, there has been a surge in the development of programs that increased family involvement in education (Strong Families, Strong Schools, 1994). Documented from their research, 40 % of parents across the United States believed they are not devoting enough time to their children's education. Teachers ranked strengthening parents' roles in their children's learning as the issue that should have received the highest priority in public education policy in the 1990s. Among students aged 10-13, 72% said they would like to talk to their parents about schoolwork, 48% of older adolescents (14-17 years old) agreed; and 89% of business executives identified lack of parental involvement as the biggest obstacle to school reform. Despite the research that existed on parental involvement and the experts who agreed on its importance, schools often struggled to engage a significant number of parents (Manitoba Department of Education and Training, 1994).

*Strategies*

While most researchers and practitioners agreed that parental involvement was an important indicator of school success for children (Henderson & Beria, 1994), consensus on what activities constituted the most effective involvement continues to puzzle experts in the field. Just as parents were essential players in the educational process, teachers were just as instrumental. From their daily practices, teachers provided pertinent information regarding which goals and activities aided parents in helping children experience success.

Teachers searched for ways to improve academic progress and ways to get parents involved in their children's education (Edwards & Warin, 1999). Bob Chase, author of The New Public School Parent (2002), suggested that in order for parents to be involved, they have to want to be involved and the only way that occurred was if they have compelling, meaningful, and personal incentives for doing so. He also states that parents must show children with actions, not just words, that they really care about education. In addition, he provided parents with an empowerment tool that addressed the most important issues for public school parents today, such as: getting the most out of the parent-teacher conference, facing standardized tests, understanding how the child learns, making sure the child is challenged, and what to do when the child falls behind.

The more familiar parents were with the workings of the school and the more the school knew about parents, the better off the children were. Schools depended on the support of parents (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001), but Epstein (1991) said that parents were uncertain about how to help their children with schoolwork, how to support their

children's schooling, and what their roles were concerning their children's education. In addition, many parents said that they were willing to spend more time on activities with children if educators gave them more guidance. There are numerous tasks; most of this assistance was given with reading, some with writing and some with routine mathematics, as well as volunteering to provide assistance in the school as teachers' aides, for which parent volunteers were critical (Edwards & Warin, 1999). The authors continued by saying that successful programs were based on essential partnership characteristics (trust and reciprocity) inside and outside the family; and were an integral part of the ways schools function. Principles of an effective home-school partnership, as identified by The League of Schools Project (Davies, 1991) were as follows:

1. Every aspect of the school building, including general climate, was open, helpful, and friendly to parents.

2. Communications with parents—whether about school policies and programs or about their own children—were frequent, clear, and two-way.

3. Parents were treated by teachers as collaborators in the educational process. Parents' own knowledge, expertise, and resources were valued as essential to their children's success in school.

4. The school recognized its responsibility to forge a partnership with all families in the school, not simply those most available.

The way parents were involved at school was linked to improved learning, and parental involvement programs were designed to develop close working relationships between families and teachers (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

*Conclusion*

Parental involvement contributed to a nurturing environment in schools. Parents should be in the forefront in order to ensure maximum achievement for students. It was important that educators focus on parental involvement in a child's education and the necessity for the child to be aware that involvement between school and home is a mutual respectful relationship. Educators should look for ways to actively keep parents involved as students move through higher grades. Parents and educators often hold each other at arm's length; unsure of the role each plays in improving the relationship between their involvement and the children's academic success. When parents are actively involved in their children's education at home and in school, students are more apt to become successful.

Statement of Problem

In today's society, fostering home-school cooperation requires time, effort, and an investment from both the parents and the school.  In an effort to improve student achievement, parental involvement is essential. Students whose parents are actively involved in their academia are often more successful than those whose are not. Many legislators, researchers, and educators agree that parental involvement is an important factor that can influence academic achievement. The end results are that students benefit, and all those stakeholders involved will reap the benefits and receive profound rewards.

This calls for a re-evaluation of the assumptions that have traditionally defined parental involvement in the school. For decades parental involvement has been defined as basically voluntary work in schools. Most educators view parent involvement as coming

to school and meeting the teachers. There is now a need for true commitment to opening opportunities for participation to all families. School staff members require administrative support, time, and access to resources if they are to work cooperatively with their students' families. A growing body of research supports the multiple benefits that occur when parents are actively involved in their children's education, but the strategies that schools employ to promote parental involvement have not been fully studied. The body of research leaves one to ponder how involved parents are in the education of their children. There is a desire for parents to become involved in their children's education but the consensus on what strategies constitute the most effective involvement continues to puzzle experts in the field.

The purpose of this study was to explore what prevents and promotes parental involvement and to look at the manner in which parental involvement is being encouraged and utilized in schools. It was the intent of this study to determine whether the school is implementing practices that promote parental involvement at a school district in Northeast Georgia. This qualitative study explored the views from participants regarding parental involvement. The researcher and district benefited from this study by being able to look at what promotes and prevents parental involvement in a Northeast Georgia School to help their children experience success throughout their careers in the system.

<center>Significance of Study</center>

National and state legislators have made parental involvement in students' education a priority. Schools in this century are faced with a surfeit of challenges. Preparing children to function in the world is of utmost importance. It is evident, from the

literature, that parental involvement is important in student success but just how involved are parents in their children's education?

Professionally, academically failing schools, the decline of achievement tests scores, implausible school quality, and widespread mistrust of schools have created a renewed interest in getting parents involved in their child's education. While much has been documented about parental involvement, there remains a need to further understand how school practices influence the degree of parental involvement.

This study provided data that helped the school district adhere to the parental involvement portion of NCLB that encourages schools to work with parents on becoming and staying involved with the education of their children throughout their educational careers. This initiative included important requirements for schools, districts, and states to organize programs for parental involvement and to implement ways to communicate with parents and the public about student achievement and the quality and performance of schools.

Even though in this district parents desire to become involved in their children's education, the specific strategies and tasks needed to assist parents in becoming involved have not been appropriately developed. This information was attained through strategic planning committees working on school improvement within the county. One of the ten strategic plans included Parents and Community involvement. The staff plays a vital role in the assistance of getting parents involved in their children's education. However, they have had little involvement in the national debate about what works best in getting parents involved. Assessing the views of the focus groups, collecting data from interviews with parents, and student surveys in this district showed, specifically, what

promotes and prevents parental involvement. From this information the study was used to aid the district in understanding what promotes and prevents parental involvement.

The results of this study will aid in developing programs designed to increase and permanently involve parents in their children's education in this school district. The researcher's interest is developing a PALS program, Parents Assisted by Leaders to Succeed. This program would allow parents the opportunity to have a mentor within the school to help them remain informed and involved in the education of their children. Leaders, as well as other adults, in the community to help keep them on the correct path of assisting with their child's education, would assist these parents. Therefore, it was necessary to find out what promotes and prevents parental involvement in the education of children in this school district.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

<div align="center">The research questions are these:</div>

1. What promotes parental involvement in the school's educational program?
2. What prevents parental involvement in the school's educational program?

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

The researcher used a qualitative research design to investigate the perspectives and experiences of individuals and groups regarding parental involvement. Qualitative research design helped the researcher gain insight and an in-depth understanding of phenomena. This study was conducted using a focus group. Focus groups are a powerful means to evaluate services and test new ideas. One can get a great deal of information from a focus group. An essential element of the focus group methodology was the authoritarian role that the researcher has by virtue of the face-to-face involvement in

guiding the discussion. The researcher used non-verbal inputs as an important part of the information that was collected during a focus group session. Along with the focus group discussions, the Nominal Group Technique developed by Delbecq & Van de Ven in 1971 was used for this study. This technique is a structured form of brainstorming to allow participants to share ideas. This method provided participants with input in identifying issues and problems, and in creating solutions.

The researcher used surveys with open-ended questions as a means to collect data from students and person-to-person interviews with parents. The researcher compiled data received from participants and used it to formulate what promoted and prevented parental involvement in a Northeast Georgia school district.

Participants

The target population for this study was teachers, principals, county personnel, parents, and students across all grade levels in the Northeast Georgia School district. The researcher contacted the schools and county office to obtain names of potential participants. After the names were obtained, the researcher selected the participants for the focus group from a hat drawing containing names of teachers from the six elementary schools, the middle school, and the high school, as well as administrators and county office personnel. The hats were individually labeled. Two names from each hat were drawn, two elementary teachers, two middle school teachers, and two high school teachers, two administrators and one county office personnel participant. The focus group consisted of nine participants.  The participants received an email for confirmation of participation in the group. The researcher sent the participants a cover letter with information concerning the project. The group was later contacted with the meeting time

and place. The researcher contacted each school counselor and requested names of parents involved in the education of their children and names of those not involved in the education of their children. From thirty-five parents, six were randomly chosen from a hat drawing to participate in the face-to-face interview. The participants received an email and/or phone call for confirmation to participate in the interviews. The researcher sent the participants a cover letter with information concerning the project. The participants were later contacted with the meeting time and place.

Six students were randomly selected from a counselor-generated list of fifty students from elementary, middle and high schools. Permissions were obtained from parents allowing students to participate in the survey. The participants' parents received an email to confirm student participation in the group. The researcher sent the participants' parents a cover letter with information concerning the project. The parents were later contacted with the meeting time and place. Students were asked to complete a survey using specific questions about parental involvement.

<div align="center">Instrumentation</div>

Ethical considerations by Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman (1987); Marshall & Rossmen (1989); Mirriam (1988); and, Spradley (1980) were made. Safeguards were employed to protect the informant's rights: 1) the research objectives were articulated verbally and in writing as a means of clarity by the informant; 2) written permission to proceed with the study was received from the informant; 3) a research exemption form was filed with the Institutional Review Board; 4) the informant was advised of all data collection devices and activities; 5) verbatim transcriptions and written interpretations and reports were made available to the informant; 6) the informant's rights, interests and

wishes were considered when choices were made regarding reporting the data; and 7) the final decision regarding informant anonymity rests with the informant.

Focus group questions used in this study were intended to generate participants' thoughts and beliefs regarding parental involvement. There were questions used to probe for practical suggestions concerning what promotes and prevents parental improvement.

The interview questions for parents were open ended in order to gain a variety of data. The data were compiled for the school district as well as for the project.

The survey questions for students were open ended to generate responses regarding parental involvement.

Data Collection

The researcher obtained permission from the Superintendent, principal of each school, dissertation committee and the Georgia Southern Institutional Review Board. The study was conducted during the 2008-2009 school year. The participants chosen were sent an information packet explaining the rationale and purpose of the study, and a letter of consent. Participants were asked to respond via e-mail if they were willing to participate in the focus group session. There was a focus group consisting of two participants from each group of certified teachers from various grade levels, elementary, middle and high, administrators and one county office personnel. Six students; one elementary student, two middle school students and three high school students completed surveys with opened-ended questions. Six parents were interviewed. Sessions were scheduled after school with an option for meeting times and places. Surveys were done with the researcher during the school day and interviews were conducted as scheduled. A reminder was sent out to participants before each session.

Data Analysis

The data were collected and analyzed. It consisted of results from the focus group session, interviews and surveys. The information was transcribed from an audiotape to identify themes and patterns. This data were further discussed for recommendations in this school district.

Limitation

The following limitation may affect the interpretation of the results:

Information gathered from the schools in this district may not generalize to other schools.

Summary

The lack of parental involvement is an issue in this Northeast Georgia school district. Identifying the views of certified staff, parents, and students, on what promotes and prevents parental involvement will enhance the academic growth of their children. Providing parents with ways to promote parental involvement will assist teachers in reaching students. Parental involvement in schools is much more than parent conferences and PTOs. If educators are to reach their goal of producing successful students, they must partner with the people ultimately responsible for those students -- the parents. Getting parents involved is no easy task; however, this study provides insight as to what promotes and prevents parental involvement.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Overview

Traditionally, parental involvement has been defined as parents' responsibility for supporting education by making sure that their children are attending school, arriving ready to learn, and providing help with homework (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001). Parent involvement grew out of a desire to include parents in their children's education, but in school prescribed ways.  This approach is often considered to be aligned with traditional middle class values about education and how parents and school staff members are serving separate roles and responsibilities for education and socializing child and youth (Trottman, 2001).

It has long been recognized that parents are the child's first teachers and that the home is his or her first classroom (Berger, 1995).  In the nation's early years, the degree to which parents provided formal education varied greatly across geographic and economic lines (Berger, 1995). During the 19th century, parents generally relinquished to professionals their responsibility for the education of their children.  Parents at that time were able to exert great control per schools through the influence of both home and church. In many instances, this control extended to such important issues as curriculum, calendars, and hiring (Bowen, 2003).

This trend began to reverse itself in the 1920s. With the spread of compulsory attendance laws, preschool and parent-education programs grew in popularity. The general acceptance of teaching as a profession began to change the face of parental involvement in schools (Berger, 1995; Bowen, 2003; Zelman & Waterman, 1998).

During this period, there existed a climate in which parents and educators perceived a common culture. Parental involvement had entered what Henderson, et. al, (2007) called the "bake sale" mode. This mode is a practical set of strategies designed to help schools move beyond the cursory, static types of relationships with parents that have been so common in our K-12 schools, toward the development and sustainment of meaningful, dynamic relationships among schools and families.

Sweeping societal changes took place in the two decades following World Was II. As the "baby boomer" generation began to move through elementary schools in the 1950s, teachers typically held the view that they should teach and parents should simply be supportive of the teachers and the school (Berger, 1995). The nature of the typical American family had been influenced by two important factors: (a) changes in the mother's role caused by her entrance into the work force and (b) changes in the typical American family brought on, in large part, by the growing questioning of all institutions.

In more recent history, new emphases have emerged. Parents were influenced by research n the 1970s that suggest they should play a greater role in school governance because both they and their children were influenced by school decisions (Lightfoot, 1978; Sarason, 1971). Calls for parental involvement in the 1980s were motivated by something quiet different, i.e. parents' dissatisfaction with poor student achievement and the resultant desire for influence in the school's decision-making process (Murphy, 1990). As a consequence, school districts across the nation responded to parents' demands for the decentralization of power to the school level and to the empowerment of parents on site-based councils (Feurstein, 2000). Parents were often included in significant matters such long-range curricular planning and decisions regarding the use of school resources.

As many in the nation increasingly shifted toward more conservative values, public-school officials found themselves increasingly in competition with home schooling and private schools. Educators were often forced to defend themselves against charges of having low expectations for students or what some perceived as having condescending attitudes towards parents. Responding to public concerns, legislators have introduced reforms that give parents more alternatives.  These reforms include relaxing laws that govern home schooling, voucher systems that permit use of federal dollars to pay private tuition, and legislation that includes monetary and policy incentives for charter schools. Provisions in The Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994) and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act: No Child Left Behind included significant incentives and sanctions concerning the nature and degree to which parent involvement is encouraged (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001). Indeed, for the first time, federal education officials have actually defined parental involvement.

The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 signified the beginning of the government's attempt to bring parental involvement in the forefront. Since that time, numerous parental involvement programs have been instituted.

In 1994, the U.S. Congress concurred with the positive association between parental involvement and student educational success by placing parental involvement on the national educational agenda as Goal 8; signed into law by former President William Clinton in March, 1994, The Goals 2000: Educate America Act formally addressed school practices that would increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (USDOE, 1997, p.1).

The following objectives were listed for Goal 8:

1. Every state will develop policies to assist schools and local educational agencies to establish programs for increasing partnerships that respond to the varying needs of parents and the home including parents of children who are disadvantaged or bilingual; or parents of children with disabilities;

2. Every school will actively engage parents and families in partnerships which support the academic work of children at home and shared educational decisions making at school; and

3. Parents and families will help to ensure that schools are adequately supported, and will hold schools and teachers to high standards of accountability (USDOE, 1997, p.1).

Desimone (2002) reviewed and synthesized existing relevant literature and reported on school improvement efforts and their demand for parental involvement in school. Desimone stated that the United States has attempted to reform schools and increase education quality and academic performance for the past two decades. Early efforts for reforms in the 1980' led to literature, which identified characteristics that are linked to successful schools, including parental involvement. Congress enacted the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program in 1997. As a result of this program, $120 million were provided for Title I schools, which are accountable for working with parents. The law mandated that schools meet CSRD program criteria for parent and community involvement (Desimone, 2002).

Doss (1998) study reported that parents need to be involved in school improvement plans and a lack of involvement is the piece of the puzzle that is missing in

schools that require improvement. Doss' theory is not substantiated with empirical data, however Trotman (2001) reported that legislation legally mandated that educators establish relationships with parents. Research has shown that student behavior is positively affected when parents are involved (Doss, 1998). The "Goals 2000: Educate America" Act includes legislation that strengthens parent-school-community partnerships and increases parental involvement in learning.

Osborne and de Onis (1999) reported findings from existing literature. The research shows a positive link between parent and family involvement and student achievement. One of the eight National Education Goals is to increase parental involvement. The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs are to be applied in each school district Standard II: Parenting. These standards demand that school boards fully accepted parent and family involvement and work with school administrators in the development of a plan to promote and monitor parental involvement (Osborne & Onis, 1999).

Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich (1999) reported that parental involvement in their child's education may change over time and this is related to school functioning. Research studies suggest that the building of a more productive collaboration between the parents and the schools is the method of choice to enhance parental involvement. Therefore, Izzo et al., (1999) conducted a longitudinal study to understand factors, which may limit this collaboration, which allowed for teacher assessments of parents for two years with different teachers for the third year. For their study, Izzo et al., (1999) included 1,205 urban elementary school children in an ethnically divers, small southern city, which was ranked the 29th poorest in the nation in 1990. The sample

targeted 341 Kindergarten through third-grade classrooms in 27 schools. A three-year data set was included for all participants. Measures of parental involvement and student school performance were included. Teacher ratings and school performance variables provided three sets of data.

Findings from the Izzo et al., (1999) study showed that parental involvement in children's schooling was related to improvements in school functioning.  Most parent-involvement variables were positively correlated with school performance; strong associations were found between quality of parent-teacher interactions, home participation, and, and school participation (r ranged from .57 to .61).  Teacher perceptions of good parental relationships and higher levels of home and school participation were related to improved school performance. While this study provided important information, findings were based on teachers' reports only, which may limit results; optimally parents and students would contribute to the database. The study also failed to include multiple parent factors such as education level, which may have affected findings. Despite limitations, parental involvement was found to decline over time and while this factor may be influenced by many other variables, it is worthy of consideration.

