

THE WINGMAN PROJECT: AN EXPLORATORY
STUDY OF SCHOOL-BASED COMMUNICATION
WITH GRANDPARENTS

By

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Abstract:

Involvement of parents and family, school personnel, and community members is important because studies from early childhood, elementary, middle, and high schools have shown that students are more successful when their families are actively involved (Gonzalez-Dehass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005). One challenge facing K-12 public schools is the development and implementation of systematic and sustainable communication that encourages parents and family members to engage with their students' schools. The purpose of this study was to explore the outcomes of regular written communication between schools and grandparents of enrolled students. This study was conducted at Oklahoma public schools of varying sizes and types and data sources will include teachers, staff, parents, grandparents, in loco grandparentis and other involved adults over the age of 18.

This research study of *The Wingman* at three schools sites resulted in the following findings. First, school-grandparent communication was influenced by creating primarily a one-way communication method between the school and the grandparents. Implementation of *The Wingman* created an avenue of communication between the schools and the grandparents regarding the grandchildren's education. *The Wingman* influenced conversations between the grandparent and the grandchildren and how the grandparent may contribute to, or participate in, the grandchild's schooling. It is demonstrated that the greatest impact of *The Wingman* seems to have been this interchange of information. Because the school prioritized communicating in a regular and systematic way with grandparents, information was often interchanged between grandparents and grandchildren and sometimes exchanged between the school and the grandparents. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) description of motivational beliefs were fully established in *Wingman* participants. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) identified role construction and self-efficacy as two of the factors that impact motivation and thus impact involvement, and I have discovered that these same factors impact motivation and involvement of *Wingman* participants. *The Wingman* enhanced the role construction of grandparents, the ability of grandparents to support the educational experiences, and grandparent knowledge developed their self-efficacy. Each of these factors supports the notion that recipients of *The Wingman* are likely motivated to be involved in their grandchildren's education experiences.

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CHAPTER I

IINTRODUCTION

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) called K-12 public schools to the task of closing the “achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, “Section 1: Short Title,” para. 2). In addition to specific guidelines for teacher quality, assessment structures, budgeting parameters and supplemental education services, “NCLB also requires schools, districts, and states to develop programs to communicate with all families about their children’s education and to involve them in ways that help boost student achievement and success” (Epstein & Salinas, 2004, p. 8). According to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), “The term parent includes in addition to a natural [biological] parent, a legal guardian or other person standing in loco parentis (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare)” (Section 9101(31), ESEA).

Involvement of parents and family, school personnel, and community members is important because studies from early childhood, elementary, middle, and high schools have shown that students are more successful when their families are actively involved (Gonzalez-Dehass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005, p. 100). One challenge facing K-12 public schools is the development and implementation of systematic and sustainable communication that encourages parents and family members to engage with their students’ schools.

Problem Statement

According to Reynolds, Wright, and Beale (2003) the structure of American families is changing and “children are growing up in blended families, families with both parents working, single parent families, multigenerational families, and families headed by grandparents” (Discussion section, para. 3). Grandparents in all types of family structures have been found to have a positive influence on grandchild well-being (Sear & Coall, 2011; Tanskanen & Danielsbacka, 2012; & Yorgason, Padilla-Walker, & Jackson, 2011). In addition to grandparents’ roles within the family structure, their engagement with schools has been documented as influential. In addition, grandparents’ roles as tutors in schools has influenced students to have more positive attitudes and ideas about older generations (Reynolds, et al., 2003; Strom & Strom, 1995; & Spudich & Spudich, 2010). These findings related to grandparents’ positive influence in the schools echo the substantial and comprehensive findings of the similar positive influence of parental involvement. Mutch and Collins (2012) state, “The better the engagement between parents, families, and schools, the greater the positive impact on student learning” (p. 168).

Although there is a strong emphasis on parental involvement in both the literature and in practice, the issue of deliberately involving grandparents in the schools remains a relatively unstudied resource. According to Strom and Strom (1995) there are many kinds of activities that grandparents can participate in at schools. Grandparents can listen to children read, review academic content with students, provide supervision at recess or lunch, and assist teachers with tasks such as grading papers, preparing materials, etc. (Strom & Strom, 1995). Through this review of literature it was determined that school efforts to involve grandparents in the education of their own grandchildren are scarce. In this research study, a specific method of communication aimed at establishing communication between schools and grandparents of the school's current students will be studied. *The Wingman* was a monthly e-newsletter that was distributed monthly to grandparents. A full description of *The Wingman* is provided in Chapter II. The existence of such a previous communication effort within public schools was not known.

While limited studies in the area of school-communication with grandparents prevent a definitive statement about how and why they may get involved, we know that parental involvement in their children's school life is influenced by the specific methods and invitations extended by the educational institution (Halsey, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005). Halsey (2005) suggests that teachers use broad and universal communication methods, while parents report they prefer specific and personal invitations. Given the parallels between the positive influence of parents and grandparents, it is possible that grandparent involvement in the schools is also impacted by the mode and methods offered by the schools. Additionally, according to Strom and Strom (2006), grandparents are an abundant and growing natural resource because they are healthier, better educated, and are living longer than ever before. These factors allow them the free time and health to be more involved in schools than ever before.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the outcomes of regular written communication between schools and grandparents of enrolled students. This study was conducted at Oklahoma public schools of varying sizes and types and data sources will include teachers, staff, parents, grandparents, in loco parentis and other involved adults over the age of 18.

Research Questions

1. How is school-grandparent communication influenced by the implementation of *The Wingman Project* in selected schools?
2. How is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) description of motivational beliefs established in regular participants of *The Wingman Project*?
 - a. How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent role construction in the education of their grandchildren?
 - b. How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent self-efficacy to become involved in their grandchildren's education?

Epistemological Perspective

According to Crotty (1998), epistemology is a way to explain how we know what we know (p. 3). The broad epistemological perspective of this study was constructionism. Crotty (1998) further suggests that constructionism is the perspective that meaning comes to being through our engagement with the realities of our world (p. 8). Constructionism is “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Through this study, I explored how meaning is constructed through the engagement of grandparents and through interactions among grandparents and the school staff.

In addition to the epistemological perspective of constructionism, the more specific theoretical perspective of social constructivism further describes the nature of this study. According to Creswell (2009), the premise of social constructivism includes the idea that individuals form meaning about objects and things through interaction with others. Grandparents, school staff, and I have had interactions with each other, as well as with others, while experiencing the communication efforts of the school. Through these interactions, we have learned of parent or students’ perspectives, we discussed this study in comparison with other school community engagement programs, and we have influenced one another on opinions and ideas.

Theoretical Framework

The use of a theoretical framework provides another level of analysis for qualitative research. In addition to assisting with making meaning of the study’s findings, applying a theoretical framework causes both myself and the reader to consider how the evidence either supports or provides contrary examples to a previously generated line of thought. According to Creswell (1998), “social science theories provide an explanation, a predication, and a generalization about how the world operates” (p. 84) and can be applied either before, during, or after data collection has taken place for the study. Theoretical analysis for this research study was selected a priori and used as an

influencer on the design of the study, methods, and data collection processes as well as a lens through which to evaluate the data. The theoretical analysis was used from design through analysis.

Two popular theoretical frameworks are often referred to in research regarding parental involvement in public education. The frameworks are Epstein's (2010) work, which focuses on overlapping spheres of influence and six specific types of parental involvement, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) work, which focuses on explaining the motivation for and process of parental involvement. This study used the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model, which provided a greater structure for recognizing the sociological factors, motivational forces, and influences that grandparents have on students' learning and well-being.

An in-depth analysis of the theory as a lens is provided in Chapter V and VI, the Analysis sections of this study. Additional information about Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's analytical framework is located in Chapter III, the Methodology section of the study.

Definition of Terms

There are numerous definitions for terms used within this study. For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used:

Grandparents

For the purpose of this study, the term grandparents was utilized to describe both maternal and paternal grandmothers and grandfathers who are not serving as primary caregivers or surrogate parents for their grandchildren; essentially, these grandparents are nonresidential to the children. For the communication effort being studied, the student's caregiver was responsible for submitting the name and contact information for the grandparent. With this understanding intact, a grandparent for this study was any adult that was identified by the caregiver and/or student to be functioning in a traditional grandparent role. This definition could include biological grandparents, legal grandparents, or surrogate grandparents. Exceptions to this definition are clearly identified in the text.

Grandparent Role Construction

Grandparent role construction was defined as an extension of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's definition of parent role construction: "what parents believe they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and the educational process" (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, p. 9). Thus, grandparent role construction within this study was defined as what grandparents believe they should do in relation to their grandchildren's education and the educational process.

In Loco Grandparentis

Any adult identified by the caregiver and/or student to be functioning in a traditional grandparent role. This definition includes biological grandparents, legal grandparents, or surrogate grandparents. Exceptions to this definition are clearly identified in the text.

Intergenerational

Intergenerational was the term used to describe relationships between grandchildren and grandparents in this study. According to Spudich and Spudich (2012), "The term intergenerational refers to the communication, relationship, and ongoing exchange of ideas that occur between students and senior citizens" (p. 134).

Loco Parentis

A grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare (Section 9101(31), ESEA).

Parental Involvement

According to Lewis, Kim, & Bey (2011), "there has been no consensus on a definition of parental involvement, possibly because the definition depends on who is asked to provide it" (p. 222). Also, the defining of 'parental involvement' by means of relevant literature did not identify a universal accepted operational definition (Fan & Chen, 2001). For this study, parental involvement was defined as "parenting directed towards children's education" (Gonzalez, et al., 2005). For the purposes of this study, the term parental involvement will refer to actions performed by loco parentis, which could be a biological parent, stepparent, or other family member that is responsible for the child's well-being. Furthermore, this understanding will include that parental involvement activities

can take place either directly at the school or indirectly in the home by supporting homework efforts, influencing perceptions of schooling, and helping students with other school-related behaviors. The terms parental involvement and parental engagement will be used interchangeably through this study.

Parental Engagement

Parental engagement is meaningful, respectful partnerships between families and schools that focuses on improving the educational experiences and success of students (Mutch & Collins, 2012, p. 176). According to Mutch and Collins (2012), engagement is characterized by regular meaningful interactions that result in increased “participation in school activities, enhanced well-being of students, and improved student learning and achievement” (p. 176). For the purposes of this study, the term parental engagement will refer to actions performed by loco parentis, which could be a biological parent, stepparent, or other family member that is responsible for the child’s well-being. Furthermore, this understanding will include that parental engagement activities can take place either directly at the school or indirectly in the home by supporting homework efforts, influencing perceptions of schooling, and helping students with other school-related behaviors. The terms parental involvement and parental engagement will be used interchangeably through this study.