Notification regarding students' progress, eligibility to transfer to other schools, and tutoring services are a few of the better-known requirements (Davis, 2004). Districts receiving federal money must dedicate a minimum of 1 % of their allocation to be used for documented programs that increase parent involvement in promoting the academic, social, and emotional growth of students (Elementary and Secondary Education Act). Individual schools must establish and disseminate a parent-involvement policy that includes regular communication with parents

and parents' participation in the development and implementation of a strategic plan for school improvement. No longer may schools regard parent involvement as simply including parents in fund raising or attending an occasional student play or music performance. Parent involvement in today's American public schools now includes the concept of a meaningful partnership between stakeholders (Elementary and Secondary Education Act).

Presently, support for parental involvement in a child's education has come through the Federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002*. This act, signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, encourages schools to reexamine their parental involvement policies and programs to obtain federal funds. Precisely, the law contains four basic education reforms principles: (1) stronger accountability for results; (2) increased flexibility and local control; (3) expanded options for parents; and (4) an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work (USDOE, 1997, p.1). Furthermore, this act emphasizes the importance of schools sharing the responsibility for student learning through the development of school partnerships with families and community members a greater opportunity to participate in the wide range of school involvement activities while having a voice in school policy.

The No Child Left Behind Act of2001 (NCLB) is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Legislators say NCLB is designed to improve student achievement. President George W. Bush refers to NCLB as the "cornerstone of my administration" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p.l).

NCLB is built on four common sense pillars: (a) accountability for outcomes, (b) more parental options, (c) scientific-based research, and (d) control and flexibility for local educational agencies (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). NCLB defines

parental involvement as:

> The participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving students' academic learning and other school activities. The involvement includes ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child. (No Child Left Behind, 2001, Common NCLB Terms & Definitions)

NCLB requires each state to test students in grades third through eighth and at least once in grades tenth through twelfth in reading and math. States and local districts are responsible for providing parents with detailed reports on student, school, and district performance in an "understandable and uniform format, and to the extent practicable, in a language that the parents can understand" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p.7).

A parent's role under NCLB is to be knowledgeable decision makers and active partners in the day-to-day operations of the school (Gomez & Greenough, 2002). Parents must be aware of their child's learning environment, parents must be able to interpret and analyze instructional and assessment information and parents must be able to adequately evaluate student and school performance (Gomez & Greenough, 2002). Local schools have the discretion to provide the necessary training to parents to assist in their understanding of educational areas such as academic content and achievement standards [Title **I,** Part A, 1118 (e)( 1)].

NCLB addresses a parent's right to be informed of the qualifications of teachers and staff that will provide instruction to their child during the school year. Title I schools are to inform parents if their child is not receiving instruction from a teacher who is not "highly qualified." Schools are equally responsible for maintaining open and clear communication between school and home and schools are responsible for incorporating strategies to gain participation from parents who are not as active in school activities (Gomez & Greenough, 2002).

In addition, schools identified as Title I schools are required to present parents with an overview of the school's curriculum and assessment practices. Title I schools that are unsuccessful in meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years will be classified for school improvement. In compliance with NCLB, schools that do not to satisfy AYP must provide parents with information outlining how the school was classified for school improvement, how the school compares to other schools in the district, a plan of action for improvement, and descriptions of how parents can be involved in the change process (Gomez & Greenough, 2002).

As a result of NCLB, parents have the option to transfer their child to a high-performing school in the district or to receive supplemental educational services for their child such as tutoring, after school enrichment, or remedial classes. Title I grants are available to states and districts for the improvement of the overall quality of low-performing schools. Local educational agencies receiving federal funding are responsible for providing information to parents regarding community resource centers that provide training, information, and support to parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

NCLB requirements of local educational agencies include (a) the dissemination

of information on effective parental involvement practices, (b) measures to ensure parental involvement in planning, (c) written policies on parental involvement and, (d) coordinating parental involvement strategies and evaluations (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Local schools have the authority and discretion to provide the necessary materials, resources, and training to help parents better assist their children with school work, to educate teachers on how to communicate and work with parents as equal partners, and to implement and coordinate parental involvement programs when feasible (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Studies conducted in Title I schools show significant student achievement gains when parents are trained on effective parental involvement practices through information, training, and discussion techniques (Shaver & Walls, 1998) and when teachers maintain open and continuous communication with parents ("Westat and Policy," 2001).

NCLB provides specific components for local educational agencies to incorporate into parental involvement program planning and development practices. These components are increasing parental involvement in the schools, increasing parental selection of educational options, and the inclusion of parental involvement in school and district governance (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Definition of Parental Involvement

Parental involvement has many meanings. It has an abundance of definitions. Most agree that parental involvement is necessary in the education of children but few can agree on the definition of this multidimensional construct. Parental Involvement can range from getting a child dressed for school to becoming apart of the major decisions within the school regarding

curriculum and governance. To form a comprehensive definition of parental involvement, Jesse (1998) argues that educators: "(a) define exactly what is meant by parental involvement; (b) define what the school means by parental involvement; provide examples of parent's decision making roles; (c ) remove structural barriers; and (d) identify who else has an interest in increasing the parent's role in the school. He further asserts that the nature of parental involvement varies depending on the following factors: "(a) characteristics of the school; (b) parent's level of participation; (c) type of participation; and (d) who is offering the definition of parental involvement" (Jesse, 1998).

Cotton and Wikelund (2001) define parental involvement as the active participation of parents with the schools and in education. Parents can support their child's education by participating in school activities and following school policies and procedures. In addition, parents can provide encouragement to their child, arrange study time at home for tutoring, and model desired behaviors.

The National Parent Teachers Association (1997) describes parental involvement as a partnership that respects and recognizes the educational needs of the whole child. A union with parents who are informed, engaged, and involved in school governance and school activities (NPTA, 1997). Parental involvement is defined by Reynolds (1992) as any interaction between a parent and child that may contribute to the child's development or interest of the child, while Henderson and Berla (1994) defined parental involvement as the participation of parents in every facet of a child's education and development from birth to adulthood.

Chavkin and Williams (1987) defined parental involvement in a broad perspective. They found that parental involvement could be used to describe the various ways in which parents can support their children's schooling. As concluded by Jesse (1998), parental involvement refers to

the extent to which a parent engages in activities that encompass the schooling of his or her child. Epstein (1986) argued that the following activities constitute parental involvement: (a) providing a home environment the supports children's learning needs; (b) volunteering to provide in the school; becoming active in the decisions made within the school; (d) attending meetings; (e) maintaining open channels of communications; and (f) tutoring the children at home.

Davies (1991) defined parental involvement from a shifting perspective. The author emphasizes that a society, school and communities change, parental involvement changes. He concludes that the structure of the family has changed drastically since the early 1950s, however asserts that non-traditional family structures can be just as effective with parents taking an active role in their children's education (Davies, 1991). Regardless of the exact definition of parental involvement, a large majority of practitioners agree; when parents get involved everyone succeeds (Epstein, 1995).

Parental involvement is helping children with homework, serving on decision-making committees in the school, volunteering in the classrooms, communicating with school officials, and discussing academic expectations at home (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001). There is a litany of parental involvement behaviors. When school officials accept the notion of supportive and active parental involvement as separate entities, school officials are in a better position to evaluate the degree and quality of parental involvement practices (Vandergrift & Green, 1992). Research studies have been conducted on the influence of parental involvement on student performance in the areas of reading, math, and/or general achievement areas. Researchers have also examined the affects of parental

involvement on students' attitudes and perceptions of education and/or students' work ethics (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001).

Research imply the most successful parent participation initiatives are those that provide parents with an opportunity to choose from several roles and responsibilities within the school, are well organized and carried out, and are long-term. Parents should be able to select from several parental involvement activities that will accommodate their unique schedules, preferences, and skill levels (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001). An ecological approach to effective parental involvement programs incorporates parental involvement practices into the total educational program. Parental involvement activities should include all members of the school community (Comer & Haynes, 1991).

Research studies indicate that parental involvement in student learning is related to student achievement. The more parents are involved in their child's learning, the greater the achievement gains for the students. This conclusion has generally remained consistent for all groups of students of all ages (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001).

Scholars now call for a broader and more powerful definition of parental involvement (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Davies, 1993; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). They suggested that "family involvement" or "family and community involvement" is a more encompassing term because they go beyond parents to include other family members and community agencies and institutions. The term, "partnership" was also introduced in this area which emphasizes that schools, families, and communities share responsibilities for children's education (Comer and Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Janson, 2004). Epstein identified six types of parental involvement which consist of a widely accepted typology of parental involvement:

1) Parenting - parents providing children with food, clothing, health and safety;

2) Communicating - parents exchanging information about their children with school;

3) Volunteering - parents assisting teachers in classroom, on field trips, or serving on school committees;

4) Learning at home - parents helping children with homework or other home learning activities;

5) Decision-making - parents participating in school leadership activities and school governance; and in contrast to the actual level of parental involvement that is often reported by parents, school expectations and initiatives for parental involvement were rarely measured in the previous studies. School expectations for parental involvement is an important measure for us to examine whether school administrators and teachers consider that parental involvement is important to their schools and students' education and whether they are willing to invest time in organizing parental involvement practices and programs. School initiatives in parental involvement are another measure that shows how school administrators and teachers invest their time to support policies and practices designed to increase parent participation and improve school-family relationships.

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can be just as effective with parents taking an active role in their children's education (Davies, 1991). Regardless of the exact definition of parental involvement, a large majority of practitioners agree, when parents get involved everyone succeeds (Epstein, 1995).

Researchers have documented the effectiveness of parental involvement on student achievement. As reported by Henderson and Berla (1994), *A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is critical to Student Achievement,* "When parents are involved in their children's education at home, their children do better in school, set higher academic goals, and the schools they go to become better" (p, 14). They conducted meta-analytic synthesis of 66 studies, reviews, and books and found that high levels of parental involvement were also found to be associated with higher student grades and test scores, better attendance, higher rates of homework completion, more positive student attitudes, and behavior, higher graduation rates and grater enrollment rates in postsecondary education (Henderson & Berla, 1994). The authors argue that the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which the family is able to support their children's learning: parents as teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision makers. In conclusion, the authors stressed that the specific form of parental involvement does not seem to be as important as the amount and variety of involvement. These findings suggest that parents who take an active role in their children's education promote the learning process.

The most effective forms of parental involvement are those, which engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home (Cotton & Wiekland, 1989). Kellaghan, T. Z., Sloane, K., Alvarez, B., & Bloom, B. S. (1993)

concur that the home environment is a powerful factor in determining the academic success of students, their levels of achievement, their interest in learning, and the years of schooling they will complete. Henderson & Berla (1994), document that a home environment, which encourages learning, is more important to student achievement than income, education level, or cultural background. Thus, a supportive home environment that encourages learning makes the home an important civil structure and has a direct correlation with a child's educational attainment.

The benefits of parental involvement are not limited to students and parents; parent participation can have a lasting impact on teachers and schools as well (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Helping parents understand the needs of schools, and helping schools understand how to optimize parents as resources are the key. Bringing the two sides together to form a strong partnership can be challenging, but when achieved, immeasurable benefits result (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez 1997).

Benefits that Promote Parental Involvement

As Cotton & Wikelund (2001) and Trusty (1998) note there are many benefits for school systems and for parents themselves when parents become involved in their children's education. School personnel benefit from the improved relationship that generally accompanies increased parental involvement. This relationship is often articulated in parents' increased willingness to support schools with their labor and resources during fundraising activities, special projects, and/or emergency situations. Ballen & Moles (1994) agree that there are many ways in which parental involvement benefits students' achievement, attitudes, and behavior, all of which have a positive impact on school staff.

Walberg, Bole, & Waxman (1980) investigated parents of students in grades 1-6 in 41 classes in Chicago and recorded the results. Children of involved parents made significantly greater academic gains than children of non-involved parents. Dornbusch & Ritter (1988) conducted a study with six San Francisco Bay Area high schools and reported that students whose parents attended school events and engaged in contacts with teachers had higher achievement than those whose parents were minimally involved or uninvolved. These authors are in concordance with Cotton & Wikelund (1989), who state that when parents are involved in their children's education, all stakeholders benefit. Epstein (1986) devised a list of benefits associated with parental involvement in a child's education. Benefits for students include improved academic performance, improved school behavior, greater academic motivation, and lower dropout rates. Benefits for parents include enhanced sense of adequacy, self-worth, and self-confidence, new ideas for helping their children learn as a result of working in the school environment, increased knowledge of child development, strengthened social networks, expanded community-involvement opportunities and networks, increased feelings of control over their environment, and positive rapport with school.

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Local educational agencies are responsible for creating and implementing new and more effective parental involvement programs (Baker & Soden, 1998). In order to obtain financial support from the federal government, school districts are encouraged to evaluate existing parental involvement programs to enhance the quality, frequency, and inclusion of parents in parental involvement practices at school and at home (Baker & Soden, 1998).

Specifically, Title I funds are available contingent upon the development of "compacts" from local schools. Compacts are designed to engage partnerships between the school and school community (Baker & Soden, 1998). The Elementary Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind states that compacts should describe the school's responsibility to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables the children served under this part to meet the State's student academic achievement standards, and the ways in which each parent will be responsible for supporting their children's learning, such as monitoring attendance, homework completion, and television watching; volunteering in their child's classroom; and participating, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children and positive use of extracurricular time. [Title I, Part A, § 1118 (d)(l)]

School compacts are created jointly with parents. School compacts encourage sharing of educational expectations and shared values between school and family. Parents are encouraged to participate in interactive school-home instructional activities as well as family goal setting, home tutoring, and family reading to encourage and motivate student learning (Gomez & Greenough, 2002).

Research from the U.S. Department of Education's Prospects Study (1993), as

cited in *"A Compact,"* 1999, revealed that children in schools with compacts performed better than children in schools without learning compacts. Conclusions were based on greater corroboration of learning at home as a result of the compacts. In addition, the affects of the compact were better predictors of student learning than other forms of school-home collaborations examined.

*Physical and Material Benefits*

Physical and material parental involvement is the participation of parents in ensuring that the school environment is favorable to safety. Providing a safe and comfortable learning environment is paramount to effective schools. With the increased accountability placed on schools and the limited funding for resources, schools are involving parents with the responsibility of maintaining a school's physical environment (Dimmock & O' Donoghue, 1996).

The 1989 Education Writers Association report found 21 % of schools in the United States to be 50 years old or older. Despite the passage of the Education Infrastructure Act of 1994, offering federal grant money to repair and/or renovate public schools, many schools are still in poor condition (Uline, 2000). In addition to the immense number of schools in need of repair, at least 14 million students attend school in buildings rated as below standard or hazardous (Argon, 1998).

The National Education Association Representative Assembly called for improved resources, materials, and adequate physical facilities for educational institutions. The National Education Association encourages students, parents, school officials, and the community to get involved in designing program practices that would result in positive changes for schools' physical structure. An

elementary school in Dekalb County, Georgia implements the physical and material involvement component of Dimmock and O'Donoghue's (1996) parental involvement program. This elementary school hosts a bi-annual "School Beautification Day". Students, parents, teachers, and community members are invited to participate in the maintenance of the school building by cleaning the school grounds, planting flowers, trimming bushes, and re-painting the walls of the classrooms.

Berner, as cited in Uline, 1999, conducted a study of Washington, D.C. public schools to determine the affects of the building's physical condition in relation to students' achievement. Buildings were rated by engineering experts on a scale of poor, fair, or excellent. Schools were evaluated based on the overall condition of its roofs, ceilings and walls, heating and electrical systems, and bathrooms. The study concluded that the physical condition of a school is an effective predictor of student success in schools. The research finding showed that when schools moved along a progressive continuum of poor to fair and poor to excellent, achievement gains from students were significantly noticeable.

*Communication Benefits*

Effective communication links the school and community and enhances meaningful parental involvement practices. Dimmock & O'Donoghue (1996) characterizes communication as a two-way process between school and home. School to home communication can be in the form of a newsletter from the school informing parents of school functions, activities, and parents' roles and responsibilities at school and at home.

Epstein's (1992) six types of parental involvement are categorized as (a) the basic obligations of families, (b) the basic obligations of the school, (c) parental involvement in the schools, (d) parental involvement at home, (e) parental participation in school decision- making, and (f) collaborating with the community. Epstein's six parental involvement components are used simultaneously with national standards in support of children's learning and successful parental involvement programs *("National Standards," 2004).*

The school's obligation in the communication efforts is to maintain open communication in understandable language for all groups of parents. Communication can be in the traditional and most frequent form such as telephone calls and parent-teacher conferences (Epstein, 1992). Open communication between school and home provides an opportunity for school officials and parents to recognize their own perceptions about families from various groups of cultures and lifestyles (Shepard, Trimberger, McClintock, &, Lecklider, 1999).

According to Epstein, school officials should recognize the varying degrees of knowledge and skills of parents and plan school activities that will allow parents the opportunity to select and participate in volunteer activities where they will feel comfortable and will be most beneficial. In addition, schools can provide the necessary training to teachers to help improve communications with parents. Teachers can design interactive homework to further engage parents' involvement with their child at home (Epstein, 1992).

Research studies probing the correlation between parental involvement and student achievement have identified open and continuous dialog between school and

home as an influential factor in increasing parental involvement in schools. Watkins (1997) found that teacher communication could increase several forms of parental involvement practices.

In a yearlong study of 24,599 students, fourteen (2000) sought to determine school characteristics on student achievement by examining multiple variables that influence parental involvement. The research findings concluded schools could increase parent participation by merely contacting and communicating with parents. Increased school contact with parents strongly resulted in increased parent contact with the school. Furthermore, "the amount of contact parents have with schools, the amount they volunteer, and their participation in PTOs can be influenced positively by more proactive communication by the school" (Feuerstein, 2000, p. l0).

Open communication is linked throughout Epstein's (1992) parental involvement components. Communication is shared among parents and the school. School officials must recognize the challenges that may be presented when working with different groups of parents from different cultures, educational levels, and skills. Additionally, schools must work to plan school and home activities to accommodate such differences. When communication is increased between home and school, perceptions change and positive relationships that result in student achievement develops.

A survey conducted with 200 superintendents in 15 United States schools revealed that more than 90% of the school districts had at least one district policy that addressed parental involvement. The two most commonly parental involvement practices were communicating with parents regarding student progress and school

functions and providing opportunities to engage parents in the decision-making processes of the school (Kessler-Sklar & Baker, 2000).

Kessler-Sklar and Baker (2000) offers seven recommendations for local educational agencies to adhere to when planning and implementing parental involvement practices in schools. School district leaders should (a) re-visit parental involvement practices on a district level, (b) assess the realities of parental involvement practices and the extent to which these practices are being fulfilled, (c) assess the degree and value of parents in decision-making roles, (d) assess communication efforts by the district and school to ensure comprehensive information is being sent and received by parents in a succinct language, (e) provide training for parents on effective parenting and teaching skills to be used at home, (f) provide training to teachers on working with parents to enhance student learning, and (g) be knowledgeable of the most recent and effective parental involvement practices.

A surfeit of literature has consistently documented the benefits for children when parents are involved in their education. One study contributing to this discourse, is the United States Department of Education research report (1994) *Strong Families, Strong Schools*, which concluded that greater parental involvement in a child's education, is the key to achieving a high quality education and a safe, discipline learning environment for every-student. The report further asserts that when parents are involved in a variety of ways at school, the performance of all children in the school improves (USDOE, 1994).

Parental involvement positively benefits the students, parents, and the school. The most important benefit to students is the increased academic support and

achievement gains through parental involvement. Parents develop better attitudes of the school and parents are more supportive of school initiatives. With quality parental involvement programs and practices, schools improve the integrity and effectiveness of instructional programs (Pena, 2000). Despite the fact that parental involvement is beneficial to all involved parties there are still barriers that parents seem to keep parents from fully participating in their child's education.

<div align="center">Barriers that Impede Parental Involvement</div>

Common barriers to the development of partnership are narrow conceptualization of how parents can be involved (Weiss & Edwards, 1992) and lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities between families and educators. According to Rich (1988), there are some barriers that impede parental involvement. He states that time, culture/language, lack of a supportive environment, attitudes/misperceptions, training, inability to help with schoolwork, lack of responsiveness to parental needs, and negative experiences with schools for teachers or parents are all barriers hindering parental involvement.

A study by Shartrand, et. al. (1977) comparably states that there are barriers that impede parental involvement. The study concludes that it is not uncommon for the same small group of parents to be the only ones to show up to volunteer or participate in school activities. It also is not uncommon for parents to find themselves wanting to be involved, but feeling unwelcome in the school and unsure how they fit in. This survey goes on to state that helping parents understand the needs of schools, and helping schools understand how to optimize parents as resources, are key in bringing the two sides together to form a strong partnership. Trotman (2001) identified other barriers that include family structure, parental socioeconomic status, parent's schedules, parental

educational level, and teacher expectations.

Bracey (2001) support the view that parents' working schedules limit their participation in their children's education. The study consisted of 1,280 mothers who completed a Behavior Problem Index. Five hundred eighty-two mothers had children in the top and 280 had children at the bottom of the Peabody Individual Achievement Test in reading. Forty percent of this sample above the poverty line had no paid sick leave, 67% below the poverty line had no paid sick leave, 46% had no paid vacation, and 67% could not leave their job to be involved in their children's education. This resulted in a problem for teachers to schedule conferences, even outside of normal school hours.

In recent years, there has been a surge in the development of programs to increase family involvement in education (Strong Families, Strong Schools, 1994). Documented from their research: 40 % of parents across the United States believe they are not devoting enough time to their children's education; teachers ranked strengthening parents' roles in their children's learning as the issue that should receive the highest priority in public education policy in the 1990s; among students aged 10-13, 72% said they would like to talk to their parents about schoolwork, 48% of older adolescents (1417 years old) agreed; and 89% of business executives identified lack of parent involvement as the biggest obstacle to school reform. Despite the research that exists on parental involvement and the experts who agree on its importance, schools often struggle to engage a significant number of parents (MDET, 1994).

A U.S. Department of Education study (as cited in *"Parental Involvement," 1999)* revealed that schools nationwide are experiencing a decline in parental

participation as students get older. Contacts between families and schools become less frequent and less positive in the quality of relationships. This study found that by seventh grade, positive contacts decrease from 52% to 36% while negative contacts increase from 20% to 33% since a child's first grade year. In addition, the rate of volunteering in schools decrease from 33% to 8%. These changes in parental involvement practices are partly due to challenges that families may endure when participating or attempting to participate in school functions.

A Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K-8 conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics provided information to schools on the different ways school officials can engage parents in their children's education and the different ways parents react to opportunities for involvement. The data revealed that parent-centered barriers to parental involvement included a lack of time for 87% of the 900 schools studied, lack of parent education for 38% of the schools, cultural or socioeconomic difference and parent attitudes for 23% of the schools, and language differences between parents and staff for 12% of the schools *("National Center," 1998).*

Additionally, school-centered, parental involvement barriers showed 56% of the schools considered lack of time on the part of school staff as a major parental involvement barrier. Almost half of the schools surveyed (48%) reported lack of staff training in working with parents as a barrier. How staff members perceived parents and parental involvement was a barrier for 18% of the schools. Safety at school after hours had the smallest affect on parental involvement practices *("National Center," 1998).*

In a qualitative study of minority parents, Pena (2000) investigated factors that influence parental involvement in an elementary school. The results of the study found

that minority parents are resistant to parental involvement due to several factors: (a)

language barriers, (b) parent cliques, (c) parent education levels, (d) attitudes of the

school staff, and (e) cultural influences.

Language barrier was the most frequent reason given by participants of the study

for not participating in school functions. Participants felt alienated from the school staff

because they were not fluent in the primary language spoken at the school. The lack of

bilingual staff in schools may contribute to non-English speaking parents' lack of

empowerment and sense of belonging when attempting to interact with school personnel

on behalf of their children *("Parental Involvement,"1999).*

Other concerns of parental involvement barriers in education are differing beliefs

about what is parental involvement in schools. Some educators believe that parents

should only participate in the traditional parental involvement practices such as

volunteering in the classroom or chaperoning a school event. Time and job pressures may

be a problem for parents who want to participate in school functions but are limited in the

amount of time needed to take off from their jobs. In addition, the lack of parent

education and parenting skills can also be a hindrance to meaningful parental

involvement at home; parents who are not as educated may have difficulty helping their

children with schoolwork *("Parental Involvement," 1999).*

Differences in the levels of parental involvement can also be a detriment to

school and family relationships and parental involvement practices. This theory is best

described through Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (as cited in Feuerstein, 2000) and

Colemen's theory of social capital (as cited in Feuerstein, 2000).

According to the theory of cultural capital, schools manifest middle to upper

class values. Therefore, schools relate better with middle to upper class parents in professional interactions and communications. This relationship between schools and middle to upper class parents put working class parents and their children at a disadvantage. Social capital can equally disadvantage lower social classes of parents and students. Schools with higher social capital have stronger relationships with families than do other schools, therefore, promoting higher student achievement (as cited in Feuerstein, 2000).

Structural differences that exist among schools can also impact the frequency and quality of parental involvement practices and relationships. Bowles and Gintis (1976), as cited in Feuerstein, 2000, reported structural differences within schools based on the social class of students and parents served. Schools located in working-class areas were mostly governed by school administrations. Schools in more affluent areas favored more participatory leadership, involving parents in school governance and decision-making.

Further findings from the National Center for Education Statistics report reveal that schools are making attempts to stimulate parental involvement practices both at home and at school. Schools are implementing practices to better communicate with parents on a regular basis regarding school functions and student performance. Schools with high rates of non-English speaking students and parents are providing interpreters in an effort to improve parent knowledge about their children and to build stronger school community relationships. In addition, schools are providing information on parent-tutoring at home, parenting styles and behaviors, and child development issues through a variety of communications such as newsletters, workshops, and parent resource centers.

Pryor (1995) study findings supported previous findings (Feuerstein, 2000) that parents are interested in their children's education but are unsure how to respond to their child's autonomy needs and are pressured by time constraints. Teenagers want their parents to be supportive without being intrusive. Teachers want parental involvement but are frustrated by barriers. Limitations of the study and alternate explanations for findings were not presented. The authors started that telephone survey, followed by mailing respondents the study results helped eliminate response bias. Despite study limitations, findings added to the information base regarding views related to parental involvement in schools, to include perspectives from students, parents, and teachers.

*Low Socioeconomic Status*

Trotman (2001) reported further that barriers to parental involvement are clearly noted in studies with low urban involvement. Barriers identified include: family structure and parental socioeconomic status: parent's schedules and educational level; and teacher expectations.  Numbers of single-parent families in urban settings are increasing and these parents tend to have a low income and a need to work. They are hard to reach and are unable to attend meetings or school activities. They lack adequate time (66% report) and transportation. Work schedules are a problem even in two parent households. Younger children at home and the belief that teaching is the job o the teacher are also associated with a lack of parental involvement. Parents with low levels of education may be intimidated since teachers have higher levels of education. Hostile and insensitive teacher attitudes contribute to a lack of parental involvement. Gender, race, income, as well as child and family appearance affect teacher expectations. Teacher-parent interaction helps overcome these difficulties.

Bracey (2001) supported the view that working poor parents are unable to participate in school involvement, which is associated with poor academic outcomes. Bracy (2001) supported the view that working poor parents are unable to participate in school involvement, which is associated with poor academic outcomes. Bracy discussed a study, which consisted of 1280 mothers who were asked to complete the Behavior Problems Index. Families were divided into those living in poverty and those above the poverty line. Out of the total sample, 582 had a child in the top quartile and 280 had a child in the bottom quartile of the Peabody Individual Achievement Test for reading. Of the mothers with children in the lowest quartile for reading, 40% of those above the poverty line had no paid sick leave and 67% of those below the poverty line had no paid sick leave. For mothers below the poverty line with children with behavioral problems; 71% had no paid sick leave, compared to 36% of mothers not in poverty; 46% had no paid vacation; and 67% could not leave their job sites. Poverty and work schedules result in problems when teachers attempt to hold meetings, even outside of school hours.

*Family Mobility*

Weckstein (2003) present his theory that family mobility is a barrier to parental involvement and student achievement. With the No Child Left Behind Act, high quality educational services must be provided to thee students and according to Weckstein (2003), family mobility and parental involvement affect this process. Family mobility makes it harder for parents to be involved and for students to be assessed or assured quality education. Due to the demands of the Act, schools may promote this mobility when students are likely to do poorly, to avoid accountability. Family mobility results in failure to provide adequate information to parents, failure to provide optimal education to

all students, and failure at allow for parent involvement.

*Lack of Information*

Winnail, Geiger, Macrina, Snyder, Petri & Nagy (2000) found the tope two factors that were identified as barriers to parental involvement were lack of relevant knowledge and not knowing 3what the child learned in school. The top five barriers are time, unaware of opportunities, having few chances to volunteer, not being asked to participate by the school, and perceiving that they were not encouraged to participate by the health curriculum, This study was limited in findings since the sample was unique (highly educated, high SES, married, and active in their child's education).

*Self-Efficacy Level*

Pelletier and Brent (2002) state that parent participation in their child's schooling may also be related to their level of self-efficacy. Parental self-efficacy affects parent-child interactions and parental styles and these factors contribute to the development of the child and their school outcomes. Parent self-efficacy is linked to beliefs in the ability to influence their child, responsiveness to their child's needs, engagement in direct interactions with their children, use of active coping strategies, and perceptions of fewer behavior problems in their children. Alternatively, parents with low self-efficacy have higher rates of depression and stress, greater defensive and controlling behavior, greater perceptions of child difficulties, passive parental coping styles or use of punitive discipline, and feelings of being helpless as a parent.

Pelletier and Brent (2002) conducted a study of 110 mothers in 12 pilot schools, who participated in a school-based Parenting and Readiness Center program with their four-year-olds. The program was based on a Parent as Teacher model, designed to

increase parent self-efficacy. Half of the families spoke English as a second language.

Parent Interviews and Teacher Questionnaires were used to assess participant beliefs.

Findings showed that parents' perceptions of self-efficacy were significantly related to

teachers' perceptions of total parent involvement. Teachers most often used positive

feedback and parent education to foster parent self-efficacy (Pelletier & Brent, 2002).

*School Characteristics*

Griffith (1998) reported that school characteristics are related to parental

involvement in schools and barriers that inhibit parental involvement. Griffith

investigated 122 public elementary (59.3% white) school (33, 153 parents and 26,904

students) and used parent and student surveys to assess the school characteristics (school

structure and population, parent involvement and perceptions of school safety, school

climate and facility, helpfulness of school staff, academic instruction, teacher-student

relationships, and student recognition.

La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta (2003) report that most families participate in the

activities when they were offered opportunities to do so. The primary barrier to parental

participation is conflicting work schedules (74%). Parents and teachers that were

involved reported the activities to be helpful. While the authors did not present

alternative explanations for findings, they did provide support conclusions. An important

conclusion was that parents are interested in being involved in school activities and need

to be offered opportunities to do so.

According to DOE (1995), four factors are identified as barriers for parental

involvement with schools. They are:

1. Logistics-Departmentalization is found to be intimidating to parents when

their children have several teachers, which they are expected to interact with.

2. Location-The location of the school may present problems with transportation, or the school may be located in neighborhoods, which are unfamiliar, unsafe, and/or frightening.

3. Curriculum-While some parents lack the skills necessary to provide homework or tutoring assistance, parents continue to be expected to serve as primary reinforcers of what children are learning at school.

4. School Size - Parents may become confused, both mentally and physically, when confronted with a larger, unfamiliar building.

As explained by DOE, in responds to these factors, recommendations have been made that schools become the subject of new and comprehensive research and scrutiny as a means of determining the need for reform efforts.

Furthermore, as documented by DOE (1995), middle school and junior high schools in particular are identified as difficult challenges to involving parents in learning activities because they typically are large and impersonal with each student having many teachers. DOE reported that prior research has found that teachers in contained classrooms are more likely to involve parents than teachers in teamed or departmentalized programs. Teachers of reading or English are also more likely to engage parents in home learning activities.

<div align="center">Parental Involvement</div>

Parental involvement practices include a broad range of parenting behaviors. These behaviors may include supporting learning at home, providing assistance with homework,

and attending school functions such as Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meetings. Several models of parental involvement practices have been introduced in education in an attempt to better organize and facilitate meaningful parental involvement practices (Feuerstein, 2000).

The Comer Parents' Program Model manifests an ecological approach to parental involvement practices (Drake, 1995). The Comer Parents' Program Model is designed with three levels of parental involvement. All parents are involved in school functions through membership in one of the three levels of parental involvement: (a) school organizations, (b) serving as volunteers, or (c) active involvement in school governance (Drake, 1995).

The Comer Parents' Program Model integrates family involvement into the total educational processes of the whole school. Parents are presented with a variety of roles, responsibilities, and tasks at each of the three levels of parental involvement. Parents are given the opportunity to select the activities they feel comfortable with completing. Therefore, parental involvement is more meaningful and effective. Programs designed with developing and nurturing child development within the framework of significant relationships with the adults in their lives are more essential to the academic and affective growth of the child (Comer & Haynes, 1991).

Dimmock and O'Donoghue (1996) identified five basic categories of parental involvement strategies. These categories are (a) school choice, (b) decision-making through formal structures or site-based councils, (c) teaching and learning, (d) physical and material environment, and (e) communication.

Teachers are always searching for ways to improve academic progress, and ways

to get parents involved in their children's education (Edwards & Warin, 1999). Bob Chase, author of The New Public School Parent (2002), suggests that in order for parents to be involved, they have to want to be involved and the only way that will occur is if they have compelling, meaningful, and personal incentives for doing so. He also states that parents must show children, with action not just words, that they really care about education. The more familiar parents are with the workings of the school and the more the school knows about parents, the better off the children will be. Schools depend on the support of parents (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001) but Epstein (1991) says that parents are uncertain about how to help their children with schoolwork, how to support their children's schooling, and what their role is concerning their children's education. In addition, many parents say that they would be willing to spend more time on activities with children if educators gave them more guidance. There are numerous tasks for which parent volunteers are critical (Edwards & Warin, 1999).

Edwards &Warin (1999) continue by saying that successful programs are based on essential partnership characteristics (trust and reciprocity) and are an integral part of the ways schools function. Principles of an effective home-school partnership, as identified by The League of Schools Project (Davies, 1991) are as follows:

1. Every aspect of the school building, including general climate, is open, helpful, and friendly to parents.

2. Communications with parents-whether about school policies and programs or about their own children-are frequent, clear, and two-way.

3. Parents are treated by teachers as collaborators in the educational process. Parents' own knowledge, expertise, and resources are valued as essential to

their children's success in school.

4. The school recognizes its responsibility to forge a partnership with all families in the school, not simply those most easily available.

The ways parents are involved at school should be linked to improving learning, and parental involvement programs should be designed to develop close working relationships between families and teachers (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

While most researchers and practitioners agree that parental involvement is an important indicator of school success for children (Henderson & Beria, 1994), consensus on what activities constitute the most effective involvement continues to puzzle experts in the field. Just as parents are essential players in the educational process, teachers are just as instrumental. From their daily practices, teachers can provide pertinent information regarding which goals and activities they perceive can aid parents in helping children experience success.

## Summary

Parental involvement contributes to a nurturing environment in schools. Parents should be in the forefront in order to ensure maximum achievement for students. It is important that educators focus on parental involvement in a child's education and the necessity for the child to be aware that involvement between school and home is a mutually respectful relationship. Educators should look for ways to actively keep parents involved as students move through higher grades. Parents and educators often hold each other at arm's length; unsure of the role each plays in improving the relationship between their involvement and the children's academic success. When parents are actively involved in their children's education at home and in school, students are more apt to

become successful.