Grandparent Involvement

Grandparent involvement is grandparents’ actions that are directed towards their grandchildren’s education and school. Grandparent involvement could also take place either directly by the grandparent making contributions to the school or indirectly by the grandparent supporting their grandchild’s education in home based activities or conversations. The terms grandparent involvement and grandparent engagement will be used interchangeably through this study.

Grandparent Engagement

Grandparent engagement is grandparents’ participation in school activities that influence the student’s well-being, learning, and achievement. Similarly, engagement can be recognized as contributions to the school or within the child’s personal life outside of the school. The terms

grandparent involvement and grandparent engagement will be used interchangeably through this study.

Grandparent Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy includes the understanding that decisions are made about involvement and behavior based on what a person believes the outcomes are likely to produce. This knowledge grows out of a person's own experiences with self-regulation and how they believe they have control over the events in their life (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Grandparent self-efficacy is more specifically defined in this study as the beliefs that grandparents have about the outcomes of their own involvement in their grandchildren's school lives. This is based on what they think their involvement will produce.

School-Communication

Communication methods that are directed at informing and involving parents, grandparents, families, and communities of relevant school news, events, and involvement opportunities. For the purposes of this study, I determined documents to be relevant to school-communication if they pertained to the school operations, school communication policies, school visitor policies, or if they were intended communication for parents or families.

Methodology

According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research can be defined as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” (p. 15). Creswell broadens his explanation of qualitative research to report how the researcher uses a few cases with many variables each to build a complex, holistic picture of the research problem. The qualitative research study includes analyzing words, reporting detailed views of participants and informants, and observation of participants in the natural setting. The methodology for this research study was qualitative due to several characteristics of the study. As identified by Agostinho (2005), a research study can be defined as qualitative if it meets three criteria:

1) appropriateness of the research design, 2) demonstration of rigor, including trustworthiness, and 3) usefulness of the research product.

First, the nature of the research questions calls for a study that describes what happened in the particular settings of focus and the question supports a qualitative research design. Additionally, to fully explore the communication method employed by the schools, a detailed view of the topic was presented. Finally, a qualitative study is appropriate because it allowed for me to explore what individual grandparents think about their roles in their grandchildren's lives. The specific design of this qualitative research study was an exploratory study of the communication method employed by the three individual pilot sites. While exploratory in nature, the study included elements of summative evaluation that produce a report of the overall effectiveness of a program and provide information about whether a program should continue (Patton, 2002, p. 218).

The rigor of this study can be demonstrated in the six specific methods of data collection for each of the three pilot sites. The six methods included: surveys, interviews, artifact and document examination, observations and field notes, informants, and school data collection. A full explanation of the six data collection methods is provided in the Data Collections' section. The school sites, participants, and informants are fully explored in the Data Needs and Sources section. Additional information about the steps taken to assure trustworthiness of the study's findings are presented in a later section on data analysis. Finally, the usefulness of the research product supports a qualitative study because the findings could support further development of school-grandparent communication in public schools.

Researcher Statement

According to Patton (2002), the ability for a researcher to demonstrate reflexivity is dependent upon self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one's perspective. In my efforts to be reflexive as I plan, study, gather data, and deduce findings, I will attempt to maintain Patton's definition of reflexivity. From the age of five, I have been directly involved with K-12 public schools. First, as a student within the system, next as a student preparing to enter the

system as an educator, and finally as an employee of public school districts in two mid-western states, I have had many, many experiences that shape my opinions and understanding of K-12 public schools. After serving as both a classroom teacher and building level administrator, my role has now changed to a higher education faculty member who is charged with the task of preparing future public school administrators by teaching graduate level courses within an Educational Administration program. As I have completed undergraduate and graduate degrees, I have been drawn to personal reading and research that focuses on organizational culture, motivation, and character building within public schools. This personal interest and the vast reading I have completed also influence my perspective of the many intangible and immeasurable influences that K-12 public schools have on various stakeholders including students, staff members, families, and community members.

Furthermore, directly related to this study, I grew up with the very strong influence of my paternal grandmother, even living with her for three years in my early twenties. This experience gave me a valuable appreciation for the older generation of my family and also provided me with an understanding of her perspective on many social issues, including public schools and grandparents.

My interest in the study stems from my personal experiences as a student with a family that was very supportive and involved with my own educational experiences. Also, as an educator, I realized the need for family engagement within my students' academic lives. As an elementary principal, I continually sought ways to provide better communication with our students' families and engage them with school activities. This research study brought together my interest in family engagement and student success.

Data Needs and Sources

This research study employed six specific methods of data collection for each of the three pilot sites. The six methods included: surveys, interviews, artifact and document examination, observations and field notes, informants, and school data collection. A detailed explanation of the data collection methods is located in Chapter III – Methodology.

Site(s) Descriptions

The three school sites used in this study were located in Oklahoma and represented three different types of school settings. One school was part of a consolidated school district that was located in the sparsely populated western section of Oklahoma and represented what originally were four separate districts. Another school was in a rural district that was comprised of students from just one small town and the residents in the nearby area. The third school was located in a mid-size district in a community that included a large university. At all three sites, formal written efforts to communicate and engage with the grandparents of students were in place for one year, with full IRB approval, before data collection began. It was these written efforts, called *The Wingman*, that were the specific communication focus of this study.

Participants

The answers to the research questions were considered from two possible perspectives: (1) the school lead administrator describing *The Wingman* and outcomes they observed and (2) the grandparents describing their experiences involving *The Wingman* and changes they observed in their motivational beliefs. Both school lead administrator and grandparents were recruited via an email invitation to share their experiences (See Appendix A).

For each pilot site, the participants were grandparents or in loco grandparentis of students who attend one of the three research sites. The term grandparents or in loco grandparentis was utilized to describe both maternal and paternal grandmothers and grandfathers who are not serving as primary caregivers or surrogate parents for their grandchildren; essentially, these grandparents are nonresidential to the children. Due to the inclusion of in loco grandparentis, a grandparent for this study was any adult that was identified by the caregiver and/or student to be functioning in a traditional grandparent role. This definition could include biological grandparents, legal grandparents, or surrogate grandparents.

Attempts were made to interview local grandparents that live in the same community as their grandchildren and, thus, may be involved in instances of being physically present at the school through attendance at school programs, volunteer efforts, or other activities. Distant grandparents,

who live more than 300 miles from their grandchildren, were also sought as participants for the study. I selected the distance of 300 miles to serve as a distinguishing characteristic between local and distant grandparents as a way to clearly define the different types of participants in the study. A distance of 300 miles or more would be make travel much more time consuming and could potentially limit the amount of school functions that these distant grandparents were able to attend as well as the frequency in which they spend time with their grandchildren.

Informants

To further develop my understanding of grandparent involvement in public schools, various informants were utilized during the course of the study. Informants provided insight into the areas of grandparent involvement in public schools, communication efforts with families, school volunteerism, donations to schools, and grandparent's roles in their grandchildren's lives. Specific informants and the resulting findings are presented in Chapter IV, the Presentation of the Research Sites section of this study.

School Data Collections

Additional data from each school was collected that reflects the amount of grandparent volunteerism and contributions that grandparents made to the school during the course of the study. This data source was provided by the school staff and not managed by me, thus, creating the possibility for misinterpretation of the data, inflated reporting, or lack of reporting. For example, local grandparents may be more informed about school activities and events as a result of the communication effort; however, data showing their increase or decrease in attending such events was immeasurable.

Data Analysis

The analysis procedures for this research study included a series of specified processes. At the conclusion of data collection, I printed two copies of all interview transcripts, field notes, journals, and all artifacts. I then created coded cards for each research site. A systematic process of establishing categories, collapsing codes, and comparing themes was conducted. Also, the

application of the theoretical lens was applied during the final stages of data analysis. A detailed explanation of the data analysis procedures are discussed in Chapter III – Methodology.

Trustworthiness of the Study

In establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study, it is important for the researcher to thoroughly examine and plan for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four specific evaluative measures help demonstrate the truth value of the study, explain the steps for applying the truth value, and establish the procedures for external judgments to be made regarding the data (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). These combined qualities have been referred to as “trustworthiness” by Lincoln and Guba, 1985, and guided the trustworthiness exploration for this research study. Each quality is generally defined and explained in Table 6. (found in Chapter III), a Trustworthiness Table identifies the specific steps to fully validate the trustworthiness of this study.

Significance of Study

A research study focused on exploring and identifying the outcomes that emerge when schools employ a regular writing communication tool with grandparents was significant to practice, research, and theory. This specific research study impacted both the education profession and the academic world.

Education professionals need knowledge of how to increase grandparent engagement in providing academic support, volunteerism, and financial contributions to their school. Information about using regular written communication to reach grandparents aids them in this process. Parents and grandparents also benefitted from this information and modified their school-engagement practices to offer maximum support for their students.

In the area of research, there is a lack of pertinent literature that deals with grandparent engagement or the use of technology as a communication method between schools and families. This research study provided information for future researchers who wish to study the engagement of grandparents with schools and the use of technology in school communication.

In the area of social sciences, the findings from this research project impacted theories about family unit structure and intergenerational relationships. More specifically, this study considered the applicability of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model as it is expanded beyond the traditional parental units.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review will highlight major findings pertinent to written communication between school and grandparents. More specifically, I will explore the known literature regarding how family involvement has been shown to impact students. In order to understand the historical and current roles of parents and families in education, a chronological portrait of education in America will first be disclosed. Next, the literature review will include various aspects of family involvement and schools. The literature review will be divided into the following areas: (a) American Education, (b) Parent Involvement, (c) Grandparent Involvement, (d) Motivation for Involvement, (e) School-Family Communication, and (f) *The Wingman*. Throughout the literature various and notable deficiencies will be noted, as well as conflicts in research findings. In the final section, *The Wingman*, which is the communication effort in place at the three school sites in this study, will be fully detailed.

American Education

In describing the history of education in America, a framework for understanding the development of the current system will be applied from Garner's (2004) work. Garner suggests that school in America can be succinctly divided into three stages: (1) providing equal access to education for all children, (2) providing equal educational treatment for all children, and (3) providing equal educational outcomes for all children. For the purpose of this study, these three stages of educational equality will be defined in terms of social expectations, relevant goals, and the parent's role in supporting the educational process.

Following the framework provided by Garner (2004), the first stage of educational equality was providing equal access to education for all children. Beginning during American colonization, this stage consisted of the creation of both the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights, neither of which provided for a national educational system, nor gave any authority over public education to the federal government. Following the premise of states' rights, since the Constitution did not provide for the federal government's role in education, the responsibility was left up to individual states to implement and manage their public school offerings. In terms of social expectations and relevant goals, during this time period, the main responsibilities of schools included teaching students reading, writing, and arithmetic. As immigrant families settled in America, the public schools helped to teach the children the dominant cultural ways of the United States (Berger, 1991, p. 212.). Due to the wide variability among individual state's decisions, the public educational experience among students was vastly different from state to state. During this time period, parents were believed to be children's first teachers, with special emphasis placed on the mother's role in nourishing the child's body and mind (Berger, 1991, p. 211). The existence of slavery throughout the United States until 1863 prohibited equal access to education for all students, as the children of slaves were not provided an education in the formal school system. President Lincoln's issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 led the entire United States, and the educational system, into a new era of reform.

The Emancipation Proclamation declared that slaves in all states would be forever free. In addition to the Emancipation Proclamation, the Fourteenth Amendment provided for naturalization for all persons born in the United States and the Fifteenth Amendment stated that all citizens have the right to vote, regardless of race or color. These three important additions to the United States Constitution established the equal treatment of all people, which included the equal educational treatment of children. Thus began the emergence of the second stage of educational equality, providing equal educational treatment of all children. Due to delays from

larger social issues, namely the economic struggles of the 1920s and both World War I and World War II, public education's progression made its first major leap in 1954 following the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education court decision (Berger, 1991, p. 214). This landmark decision declared that separate schooling for different races of children did not provide for equal treatment. As a result of this court case, public schools were required to accept students of all races and provide the same quality and availability of education programs equally to all students. During this stage, the social expectations of public schools were also influenced by the development of two federal government acts aimed at public education. First, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 established the federal government's presence in public school policy and funding. Second, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975 provided for appropriate education programs for disabled children. Parenting programs during this time period also underwent many changes including an increased focus on early childhood development, support services for the entire family, and efforts by public schools to involve parents in school collaboration (Berger, 1991). The development of these parenting programs worked to reverse the "walling out" of the community that occurred as teaching underwent a professionalization in the mid-twentieth century (Henry, 1996, p. 15).

In 2001 the federal government reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, changing the name to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB called for great improvement to the American education system, with its specific goal being "To close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, "Section 1: Short Title," para. 2). Additionally, NCLB states, "The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, "Section 1001 – Statement of Purpose," para. 1). This statement defines the social expectation and relevant goals of the third stage of educational equality. NCLB

includes a call for schools to provide parents with “substantial and meaningful opportunities” to be involved in their children’s education (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, “Section 1001 – Statement of Purpose,” para. 1). Under the regulations established by NCLB, public schools that serve disadvantaged students must utilize federal funding to establish parent involvement programs and work actively to engage parents with their child’s educational experience. This requirement appears to be a well-supported decision. In their 2001 meta-analysis, Fan & Chen concluded that parental involvement does influence student academic achievement and Mutch & Collins (2012) state, “The better the engagement between parents, families, and schools, the greater the positive impact on student learning.” However, quality and effectiveness of interaction must still be a careful consideration. A 2002 study by Mattingly, Prislun, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar found that schools are implementing a variety of very different parental involvement programs, however, they are not always theoretically grounded or rigorously evaluated (Mattingly, et al., 2002. p. 553). This idea supports the necessity for schools to use their finite resources on the most effective parental involvement efforts. The third stage of educational equality continues to be a focal point in our national education agenda, with increased accountability, assessment, and the recent development of our first national set of curriculum standards, the Common Core State Standards.

In conclusion, while the role of parents in their children’s education has undergone changes during the first 225 years of the United States’ history, the belief that parents do have an important and active responsibility remains both an expectation of families and schools. The United States has arrived at the national goal of providing all children the opportunity to pursue, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in a highly educated society.

Parent Involvement

In their 2001 meta-analysis, Fan and Chen clearly articulated the finding that parental involvement has a positive effect on student academic achievement. In a later meta-analysis, Hill and Tyson (2009), stated that, “Indeed, family-school relations and parental involvement in

education have been identified as a way to close demographic gaps in achievement and maximize students' potential" (p. 740). Fan and Chen argue that while numerous studies present a finding of positive effects, and while schools encourage parental involvement, the strongest relationship for effect can be found between parental aspiration/expectation and children's academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). This is an interesting consideration since a parent's aspiration or expectation for their child's academic success can be demonstrated, articulated, and acted upon either at the home or at the school. In order to determine this finding, Fan and Chen reviewed twenty-five empirical studies that met their strict inclusion requirements. Through their meta-analysis they discovered that while each study focused on measuring parental involvement, the concept was defined and operationalized quite differently among the studies, which contributes to an inability of the researchers to compare findings (Fan & Chen, 2001).

According to the Hill and Tyson meta-analysis, one of the strongest positive relationships between parent involvement and school experiences results from what they term 'academic socialization' (2009, p. 758). Academic socialization includes actions and conversations that parents participate in that communicate their expectations for their children, their value for education, and help their children think about the future in relation to their educational decisions. Hill and Tyson's meta-analysis was focused on evaluating parent involvement strategies at the middle school level and found that academic socialization can be especially successful because it does not require, "...the development of deep, high-quality relationships with each teacher" (Hill & Tyson, 2009, pg. 6).

Fan and Chen (2001) identify and describe two main theoretical frameworks that have been developed to guide the study of parental involvement. The two theoretical frameworks are Epstein's (1992, 1994) design, which focuses on six defined levels of parental involvement, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) comprehensive theoretical framework about parental involvement. Hill and Tyson (2009) mention two different theoretical frameworks that have influenced the field of parent involvement research. Comer's School Development Program and

Grolnick and Sowiacek's three-pronged framework are the two additional frameworks. Comer's School Development Program includes the belief that by improving the interpersonal relationships and climate of a school, student success can also be improved (Cook, Murphy, & Hunt, 2000). The specific component of Comer's program that includes parent is the Parent Team, which focuses on mobilizing parents to be involved with the school. Hill and Tyson (2009) explain Grolnick and Sowiacek's three-pronged framework as one that includes behavioral involvement, cognitive-intellectual involvement, and personal involvement, all which include specific parent roles (p. 741).

Epstein's (1992, 1994) design and Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (1995) framework are the two parent involvement structures that were considered as possible theoretical framework's for this research study. Epstein uses the term "partnership" to discuss relationships between parents and schools, and her framework identifies six types of involvement that have been found to "improve schools, strengthen families, invigorate community support, and increase student achievement and success" (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). The six types of involvement are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Epstein and Salinas (2004) define a 'school learning community' as "educators, students, parents, and community partners who work together to improve the school and enhance students' learning opportunities." Epstein's framework is primarily aimed at assisting schools with the planning and implementation of activities and programs that involve families; there is not a reference in this framework or Epstein's research that includes the specific idea of grandparents. However, Fan & Chen (2001) clearly indicated in their meta-analysis of twenty-five studies that "the operational definition of 'parental involvement' in the literature was diverse and very different across individual studies" (pg. 6). This finding from their research shows that the term 'parent involvement' could be broadened to encompass other family members and remains indistinguishable among various research studies.

The comprehensive framework developed by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler approaches the understanding of parental involvement from a perspective different than Epstein. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler focus on looking closely at the factors that motivate parents to become involved with schools (Fan & Chen, 2001). The three broad areas of exploration are: parents' motivational beliefs, parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others, and parents' perceived life context (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson, 2005). Instead of being a model that focuses on school activities, the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model aims at determining psychosocial factors that influence the parent involvement. Because the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model serves as the theoretical framework for the current study, a thorough exploration will be provided in a later section.

According to Smith, Wholstetter, Kuzin, and DePedro (2011), parent involvement is related to the following achievement indicators: better grades, attendance, attitudes, expectations, homework completion, and state test results. Epstein (2004) clearly states, "To learn at high levels, all students need the guidance and support of their teachers, families, and others in the community" (p. 8). These two findings suggest that parental involvement, which is used interchangeably with 'family' involvement in many studies, is a factor to be carefully evaluated when determining a school's success at providing a quality educational experience. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if the same findings would be represented by evaluating grandparent engagement to determine how it enhances a child's educational process. Also, looking specifically at grandparents' involvement in school-community engagement could provide insight on how to best support student's success.

Another important theme that emerged in studying the current literature is that the positive effects of parental involvement, and thus potentially grandparent engagement, are just as significant for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status. According to Haynes et al., (1989), one of the most effective ways to enhance the climate of schools is to involve parents at all levels of school life. Parents from all socioeconomic levels bring to schools valuable insights

and unique perspectives, which serve to enhance home-school relationships, student behavior, and academic achievement. (p. 87)

It is also noted that parental involvement in the poorest neighborhoods is still possible, desirable, and beneficial for the academic success of students (Haynes et al., 2005). Many types of parental engagement that were noted in the literature can be completed regardless of financial resources. Assisting students with homework, maintaining contact with the teacher, and passing on the belief that school is important are all tasks that can be completed regardless of socioeconomic status.

Concerning the relationship between socio-economic status and student achievement, a very important finding by Tobolka (2006) suggests that parent involvement can actually lessen the negative effects of poverty. Tobolka states, "Parental involvement was not only positively correlated to academic achievement, but also took precedence over household income as a determiner of student success" (Tobolka, 2006, p. 3). Gonzalez-Dehass (2005) reported that teacher and parent involvement were primary predictors of academic achievement. These findings further support the idea that parental involvement has the potential to contribute to the learning and well-being of students; one might assume that grandparent engagement may have the same effect.

Grandparent Involvement

Grandparents can be engaged in their grandchildren's lives in a variety of ways. According to a publication from the Population Reference Bureau, nearly 5.4 million children in the United States rely on a grandparent to serve as the head of the household and provide for their primary care. For the 7% of children that live with a grandparent as a primary caregiver, a variety of factors have been found to lead to this living situation. Factors such as financial difficulties, illness, divorce, adolescent childbearing, abuse, incarceration, and other difficulties can lead to intergenerational homes. This literature review will focus on relevant literature that addresses nonresidential grandparents' roles in their grandchildren's lives and school experiences.

During the analysis of current, relevant literature surrounding extended family engagement, it quickly became apparent that significant research on how adults, other than parents, are involved with public schools is missing the depth and breadth necessary for truly informed and specific statements. In reviewing studies within the United States, there was little distinction between parental engagement and grandparent engagement; the vast majority of literature reviewed was focused only on parental involvement or engagement. A full description of grandparent's role in schools will be discussed at the end of this section.