Parental involvement in education has been researched for the past three decades. Major legislative reform efforts have challenged educational researchers and educators within the school system to re-examine parental involvement programs in an effort to uncover the most effective parental involvement practices that yield an increase in student achievement. The demand for more meaningful parental involvement programs and practices must be identified for all groups of students.

Parental involvement is a wide topic with expanding definitions. Parental involvement is helping children with homework, attending school functions, communicating with school officials, and lobbying on behalf of students through decision-making processes. Some researchers also contend that parental involvement is parents holding high expectations and aspirations for their children.

Educators are faced with several challenges in an effort to promote promising parental involvement programs and practices in schools. School and parental barriers have prevented school officials and parents from working collaboratively. Research studies show that language barrier is a major concern among educators and parents.

Despite these parental involvement barriers, educators are making a noticeable and promising difference within the school arena. Schools are implementing practices to improve communication, schools are working to enhance the quality and frequency of parental involvement, and schools are providing information on how parents can work with their children in and out of school through the use of parent workshop forums.

As society changes, school officials will need to constantly change approaches to parental involvement programs and practices in order to better provide optimal

educational experiences for students. In the midst of these ever-changing strategies, educators and parents must continue to work together, to communicate, and to exchange ideas and theories about education.

Difficulties also are further complicated as a result of differences in the academic expectations and classroom organization between the middle grades and the elementary grades (Epstein et al., 1993). According to the authors, when faced with these differences, students and their families often find themselves confused and uncertain as to their relationship with the school. As cited by Epstein and colleagues, confusion can emerge as to how homework is suppose to be done and the degree to which parents should assist their children if they perceive themselves as lacking expertise in a particular academic subject area.

Research conducted by Duuber and Epstein (1991) documented that parental involvement was more extensive, positive comprehensive and stronger at the elementary school level than that which was demonstrated by parents whose children had entered the middle grades. As reported by Useem (1990), research has also found that parents of children in the middle grades tended to receive less information and guidance specifically at a time when they needed more in order to understand the larger and more complex schools, subjects, and schedules.

Support for parental involvement in a child's education has been thoroughly documented. Consequently, few can agree on the actions that actually constitute this involvement. Thus, adequate training, skills, knowledge, and a positive attitude about parental involvement are needed in order to establish productive relationships with parents.

This literature review represents a sampling of the extensive based of literature dedicated to parental involvement. Finding substantiate the argument that parental involvement in any form impacts student performance. Research illuminates that students achieve more when parents provide a stimulating home environment, supervise homework, hold high standard, and for collaborative partnerships with schools. However, while research has shown that parental involvement has a significant impact on student success; it is not clear what type is the beneficial. Efforts to determine the most prominent strategies have been thwarted by the inconsistencies and methodological flaws found in numerous studies linking student success to parental involvement. Therefore, future investigators are encouraged to us a variety of measures to assess the true relationship.

Rationales as to why parents are not involved are numerous. Barriers perceived include teachers' attitudes, work schedules, education levels, lack of time, and cultural and linguistic obstructions. Government attempts to involve parents into the educational lives of their children have served as the force behind various school reform initiatives aimed at reestablishing the foundation of public education in America. No matter where when or how parental involvement is instituted, the results of this literature review indicate that when parents are involved, children succeed.

In summary, parental involvement in the schools has been linked to school success (Osborne & Onis, 1999). Parents report their interest in school involvement and their interest in improving communication with the school; however, they differ in their perception of what constitutes parental involvement and there may be barriers to their participation (Trotman, 2001). Strategies to overcome these barriers and include parents

in school matters are reported and experts such as Epstein focus on major types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with community (NREL, 2000). Regardless of opposing views by Mattingly et al. (2002), the research is mixed on how best to implement strategies for parental involvement.  This calls for a re-evaluation of the assumptions that have traditionally defined parental involvement in the school. If cooperation is to be realized, there is a need for commitment to opening opportunities for participation to all families. School staff members require administrative support, time, and access to resources if they are to work cooperatively with their students' families. A growing body of research supports the multiple benefits that occur when parents are actively involved in their children's education but the strategies that schools employ to promote parental involvement are not fully studied.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presented the methodology used in this study. It provided the

research questions, setting, participants, and a thorough description of the qualitative

design used. This chapter described the research design, the target population that was

studied, and the research instrument used for this research. Procedures and guidelines for

the focus group sessions were described and methods of data collection and analysis used

to determine research findings and conclusions are included.

Introduction

There is a desire for parents to become involved in their children's education but

the consensus on what strategies constitute the most effective involvement continues to

puzzle experts in the field. The purpose of this study was to explore what prevents and

promotes parental involvement and to look at the manner in which parental involvement

is being encouraged and utilized in schools. It was the intent of this study to determine

whether the school, a school district in Northeast Georgia is implementing practices that

promote parental involvement or those that prevent parental involvement. It was hoped

that this study would be used to determine how schools are developing and implementing

effective strategies for enlisting and keeping the involvement of parents in their child's

education. This qualitative study explored the views from participants regarding parental

involvement. The researcher and district benefited from this study by being able to look

at what promotes and prevents parental involvement in a Northeast Georgia School to

help their children experience success throughout their career in the system.

Research Design

To investigate the perspectives and/or experiences of an individual or group of people, a qualitative research design was the most appropriate tool. Qualitative research methods were inductive. Qualitative research design helped the researcher gain insight and an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of parental involvement. This research methodology involved a provocative form of inquiry design to generate data, and allowed the researcher to be more spontaneous and flexible while exploring phenomena (Rudestam & Newton, 1992). Rudestam & Newton, 1992 found three fundamental assumptions that qualitative methods share: (1) a holistic view, which seems to understand phenomena; (2) an inductive approach; and (3) naturalistic inquiry.

The researcher used a qualitative research design to investigate the perspectives and experiences of an individual or group of people in a Northeast Georgia school district.  This study was conducted using a focus group. Focus groups were a powerful means to evaluate services and test new ideas. The researcher got a great deal of information from the focus group.  An essential element of the focus group methodology was the authoritarian role that the researcher had by virtue of the face-to-face involvement in guiding the discussion. The researcher used non-verbal inputs as an important part of the information that was collected during the focus group session. Along with the focus group discussions, the Nominal Group Technique developed by Delbecq & Van de Ven in 1971 was used for this study. This technique is a structured form of brainstorming without leading the group on to allow participants to share ideas. This method provided participants with an input in identifying issues and problems, and

creating solutions. This technique was used with the focus group and the parent interviews.

The researcher also used surveys with open-ended questions as a means to collect data from students and in person-to-person interviews with parents. The researcher compiled data received from participants to see what promoted and prevented parental involvement in this Northeast Georgia school district.

Participants

The target population for this study was teachers, principals, county personnel, parents, and students across all grade levels in the Northeast Georgia school district. The researcher contacted the schools and county office to obtain names of potential participants. After the names were obtained, the researcher selected the participants for the focus group from a hat drawing containing names of teachers from the six elementary schools, the middle school, and the high school as well as administrators and county office personnel. The hats were individually labeled. Names from each hat were drawn, two elementary teachers, two middle school teachers, two high school teachers, two administrators and one county office personnel participant. The participants received an email for confirmation to participate in the group. The researcher sent the participants a cover letter with information concerning the project. The group was later contacted with the meeting time and place. The focus group consisted of nine participants.

The researcher contacted each school counselor and requested names of parents involved in the education of their children and names of those not involved in the education of their children. From thirty-five parents, six were randomly chosen from a hat drawing to participate in the face-to-face interview. The participants received an

email and/or phone call for confirmation to participate in the interview. The researcher

sent the participants a cover letter with information concerning the project. The

participants were later contacted with the meeting time and place.

   Six students were randomly selected from a counselor-generated list of fifty students

from elementary, middle and high school. Permissions were obtained from parents allow

students to participate in the survey. The participants' parents received an email for

confirmation of their participation in the group. The researcher sent the participants'

parents a cover letter with information concerning the project. The parents were later

contacted with the meeting time and place. Students were asked to complete a survey

using specific questions about parental involvement.

<div align="center">Instrumentation</div>

   Ethical considerations by Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman (1987); Marshall  &

Rossmen (1989); Mirriam (1988); and, Spradley (1980) were made. Safeguards were

employed to protect the informants' rights: 1) the research objectives were articulated

verbally and in writing as a means of clarity by the informant, 2) written permission to

proceed with the study was received from the informant, 3) a research exemption form

was filed with the Institutional Review Board, 4) the informant was advised of all data

collection devices and activities, 5) verbatim transcriptions and written interpretations

and reports were made available to the informant, 6) the informant's rights, interests and

wishes were considered when choices were made regarding reporting the data, and 7) the

final decision regarding informant anonymity rests with the informant.

Focus group questions used in this study were intended to generate participants'

thoughts and beliefs regarding parental involvement. There were questions used to probe

for practical suggestions concerning what promotes and prevents parental improvement.

The interview questions for parents were open ended in order to gain a variety of

data. The data were compiled for the school district as well as for the project.

The survey questions for students were open ended to generate responses

regarding parental involvement.

Focus group questions, parent interview questions, and student survey questions

used in this study were intended to generate participants' thoughts and beliefs regarding

parental involvement. There were questions used to probe for practical suggestions

concerning what promotes and prevents parental improvement.

Once the questioning process began, other probing questions were asked of

individuals for clarification. The data were compiled for the school district. The

underlying questions guiding this study were:

1.  What promotes parental involvement in the school's educational program?

2.  What prevents parental involvement in the school's educational program?

The following questions were asked to probe for answers in the focus group:

1.  How do you define parental involvement?
2.  Describe the level of parental involvement in schools in this county? Give some examples of ways parents are involved.
3.  What causes parents to stay involved in their child's education?
4.  What causes parents not to be involved in their child's education?
5.  How do parents and children benefit from their parents being involved in their child's school experiences?
6.  How do teachers benefit from parental involvement?
7.  What could the school do to help you get more parents involved in their child's education?
8.  How welcome do your parents feel at your school?

Questions for parents:

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. In what ways have you been involved with your child's education
3. What causes you to be involved in your child's education?
4. What causes you not to be involved in your child's education?
5. How do you and your child benefit from your being involved in your child's education?
6. How does the school benefit from your being involved in your child's education?
7. What could the school do to help you get more involved in your child's education?
8. How welcome do you feel at your child's school?
9. What has been the worst experience with the school and your child?
10. What has been the best experience with the school and your child?


Questions for students:

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. In what ways are your parents involved in your education?
3. What causes your parents to be involved in your education?
4. What causes your parents not to be involved in your education?
5. How do you and your parents benefit when involved in your education?
6. How does the school benefit from your parents being involved in your education?
7. What could the school do to encourage your parents in becoming more involved in your education?
8. How welcome do your parents feel at your school?
9. Describe the worst experience you have had at your school.
10. Describe the best experience you have had at your school.


## Data Collection

The researcher gained permission from the County Board of Education, principals of each school, the dissertation committee and the Georgia Southern Institutional Review Board. The study was conducted during the 2008-2009 school year. The participants chosen were sent an information packet explaining the rationale and purpose of the study, and a letter of consent. Participants were asked to respond via e-mail if they were willing to participate in the focus group session. There was a focus group of certified teachers

from various grade levels, elementary, middle and high school; administrators and county office personnel; students completed a survey with open-ended questions and parents were interviewed. Sessions were scheduled at the participants' convenience and surveys were done during the school day and/or after school, with parental consent; and interviews were conducted as scheduled. A reminder was sent out to participants before each session.

## Data Analysis

Marshall and Rossman (1989) contended that the processes of data collection and data analysis in a qualitative study should be simultaneous. According to Schatzman and Strauss (1973), the analysis of qualitative data primarily involves the categorization of things, persons, and/or events and the properties that characterize them.

The data from interview transcriptions and journals were analyzed through the category construction method that consists of organizing the data sources, reducing the text, and generating conceptual categories, themes, and patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mirriam, 1998).

The data were collected and analyzed. The data consisted results of the focus group session, interviews and surveys. The information was transcribed from an audiotape to identify themes and patterns. This data were further discussed for implementation in the school district.

## Limitation

The following limitations may affect the interpretation of the results:

Information gathered from the schools in this district may not generalize to other schools.

Summary

The lack of parental involvement is an issue in this Northeast Georgia school district. Identifying the views of certified staff, parents, and students, on what promotes and prevents parental involvement will enhance the academic growth of their children. Providing parents with ways to promote involvement will assist teachers in reaching students. Parental involvement in schools is much more than parent conferences and PTOs. If educators are to reach their goal of producing successful students, they must partner with the people ultimately responsible for those students -- the parents. Getting parents involved is no easy task, however this study provides insight as to what promotes and prevents parental involvement.

Qualitative Item Analysis

Once the questioning process began, other probing questions were asked to individuals for clarification. The data were compiled for the school district.  The underlying questions guiding this study were:

1. What promotes parental involvement in the school's educational system?

2. What prevents parental involvement in the school's educational system?

The following questions were asked to probe for answers in the focus group:

1.  How do you define parental involvement?
2.  Describe the level of parental involvement in schools in this county. Give some examples of ways parents are involved or not involved.
3.  What causes parents to stay involved in their child's education?
4.  What causes parents not to be involved in their child's education?
5.  How do parents and children benefit from the parents being involved in their child's school experiences?
6.  How do teachers benefit from parental involvement?
7.  What could the school do to help you get more parents involved in their child's education?
8.  How welcome do your parents feel at your school?

Questions for parents:

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. In what ways have you been involved with your child's education?
3. What causes you to be involved in your child's education?
4. What causes you not to be involved in your child's education?
5. How do you and your child benefit from your being involved in your child's education?
6. How does the school benefit from your being involved in your child's education?
7. What could the school do to help you get more involved in your child's education?
8. How welcome do you feel at your child's school?
9. What has been the worst experience with the school and your child?
10. What has been the best experience with the school and your child?

Questions for students:

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. In what ways are your parents involved in your education?
3. What causes your parents to be involved in your education?
4. What causes your parents not to be involved in your education?
5. How do you and your parents benefit from them being involved in your education?
6. How does the school benefit from your parents being involved in your education?
7. What could the school do to encourage your parents to become more involved in your education?
8. How welcome do your parents feel at your school?
9. Describe the worst experience you have had at your school.
10. Describe the best experience you have had at your school.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. The purpose of this study was to determine what promotes and prevents parental involvement in a child's education. To achieve the goal of this study, the researcher utilized a focus group, parent interviews, and student surveys in order to obtain information for this research project. All participants were randomly selected from a purposive sample of certified staff, administrators, board office staff, parents and students.

After receiving approval from Georgia Southern University Instructional Review Board (IRB), the researcher contacted each prospective participant about the research project via e-mail and/or phone and extended an invitation to join the focus group to discuss the issue of parental involvement. The researcher explained to the prospective participants that he or she had been randomly selected to participate in the small focus group to discuss what promotes and prevents parental involvement in a child's education. The researcher contacted, by phone, prospective parents to schedule an interview; the researcher also contacted parents of potential student survey participants and sent a letter to be signed by parents giving consent for student participation.

The researcher handed the participants the cover letter and e-mailed others explaining the purpose of the research project (see Appendix A). At the beginning of the focus group and interviews, the researcher provided the informed consent to be signed by the participants (see Appendix B). The consent forms for students were signed by their parents and returned to the researcher prior to meeting with the participants (see Appendix C).

In order to help insure participant confidentiality, real names of the participants have not been used for this project. The focus group sessions and interviews were audio taped in order to allow the researcher to transcribe the data and to report the findings.

Overview of Focus Group

The focus group used the selected methodology to generate participants' thoughts and beliefs regarding prevention and promotion of parental involvement in a child's education. During the sessions, teachers were given the opportunity to express their sincere thoughts and opinions. A focus group was held with certified teachers from various grade levels, elementary, middle and high schools; administrators and county office personnel. This group consisted of nine members: All names are pseudonyms:

1.  Evelyn-elementary kindergarten teacher with 10 years of experience, has a son in high school and a daughter in middle school
2.  Eva-elementary 4th grade teacher, 2 years of experience
3.  Martha-6th grade math teacher, 15 years of experience
4.  Mary-middle school music teacher, teaches all grade levels, 7 years of experience
5.  Hilda-high school teacher, 9th and 10th grade history, 14 years of experience
6.  Harry-high school teacher of 11th and 12th grade PE, basketball coach, 12 years teaching and 5 years coaching
7.  Adam-high school principal, 25 years of experience
8.  Angela-elementary principal, 9 years of experience
9.  Carrie-board office representative, 20 years of experience

The session lasted an hour as the group expressed their ambivalence for involving parents in their children's education. Questions were explored one at a time until all questions were answered, and, if necessary, participants were prompted to respond more thoroughly. Through observation of group discussions, the investigator was able to garner a general sense of participants' experiences. In order to answer the focus

group questions, the research questions served as the focus of the group discussion. The research questions were:

1) What promotes parental involvement in a school's educational program?

2) What prevents parental involvement in a school's educational program?

Focus Group Questions

*Question 1: How do you define parental involvement?*

"Active participation" was the general consensus about the definition of parental involvement. The final definition was "parents taking an active role in all aspects of the lives of their children." Participants' definitions generated three common themes: disciplinary, organizational and academic perspectives.

*Disciplinary Perspective*

Participants defined parental involvement as parents spending quality time with their children. This included knowing where they are, whom they are with, and what they are doing at all times. Participants felt that parents must take responsibility for their children and their whereabouts and that discipline must come with love. The participants discussed that parents must demand respect and model those behaviors. Adam stated that "Children are having children; therefore, children are raising themselves." Participants commented that parents attempted to become their children's friend as opposed to being a parent. Mary stated, "After a child is reprimanded, if you tell them you will call their parents, the first thing out of the child's mouth is, I don't care." When asked to elaborate, Mary replied, "When calling parents, many appear to be nonchalant and have an 'I don't care attitude.' They are often critical about the teacher's inability to motivate their child." Evelyn, Martha, Eva, and Hilda commented that parents are unable to discipline their

children due to the governmental system. Participants felt that the power of many parents

has been taken out of their hands and parents are doing the best they can.

*Organizational Perspective*

Several teachers defined parental involvement from an organizational perspective.