The majority of literature available in this field represents the narrow category of parental engagement; however, this review will allow for potential connections to grandparents' motivation and their specific roles in engagement with students and schools. In the brief areas of the literature that did regard parental involvement and extended family engagement, it was quickly discovered that the only literature addressing any extended family member contributions focused on grandparents' role. The inclusion of other extended family members--aunt, uncles, brothers, sisters, step-families, or more distant relatives--is absent from the literature. In reviewing relevant literature it was discovered that when grandparents were included in children's home and school life, the students benefited from their positive influence, the grandparents benefited from contributing to their families, and schools benefited from the time grandparents volunteered (Sear & Coall, 2011; Tanskanen & Danielsbacka, 2012; Spudich & Spudich, 2010; Strom & Strom, 1995; Yorgason, Padilla-Walker, & Jackson, 2011). At home, nonresidential grandparents provide emotional and financial support as well as help students develop healthy socialization patterns (Yorgason et al., 2011). At school, students benefited from the communication, ongoing exchange of ideas, and exposure to knowledge that senior citizens hold (Spudich & Spudich, 2010).

Grandparents also benefited from being involved in their student's schools. According to Strom and Strom (1995), grandparents are an abundant and growing resource because they are healthier, better educated, and are living longer than ever before. These factors allow them the

free time and health to be more involved in schools than in previous generations. Also, some grandparents want to use these additional years to contribute to their families and communities (Strom & Strom, 1995).

Schools are also receiving several positive outcomes due to grandparents volunteering. First, students who are in need of additional support are receiving tutoring by senior citizen volunteers (Strom & Strom, 1995). Through these types of activities, students are exposed to a different generation of people, and results show that the students' positive attitudes towards aging and senior citizens increased (Spudich & Spudich, 2010). A third benefit is that schools are helping to provide intergenerational communication that helps students learn about our country's values, history, and community strength.

Motivation for Involvement

Understanding what motivated parents to become involved in their children or school lives is a very important component of the existing literature. This section will first explore the types of involvement that are often captured in research studies, and then this section will explain various ideas regarding motivation.

In addition to understanding the theoretical frameworks that can be used to evaluate parental involvement, the different types of parental involvement, and thus grandparent engagement, must be defined. Two main categories of involvement are home-based involvement and school-based involvement. The various forms of involvement that take place at school include a wide range of activities. One opportunity for parent and/or grandparent engagement includes family members planning and organizing school activities, contributing to important decisions in regards to school events, or participating in school activities and events (Haynes et al., 1989, p. 89; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005). Another common practice that creates opportunities for engagement is annual parent-teacher conferences. Parent-teacher conferences are held as a formal opportunity for teachers to share information about the student's performance and provide parents the time to ask questions about their child's progress. According to

Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005), engaging in student's extracurricular activities and helping students select appropriate courses to take is another type of involvement that takes place at the school. In many schools, family members can also volunteer to serve as crossing guards, library aides, student mentors, reading tutors, and general volunteers. Also, when parents participate in school-based involvement, Sheldon (2002), suggests that parents gain information that allows them to be in a better position to support their child's education. Examples of this additional information include direct observations of the school environment and teachers and observations of their children in the learning environment (Sheldon, 2002).

Grandparent and/or parent engagement that takes place at the home also includes a wide variety of opportunities. Family members can help students complete homework, monitor student grades using online grade books, assist students in completing learning projects, and help students study to prepare for assessments. In addition to the tangible activities that family members can assist with, Gonzalez-Dehass et al. (2005) expand their explanation to include the idea that through involvement parents communicate the importance of education. The specific idea of grandparents contributing to student's value and understanding of the importance of education was not found in the literature. This is an important area for future research and one to which the current study makes a contribution.

According to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) comprehensive model for parental involvement, there are three main sources of motivation for parental involvement. The first main source for motivation is parents' motivational beliefs. Next, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler name parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others as a motivational source. Finally, parents' perceived life context contributes the third source of motivation for parental involvement.

Within each broad motivational source, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler have identified specific factors that define each source's construction. The definition for parents' motivational beliefs includes parental role construction and parental self-efficacy (Walker, 2005). Role

construction includes the parents' beliefs about child rearing, child development, and how the home should support children's educational experiences (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). Parental self-efficacy indicates that parents make choices on their involvement based on what they think the outcomes are likely to produce (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). Parents who have experienced personal success and believe their actions will have a positive effect on their child's education are more likely to become involved. Both role construction and parental self-efficacy are influenced by the social forces that surround the parents.

The definition of parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others includes three branches: perceptions of general school invitations, perceptions of specific child invitations, and perceptions of specific teacher invitations (Walker, 2005).

General school invitations are generated in two distinct ways from schools. The first way is a by the creation of a welcoming and responsive school atmosphere. A welcoming atmosphere allows parents to feel comfortable in visiting the school and provides the confidence that their questions and suggestions will be given appropriate attention (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). The second function of general school invitations includes keeping parents well informed about student progress, school requirements, and school events (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). This type of invitation includes general information that the school produces and distributes to all students through their established communication methods. These invitations are most commonly sent home from school with students, thus, whatever caregiver is responsible for the child's daily supervision is most likely to receive this form of general communication. As the accessibility of both technology and wide-spread internet service increases, schools may distribute some general communication via email or their school website. Using email allows for personal delivery to the caregiver's inbox, however, it does not serve as a specific child or teacher invitation, which results from the direct and personalized communication between the child and/or teacher and an individual caregiver.

Both specific child invitations and specific teacher invitations result in increased parental involvement because these types of invitations appeal to parents' desire to help their children be successful in school. Specific child invitations are motivating to parents because they want to respond to their child's needs (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). Teacher invitations are similarly successful because they highlight the idea that the teacher values the parental contributions (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). Specific child and specific teacher invitations are enhanced when the school environment is welcoming and trustworthy.

The third source of motivation for parental involvement is the parents' perceived life context. Perceived life context is defined as self-perceived time and energy and self-perceived skills and knowledge (Walker, 2005). Several factors help define the understanding of self-perceived time and energy in the Hoover-Dempsey model. First, this definition includes the level of child-care or extended family responsibilities (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). These responsibilities can impact a parents' ability to be involved in school based activities. Also, parents' perceptions of their time, energy, and the flexibility of their work schedules, can influence their motivation for parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005). For example, if parents have more physically demanding jobs, more intrusive work schedules, or overall poorer working conditions, then their motivation for parental involvement could be negatively impacted. This detriment to their motivation could be caused by more stress and less availability for school functions. However, even if parents are less available for school activities, they could still practice several important at home involvement strategies including assisting with homework, maintaining contact with teachers, and passing on the belief that school is important. Parents' self-perceived skills and knowledge is another area that influences parental motivation. If a parent perceives that they have a specific skills and knowledge, such as public speaking, math calculations, or party planning, they are more likely to be involved in school activities than parents who perceive they do not have the needed skill set.

Through exploring the literature related to parent involvement, I discovered two other factors that are commonly accepted to influence parents' motivation for involvement. First, parents' social networks can play a role in influencing their motivation and second, the existence of a structured program of parent involvement. The National Network of Partnership Schools is an example of an organization that can provide resources to schools seeking to enhance the effectiveness of partnership programs (Epstein, 2005).

A parent's social network related to their child's school is defined as a set of relationships that connects the parent to other individuals directly involved with their child's school (Sheldon, 2002). Parent involvement at the school was influenced by the parent's network of other parents with children at the school and parent involvement at the home was influenced by parent's network of other adults including relatives, educators, or parents with children at a different school (Sheldon, 2002). Previous research has explained that social networks provide a method for sharing information, help members obtain human and material resources, and can influence a member's attitudes and beliefs (Sheldon, 2002). According to Sheldon (2002), a parents' social network can have an "influence on the frequency and type of parent involvement" that parents' participate in (p. 304). Membership in a social network can influence a parent's beliefs about his/her role of being involved at the school, and thus can be a motivating factor.

Another factor that could influence a parent's motivation on involvement can be found in resources available to schools for establishing effective partnerships with parents. An example of an organization designed to facilitate and support partnership programs is the National Network of Partnership Schools. The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) is a structured school involvement program based on Epstein's work and six types of involvement. When schools are a member of the NNPS, they receive tools and a great deal of support in creating and maintain school-wide programs that encourage parent involvement in their children's education. According to two recent studies, Sheldon (2007) and Sheldon & Van Voorhis (2010), schools that have strong NNPS programs in place report higher levels of parent volunteerism, parent

attendance at events, and an overall higher level of parental involvement. It appears that when the school actively seeks parent involvement in specific and regular ways, more parents are motivated to be involved.

School-Family Communication

The best practices in school-family communication are vitally important for schools to understand because of the many research findings that support that notion that increased parental involvement enhances student learning and well-being. Also, federal legislation calls for schools to communicate with their students' parents (Epstein and Salinas, 2004). According to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), "The term "parent" includes in addition to a natural parent, a legal guardian or other person standing in loco parentis (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare)" (Section 9101(31), ESEA). Also, NCLB requires that schools establish methods for the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication that focuses on academic learning and parent involvement in other school activities.

While it is clearly established that parental involvement and, possibly, grandparent involvement, have the potential to enhance student learning and well-being, not all members of the family and community are typically included in regular and relevant communication. According to the American Federation of Teachers (www.aft.org) communication between schools and families can take many different forms including parent newsletter, annual open houses, curriculum nights, home visits, phone calls, school calendars, local newspapers, and homework hotlines. However, these tend to be aimed at parents and family members living in the same home as the student, not extended or nonresidential family members, or specifically grandparents. This lack of intergenerational communication limits grandparents' ability to make valuable contributions to their student's academic lives (Strom & Strom, 2006).

Also, an increase in communication with grandparents could help relieve some of the stress that parents feel from the increasingly complex responsibility of raising children (Strom &

Strom, 2006). Communication between schools and family members can be presented in two different forms: general and individual. General, or institutional, interactions include newsletters, open houses, and initiations that are extended to all families (Halsey, 2005). Individual interactions are between teachers and parents of a specific student (Halsey, 2005). Both types of communication could be used to reach grandparents or other extended, nonresidential family members and involve them in their student's educational experience. By utilizing both specific and general forms of communications, schools would allow grandparents to be informed of school activities and volunteer opportunities as well as explicit ways they could support their grandchild's education.

Various studies have reported on the use of email as a method of communication between schools and parents (Smith et al., 2011; Lewin & Luckin, 2010; Tobolka, 2008). The findings reported in each study were very similar and simple: using e-mail to communicate is becoming increasingly popular among educators and provides an efficient way to communicate basic information with family members. According to Smith et al.(2011), using technology provides the benefits of instant communication as well as reducing costs of sending home paper notes with students. Lewin and Luckin (2010) include in their findings that technology can improve communication, increase parent involvement, and extend learning outside the classroom. Additionally, Tobolka (2006) expanded to include the finding that parents with access to school information via technology had more knowledge about classroom activities and felt more connected to the teachers.

While there is limited information on the use of technology for communication with grandparents, the cited literature does highlight the positive outcomes of this communication method associated with parents. The research surrounding the use of technology to support parental involvement and by extension, possibly nonresidential grandparent involvement, shows that using email to communicate has been beneficial, cost-effective, and successful at engaging families.

The Wingman Project

In the fall of 2011, a parent volunteer at an elementary school site in Oklahoma approached the principal with the idea to start an e-bulletin that would be distributed via email to grandparents of students at the school. The school was diverse in the socio-economic status of its children with varying levels of parental involvement; it was also faced with decreasing budgets and conversations were ongoing within the school's parent-teacher organization about how to increase giving toward the primary educational purposes of the school. The parent proposed that through e-bulletin communications with grandparents, a deliberate expansion of the typically defined school community, the school may receive immediate help with meeting student or school needs but, perhaps more importantly, could strategically build an extended investment in the school for the future. Thus, the original impetus for the project was to create a short- and long-term economic buffer, as well as provide additional support for some children who may not have other active family members. The principal approved the effort and *The Wingman*, was created. During this research study each of the three research sites has a similar communication method in place to provide grandparents with general communication about school news, events, and needs. The communication method in place is a monthly or quarterly e-bulletin called *The Wingman*. *The Wingman* is created by a parent volunteer and counselor at one of the sites, and it is created by the researcher and principal at the other three sites.

The name *The Wingman* comes from a definition obtained from U.S. Tinker Air Force Base in Midwest, OK, which states:

The term Wingman stems from a time-honored tradition within the Air Force. . . that essentially says a lead pilot will never lose his or her Wingman. It's a promise, a pledge, a commitment. . . Wingman Culture affirms that each and every person is essential to our mission (Tinker Air Force Base, 2011, "Virtual Wingman," para. 1).

This name was chosen because of the purpose of the e-bulletin, which was to enlarge the school community and provide grandparents a way to serve as an additional support network for the school and its students.

This pilot effort was shared with the researcher in November of 2011 and revisited in depth in January of 2012. After extensive conversations regarding the operation of *The Wingman* and examination of documents which explained its establishment, organization, and publication process, it was decided that three additional pilot sites would be located in Oklahoma and an in-depth research study would be pursued to explore the experiences of the schools and the grandparents involved. Permission was obtained from the superintendents and principals at each of the sites, research approval was received from the Oklahoma State University IRB, and the monthly e-bulletins were launched at the additional sites in September of 2012.

The students at all four schools were provided with printed invitations to submit email addresses of their grandparents and extended family members (See Appendix B). The email addresses provided by the students and their families were used to generate the distribution list for each school. Each month the e-bulletin is created by the designated parties (depending upon the school) and often includes pictures, quotes from individual students, special stories about events, and sometimes specific contributions from teachers or the principal. While the e-bulletin at times contains specific contributions about a featured class, the purpose of *The Wingman* is to serve as a general communication method and strategic tool for the school and/or principal. It is delivered to grandparents' email inboxes, but does not serve as a specific child or teacher invitation, because the communication is not personalized to the grandparent. *The Wingman* e-newsletter is only delivered via email and is not printed and distributed to any family members by the school. The decision to refrain from printing and sending hard copies of this newsletter was made as part of the original design of *The Wingman* by myself and the lead administrator at each site. Examples of *The Wingman* from each pilot site can be viewed in the Appendices C, D, and E.

Conclusion

The findings in this review of the literature support the need for an investigation of technology based communication that provides engagement opportunities for grandparents. The

empirical research in the areas of both family engagement and school-family communication support the notion that the better job that schools do communicating with and engaging families, the more success their students will experience. Also, research surrounding the influence that grandparents have on students and schools supports research projects that will work to increase this kind of intergenerational exposure for public schools. Lastly, a research study that investigates the motivational components of extended family members will add literature to a field of study that is currently very limited. These three reasons, founded in research, create a compelling need for this research study to be completed.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Even in a good market, its value would lie only in its potential, which at that moment was entirely theoretical. Who knew what flaws might run through its centre? Who could be sure that rough small stone could become the cut gem that Ida had already begun to see in her mind's eye, though she tried not to see it, not yet, because that, right there, was the first mistake she could take: to form a preconceived notion and force the stone to conform to it, to cut it in the image of something too hastily imagined, a gem that might be adequate, and even beautiful, but that would not be the realization of the stone's unique potential. To achieve that uniqueness – and there was no point in proceeding if not for that – she would have to allow the stone to guide her. (Richler, 2012, pp. 199-200)

The passage above is found in Nancy Richler's novel, *The Imposter Bride*, and provides a powerful metaphor to the perception and awareness that a qualitative researcher must possess as a research pursuit is initiated. The character in the story is considering the potential in the uncut gem much as a researcher considers the value and impact that a research study could provide. As the author mentions, a qualitative researcher must also be able to avoid the creation of a preconceived notion about the future image of the gem or the research, and instead allow the focus to achieve its own unique potential, as every research study must. In essence, the research study must guide the researcher in theory, methods, and findings.

Throughout the following sections the specific steps related to study design, data sources and needs, data collection, and data analysis allowed this research study to achieve its own unique potential are explained. Also included are the trustworthiness of the study, implications, and possible limitations from this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the outcomes of regular written communication with grandparents of enrolled students. This study was conducted at Oklahoma public schools of varying sizes and types and data sources will include teachers, staff, parents, grandparents, in loco grandparentis and other involved adults over the age of 18.

Research Questions

Central Questions:

1. How is school-grandparent communication influenced by the implementation of *The Wingman Project* in selected schools?
2. How is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) description of motivational beliefs established in regular participants of *The Wingman Project*?
 - a. How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent role construction in the education of their grandchildren?
 - b. How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent self-efficacy to become involved in their grandchildren's education?

Researcher Subjectivity

Chapter I includes a full explanation of the researcher's subjectivity.

Study Design

Epistemology (Constructionism)

According to Crotty (1998), epistemology is a way to explain how we know what we know (p. 3). The broad epistemological perspective of this study was constructionism. Crotty (1998) further suggests that constructionism is the perspective that meaning comes to being

through our engagement with the realities of our world (p. 8). Constructionism is “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Through this study, I explored how meaning is constructed through the engagement of grandparents and through interactions among grandparents and the school staff.

Theoretical Perspective (Social Constructivism)

In addition to the epistemological perspective of constructionism, the more specific theoretical perspective of social constructivism further describes the nature of this study. According to Creswell (2009), the premise of social constructivism includes the idea that individuals form meaning about objects and things through interaction with others. During the course of *The Wingman* publication I interacted with grandparent and school staff. Through these interactions, the participants may have learned of parent or students’ perspectives, we may have discussed this study in comparison with other school community engagement programs, and we may have influenced one another on opinions and ideas.

Exploratory Research Design

According to Creswell (1998), qualitative research can be defined as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” (p. 15). Creswell broadens his explanation of qualitative research to report how the researcher uses a few cases with many variables each to build a complex, holistic picture of the research problem. The qualitative research study includes analyzing words, reporting detailed views of participants and informants, and observation of participants in the natural setting. The methodology for this research study was qualitative due to several characteristics of the study. First, the nature of the research questions called for a study that describes what was going on in the particular settings of focus. Additionally, to fully explore the communication method employed by the schools, a detailed view of the topic needed to be presented. Finally, a

qualitative study was appropriate because it allowed me to explore what individual grandparents think about their role in their grandchildren's lives. As with all qualitative research, the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher will influence the study's ability to recognize the findings as epitomized in Miyamoto Musashi's well-known quote, "Perception is strong and sight weak. In strategy it is important to see distant things as if they were close and to take a distanced view of close things" (Patton, 2002, p. 38).

The specific design of this qualitative research study was an exploratory study of the communication method employed by the three individual pilot sites. The following two research questions allowed me to gather extensive data related to the program's effectiveness at reaching its goal of improved grandparent involvement in public schools:

1. How is school-grandparent communication influenced by the implementation of *The Wingman Project* in selected schools?
2. How is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) description of motivational beliefs established in regular participants of *The Wingman Project*?
 - a. How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent role construction in the education of their grandchildren?
 - b. How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent self-efficacy to become involved in their grandchildren's education?

The use of an exploratory study embodies both the earlier mentioned broad epistemological perspective of constructionism and the theoretical perspective of social constructivism which includes the idea that individuals form meaning about objects and things through interaction with others. Additional information about the steps taken to assure trustworthiness of the study's findings are presented in a later section on data analysis.

Data Collection Methods

In the field of qualitative research, the researcher is a key instrument in the data collection process (Creswell, 1998, p. 16). The specific methodology and methods employed by

the researcher must be well-chosen and expertly executed, to ensure accurate findings from the study. According to Patton (2002), “The quality of qualitative data depends to a great extent on the methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity of the researcher” (p. 5). With this importance of researcher proficiency in mind, this study will employ six specific methods of data collection for each of the three pilot sites. The six methods will include: surveys, interviews, document and artifact examination, observations and field notes, informants, and school data collection. The school sites, participants, and informants will be fully explored in the Data Needs and Sources section. A full explanation of the six data collection methods will be provided in the Data Collections section.

Data Needs and Sources

Site(s) Descriptions

The three school sites used in this study were located in Oklahoma and represent three different types of school settings.

Table 1

Pilot Site District Information, 2012-2013 School Year

District Number (School Pseudonym)	Population of Town	District Total Enrollment	District Total Low-Income Students
District #1 (Charlie Public Schools)	1,013	309	251/309 81.23%
District #2 (Wheatridge Elementary)	213 *District includes multiple towns; this is where Wheatridge is located.	249	135/249 54.22%

District #3 (Robinlee Elementary)	45,688	5,996	2,749/5,996 45.85%
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Table Reference: www.census.gov/2010census/popmap

Table 2

Pilot Site School Information, 2012-2013 School Year

School Pseudonym	Grade Levels Involved with Wingman	School Enrollment	% School Total Low-Income Students	District Total Low-Income Students
Charlie Public Schools	PK – 12	309	81.23%	251/309 81.23%
Wheatridge Elementary	PK – 6	178	57.30%	135/249 54.22%
Robinlee Elementary	PK – 5	580	56.45%	2,749/5,996 45.85%

Table Reference: Oklahoma Low Income Report, February 2013 for enrollment and low-income data.