Eva stated, and Evelyn, Martha, Angela, and Carrie agreed, that parents should ensure

that their children are clean, fed, well rested for school, and ready to learn. They believe

that parents should take every opportunity to create a loving environment that supports

learning. Participants expressed that parents should have a structured home routine. This

included bedtime, chores, and limited television, computer, and game time. Participants

felt parents should choose educational programs and not shows or games with vulgarity,

nudity and violence.

*Academic Perspective*

The overall perspective of this definition was parents come to school only if

something is wrong or when they think a teacher has wronged their child. The

participants expressed a desire for parents to make visiting the school a top priority.

Adam asked, "Why can't they come to support their children on a weekly or bi-weekly

basis?" Other participants felt the definition of parental involvement was checking

homework, signing agendas, tutoring, and supporting home-school relationships.

Participants felt parents should come out and support academics as well as sporting

events. This quote coming from Carrie seemed to sum up the overall perspective of the

definition of parental involvement, "Parental involvement is supporting the whole child

educationally (homework, parent teacher conferences, etc, socially (knowledge of

friends, time and concerns), behaviorally (modeling, teaching ethics and responsibility) and emotionally (praising and self esteem)."

*Question 2: Describe the level of parental involvement in schools in this county. Give some examples of ways parents are involved or not involved.*

Participants' perspectives varied regarding the level of involvement in this county. Something that was mentioned frequently was "dismal." This was a consensus for middle and high school participants. Elementary participants stated that their level of parental involvement for the most part was okay, but they struggled with the hard to reach parents. Martha and Hilda stated, "We cannot get parents to return important documents or come to meetings." Mary stated, "Getting a working telephone number is like pulling teeth." The comment was related to another comment made concerning the numerous non-working or disconnected telephone numbers. Participants commented that not being able to reach parents was extremely frustrating because they had no way to notify parents of events taking place with their child, positive or negative. Carrie, representing the board office, and Adam and Angela, have witnessed the frustration level of teachers not having access to parents via telephone and mentioned the extensive number of parents that do not have access to computer emails.

The researcher interjected and asked participants to include ways parents are not involved. As mentioned by Eva, there is a high mobility rate. Parents move in and out without updating their information. Teachers responded that mail is often returned. At the middle and high school level, Martha and Mary agreed with Hilda and Harry that parents were so involved in other issues outside of school that their children got placed on the back burner. Adam and Harry said, "Other things were more important than their children

such as: raising other siblings, jobs, insurance and medicine." Evelyn and Eva stated, "Even the elementary schools' hard to reach parents indicated that they would like for parental involvement to increase but were unsure of how to motivate parents to become more interested in the education of their children." It was suggested by Carrie that maybe our parents need parenting skill classes because parents often want to know what incentives we are offering for them to come to see about their children.

Hilda and Mary stated, "Parents might become more involved at school if there were more opportunities for them to participate. They stated that elementary schools have more parental participation because they have monthly performances. Most parents like to see their children participate in some type of public activity." Martha and Harry felt that in order to bring more parents into the physical school building, participants felt school officials must provide more opportunities for students to perform and show off their school work.

The music teacher and the basketball coach had differing opinions about parental involvement when it came to their elective areas. We see parents all the time. When their children participate in sports, musical performances and artwork, parents come out in massive numbers. The emerging theme was that these teachers had a different perspective on the level of parental involvement. The basketball coach commented that he had a high level of participation because the activity is after school hours and on Saturdays.

Participants pointed out that parental involvement is just not an in-school activity. Participants stated that some parents are not able to come to school for events, performances, and/or meetings, but we know that they are involved because their children show-up dressed, prepared and ready to go. This statement caused some of the middle

and high school participants to change their perceptions from "dismal" to "moderate"
about parental involvement.

*Question 3: What causes parents to stay involved in their child's education?*

Participants felt that there are certain factors that would cause parents to stay involved in their child's education. Parents should spend at least 10 to 20 minutes per day chatting with their children. Carrie and Mary stated, "Parents should sit with their children daily and discuss or give them an opportunity to express their opinions about their school day and what they learned." Adam and Angela felt that communicating more, supporting learning and setting goals would help parents identify with what is going on at school.

Listening was another way participants identified that parents can stay involved in their child's education. Adam and Angela felt parents should keep an open line of communication and be willing to listen to the good and the bad. They felt that if parents ask the "5 w how" questions they would stay in tune with their children's friends, whereabouts, and feelings. Evelyn and Eva suggested, "In order for parents to stay involved, they must inquire about their child's concerns and be supportive." Martha and Mary felt that parents need to check agenda's daily, attend conferences and early release days, and read all letters and notes and return them all in a timely manner.

Mary, Angela and Carrie also discussed the need for parents to support learning. Eva stated, "When parents support learning by reading to their children, going over homework, and having a routine place for study helps them stay involved." The group suggested that playing soothing music, giving children a snack, and limiting their

movement would provide the school with support at home. Harry and Mary believed that parent support was the key to keeping them involved in school.

All participants seem to agree that setting goals was another way to keep parents involved in their child's education and felt that parents should teach their children to do their best and expect nothing less. Angela stated, "Parents could give their children challenges and show them steps to make their dreams a reality." In addition, parents could set guidelines, enforce them, and modify them as needed in order to provide consistent structure and nurturing. After being prompted to elaborate, Carrie, Harry and Adam stated, "Parents' involvement can start at home but school must communicate, listen, inquire, be supportive and help set goals for students."

*Question 4: What causes parents not to be involved in their child's education?*

The two barriers causing parents not to be involved in their child's education were lack of time and lack of education. Carrie and Adam expressed their concern as to why parents are not actively involved in their child's education. Participants seemed to be really down as they spoke about parents not having time for their children. They don't attend conferences or assist their children at home. Adam stated, "We have children raising children." Angela then replied, "Schools must make a conscience effort to help parents become more responsible for their children."

Adam, Martha, and Mary noted that parents are so busy with their daily lives and jobs that they have little time for their children. They commented that most parents have to choose between working and spending time with their children. In order to feed and take care of their children, they must work. Hilda made this statement, "Burger King, TV time, and hand held games have replaced talking at the dinner table." Other barriers

related to parents not being able to be involved in their child's education included work schedules conflicting with school events, lack of employment causing parents not to be able to afford transportation, parents addicted to drugs, incarceration, illness and other priorities.

Language was also found as a reason some parents are not involved. Adam and Carried stated, "The rising flux of limited English as a first language students appear in the county they felt alienated from the school staff because they were not fluent in the primary language spoken at the school." The lack of bilingual staff in schools may contribute to non-English speaking parents' lack of participation in their child's education.

Harry explained that, due to lack of education, parents have had to make a choice of working or supporting their child's education. Parents may not realize that without their support they are helping to create the same type of generation as their parents. Carrie and Angela suggested that schools provide parents with workshops on rearing their children and provide more literacy activities. Participants felt that the school materials are difficult to understand and that parents want to be involved but do not know how. Adam stated, "Parents don't have time to come now. What makes us think that they would set aside time for parenting classes? A class, in my opinion, would not be good."

Adam noted another barrier that causes parents not to be involved in their child's education is the number of immature parents. Most participants agreed that the maturity level of parents is low; the average age of parents is 28-30 years of age. Participants felt that parents twenty years ago encouraged their children to graduate from high school and college, whereas today parents are accepting a lot less, with emphasis placed on sports

and music. Most students desire to become professional musicians or sports persons. Elaborating further, participants spoke of bad experiences parents encountered in school themselves. Others felt parent are very embarrassed about their children's actions and come to cause a scene before the blame is placed on them or the child. Participants suggest that when calling parents we need to start with something positive.

The last barrier that was discussed was that involvement decreases, as students get older. Mary and Hilda felt parents believed middle and high school students could support themselves. Therefore, they devote more time when children are in elementary school than in later grades. Martha stated, "Middle school is independent time. Students are embarrassed if parents come to school." One group member responded, "Parents need to be involved just as much or more as students get older." The participants concurred that there is a need to help parents overcome barriers that keep them from being involved in their child's education.

*Question 5: How do parents and children benefit from their parents being involved in their child's school experiences?*

Participants started the discussion of question five often on how teachers benefit from parental involvement. The researcher had to redirect the group discussion back to the benefits for parents and children. Angela stated, "Parents and children benefited when students get good grades and test results were higher." Mary stated, "Students' attitudes and behavior were more positive when parents are involved." Harry responded that academic programs are more successful and the school as a whole is more effective. Eva said, "All of this is beneficial for the teachers as well as the parents." Most parents want their child to be in a good school. The participation of all parents, including those with

limited knowledge of English, is important to the success of our children. Such

participation is beneficial for parents and children.

Evelyn stated, "Parents have a better chance to understand the school system

when becoming involved in the education of their children." Angela stated, "Having open

communication with parents can benefit all of us."  While Carrie said, "The school has to

communicate to parents their child's progress and let them be a part of the decision

making process." Martha, Hilda, and Adam did not have anything major to say, but

agreed with their colleagues, "If parents become more involved in the education of their

children, then state mandates can be met and students can achieve academically." With

this new trend, everybody is happy. Some benefits for parents include self-worth, and

self-confidence, acquiring new ideas for helping their children learn while working with

the school, a better social network, expanded involvement opportunities, and positive

rapport with the school. Adam stated, "Teachers benefit anytime parents are involved in

the education of their children."

*Question 6: How do teachers benefit from parental involvement?*

Hilda suggested that the group generate a list of benefits for teachers when

parents are involved in their child's education. The researcher allowed them to brainstorm

and after much discussion, participants generated a list of benefits for teachers.  It

included these things: improved academic performance, improved school behavior,

greater academic motivation, and lower dropout rates.

*Question 7: What could the school do to help you get more parents involved in their*

*child's education?*

The participants agreed in order to get more parents involved they must create and implement new and more effective parental involvement programs engaging parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home. Schools must also provide the necessary materials, resources and training to better assist parents in helping their children with their schoolwork. All participants implied that they had had no "formal" training in the area of parental involvement. Carrie stated, "We need to be trained to better assist parents to help their children with their school work."

Participants recognize that the school system needs to provide a course on communicating with parents. Participants felt that, given the impact of parental involvement on student achievement, we must provide teachers with the resources to aid in forming successful collaborative partnerships. They stress that in an effort to reach the children they serve more effectively, a rapport must be built with the parents. Carrie also said that teachers must be willing to be taught. Participants stated that parents must be willing to join in and learn how to become a part of their child's education.

*Question 8: How welcome do your parents feel at your school?*

Evelyn, Eva, and Carrie stated that parents feel welcome at most of the elementary schools, but the middle and high schools were in need of a welcoming committee. The participants agreed that front office staff should be provided with training. Martha said, "Parents are made to feel incompetent and, therefore, they feel uncomfortable visiting the school. When parents have a negative experience with school, they are reluctant to visit."

Focus Group Results

Participants noted that parents needed to feel a sense of being wanted and needed. "Make sure that you do not use an abundance of acronyms that parents do not understand. Education, like any other field, is filled with acronyms that only make sense to other educators. Be plain with your communication. If you must use an acronym, be sure and explain it to the parent."

Participants felt that when parents show up to school, for the most part, they are welcome. Carrie stated, "If we could get them here, we would roll out the red carpet." Adam said, "When, or if they come, it should be for a cordial visit, not to cuss the teacher out." The overall view was if parents come to school, most people would welcome them.

The results from the focus group answered the research questions. Themes emerged and the results are stated in Table I in the appendix. Research question one: What promotes parental involvement in a school's educational program? This question was answered using focus group questions:

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. Describe the level of parental involvement in schools in this county. Give some examples of ways parents are involved.
3. What causes parents to stay involved in their child's education?
4. How do parents and children benefit from their parents being involved in their child's school experiences?
5. How do teachers benefit from parental involvement?
6. What could the school do to help you get more parents involved in their child's education?
7. How welcome do your parents feel at your school?

Research question two: What prevents parental involvement in a school's educational program? This question was answered using focus group questions:

2. Describe the level of parental involvement in schools in this county. Give some examples of ways parents are involved or not involved.
3. What causes parents to stay involved in their child's education?
4. What causes parents not to be involved in their child's education?

Overview of Parent Interviews

Parent interviews involved six parents who were selected from a hat drawing

consisting of names from a purposive sample from elementary, middle, and high schools..

All names are pseudonyms:

1) Freda has a son and two daughters. Her son and one of her daughters are in middle school and the other daughter is in high school. (Involved)
2) Neicy has a daughter in high school. She is a single mom. (Not Involved)
3) Andrew has a son in middle school. He is a single father. (Partially involved)
4) Kelcie has two sons, both in elementary school -1$^{st}$ and 6$^{th}$ grade. (Involved)
5) Tika has six children-one in elementary school (3rd grade), three in middle school (6th, 7th and 8th grades), and two in high school (10th and 12th grade), (Not involved)
6) Rooker has two children-a daughter in 7th grade and a son in the 10th grade. (Involved)

During the interviews, parents were given the opportunity to express their sincere

thoughts and opinions. Each session lasted, on an average, for 45 minutes, as parents

expressed their involvement in their child's education. Questions were explored, one at a

time, until all questions were answered and, if necessary, parents were prompted to

respond.  Through observation of parent discussions, the investigator was able to garner a

general sense of participants' experiences. In order to answer the parent questions, the

research questions served as the focus for the interview sessions. The research questions

were:

1) What promotes parental involvement in a school's educational program?

2) What prevents parental involvement in a school's educational program?

Interview Questions for Parents

*Question 1: How do you define parental involvement?*

After discussion of the definition with each parent, the participants stated their idea of parental involvement was 'to help their children with school and to be actively involved.' Neicy said, "I am not involved with the school that much." Mr. Rooker told the researcher that he comes to everything he can that involves his children and school. He felt that he was very active in the education of his children.

*Question 2: In what ways have you been involved with your child's education?*

Kelcie volunteered at the school on days off from work, served as president of the PTO at the elementary school, and as class mom for her son and daughter. Freda helped at basketball games, worked in the concession stand at ballgames, helped with homework and ran the taxi for the kids to and from the recreation department. Andrew was involved when he needed to be involved. He said, "I come when I need to take care of business." Neicy was not involved and had not even seen the new school. Tika stated that she was pulled in every direction having kids in various grade levels at different schools. She rarely missed any functions but it was hard to manage the schedules of her children. She attends PTOs and volunteers at the ballgames in the concession stand. She stated, "I attend early release days and help with homework." Mr. Rooker makes his own schedule and volunteers to speak in classrooms, work with small groups and chaperons trips.

*Question 3: What causes you to be involved in your child's education?*

Freda stated, "I feel it is very important to know what my children are working on so they can succeed in class."  Neicy pointed out her involvement was on her job not at school. "What would the teachers do if I came to help all the time?" Kelcie said, "My

children cause me to be involved." Andrew said, "When the need arises, I am there."

Tika stated that her kids require her involvement. "They all need something different

everyday; therefore, it drives me to go and see what they are doing at school and support

them. I have no choice but to communicate with the teachers." Mr. Rooker's father died

when he was young. He was not fortunate enough to have his dad at his school functions.

He said, "If I ever have children, I will attend all the functions at school that I can. My

children will be a high priority."

*Question 4: What causes you not to be involved in your child's education?*

Neicy could not give an answer even when prompted. Kelcie, Tika, Mr. Rooker

and Freda shared that they stay involved in the education of their children. Andrew said

he only missed school functions if his children had sporting event games.

*Question 5: How do you and your child benefit from being involved in your child's*

*education?*

Freda replied that being involved with her children's education helped them to

work together and sometimes have great sharing times because of it. Kelcie said, "I have

a GREAT CLOSENESS with my boys. It is only natural for this to occur. They know

that their Dad and I care…so, of course, that makes them care a great deal! Or at least I

like to think that it works that way!" Neicy did not have a comment. Andrew said, "We

benefit when grades are good." Tika and Mr. Rookie both commented they benefited

from being involved in their child's education when they are excited about going to

school, when they do homework without too much of a fuss, when they want to be

involved in their own education, and when they want help with their projects and

homework.

*Question 6: How does the school benefit from your being involved in your child's*

*education?*

Freda believes that being involved helps her children's attitude about themselves

and the school. "When kids feel good about themselves and their work, it is actually

passed on to others in the school." Andrew commented that the school has his support

when and if needed. Kelcie said that they know and her boys know that anytime they

need her, she is there. "They also benefit academically. One of the key issues for school

was support and I support that issue," acknowledged Kelcie. Neicy said she supports the

school and the benefit for them is that her child does not create discipline problems. Tika

felt that the school benefited because her children are passing their classes and

standardized tests, as well as they do not create discipline problems. Mr. Rookie stated

that school benefited because his children helped to raise attendance, test scores, and

added to the social status of the school. I asked for clarity. He stated, "Because my

children are involved in sports and other school related activities, I am a taxi service to

other children in the county." There was no taxi service in the county so it added to the

social status with him being a taxi service helping her children and parents.

*Question 7: What could the school do to help you get more involved in your child's*

*education?*

Kelcie responded,"The only way I would become more involved is if I had a bed

and a refrigerator, she said, "Because I stay at the school all the time." Freada responded,

"I do not think they could do much more." Yet Andrew stated, "School could open earlier

and stay later for parents who work 12 to 14 hour shifts." "The school should be willing

to help us out", said Neicy. "Nothing", stated Tika. Mr. Rooker stated he did not need any

help, but parents of other students have stated that the school could schedule conferences and other events at different time.

*Question 8: How welcome do you feel at your child's school?*

"We're in and out all the time. There is always a friendly greeting and smile from someone on faculty or staff. I get a lot of brags from different people when I'm there. Of course, that makes me feel good as a Mama," said Kelcie. Freda stated, "Teachers and administrators have always made us feel welcome." Neicy's comment was that they talk hateful to you because they think you don't have good sense. Andrew said, "I feel welcome most of the time depending on who I see first." Tika felt very welcomed at school; most of the staff knew her name. Mr. Rooker felt very welcomed.

*Question 9: What has been the worst experience with the school and your child?*

Kelcie-I did have one teacher that put my child on the computer every day to accelerate him in Math-so she could work with the kids that really needed her. Well needless to say, my child was basically teaching himself math all year. It was not good for him even though she thought she was accelerating him!