Participants

Study participants included: (1) the school’s lead administrator describing *The Wingman Project* and the outcomes they observed and (2) the grandparents describing their experiences involving *The Wingman Project*. Lead administrators and grandparents from each site were recruited via an email invitation to share their experiences. The email invitation that was utilized was reviewed and approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board. The email invitation (see Appendix A) explained the researcher’s background and role in conducting research at the school and included a link to a secure survey where participants shared their experiences by answering a list of questions. The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that if they chose to participate they could be asked to complete three tasks, an Informed Consent document, an online survey, and possibly an interview with the researcher.

Initially, the email invitation was sent to all staff members at each school and to each grandparent who was receiving of *The Wingman Project* e-newsletter. The participants were recruited through multiple emails in the fall of 2013. Depending on the response rate, the initial email may have been sent again to provide possible participants another chance to volunteer. *The Wingman Project* communication effort utilized email to distribute information to grandparents. Also, the data collection process in this study recruited participants using known email addresses. So, if a grandparent did not have an email address, they were excluded from receiving the e-newsletter. Another possibility is that a family member could have printed the e-newsletter each month and shared it with the grandparent. In this instance, there could be grandparents who experienced changes in the role construction or self-efficacy that are not included because of their inaccessibility to email. Additionally, some grandparents may have declined the invitation to participate. Socioeconomic levels of grandparents of students at the three research sites could have impact the availability of computer access and email. This would provide another instance where grandparents' experiences were omitted. This study did not make an effort to discover or report on such instances.

For each of the three pilot sites, the lead administrator for *The Wingman* served as a participant. If the email invitation failed to recruit the lead administrator, then the researcher sent personalized emails to each lead administrator requesting his/her participation.

For each pilot site, the participants were grandparents or in loco grandparentis of students who attended one of the three research sites. For the purpose of research study, the definition of grandparents and in loco grandparentis included any adult identified by the caregiver and/or student to be functioning in a traditional grandparent role. This definition includes biological grandparents, legal grandparents, or surrogate grandparents. If grandparents were functioning in the role of parent for the child and live in the same residence, they were excluded from an interview. The focus of this study was to notice the influence of *The Wingman* on adults in a traditional grandparent role. After data collection was complete, it was discovered that one

grandparent was in fact the legal guardian of the students. This situation was unintentional by the researcher and is noted in the presentation of the findings.

Attempts were made to interview local grandparents that live in the same community as their grandchildren and, thus, may be involved in instances of being physically present at the school through attendance at school programs, volunteer efforts, or other activities. Distant grandparents, who live more than 300 miles from their grandchildren, were also sought as participants for the study. Distant grandparents are generally less likely to be physically present in the school on a regular basis and thus may be more dependent on *The Wingman* to learn about activities and programs at the school. I selected a distance of 300 miles to classify as distant because this would make travel much more time consuming and could potentially limit the number of school functions that a grandparent could attend.

Both local grandparents and distant grandparents were invited to participate via the Institutional Review Board approved invitation email which explained the researcher's background and role in conducting research at the school. The invitation email included a link to a secure survey where participants could share their experiences by answering a list of questions. The participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and that if they chose to participate they could be asked to complete three tasks, an Informed Consent document, an online survey, and possibly an interview with the researcher.

For each pilot site, the researcher sought to secure two or three interviews with local grandparents and two or three interviews with distant grandparents. Depending on the response rate, the initial email was sent again to provide possible participants another chance to volunteer. If participants were still needed following the second invitation email, the researcher then worked with the lead administrator to identify grandparents who may be open to an individual invitation to participate in the study. During this recruitment process, the email invitation was sent to the entire group three times and additional personal emails were sent to some grandparents inviting

them to complete an interview. The principals did not help identify additional participants. A full description of each school's recruitment efforts and results are found below.

Upon the event that the email invitation prompted more than the needed interviews, the researcher evaluated the possibility of expanding the number of individual interviews to gain a variety of perspectives and enhance the study findings. If expansion of the study to include more interviews was not a feasible option, then the researcher selected participants to interview based on information that was obtained during the survey. Attempts were made to interview grandparents who had been a member of *The Wingman* for at least six months and indicated that they read *The Wingman* each month. These two characteristics support purposeful sampling in regards to members that were likely to have had more experiences with the communication tool being studied.

For Charlie Public Schools, I sent research surveys and invitations to all Wingman recipients on three dates in the Fall of 2013: September 28, October 7, and November 8. A total of 114 email addresses, for both staff and family members, received these surveys and invitations. As a result of these attempts to obtain interviews, I had one grandparent respond that they would complete an interview. Additionally, I asked the principals if they could provide me with any suggestions for grandparents to interview and I published an invitation to interview in the October 2013 edition of *The Wingman*. Following the large group invitations, I sent out individual email invitations to eight email addresses, asking for an interview. I selected the eight email addresses based on recipients that had been receiving *The Wingman* for both years and were grandparents. From these individual invitations, I had one grandparent respond that they would complete the survey. So, after multiple attempts and various avenues of participant recruitment, I interviewed two grandparents from Charlie Public Schools.

For Robinlee Elementary, I sent research surveys and invitations to all Wingman recipients on three dates in the Fall of 2013: September 25, October 7, and November 8. A total of 190 email addresses, for both staff and family members, received these surveys and invitations.

As a result of these attempts to obtain interviews, I had one grandparent respond that they would complete an interview. Additionally, I asked the principal if she could provide me with any suggestions for grandparents to interview and I published an invitation to interview in the October 2013 edition of *The Wingman*. Following the large group invitations, I sent out individual email invitations to ten email addresses, asking for an interview. I selected the ten email address based on recipients that had been receiving *The Wingman* for both years and were grandparents. From these individual invitations, I did not have any grandparents volunteer to complete an interview. I made one last attempt to gain grandparent interviews by emailing two teachers at Robinlee Elementary to see if they would talk with their own parents, grandparents to students at Robinlee, about completing interviews. Neither of these emails resulted in an interview volunteer. So, after multiple attempts and various avenues of participant recruitment, I interviewed one grandparent at Robinlee Elementary.

For Wheatridge Elementary, I sent research surveys and invitations to all Wingman recipients on three dates in the Fall of 2013: September 25, October 7, and November 8. A total of 102 email addresses, for both staff and family members, received these surveys and invitations. As a result of these attempts to obtain interviews, I had one grandparent respond that they would complete an interview. Additionally, I asked the principal if he could provide me with any suggestions for grandparents to interview and I published an invitation to interview in the October 2013 edition of *The Wingman*. Following the large group invitations, I sent out individual email invitations to thirteen email addresses, asking for an interview. I selected the thirteen email addresses based on recipients that had been receiving *The Wingman* for both years and were grandparents. From these individual invitations, I had two grandparents volunteer to complete an interview. So, after multiple attempts and various avenues of participant recruitment, I interviewed three grandparents at Wheatridge Elementary.

Table 3

Dates of Grandparent Email Invitations

School/Invitation Email	1 st Attempt	2 nd Attempt	3 rd Attempt
Charlie Public Schools	September 28, 2013	October 7, 2013	November 8, 2013
Robinlee Elementary School	September 25, 2013	October 7, 2013	November 8, 2013
Wheatridge Elementary School	September 25, 2013	October 7, 2013	November 8, 2013

Table 4

Result of Grandparent Email Invitations

School	Volunteers from 1 st Email	Volunteers from 2 nd Email	Volunteers from 3 rd Email	Individual Emails	Total Grandparent Interviews
Charlie Public School	1	0	0	1	2
Robinlee Elementary School	1	0	0	0	1
Wheatridge Elementary School	1	0	0	2	3

In reflecting on my original goal of at least two near grandparents and two distant grandparents, my data collection shows that I did not reach this goal. I believe there are many possible reasons for this shortfall. First, when *The Wingman* started being published at each school, I don't believe that it was made clear enough to families that it was a research project and that data collection would be conducted. I think that if the original invitations to sign up and the

monthly newsletter contained more information about the research component, it could have prepared more grandparents for the fact that they could assist by completing an interview. Another possible reason that I believe I had so few volunteers was because grandparents may have assumed that they needed to have some kind of expertise in either the school, their grandchildren's school efforts, or in some technical skill associated with *The Wingman*. In talking with one of the grandparents to arrange our interview time, she mentioned that she didn't know if she could really help me with my research. I believe this could have been a common thought of grandparents when they read the invitation to interview.

School Data Collections

Additional data from each school was collected that reflects the amount of grandparent volunteerism and contributions that grandparents make to the school during the course of the study. This data source was provided by the school staff and not managed by the researcher, thus, creating the possibility for misinterpretation of the data, inflated reporting, or lack of reporting. Another piece of data that was hard to measure was grandparent attendance at school activities and events. *The Wingman Project* may have provided local grandparents with information about school activities and events. The provided information might have increased grandparent's attendance at such functions; however, there was not a data collection process in place to measure this experience. During the survey and interviews of grandparents, it could be discovered that grandparents did in fact attend more events, but numerical representation for all Wingman readers will not be available.

Additional data collection at each of the research sites was not completed in a formal or systematic way. This was a result of my ineffectiveness at asking for a formal report at the end of each semester. The reason I did not ask for this information was two-fold; first, I knew that we had published very few pieces of information or requests that would allow grandparents to make donations or volunteer, and second, I felt that asking the school administrators to complete a form

about this would be bothersome to them. I also planned to ask during my lead administrator interviews if they had received any donations or volunteerism as a direct result of *The Wingman*.

Data Collection

This research study employed six specific methods of data collection for each of the three pilot sites. The six methods included: surveys, interviews, document and artifact examination, observations and field notes, informants, and school data collection.

Surveys

The participant survey was designed using Survey Monkey which allowed for electronic submission by participants. Survey Monkey is an online survey service company that provides a variety of assessment strategies for both free and paying customers. Survey Monkey is recognized by online trust seals including Norton, TRUSTe, McAfee and the Better Business Bureau (www.surveymonkey.com, 2013). My Survey Monkey account is user name and password protected, so once participants submitted their survey, the data remained private, safe, and secure. The surveys used both “yes” and “no” questions and a Likert scale to gather participants’ feelings and experiences. The questions for both the school staff survey and the grandparent survey were created by reflecting on the theoretical framework and the researcher’s own experiences with public schools and family involvement. A copy of the survey questions is located in Appendix D.