Freda-I have not encountered any major problems but last year when my child was sick so much there was a lack of communication causing some attendance problems

Neicy-My worse experience was when I needed to pick up my child and it was around 2:30. That secretary told me I had to wait until after the buses left. Needless to say I was mad. I raised my voice at her and she just looked at me. I was mad and when my child came to the car I was raising "cane". She politely said, "I hope she still likes me Monday." I was then hurt and embarrassed.

Andrew-The time I got a call from the school about my son. He was acting out in class and I came up to the school. I wanted to meet with everyone because my son was not bad. I was going to tell those teachers and that principal off. I walked in and the lady sent me to another office. As I was walking by this class, I saw some people playing. I thought to myself what in the world are they doing in that class. They were hitting and jumping up and down. I was appalled. That had to be the worst teacher. I asked the principal, "What kind of school is this that teachers allow their students to play in class." The principal wanted to know where I saw the children playing. So I took him to the classroom. To my amazement it was my son. Talk about embarrassed. I was.

Tika-The time that one of my middle school children decided that he was going to be disruptive in math class. I had to come to the school and talk with the principal about his behavior. It was the worst and most embarrassing experience I had to deal with at school.

Mr. Rooker-My worst experience was watching another parent get frustrated with the secretary due to difficulty of understanding another language. The secretary and the parent were upset. It bothered me because I could offer no assistance making me aware of the need for bilingual staff.

*Question 10: What has been the best experience with the school and your child?*

Kelcie-Getting to know their teachers and still having a positive relationship with them through the years is the best experience. My kids see that we try and connect as parents/teachers and I'm sure this affects their attitude toward their whole school experience.

Freda-Each day is a new experience at school. I count it a blessing to have her in this school. I feel she is safe and is receiving the education she needs to reach her goals.

Neicy-At Christmas they gave my child some presents that I didn't even ask for. This was a good thing. After being asked to elaborate, the parent stated although she had had a run in with the school, she wished she had done more to get involved with school events and her child education. Her child has good grades but could have been an all A student had she pushed her more.

Andrew-The school chose my child to do a welcome at the dedication program. This was the best experience to be chosen to represent the whole sixth grade.

Tika-One of my middle school children was given the opportunity to model behavior and dress for a pep rally. He was chosen because of an essay he wrote about the person he respected the most. In the essay, he wrote about his father and mother modeling correct behavior for her children. This led to his being chosen for the pep rally to model clothing and behavior. This was a wonderful experience for me.

Mr. Rooker-As I visited the school one day, I saw my child helping a less fortunate child with his homework and he then asked me if the young man could come to our house to get additional help organizing his notebooks, studying for his test, and some new tennis shoes. This did my heart good to see my son helping another student in this capacity.

<div align="center">Parent Interview Results</div>

The most befitting definition of parental involvement from the parents was "helping" and "actively involved."  Some parents seem eager to volunteer from PTO president to taxi for the recreation department while others could not be involved because

of their job or because they chose not to become involved. Some parents only missed school functions because of sporting events. The benefits for parents were closeness and caring while the school benefits were good attitude and academic achievement. Some parents wanted to lay the blame on the school because they could not or would not be involved in their child's education.

There were parents who wanted schools to open earlier and stay open later. It seemed to be linked with how welcomed they felt at school. If the parent had an issue with the school, they wanted the school to fix the problem. Some parents had a bitter taste regarding the school system. Again they did not want to accept the responsibility of taking care of business.

Many of the experiences the parents had were great. There were some good and some not so good. The themes that emerged were positive relationships and communication. Although there were some bad experiences, the parents gave good comments about the school as a whole. One parent put it in a nutshell, "you have to blend peanuts to produce peanut butter; therefore, you have to blend schools and parents to produce academically sound students."

The discussions from the focus group answered the research questions. Themes emerged and the results are stated in Table I in the appendix. Research question one: What promotes parental involvement in a school's educational program? This question was answered using parent interview questions:

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. In what ways have you been involved with your child's education?
3. What causes you to be involved in your child's education?
4. How do you and your child benefit from when involved in your child's education?
5. How does the school benefit from your being involved in your child's

education?

6. What could the school do to help you get more involved in your child's education?
7. How welcome do you feel at your child's school?
8. What has been the best experience with the school and your child?

Research question two: What prevents parental involvement in a school's educational program? This question was answered using parent interview questions:

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. What causes you not to be involved in your child's education?
3. What has been the worst experience with the school and your child?

Overview of Student Surveys

Four students were randomly selected from a purposive sample group of

elementary, middle and high school students asked to complete a survey using specific

questions about parental involvement. They were: all names are pseudonyms:

1) Teresa-9th grade-discipline problem, B - C student
2) Brooke- 8th grade - straight A student, gifted student
3) James- 6th grade - BD student
4) John- 5th grade - average student elementary school
5) Cathy-12th grade - honor student-athlete
6) Lisa-10th grade - A/B student
7. Chole-7th grade-average student

Permission was obtained from parents through written communications. They

were asked to complete a survey asking specific questions about parental involvement.

During the survey with students, they were given the opportunity to express their sincere

thoughts and opinions on paper about the topic. They were encouraged to ask questions

for clarity. Each session lasted on an average of thirty minutes as students completed the

survey on how involved their parents were in their education. Questions were explored

one at a time until all questions were answered and, if necessary, students were asked

other questions to clarify responses.  In order to answer the student questions, the

research questions served as the focus for the survey. The research questions were:

1) What promotes parental involvement in a school's educational program?

2) What prevents parental involvement in a school's educational program?

Student Questions

*Question 1: How do you define parental involvement?*

The students defined parental involvement as 'parents involved in your school

life.' Chloe said, "Everybody getting along." Cathy shared her definition for parental

involvement as 'when her parents came to functions at her school even if she was not

involved.'

*Question 2: In what ways are your parents involved in your education?*

James-They call my teachers when they need to talk with them about my behavior or

grades.

John-They help me with fundraisers and collecting the money.

Chloe- My parents want me to go to college therefore they make sure I get good grades.

They go to parent conferences, early release days and check parent connect. They talk the

school all the time.

Teresa-My mama is always up in my business calling the school to see how I am doing.

Cathy-My parents volunteer to help at school functions. They come to my ballgames and

donate money to different organizations within the school.

Lisa-My Mom is the secretary for the tip off club and she is always asking my teachers

about my behavior and grades.

*Question 3: What causes your parents to be involved in your education?*

James- My parents come to school to see if I am doing well.

Chloe-My parents want me to succeed in life.

John-They go to see about me at school because they care about me.

Teresa-My mama is just nosey.

Cathy-My parents want to make sure I am equipped with the knowledge I need to succeed in high school and go on to college.

Lisa-My mom stays on target about my grades to enable me to get the best education I can have.

*Question 4: What causes your parents not to be involved in your education?*

Teresa-She wouldn't miss a chance to see what I am doing.

Chloe-She is involved in my education.

James-Parents have the right to choose. They both work and have little time off.

John-My mother speaks no English and my dad works a lot.

Cathy-My parents are involved.

Lisa-Teachers having a better attitude would cause my mom to be involved

*Question 5: How do you and your parents benefit from being involved in your education?*

Chloe-I feel I am loved and I learn more. My parents' benefit when I get good grades.

James-My parents get a kick out of telling me to do my homework.

Teresa-I get my education and she does not get any discipline forms to sign.

John-When I get a good job, she will benefit from all the money I will send home.

Cathy-My parents and I benefit from their involvement when I get good grades and my name is in the paper.

Lisa-My mom and I benefit when other people ask how is school and we get to say great and it is the truth.

*Question 6: How does the school benefit from your parents being involved in your education?*

"The school benefits by me just being there," said John.

"It helps my grades," replied Chloe.

"It helps me get along with others," said James.

"They get to celebrate when we pass the end of the course test," said Teresa.

"When I do well the school gets recognition," said Cathy.

"I help the school look well when I do good," said Lisa.

*Question 7: What could the school do to encourage your parents to become more involved in your education?*

Students (Teresa)-Call home every week and write parent letters in the agenda book.

Student (James)-Have more parent meetings with the teachers and have performances for that students can participate.

Student (John) - Have interpreters at meetings so that my parents can understand. They have very little education.

Student (Chloe)-Nothing, she could not come anymore than she already does.

Student (Cathy)-My parents come but they have mentioned that they wished the school would offer more programs for parents to get involved.

Student (Lisa)-The school could make sure the teachers call before something negative happens.

*Question 8: How welcome do your parents feel at your school?*

Teresa said, "My mama feels "much welcome". They know her by name.

James said, "My parents feel welcome at school."

Chloe commented how very welcome her mom felt when coming to the school. Cathy and Lisa also said that their parents felt welcomed at school.

John said, "my mom doesn't speak English but she knows a smile."

*Question 9: Describe the worst experience you have had at your school?*

Student (Teresa)-The time I looked at something I shouldn't have on the laptop.

Student (James)-The time I got into a fight with a boy in the bathroom.

Student (John) - The time I was suspended off the bus because I would not sit down.

Student (Chloe)-The time I was being ugly to one of my classmates. My teacher and my mom got very upset with me.

Student (Cathy)-My worst experience was when my mom caught me up talking to someone in the classroom. I did not know she was there to pick me up. She heard the teacher tell me to sit down and be quiet. By that time she walked in the classroom. All the kids started to say, ooooh. She got me in the hall and would not take me with her. I had to go back to class. I was embarrassed.

Student (Lisa)-The worst experience I have ever had at school was when my teacher at the high school called my middle school coach. My mom was picking something up from the middle school and the middle school coach told her. They all came, my mom, my aunt, my middle school coach, along with my varsity high school basketball coach to my classroom. There I was asleep in class. What a surprise when I woke up to see all those people standing around my desk! I was sick with embarrassment.

*Question 10: Describe the best experience you have had at your school?*

Student one (James)-Student dances

Student two (Chloe)-School dances and I love sports here

Student three (John)-Going to gym to see my girlfriend

Student four (Teresa)-School dances are the best

Student five (Cathy)-The best experience at school was when my teachers nominated me best all around. This included academics, athletics and behavior. I was thrilled.

Student six (Lisa)-When we went to the final four in basketball and I looked in the stands to see my teachers, it was a good feeling. The next day at school they congratulated us and commended us on our accomplishments. It made me realize they do care about our academics as well as other areas of our lives.

<div align="center">Student Survey Results</div>

The student answers were short and to the point. They did ask for clarity when they did not understand. Their definition for parental involvement was "everybody getting along." When it comes to parents being involved in their education, some of the students were adamant stating that parents are "nosey" and "all up in their business." They did say that some parents were involved in fundraisers and after being questioned they stated that they did not have PTO anymore. The students reiterated parents and the school benefiting from being involved in their education. "Our parents want us to do well and succeed. The teachers were overjoyed when we passed." According to the students, some barriers keeping parents from being involved are language and job obligations.

The students expressed several ways for parents to become more involved. By calling home, sending letters, signing agendas, and meeting with parents would benefit involving more parents in the educational field. Students felt that parents were welcomed

at their school and were disappointed when they fought, got suspended, and were being

mean to others. Although they got in some minor trouble, they enjoyed the dances. The

students seem to enjoy school and were for the most part glad their parents were involved

in their education.

The results from the student survey answered the research questions. Themes

emerged and the results are stated in Table I. Research question one: What promotes

parental involvement in a school's educational program? This question was answered

using student survey questions:

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. In what ways have you been involved with your child's education?
3. What causes you to be involved in your child's education?
4. How do you and your child benefit from being involved in your child's education?
5. How does the school benefit from your being involved in your child's education?
6. What could the school do to help you get more involved in your child's education?
7. How welcome do you feel at your child's school?
8. What has been the best experience with the school and your child?

Research question two: What prevents parental involvement in a school's educational program? This question was answered using student survey questions:

1. How do you define parental involvement?
2. What causes parents to stay involved in their child's education?
3. What causes you not to be involved in your child's education?
4. What has been the worst experience with the school and your child?

Overall Results

To facilitate reporting, the results of the focus group, parent interviews, and

student surveys were charted. Table 1 showed some common themes that promote

parental involvement emerged from responses from the focus group, parent interviews,

and student surveys. Table 2 showed some of the barriers that schools, parents, and

students identified that prevent parental involvement, research question two. Table 3

showed some of the supportive roles that schools, parents and students identified as

important to promoting parental involvement, research question one.

 Research Question One: What promotes parental involvement in a school's education

 program?

There were several common themes that emerged during the focus group, parent

interviews and the student surveys. Participants seemed to encompass similar thoughts as

the questions were discussed. The common themes that surfaced during the focus group,

parent interview and student surveys were communication, reliability, accountability and

responsibility, and emotional support. These were the themes that would promote parental

involvement.

*Communication*

The most common and significant idea about effective parental involvement that

emerged during the focus group discussion, parent interviews, and student surveys was

communication. Most participants made reference to communication as an important

ingredient to the success of promoting parental involvement.  Sometimes open

communication between teachers and parents is all that it takes to improve parental

involvement.

Communicating the rules and regulations not only to students, but also to parents,

helps establish clear expectations for promoting parental involvement. The key to

promoting parental involvement is having informed parents. Therefore, good

communication lines between school and home is essential for promoting parental

involvement. When parents know school and home are working together it is beneficial to all involved.

Adam and Angela, principals, felt that communicating more, supporting learning and setting goals would help parents identify with what was going on at school. Freda, a parent, stated, "I feel it is very important to know what my children are working on so they can succeed in class." While Teresa, a student said "the school should call home every week and write parent letters in the agenda book."

Carrie, Harry, and Adam, board office personnel, a teacher, and a principal stated, "parents' involvement can start at home but school must communicate, listen, inquire, be supportive and help set goals for students." Angela, a principal, stated that, "Having open communication with parents can benefit all of us." While Carrie believed, "The school has to communicate to parents their child's progress and let them be a part of the decision making process."

Tika, a parent, also stated that her kids required her involvement. "They all need something different everyday therefore it drives me to go and see what they are doing at school and support them. I have no choice but to communicate with the teachers." And Freda stated," I feel it is very important to know what my children are working on so they can succeed in class."

The results indicated that these groups acknowledged the importance of involvement by all stakeholders as an important aspect to a quality education. The data indicated that the participants in the focus group, parent interviews, and student surveys considered communication to be an important factor when it came to promoting parental involvement.

*Reliability and Consistency*

Another important theme is reliability. It is important for the promotion of parental involvement. Schools, teachers, parents and students have significant impact on parental involvement and they all must be reliable in what they do regarding the promotion of parental involvement. Being reliable is part of the rearing a child. It is the consistency of a weekly schedule, a set bedtime, and student expectations. The participants discussed that parents must demand respect and model those behaviors.

Being consistent requires a lot of dedication and commitment on the part of parents, teachers and schools. However, consistency can be viewed as an expression of love and caring. When parents, teachers and students behave consistently, parental involvement will be promoted. Being reliable means that all participants are vested in the commitment it takes to see that parents are involved in their child's education and they maintain a safe and orderly environment for the children.

Martha and Mary, a veteran teacher and a relatively new teacher, felt that parents needed to check agendas daily, read all letters and notes and return them all in a timely manner, attend conferences and early release days.  Angela, an elementary principal of seven years stated, "Parents could give their children challenges and show them steps to make their dreams a reality. In addition, parents could set guidelines, enforce them and modify them as needed, in order to provide consistent structure and nurturing." Participants in the focus group expressed parents should have a standard structured at home routine. This included bedtime, chores, and limited television, computer, and game time. Participants felt parents should choose educational programs and not shows or games with vulgarity, nudity, and violence.

Chloe, a student, stated, "I feel I am loved and I learn more." My parents benefit when I get good grades. James, another student, expressed "My parents get a kick out of telling me to do my homework."

John, one of the students, expressed that his parents go to see about him at school because they care about him. Lisa, another student, said, "My mom stays on target about my grades to enable me to get the best education I can have." Teresa shared, "She wouldn't miss a chance to see what I am doing."

It is no easy task, but being committed to the steadfast plan of being reliable and consistent will result in desired outcomes of promoting parental involvement.

*Accountability and Responsibility*

When students display the appropriate attitude and grades, it is important to tell them how well they are doing. Accountability is also vital for effective parental involvement. It is important to emphasize the importance of being responsible parents, students and school workers. It is important that all stakeholders take responsibility for their actions. Parents, teachers, students, and schools have to take on the responsibility of keeping and getting parents involved, as well as supporting their children.

To promote parental involvement each group of participants suggested that a structured environment must be provided in order to support learning. Quiet places to complete homework, check homework for neatness and completion, and provide necessary resources and materials are all part of being responsible parents. Having the necessary resources at school, enforcing rules, and setting goals are ways to keep parents involved.

Another responsibility was support of learning. Mary, a teacher; Angela, a principal; and Carrie, board staff member, from the focus group discussed that parents must support learning. Eva stated, "When parents support learning by reading to their children, going over homework, and having a routine in place for study that would help them stay involved." "Parents should at least spend 10 to 20 minutes per day chatting with their children." Carrie and Mary stated that parents should sit with their children daily and discuss or give them an opportunity to express their opinions about their school day and what they learned. Hilda and Mary, two teachers, stated, "Parents might become more involved at school if there were more opportunities for them to participate."

Tika, a parent, stated that her kids require her involvement. "They all need something different everyday' therefore, it drives me to go and see what they are doing at school and support them." Mr. Rooker's father died when he was young. He was not fortunate enough to have his dad at his school functions. He said, "If I ever have children I will attend all the functions at school that I can. My children are a high priority." "One of the key issues for school was support and I support that issue," acknowledged Kelcie, one of the parents. Neicy, another parent, said she supported the school.

John, one of the students, expressed that his parents, "go to see about me at school because they care about me." Lisa, another student, said, "My mom stays on target about my grades to enable me to get the best education I can have." Teresa added that her mom wouldn't miss a chance to see what she was doing

All stakeholders must be held accountable and be responsible when it comes to promoting parental involvement.

*Emotional Support*

Emotional support is often needed to promote parental involvement. It comes with strings attached to becoming involved with children for an extended amount of time. One does not give emotional support without being attached in some way. The research shows that giving emotional support by all involved participants can and will increase parental involvement.