The Wingman Participant Survey for Charlie Public Schools was sent to all Wingman recipients on three dates in the Fall of 2013: September 28, October 7, and November 8. The goals of the survey were to gather some information regarding participant’s opinion about *The Wingman* and also to provide a way for participants to volunteer to complete an interview. As mentioned above, the results of the survey in terms of interview participants were dismal, but a total of thirteen participants did complete the anonymous survey.

The Wingman Participant Survey for Robinlee Elementary was sent to all Wingman recipients on three dates in the Fall of 2013: September 25, October 7, and November 8. The

goals of the survey were to gather some information regarding participant's opinion about *The Wingman* and also to provide a way for participants to volunteer to complete an interview. As mentioned above, the results of the survey in terms of interview participants were weak, but a total of eleven participants did complete the anonymous survey.

The Wingman Participant Survey for Wheatridge Elementary was sent to all Wingman recipients on three dates in the Fall of 2013: September 25, October 7, and November 8. The goals of the survey were to gather some information regarding participant's opinion about *The Wingman* and also to provide a way for participants to volunteer to complete an interview. As mentioned above, the results of the survey in terms of interview participants were low, but a total of eighteen participants did complete the anonymous survey.

Interviews

Participant interviews were conducted in a one-on-one setting that was decided by the participant and I after choosing the day, time, and location that was most convenient for the participant. I guided the interviews with a prepared interview guide (see Appendix E). With permission from the participants, all interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by myself. In-person interviews were be utilized when possible; however, due to the desire to obtain information about the experiences of distant grandparents, some interviews were conducted via technological methods. For long distance interviews, I conducted phone calls with the grandparents. I transcribed each interview within 10 days of the interview. Due to adverse weather and travel conditions, I conducted one lead administrator interview and one informant interview via telephone as well.

Document and Artifact Examination

I obtained various public and school-based documents and artifacts that explain and define the school operation, culture, and communication methods. These documents and artifacts were collected both during on-site visits as well as via the internet. Examples of artifacts and documents that were collected include school handbooks, visitor procedures, event calendars,

meeting agendas, and school accountability reports. Such documents helped me understand the school's procedures for allowing grandparents to visit school activities and functions. These documents assisted in the creation of a thick description of each research site and provided insight into how the school operation, culture, and communication methods could potentially impact the efforts of the communication method aimed at grandparents.

Additionally, existing documents and artifacts that relate to the start-up and operation of *The Wingman* at the original site were used as source of data. I was gifted these documents by the original founder of *The Wingman*. For each of the three additional sites, both documents and artifacts from the start-up of each operation were used as a source of raw data which I have been collecting since the program's origination in the fall of 2012.

Observations and Field Notes

I conducted extensive formal and informal observations at the three active school sites to further the understanding of the school operation, culture, and communication methods. Observations were conducted during a variety of events including PTO/PTA meetings, staff meetings, sporting events, dismissal, special school events, and meetings that pertained to school communication with grandparents. Audio recording were used during observations that are not open to the public as well as open meetings. In compliance with Institutional Review Board policies, an Informed Consent permission document was completed when recording anything that was not a public event. During both formal and informal observations I took extensive field notes that included the setting being observed, sights, sounds, smells, conversations, and events that I noticed. Observations were completed at each of the three active research sites from August 2013 through December 2013 and included a variety of events such as: student assemblies, staff meetings, parent meetings, family involvement events, fundraisers, sporting events, and normal daily operations.

Informants

To further develop my understanding of parent and grandparent involvement in public schools, various informants were utilized during the course of the study. Informants provided insight into the areas of grandparent involvement in public schools, communication efforts with families, school volunteerism, donations to schools, and grandparent's roles in their grandchildren's lives. An informant was a participant that was not an employee of the research sites or a grandparent to any students; however, due to either his/her profession or his/her involvement with the school in some other capacity each person was knowledgeable about topics pertinent to this research study. Informants were chosen for their expertise, knowledge, and willingness to share their ideas. Informants were asked to share understanding they have in regards to parent and grandparent motivation for involvement, other programs that work to involve grandparents, insights as to these specific sites' efforts (if known), and their perceptions of the benefits of grandparent involvement. An informant from the original school that started *The Wingman Project* will be sought to provide background knowledge on the creation and management of the program at the fourth school.

Researcher as Observer Participant

During this research study I was directly involved with the lead administrators, schools, and grandparents because I was the publisher of the monthly e-newsletter. Due to my unique position as both the publisher of *The Wingman* and my role as the researcher it is important to consider how this dual role may have impacted my study. Merriam (1988) explains how the relationship between the researcher, or observer, and the observed can be defined. Merriam's explanation of the role a researcher can take is the idea of 'observer as participant.' When a researcher's purpose and study is known to the group and he or she is openly conducting a study he or she can be viewed as an observer as participant (Merriam, 1988). In this role the primary job of the researcher is first observer and their top priority is gathering information. A secondary role that an observer as participant might fulfill is to be an active member of the group. I will

revisit my role as observer as participant in Chapter VI and explain how this understanding influenced my study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis procedures for this research study included a series of specified processes. At the conclusion of data collection, I printed two copies of all interview transcripts, field notes, journals, and all documents and artifacts. One set of the copies was securely stored to provide an original reference copy. The other set of copies was used for notations and coding. I then read through interviews, field notes, journals, and documents and artifacts, making comments and notes in the margins about various pieces of data. This process of reading was an essential step to help determine what pieces of data were significant (Patton, 2002). During a second reading of the interviews, field notes, journals, and documents and artifacts, I continued to make notes and also highlight phrases and sentences that will be later coded. The next step I took was to transfer the comments, notes, and highlighted sections onto coding cards, such as this one:

Figure 1

Coding Card

Source:
Site:
Type of Respondent:
Episode:

These first steps were completed independently for each of the three research sites. The next step was to develop codes, categories, and themes for each of the individual sites. While creating groups of cards that fit together, I addressed the convergence of the data and looking for recurring regularities (Patton, 2002, p. 465). I started by sorting each coded card into different groups that refer to the same idea or data. Next, the original categories were combined into groups that showed internal homogeneity and dovetailed in a meaningful way. This process developed the themes for each site. Next, I moved on and completed the same process for each of the remaining sites.

After I had completed the initial coding and had created collapsed themes for each of the research sites, then the analysis of the data as related to each other began. Similarities and differences among the themes at each site were considered. The specific methods of data collection and analysis added depth, detail, and nuance, which created powerful insights for each of the pilot site's Wingman e-newsletter and the outcomes at each school (Patton, 2002, p. 220).

Each of the chosen theoretical framework's categories were used as the specific coding labels. As individual pieces of data were coded, they were assigned one of the identified codes (Table 3.7.). This method of closed coding allowed for data analysis through the lens of the chosen theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

The use of a theoretical framework provides both design guidance and another level of analysis for qualitative research. In addition to the presentation of the study's findings, applying a theoretical framework causes both the researcher and the reader to consider how the evidence either supports or provides contrary examples to a previously generated line of thought.

According to Creswell (1998), "social science theories provide an explanation, a predication, and a generalization about how the world operates" (p. 84) and can be applied either before, during, or after data collection has taken place for the study. Theoretical analysis for this research study was selected a priori and used as an influencer on the design of the study, methods, and data

collection processes as well as a lens through which to evaluate the data. The theoretical analysis was used from design through analysis.

Two popular theoretical frameworks are often referred to in research regarding parental involvement in public education. The frameworks are Epstein's (2010) work, which focuses on overlapping spheres of influence and six specific types of parental involvement, and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997, 2005) work, which focuses on explaining the motivation for and process of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Walker et al. 2005). This study uses the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler revised model, which provided a greater structure for recognizing the sociological factors, motivational forces, and influences that grandparents have on students' learning and well-being.

History of Theoretical Framework

In 1992, Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie examined the connection between parents' sense of efficacy and its relationship to parent involvement. The basis for their examination was an understanding and application of Bandura's work on personal efficacy, which encompasses the idea that "one is capable of achieving specific outcomes on behavior choices" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992). In essence, Hoover-Dempsey et al. wanted to see if Bandura's work on self-efficacy would also hold true in the relationship between parents and school involvement. By applying Bandura's theory, Hoover-Dempsey et al. hypothesized that parents hold personal efficacy beliefs about their abilities to help their children with the schooling and learning process (1992). In turn, these beliefs will influence parents' decision and determination to be involved with their child's school. This original study found that parents' personal efficacy did appear to facilitate increased school involvement in some areas (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992).

The completion of this initial study by Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie, led Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler to create a model of the parental involvement process that was originally published in 1995. An additional, modified description of the model in a 1997

publication by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler was also reviewed for this study. This version of the model includes five distinct levels that identify and explain various components of parent involvement (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of the Parental Involvement Process (1995, 1997)

Level 5

Child/student outcomes	
Skills & Knowledge	Personal sense of efficacy for doing well in school

Level 4

Tempering/mediating variables	
Parents' use of developmentally appropriate involvement strategies	Fit between parents' involvement actions & school expectations

Level 3

Mechanisms through which parental involvement influences child outcomes		
Modeling	Reinforcement	Instruction

Level 2

Mechanisms through which parental involvement influences child outcomes		
Modeling	Reinforcement	Instruction

Level 1

Parent's basic involvement decision, influenced by		
Parent's construction of the parental role	Parent's sense of efficacy for helping her/his children succeed in school	General invitations & demand for involvement from child & school

In creating and utilizing this model for parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler were seeking to answer the question, "Why do parents become involved in their children's education?" Through exploring this model, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler found that parents' involvement decisions and choices are determined by several factors including their own ideas and experiences, environmental demands, and involvement opportunities (1997).

Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey (2005), further advanced the use of this model through a revised version that drew upon the findings and application of the first model. This revision combines the original ideas from Levels 1 and 2 and joined these into three overarching constructs that now make Level 1 (Walker et al., 2005). Another difference in the 2005 revised model includes the use of links that prompt possible relationships that exist between and within the levels. The original and revised versions of Level 1 and Level 2 are found in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Original and Revised Model

Original (1997):

Level 2

Parent's choice of involvement forms, influenced by		
Specific domains of parent's skill & knowledge	Mix of demands on total parental time and energy (family, employment)	Specific invitations & demands for involvement from child & school

Level 1

Parent's basic involvement decision, influenced by		
Parent's construction of the parental role	Parent's sense of efficacy for helping her/his children succeed in school	General invitations & demand for involvement from child & school

**Revised (2005):
Level 1 & 2**

Parents' Involvement Forms						
contribute to						
Parents' Motivational Beliefs		Parents Perceptions of Invitations for Involvement from Others			Parents' Perceived Life Context	
defined as:		defined as:			defined as:	
Parental Role Construction	Parental Self-Efficacy	Perceptions of General School Invitations	Perceptions of Specific Child Invitations	Perceptions of Specific Teacher Invitations	Self-Perceived Time and Energy	Self-Perceived Skills and Knowledge

The 2005 revised version of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of the parental involvement process was utilized as the theoretical framework for this study. The focus of this study was exclusively on a portion of Level 1, motivational beliefs, and only from the vantage point of grandparents' involvement as an alternative to parents' involvement. Thus, the model of the grandparent involvement process is revealed in Figures 4 and 5 and are discussed in the following section.

Figure 4

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, Level 1 & 2

Grandparents' Involvement Forms						
contribute to						
Grandparents' Motivational Beliefs		Grandparents Perceptions of Invitations for Involvement from Others			Grandparents' Perceived Life Context	
defined as:		defined as:			defined as:	
Grandparent Role Construction	Grandparent Self-Efficacy	Perceptions of General School Invitations	Perceptions of Specific Child Invitations	Perceptions of Specific Teacher Invitations	Self-Perceived Time and Energy	Self-Perceived Skills and Knowledge

Figure 5

Level 1: Focus on Motivational Beliefs

Grandparents' Involvement Forms	
contribute to	
Grandparents' Motivational Beliefs	
defined as:	
Grandparent Role Construction	Grandparent Self-Efficacy

Grandparents' Motivational Beliefs

The proposed definition for grandparents' motivational beliefs included grandparent role construction and grandparent self-efficacy. Role construction includes grandparent beliefs about child rearing, child development, and how the child's home should support the child's educational experiences. Additionally, this role construction is based on their own experiences as

parents, thus enhancing their knowledge and influencing their beliefs. According to Hoover-Dempsey et. al (2005), parent's knowledge can be enhanced through their involvement with individuals and groups related to schooling. In adapting Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model of the parental involvement process this same understanding was applied to grandparents. Grandparent's knowledge about how and why to become involved with their grandchildren's education is influenced by experiences with schooling, as students or as parents. Grandparent self-efficacy indicates that grandparents make choices on their involvement based on what they think the outcomes are likely to produce. Grandparents who have experienced personal success and believe their actions will have a positive effect on their grandchild's education, are more likely to become involved. Both role construction and self-efficacy are influenced by the social forces that surround grandparents. This influence of social forces reflects the child's grandparents' involvement in school, lack of involvement in school, and the grandparents' role in child rearing.

The proposed definition for grandparents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others includes three branches: perceptions of general school invitations, perceptions of specific child invitations, and perceptions of specific teacher invitations. While each of these three branches may influence a grandparents' involvement with schools, this study focused on only discovering specific changes in their motivational beliefs, including role construction and self-efficacy. The following explanations of the other influences on involvement are described to support a better understanding of the theoretical framework.

General School Invitations

General school invitations are generated in two distinct ways by schools. The first way is by the creation of a welcoming and responsive school atmosphere that includes specific methods for involving grandparents. This allows grandparents to feel comfortable in visiting the school and also provides attention to grandparents' questions and suggestions. The second function of general school invitations includes keeping grandparents well informed about student

requirements and school events. These invitations are most commonly sent home from school with students, thus, whichever caregiver is responsible for the child's daily supervision is most likely to receive this form of general communication. Depending on whether or not grandparents see a child daily, they may or may not receive a paper copy of the communication. However, schools may distribute general communication via email or their school website. Using email allows for personal delivery to a grandparent's inbox. Distribution of general communication would not include providing non-custodial grandparents with information about the individual student's academic progress.

Specific Child and Teacher Invitations

Both specific child invitations and specific teacher invitations might result in increased grandparents' involvement because these types of invitations would appeal to grandparents' desire to help their grandchildren be successful in school. It is possible that specific child invitations are motivating to grandparents because they want to respond their grandchild's needs. Teacher invitations would be similarly successful because they highlight the idea that the teacher values the grandparents' contributions. Specific child and specific teacher invitations are enhanced when the school environment is welcoming and trustworthy.

Perceived Life Context

The proposed third source of motivation for grandparents' involvement is the grandparents' perceived life context, which is defined as self-perceived time and energy and self-perceived skills and knowledge. This definition includes the level of child-care or family obligations that grandparents currently support for the family unit. If grandparents are already involved in providing a high level of child-care, then it could be very natural for them to be motivated for school engagement. Also, grandparents' perceptions of their time, energy, and the flexibility of their work schedules, can influence their motivation for involvement. Retired grandparents may have more flexibility that may provide added motivation for school engagement. Also, grandparents' self-perceived skills and knowledge is another area that may

influence their motivation. Grandparents who have been involved in the school setting before, with their own children or as a professional, may be more motivated to pursue school engagement.

Table 5

Comparisons: Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s Model and Grandparents

Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler’s Parent Involvement Process Level 1 Constructs (2005 Revised Model) Adapted to Grandparent Involvement: Motivational Beliefs	Possible Common Themes/Codes for this Study
<i>Grandparents’ Motivational Beliefs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Role construction</i> • <i>Beliefs about child rearing, child development, and how the child’s home should support the child’s educational experiences</i> • <i>Based on their own experiences as parents, thus enhancing their knowledge of schooling and influencing their belief</i> • <i>Make choices on their involvement based on what they think the outcomes are likely to produce</i>

The selection of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model as an analytical lens was appropriate for this study because it sought to identify how grandparents engaged with the communication methods of public schools. Furthermore, the lens provided a structure in which to analyze how grandparents’ motivation beliefs are influenced. This analysis of the theory as a lens is provided in Chapter V, the Analysis section of this study.

Trustworthiness of the Study

In establishing the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study, it is important for the researcher to thoroughly examine and plan for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four specific evaluative measures help demonstrate the truth value of the study, explain the steps for applying the truth value, and establish the procedures for external judgments to be made regarding the data (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). These combined qualities have been referred to as “trustworthiness” by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and guided the trustworthiness exploration for the research study. Each quality is generally defined and explained, then, a Trustworthiness Table identifies the specific steps to fully validate the trustworthiness of this study.

Credibility

A qualitative researcher works to understand the constructed realities that exist in the minds of the study participants and the settings. Through this process, certain ideas, facts, and understandings are attributed to the participants. The relationship between the realities that are attributed to the participants and the participant’s actual realities is referred to as credibility (Erlandson et al., 1993). According to Erlandson et al. (1993), there are several strategies that support the development of credibility within a study. The strategies are identified as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, referential adequacy materials, peer debriefing, and member checks (Erlandson et al., 1993, pp. 30-31). A particularly prominent strategy for creating trustworthiness within this study is the triangulation of data from different sources, different perspectives, and different methods. For example, I sought the perspectives of both grandparents who live near the school and grandparents who live more than 300 miles from the school. Perspectives of both administrators and grandparents were included. Informants were used as appropriate and added depth of understanding to this study. Data and artifact analysis added more knowledge to the triangulation process.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the capacity with which a researcher can apply the findings from one research study to other contexts, participants, and settings (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Throughout this study a “thick description” of all three research sites was completed in effort to provide valuable insight about the ideas, facts, and understandings that are attributed to the participants. According to Erlandson et al. (1993), a “thick description” allows for “tentative judgments about the applicability of certain observations for [their] contexts and to form ‘working hypotheses’ to guide empirical inquiry in those contexts” (p. 33). Essentially, with the inclusion of a thick description, future researchers can determine if their context is similar to the context be reported on and thus, make decisions about the implementation of programs, strategies, and processes, based on the likelihood of success. Initial, document-based descriptors about the sites appear earlier in this chapter. Additional descriptions based upon observation will appear in Chapter IV.

Dependability

Throughout this study an ‘audit trail’ was maintained that included the documentation of observations, critical incidents, documents, interviews, and the researcher’s reflexive journal. The audit trail allows for external checks to be made regarding the processes by which the researcher developed themes and specific findings throughout the data analysis and interpretation. Both the audit trail and the external checks are necessary to help determine if the study meets the standards for dependability, which means that if the study was replicated with the same or similar participants, in the same or similar setting, the findings would likely be repeated (Erlandson et al., 1993). Also, member checks were attempted with each of the three pilot site’s lead administrators. The lead administrators for both Charlie Public Schools and Wheatridge Elementary reviewed the site descriptions and interview summaries to check for accuracy. The lead administrator for Robinlee Elementary did not complete a member check.

Confirmability

Confirmability for the study was evaluated by determining if the study’s findings were based on the focus of the research questions and not on the researcher’s personal interests or biases. The confirmability of the study was evidenced through the collection of an audit trail that includes documentation of observations, critical incidents, documents, interviews, and the researcher’s reflexive journal. Additionally, the researcher’s notes, coding themes, and interpretations of data is included in the audit trail.

The intersecting relationship of these four evaluative measures worked to establish the trustworthiness of the study and provided for external checks, which are indispensable.

Table 6

Trustworthiness Table

<i>Technique</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Prolonged engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trust • Develop rapport • Build relationships • Obtain wide scope of data • Obtain accurate data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing observations in the school settings • Interviews of each study participant • Artifact and document examination from beginning of each schools’ program through data collection
Persistent observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain in-depth data • Obtain accurate data • Sort relevancies from irrelevancies • Recognize deceptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews of participants outside of school • Artifact and document examination from beginning of each schools’ program through data collection • Observations at school sites and school events

Triangulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using observations, interviews, and documents to verify discovered themes
Referential adequacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a “slice of life” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing artifacts and documents • School newsletter, handbooks, letters to parents, and Wingman e-bulletin
Peer debriefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test working hypotheses • Find alternative explanations • Explore emerging design and hypotheses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual debriefing with peers • Group debriefing with peers
Reflexive journal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document researcher decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissertation Progress Reports
Thick description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide data base for transferability judgment • Provide a vicarious experience for the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included in Chapter IV – Presentation of Research Sites
Purposive sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate data for emergent design and emerging hypotheses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview sampling included local, semi-local, and distant participants who meet study criteria
Dependability Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow auditor to determine trustworthiness of study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents organized and securely stored by researcher

Significance

Preliminary research similar to this study was completed during my