Participants from the focus group pointed out that parental involvement is not just an in-school activity. Participants stated that some parents are able to come to school for events, performances, and/or meetings but we know that they are involved because their children show-up dressed, prepared and ready to go. They stress that in an effort to reach the children they serve more effectively, a rapport must be built with the parents. Carrie, board office staff, also said that teachers must be willing to be taught. Participants stated that parents must be willing to join in and learn how to become a part of their child's education.

Kelcie, a parent, acknowledged getting to know her children's teachers and having a continuing positive relationship with them through the years is the best experience. "My kids see that we try and connect as parents/teachers and I'm sure this affects their attitude toward their whole school experience." Freda, another parent, said, "Each day is a new experience at school. I count it a blessing to have her in this school. I feel she is safe and is receiving the education she needs to reach her goals." Neicy, a parent, added, "At Christmas they gave my child some presents that I didn't even ask for. This was a good thing." After being asked to elaborate, the parent stated, although she had had a run in with the school, she wished she had done more to get involved with

school events and her child education. Her child has good grades, but could have been an all A student had she pushed her more.

Cathy, a student, said, "The best experience at school was when my teachers nominated me best all around. This included academics, athletics and behavior. I was thrilled." Lisa, a student, shared, "When we went to the final four in basketball and I looked in the stands to see my teachers, it was a good feeling. The next day at school they congratulated us and commended us on our accomplishments. It made me realize they do care about our academics as well as other areas of our lives."

When all stakeholders take on some type of emotional support, schools, parents and students benefit. Emotional support does enhance parental involvement.

Research Question Two: What prevents parental involvement in a school's education program?

*Lack of Time*

Participants noted that parents are so involved with their lives and their jobs they do not have time for their children. They acknowledged that the majority of parents had to choose between paying bills and spending time with their children. Other barriers related to lack of time included work schedules, drugs, illnesses, and taking care of family members. Participants felt that the system needed to provide more literacy activities for parents, along with activities and workshops on how to rear their children and workshops for teachers to learn to effectively deal with children.

Adam, Martha, and Mary, participants in the focus group noted that parents are so busy with their daily lives and jobs that they have little time for their children. They commented that most parents have to choose between working and spending time with

their children. In order to feed and take care of their children, they must work. Hilda made this statement, "Burger King, TV, and hand held games have replaced talking at the dinner table." Other barriers related to parents not being able to be involved in their child's education included work schedules, lack of employment, drugs, incarceration, illness and other priorities.

Carrie, a board office representatives, and Adam, principal, expressed their concerns as to why parents are not actively involved in their child's education. Participants seemed to be really down as they spoke about 'parents not having time for their children.' "They don't attend conferences or assist their children at home." Adam, principal, stated, "We have children raising children."

Mr. Rooker, a parent, stated that he did not need any help, but parents of other students have stated that the school could schedule conferences and other events at different times.

James, a student, said parents have the right to choose. They both work and have little time off.

If parents do not have time, it prevents parental involvement in their child's education.

*Lack of Education*

Due to the level of content, many parents have difficulty understanding content. Participants noted that parents want to be involved in their child's education. They just don't know how.

Harry, a high school teacher explained that, due to lack of education, parents have had to make a choice of working or supporting their child's education. Parents may not

realize that, by not giving their support, they are helping to create the same type of

generation as their parents. Carrie and Angela suggested that schools provide parents with

workshops on rearing their children and provide more literacy activities. Participants felt

that the school materials are difficult to understand and that parents want to be involved

but do not know how. Adam stated, "Parents don't have time to come now. What makes

us think that they would set aside time for parenting classes? A class in my opinion would

not be good." John said his parents have very little education. Limited education helps to

prevent parental involvement.

*Lack of Language Proficiency*

Language was found to be a reason why some parents are not involved. Adam and

Carried stated that with the rising flux of limited English as a first language student,

students appear in the county they felt alienated from the school staff because they were

not fluent in the primary language spoken at the school. The lack of bilingual staff in

schools may contribute to non-English speaking parents' lack of participation in their

child's education.

Mr. Rooker, a parent, said, "My worst experience was watching another parent

get frustrated with the secretary due to difficulty of understanding another language." The

secretary and the parent were upset. It bothered me because I could offer no assistance,

making me aware of the need for bilingual staff.

John, a student, said, "My mother speaks no English and my dad works a lot."

If there is a language barrier, that prevents parental involvement.

*Lack Maturity Level*

Most participants agreed that the maturity level of parents is low; the average age of parents is 28-30 years. Participants felt that parents twenty years ago encouraged their children to graduate from high school and college; whereas, today parents are accepting a lot less, with emphasis placed on sports and music.

Another barrier that emerged was the number of immature parents. Teachers pointed out that the maturity level of the parents was very low and that some no longer valued the importance of education. Due to negative experiences, parents and students perceive the school as cold and unwelcoming. Participants suggested that when calling parents, start with a positive comment.

Mary and Hilda felt parents believed middle and high school students could support themselves. Therefore, they devote more time when children are in elementary school than in later grades, Martha stated. "Middle school is independent time. Students are embarrassed if parents come to school." One group member responded, "Parents need to be involved just as much or more as students get older." There are a lot of young parents; therefore, they do not view education as older more mature parents. If parents do not value education, they tend not to be involved the education of their children.

*Lack of Active Involvement*

Several participants expressed their frustrations as to why parents do not take an active role in their children's education. One participant became emotional when stating, "Parents just don't have time for their children. They don't attend conferences or help with their children at home." Another felt, "We have children raising children." Parents and students also expressed that barriers get in the way and neither they nor their parents

can take an active role in the education of their children. Carrie, representing the board office, and Adam and Angela, principals, has witnessed the frustration level of teachers not having access to parents via telephone and mentioned the excessive number of parents that do not have access to computer emails.

At the middle and high school level, Martha and Mary, middle school teachers, agreed with Hilda and Harry, high school teachers, that parents were so involved in other issues outside of school; their children got placed on the back burner. Adam, principal, and Harry said that other things were more important than their children, such as: raising other siblings, jobs, insurance and medicine. Evelyn and Eva, teachers, stated that even the elementary schools' hard to reach parents indicated that they would like for parental involvement to increase, but was unsure of how to motivate parents to become more interested in the education of their children.

Yet Andrew stated that school could open earlier and stay open later for parents who worked 12 to 14 hour shifts. "The school should be willing to help us out," said Neicy, a parent. Neicy's comment was, "They talk hateful to you because they think you don't have good sense." Lisa, a student, said, "Teachers having a better attitude would cause my mom to be involved." Parents must be willing to be active participants in the education of their children.

Table 1:

Common themes emerging from the participants of the focus group, parents, and students
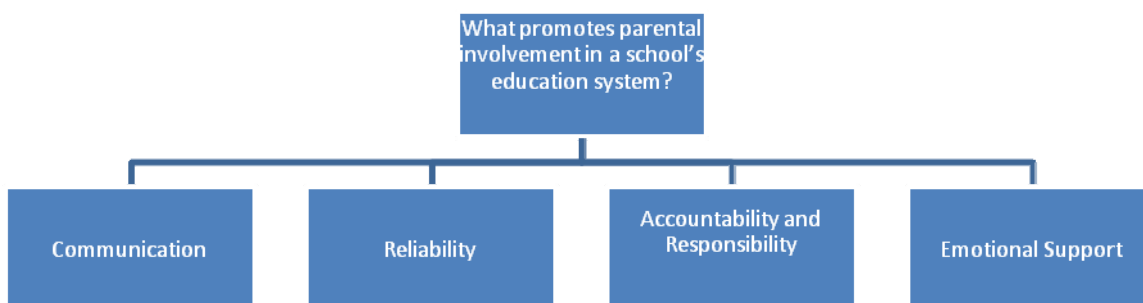
for

Research Question 1:

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Table 2:

Common themes emerging from the participants of the focus group, parents, and students
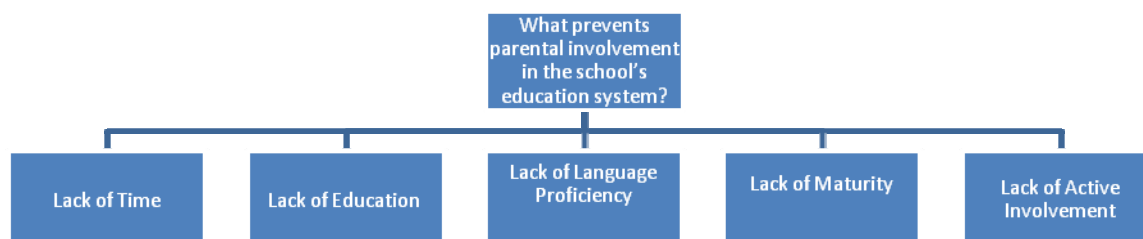
for

Research Question 2:

Table 3

Supportive roles identified to promote parental involvement

| Groups | Response |
|--------|----------|
| Focus Group | 1. More available time after school, before school, or planning time<br><br>2. Communicate with parents concerning student progress<br><br>3. Parents need to make their child's education their top priority.<br><br>4. Collaborate with parents<br><br>5. Provide teachers with training on how to deal with parents.<br><br>6. Visit school for activities other than discipline.<br><br>7. Structured Environment |
| Parents | 1. Teachers are available for conferences different times of the day.<br><br>2. Provide parent training for understanding of curriculum, procedures, and policies<br><br>3. School activities during the day to allow student involvement<br><br>4. Take more positive role in the decision making process.<br><br>5. Communicate with school |
| Students | 1. Put articles in the local newspaper about academics, sports, and other school related activities.<br><br>2. Accept and understand the importance of applying themselves to their highest potential.<br><br>3. Send more information home to parents.<br><br>4. Set goals. |

Summary

The research discussions and written comments from participants in the Northeast Georgia School System align with the review of literature in Chapter Two. Their efforts in this study were focused on parental involvement. Teachers go to several courses for certification, professional development and education, but teachers have received little or no training on how to involve parents in the educational lives of their children. Participants in this study were very clear in their responses and appreciated the opportunity to express their ideas and concerns. Based on the discussions and responses, themes were presented. The result of these findings indicated schools, parents, and students recognized the importance of home-school relationships and were willing to work towards establishing partnerships.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore what prevents and promotes parental involvement and to look at the manner in which parental involvement is being encouraged and utilized in schools. The researcher used a focus group, parent interviews, and student surveys to gather information for this project. All participants were randomly selected and included school administrators, teachers, parents, students, and board office personnel. This project was driven by two research questions. The research questions were: 1) What promotes parental involvement in a school's education system? 2) What prevents parental involvement in a school's education system?  Through this study, the researcher found emerging themes to promote parental involvement include communication, reliability, accountability and responsibility, and emotional support. Stakeholders whether it is the school, parent, or student, should be held accountable for their actions regarding parental involvement. It takes effort from all to promote and keep parents involved.

The focus group session, parent interviews, and student surveys were held during the 2008-2009 school year. A series of questions explored what promoted and prevented parental involvement in a school's education system. Sessions with parents and focus group were audio taped, transcribed, and grouped to establish themes. Throughout this method, data were constantly reviewed, and sorted to find any overlaps. Overlaps were grouped into categories and summarized as themes.

Discussion of Research Findings

Developing a clear definition of parental involvement from participants was difficult due to the broad range of parenting behaviors that parental involvement encompasses. Thus, parental involvement was defined from a number of perspectives. When analyzing responses, the majority of participants' definitions formed into three themes: parental involvement from a disciplinary perspective, parental involvement from an organizational perspective, and parental involvement from an academic perspective. Participants in the study were more interested in home-based activities that defined parental involvement as opposed to school-based activities. This indicator led to the contention that teachers perhaps felt home-based parental involvement was more effective than parents visiting the school, becoming active member in the PTO, or taking a part in school governance. This was in line with what parents and students said about how parental involvement starts at home. Within this disciplinary perspective, the focus group, parents, and students agreed that parental involvement has to be "active participation in some form." Cotton and Wikelund (2000) also defined parental involvement as the active participation of parents with the schools and in education.

Concerning the level of participation, focus group participants indicated that parents had a responsibility to support their child's education. There was some discord with the level of parental involvement in this Northeast Georgia School System. However, elementary schools were found to have more participation than middle schools. Participants in the focus group concluded that, as students entered higher grades, the parental involvement decreased. Taken together, these findings indicate a need to increase parental involvement at home and in school. Useem (1990) also found that

parents of children in middle school receive less information and guidance than those in elementary school.

*Research Question 1*

What promotes parental involvement in the school's education program?

The focus group participants identified communication as being valuable to the promotion of parental involvement. Participants in the focus group felt parents should keep an open line of communication by talking and listening to their children daily. Due to factors such as immaturity, puberty, and adult tendencies, children are impressionable therefore, creating difficulties communicating their feelings and emotions, especially during their middle school years. This strengthens the need to communicate with children concerning their friends, hangout places, morals and values, and responsibilities. The focus group and parents felt strongly about communication, whereas the student group felt apprehensive about parents imposing upon their privacy. Communicating is not only for parents but also for teachers and students to help establish clear expectations. This coincides with Dimmock and O'Donoghue (1996), characterizing communication as a two way process between school and home. Students agreed that schools should stay in contact with their parents. Students also stated that schools should send more information home so that parents are aware of activities and events.

Focus group participants felt that providing a structured environment to finish homework promoted parental involvement. This shows that parents are reliable in aiding and assisting their children at home by providing a quiet place to study. Some focus group participants and parents felt that this was a time to check homework and it gave students a chance to slow down from the hustle of the day. In this environment parent

participants are expected to ensure children are healthy, clean, and prepared. Student participants stated that when their parents stayed abreast of their grades and made sure resources were available, a stable environment for learning was provided. In Epstein's six types of parental involvement, two indicators, parenting and learning at home were equivalent to the findings in this study.

Focus group participants in the study also identified accountability and responsibility as a means to promote parental involvement. Parents are younger now and may need more guidance than before. Schools should model behavior expected from parents and parents should model behavior expected from their children. Modeling behavior just is not enough but appropriate behavior should be modeled such as teaching children to respect themselves and others, showing them how to conduct themselves in private and pubic places. Participants in the focus group felt every opportunity should be taken to reinforce manners, values, and social skills. Adults as well as children must earn respect. Participants in the focus group believe that what is taught at home will surface at school, thus creating a better environment for all. One student mentioned being selected for a part in a school wide activity based on his mom modeling appropriate behavior. These findings are consistent with the research according to Kesler-Skylar and Baker (2002), This was a great way to implement parental involvement. Cotton and Wikelund (2001), also suggest that parents should model desired behavior. This goes to show that children learn by example.

The focus group suggested that setting goals to provide emotional support for parents and students would be a way to promote parental involvement. Focus group participants seem to feel that parents should set goals and expectations as well as schools.

As opposed to setting goals and limitations for students, have parents and students sit down and set some goals together, thus giving children a daily challenge according to the focus group. On the other hand, student participants were satisfied with someone else making the decisions. Their strengths and weaknesses consisted of what was happening at that moment. They had no thought for the future. Even though students did not have much to say about setting goals, some stated that they had to make good grades and had plans to go to college. This led the researcher to believe, at some point, goals had been set and discussed with students. A network of caring adults, working together to achieve a common goal, formed a powerful learning community (Gonzalez, 2002). This learning community became powerful as parents, teachers, administrators, faculty and staff, and students worked together to form an alliance to promote parental involvement.

Participants of the focus group as well as parents identified praise and emotional support as expected. Contrary to the student group, they came across as not caring how much you know but they wanted to know how much you care. In order to promote parental involvement, participants of the focus group suggested hugging your child, telling them you love them, loving them enough to discipline them when they are wrong and giving praise for accomplishments, whether it is large or small. Student participants seem to agree with this concept, but the older children wanted to leave off the hugging. Students seemed to like when teachers expressed an interest in them. Some students mentioned how thrilled and overjoyed they were when teachers attended functions outside of school. They were excited to be selected for awards from teachers. Overall, participants felt strongly about providing a strong foundation of emotional support in order to promote parental involvement. Henderson & Berla (1994), document that a

home environment, which encourages learning, is more important to student achievement than income, education level, or cultural background. Thus, a supportive home environment that encourages learning makes the home an important civil structure and has a direct correlation with a child's educational attainment.

*Research Question 2*

What prevents parental involvement in the school's education program?

Focus group, parent, and student participant barriers aligned closely to those prevalent in literature review. The long list of barriers in the literature was categorized into the following themes: lack of time, lack of education, lack of maturity levels of the parents, lack of training in parenting skills, lack of positive past experiences with the school, lack of parents who value education, lack of parents who have difficulty understanding content, lack of the belief regarding level of parental involvement, and lack of positive teacher attitudes.  The list of barriers in this study was categorized into the following themes: lack of time, lack of education, lack of maturity levels of the parents, and lack of language proficiency. These themes are consistent with existing research done by Weiss & Edwards (1992) regarding lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities between families and educators. According to Rich (1988), there are some barriers that impede parental involvement. He states that time, culture/language, lack of a supportive environment, attitudes/misperceptions, training, inability to help with schoolwork, lack of responsiveness to parental needs, and negative experiences with schools for teachers or parents are all barriers hindering parental involvement. Focus group, parent, and student participants' responses were closely aligned with the barriers found in the study.

One theme that emerged across the board was that teachers were quite accommodating to barriers that were present. Participants believe that, despite the barriers, accommodations were being made to help families overcome their barriers. Teachers were willing to make home visits, provide transportation, and provide food and money for lunch for students in need. Even though focus group participants and parents recognized several barriers, they displayed a continued desire to help parents and children overcome these barriers.

Parents are first in line to promote parental involvement and, therefore, play a vital role in assisting schools to accomplish this goal. Parents who are involved in their children's education have a better understanding of what is expected in the school. Promoting parental involvement focuses on consistency and teamwork from all stakeholders involved. Schools and parents should be expected to reinforce the same behavior from all students to follow in order to promote parental involvement. This study revealed, as cited in the literature Edwards & Warin, (1999), that all stakeholders should work together for the common good of the students and school.

## Conclusion

Research has shown how parental involvement is linked to student success. There is a challenge as to how to continue promoting parental involvement in the education of children. Findings from this project support the already massive amount of literature suggesting that a home environment that encourages learning is one of the most important predictors of student success (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Participants' responses provided insight as to how to better promote parental involvement. The results of this study are intended to be a guide to aid this system in approaches promoting

parental involvement. It is known that parental involvement has a powerful impact with student success. Therefore, there should be an effective plan to promote parental involvement. This research project has served as a needs assessment in the area of promoting parental involvement.

Cotton & Wikelund (1989) showed that promoting parental involvement results in benefits not limited to students and parents; parent participation can have a lasting impact on teachers and schools. The research question, what promotes parental involvement? in this study is consistent with the research, as the participants expressed parental involvement as playing a major role in the decisions of all. Parental involvement has a powerful impact on the success of our children; therefore all stakeholders will have to establish the best way to promote parental involvement.

The research findings also correlated with the second research question, what prevents parental involvement? There are several barriers that prevent parents from being involved in their child's education. Participants' responses correlate with the study according to Rich (1988), who states that time, culture/language, lack of a supportive environment, attitudes/misperceptions, training, inability to help with schoolwork, a school's lack of responsiveness to parental needs, and negative experiences with schools for teachers or parents are all barriers hindering parental involvement.

The results from this study concur with studies conducted in Title I schools which show significant student achievement gains when parents are trained on effective parental involvement practices, (Shaver & Walls, 1998). The results from the focus group reflected that, if there were formal training for faculty and staff, one or more barriers could be remedied. Although this group spoke on how, instead of why, parents

should stay involved; this lets the researcher know that, with proper training, barriers

can be limited. Schools could provide some type of training for parents with language

barriers. This was another barrier mentioned by the focus group and the students.

The parent group expressed a need for their children to feel safe. The research by

The League of Schools Project (Davies, 1991) concurs with the group that every aspect

of the school building, including general climate, is open, helpful, and friendly to parents.

The parent group concluded that schools must also be friendly and helpful when parents

come to the school. Davies (1991), states that every aspect of the school building must be

friendly and, if this occurs, parents may be willing to learn how to become a part of their

child's education.

Bracy (2001) and La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta (2003), believe that barriers

such as, conflicting work schedules, impede parents becoming involved with their child's

education, as did the parent group. The students also mentioned that sometimes parents

were unable to get off work to attend conferences or other school related functions. The

focus group discussed that maybe events could be held on weekends to accommodate

those parents working second and night shift.

The focus group, parents and students were in line with Cotton & Wikelund,

(1989), who states that benefits of parental involvement are not limited to students and

parents; parent involvement can have a lasting impact on teachers and schools as well.

Students seem pleased to have good grades to show their parents and parents seem happy

to acknowledge those grades.

The findings in this study are consistent with the parental involvement literature

from the U.S. Department of Education study (as cited in *"Parental Involvement," 1999)*

that revealed that schools nationwide are experiencing a decline in parental participation as students get older. Contacts between families and schools become less frequent and less positive in the quality of relationships. This study found that by seventh grade, positive contacts decrease from 52% to 36%, while negative contacts increase from 20% to 33% since a child's first grade year. In addition, the rate of volunteering in schools decreases from 33% to 8%. These changes in parental involvement practices are partly due to challenges that families may endure when participating or attempting to participate in school functions. Participants in this study stated that parents are less likely to come to visit the school after elementary school.

   In conclusion, the data from this study, correlated with other research, indicates that promoting parental involvement would aid in the success of schools and students in a Northeast Georgia school district. When schools promote parental involvement by action and not just in word, no child will be left behind.

<div align="center">Implications</div>

Based on the information provided in the focus group discussion, parent interviews, and student surveys, it is recommended that the school system provide professional development to help teachers learn to effectively deal with students and maintain a positive partnership with parents. The teachers in this study never mentioned any formal training on how to involve parents. Therefore, training is necessary, not only for teachers but parents as well. It is recommended that schools review current policies that act as constraints to parents' involvement and treat them as intruders. Schools should be conscience of issues regarding childcare, transportation, and past fears and experiences. The school can serve as an instrument in increasing parental involvement.

Teachers and parents need more time to enable true partnerships. Parent conferences are scheduled in 5-7 minute increments, which limit the length of time available to discuss concerns that are relevant to the child. Teachers need extra time to only devote to parents. In addition to providing teachers with additional time, administrators should be cognizant of classroom practices that do not support parental involvement and work to rectify concerns in any areas. If parents cannot come to the schools, the school should go to the parents. Instead of going to parent conferences at school, set up a place in the neighborhood to hold conferences. The recreation department is a good place to see parents. Schools should be willing to stretch as far as possible in order to reach parents and students.

This study will aid in the creation of programs designed to increase and permanently involve parents in their children's education in this district. A personal interest of the researcher is to develop a PALS program, Parents Assisted by Leaders to Succeed. This program would allow parents the opportunity to have a mentor within the school to help them become informed and involved in the education of their children. These parents would be assisted by leaders as well as other adults in the community to help get them on the correct path of assisting with their child's education

Few studies exist that have tracked parents in order to add to the knowledge base of how parents remain involved in their child's education from elementary to high school. It would be interesting to know if these parents remain involved throughout the school year or if parents and student answers would change. Therefore, it is necessary to find out what promotes and prevents parental involvement in the Northeast Georgia school district.

The following are recommendations for further research:

1) The researcher could use more students to gain a wider variety of answers.

2) The researcher could use interview techniques with the students to probe for explanations to answers.

3) The researcher could use a larger system in order to track parent participation throughout the education of the child.

4) In future studies, a list of tasks and strategies can be generated and used to determine the impact on academic achievement. This study should be replicated and extended. Future use should include a more diverse group of teachers, parents and students from schools with different socio-economic backgrounds, locations, and ethic groups to see if there are any differences in their perceptions. This school system is a low socio-economic system where a large percentage of students receive free and reduced lunches. Teachers wear many hats: teacher, nurse, and some server as mother. It would be interesting to research teachers who work in middle to upper class schools to see if there are any changes.

This study extends the knowledge of a subject that is widely supported, parental involvement. Despite the relevance of the findings, many questions remain unanswered about this construct. Research confirms that, regardless of race, creed, color, or economic background of the family, when parents are involved, children do better in school. Parental involvement provides the tool by which we can close the achievement gap and educate all children. By providing effective ways to involve parents, no child or parent will be left behind.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER

Dear Research Participants:

As part of my graduate program, I am conducting a study on *Parental Involvement in a Northeast Georgia School District.* This qualitative research study will seek to gather information on what promotes and prevents parental involvement.

This letter is to request your assistance in gathering data to analyze this topic. There is no penalty should you decide not to participate or to later withdraw from the study.  Be advised that none of the questions asked in the focus group, interview, or survey will contain information that is personally intrusive or offensive. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential, and research results will be written as a group report. There is no incentive pay and your participation is strictly voluntary. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study and/or I am asking your permission for your child to participate in this study, and will provide him/her with a simplified "assent" letter/verbal description before enrolling them in this study. You will be given a copy of the consent form to keep with your records.

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me, my e-mail address is xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. My mailing address is xxxxxxxxxxxxx and my phone number is xxxxxxxxxx. If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, they should be directed to Dr. Linda Arthur at Georgia Southern University at (912) 681-0275.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this research study. The results should allow me to better understand what promotes and prevents parental involvement.

Sincerely,

Veronica T. Hunter
Doctoral Student
Georgia Southern University

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

ADULT

Dear Educators and/or Parents:

I am a graduate student at Georgia Southern University pursuing a doctoral degree in Educational Administration. I also serve on the committee for school improvement, and I am challenged with the responsibility of continuously seeking effective teaching and learning strategies to improve academic performance.

As part of graduation requirements, I plan to conduct a research project regarding parental involvement in a school system in Northeast, Georgia. Due to the current No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and high stakes testing, raising students' achievement has placed importance on organizing and implementing strategies to influence the degree at which parents are involved in their child's education. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore what promotes and prevents parental involvement in the education of children throughout their educational career. It is my desire as an educator to share learning and strategies with others in an attempt to improve parental involvement. The results of the study will provide educators with descriptive data regarding strategies to use while dealing with parental involvement and will be available upon request.

Your name was listed and you have been selected to participate in a research project. In order to answer the research question, focus groups, structured interviews, and opened ended survey questions are designed to last approximately thirty to forth five minutes. I will be contacting the participants to logistically determine a timetable for the focus group, Interviews and surveys. There will be no information collected that will identify participants or jeopardize confidentiality. Please be informed that all responses are absolutely confidential and cassette tapes and transcribed information will be destroyed upon completion of the project. The research project is voluntary and participants have the right to end their participation at anytime by communicating to the person in charge. Participants may also decline from answering any interview questions that they do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below and/or I am asking your permission for your child to participate in this study, and will provide him/her with a simplified "assent" letter/verbal description before enrolling them in this study. You will be given a copy of the consent form to keep with your records. You also contact the IRB coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs @ 912-681-0843. Thank you for your assistance in this study of parental involvement. Your time and willingness to participate is greatly appreciated.


Sincerely,

Veronica T. Hunter

Title of Project:         Parental Involvement in a Northeast Georgia School District
Principal Investigator:   Veronica T. Hunter
Other Investigator(s):   None
Faculty Advisor:       Dr. Linda Arthur, P. O. Box 8131, Statesboro, GA 30460,
                  912-681-0697
            larthur@georgiasouthern.edu


_____      _____

Participant Signature                        Date


I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.


_____      _____

Investigator Signature                       Date

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

CHILDREN

Dear Parents:

I am a graduate student at Georgia Southern University pursuing a doctoral degree in Educational Administration. I also serve on the committee for school improvement, and I am challenged with the responsibility of continuously seeking effective teaching and learning strategies to improve academic performance.

As part of graduation requirements, I plan to conduct a research project regarding parental involvement in a school system in Northeast, Georgia. Due to the current No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and high stakes testing, raising students' achievement has placed importance on organizing and implementing strategies to influence the degree at which parents are involved in their child's education. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore what promotes and prevents parental involvement in the education of children throughout their educational career. It is my desire as an educator to share learning and strategies with others in an attempt to improve parental involvement. The results of the study will provide educators with descriptive data regarding how to deal with parental involvement and will be available upon request.

Your child's name was listed to participate in a research project. In order to answer the research question structured opened ended survey questions are designed to last approximately thirty to forth five minutes. I will be contacting you to logistically determine a timetable to speak with your child. There will be no information collected that will identify your child or jeopardize confidentiality. Please be informed that all responses are absolutely confidential and cassette tapes and transcribed information will be destroyed upon completion of the project. The research project is voluntary and participants have the right to end their participation at anytime by communicating to the person in charge. Participants may also decline from answering any interview questions that they do not want to answer.

I am asking your permission for your child to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of the consent form to keep with your records. You can contact the IRB coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-681-0843. Thank you for your assistance in this study of parental involvement. Your time and willingness to participate is greatly appreciated. If you consent for your child to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

 Sincerely,



Veronica T. Hunter

Title of Project:          Parental Involvement in a Northeast Georgia School District
Principal Investigator:    Veronica T. Hunter, Hwy 172  P. O. Box  3215 Comer, GA 30629
                        706-248-1101        vhunter@madison.k12.ga.us
Other Investigator(s):    None
Faculty Advisor:        Dr. Linda Arthur, P. O. Box 8131, Statesboro, GA 30460
                        912-681-0697        larthur@georgiasouthern.edu


_____          _____
Participant Signature                                          Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

_____          _____
Investigator Signature                                         Date

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus Group Protocol

The purpose of this focus group is to discuss what promotes and prevents parental involvement in a child's education in a Northeast Georgia School District. During the group discussion I ask that you remember to: (1) please talk one at a time, (2) avoid side conversations, (3) actively participate during the course to f the discussion, and (4) feel free to respond directly to someone who has made a point.

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group Questions

The following questions will be asked to probe for answers in the focus group:

1. How do you define parental involvement?

2. Describe the level of parental involvement in schools in this county? Give some examples of ways parents are involved.

3. What causes parents to stay involved in their child's education?

4. What causes parents not to be involved in their child's education?

5. How do parents and children benefit from their parents being involved in their child's school experiences?

6. How do teachers benefit from parental involvement?

7. What could the school do to help you get more parents involved in their child's education?

8. How welcome do your parents feel at your school?

APPENDIX F

PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Parent Interview Questions

Questions for parents:

1. How do you define parental involvement?

2. In what ways have you been involved with your child's education

3. What causes you to be involved in your child's education?

4. What causes you not to be involved in your child's education?

5. How do you and your child benefit from being involved in your child's education?

6. How does the school benefit from your being involved in your child's education?

7. What could the school do to help you get more involved in your child's education?

8. How welcome do you feel at your child's school?

9. What has been the worst experience with the school and your child?

10. What has been the best experience with the school and your child?

APPENDIX G

STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Student Survey Questions

Questions for students:

1. How do you define parental involvement?

2. In what ways are your parents involved in your education?

3. What causes your parents to be involved in your education?

4. What causes your parents not to be involved in your education?

5. How do you and your parents benefit from being involved in your education?

6. How does the school benefit from your parents being involved in your education?

7. What could the school do to encourage your parents in becoming more involved in your education?

8. How welcome do your parents feel at your school?

9. Describe the worst experience you have had at your school?

10. Describe the worst experience you have had at your school?

APPENDIX H

ITEM ANALYSIS

Item Analysis

| *Focus Group Questions* | Research Questions | Major Research |
|---|---|---|
| 1. How do you define parental involvement? | 1, 2 | Jesse, 1998<br>Cotton and Wikelund, 2001<br>Epstein and Jansorn, 2004 |
| 2. Describe the level of parental involvement in schools in this county? Give some examples of ways parents are involved. | 1 | Ballen and Moles, 1994<br>Baker Soden, 1998<br>Dornbuach and Ritter, 1988<br>Gomez and Greenough, 2002<br>Strong Families, Strong Schools, 1994 |
| 3. What causes parents to stay involved in their child's education? | 1, 2 | Epstein and Jansorn, 2004<br>Dimmock and O'Donoghue, 1996<br>Drake, 1995 |
| 4. What causes parents not to be involved in their child's education? | 2 | Weiss and Edwards, 1992<br>Rich, 1998<br>Trotman, 2001<br>Pena, 2000<br>Pryor, 1995 |
| 5. How do parents and children benefit from their parents being involved in their child's school experiences? | 1 | Cotton and Wikelund, 2001<br>Trusty, 1998<br>Cotton and Wikelund, 1989<br>Baker and Soden, 1998 |
| 6. How do teachers benefit from parental involvement? | 1 | Dimmock and O'Donoghue, 1996<br>Davies, 1991<br>Henderson and Mapp, 2002 |
| 7. What could the school do to help you get more parents involved in their child's education? | 1 | Edwards and Warin, 1999<br>Davies, 1999 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8. How welcome do your parents feel at your school? | 1 | Edwards and Warin, 1999<br>Davies, 1999 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Parent Interview Questions* | | |
| 1. How do you define parental involvement? | 1, 2 | Jesse, 1998<br>Cotton and Wikelund, 2001<br>Epstein and Jansorn, 2004 |
| 2. In what ways have you been involved with your child's education? | 1 | Epstein, 1992<br>Feuerstein, 2000<br>Kessler-Sklar and Baker, 2000 |
| 3. What causes you to be involved in your child's education? | 1 | Epstein, 1992<br>Strong Families, Strong Schools, 1994 |
| 4. What causes you not to be involved in your child's education? | 2 | Trotman, 2001<br>Bracy, 2001<br>Weckstein, 2003 |
| 5. How do parents and children benefit from their parents being involved in their child's school experiences? | 1 | Dimmock and O'Donoghue, 1996<br>Shepard, Weiss, Kreider and Lopez, 1997 |
| 6. How does the school benefit from your being involved in your child's education? | 1 | Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fend Rich, 1999 |
| 7. What could the school do to help you get more involved in your child's education? | 1 | Dimmock and O'Donoghue, 1996<br>Davies, 1991<br>Henderson and Mapp, 2002 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8. How welcome do you feel at your child's school? | 1 | Edwards and Warin, 1999<br>Davies, 1999 |
| 9. What has been the worst experience with the school and your child? | 2 | DOE, 1995 |
| 10. What has been the best experience with the school and your child? | 1 | Edwards and Warin, 1999 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Student Questions* | | |
| 1. How do you define parental involvement? | 1,2 | Jesse, 1998<br>Cotton and Wikelund, 2001<br>Epstein and Jansorn, 2004 |
| 2. In what ways are your parents involved in your education? | 1 | Epstein, 1992<br>Feuerstein, 2000<br>Kessler-Sklar and Baker, 2000 |
| 3. What causes your parents to be involved in your education? | 1 | Epstein, 1992<br>Strong Families, Strong Schools, 1994 |
| 4. What causes your parents not to be involved in your education? | 2 | Trotman, 2001<br>Bracy, 2001<br>Weckstein, 2003 |
| 5. How do you and your parents benefit from being involved in your education? | 1 | Dimmock and O'Donoghue, 1996<br>Shepard, Weiss, Kreider and Lopez, 1997 |
| 6. How does the school benefit from your parents being involved in your education? | 1 | Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fend Rich, 1999 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 7. What could the school do to encourage your parents in becoming more involved in your education? | 1 | Dimmock and O'Donoghue, 1996<br>Davies, 1991<br>Henderson and Mapp, 2002 |
| 8. How welcome do your parents feel at your school? | 1 | Edwards and Warin, 1999<br>Davies, 1999 |
| 9. Describe the worst experience you have had at your school? | 2 | DOE, 1995 |
| 10. Describe the worst experience you have had at your school? | 1 | Edwards and Warin, 1999 |

APPENDIX H

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs
**Institutional Review Board (IRB)**
Phone: 912-478-0843 Veazey Hall 2021
P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719 IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu Statesboro, GA 30460
**To:** Veronica T. Hunter
3215 HWY 172
Comer, GA 30629
**CC:** Charles E. Patterson
Associate Vice President for Research
**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)
**Date:** September 11, 2008
**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research
After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H09031** and titled **"Parental Involvement in a Northeast Georgia School District"**, it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.
*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*
**This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter**. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer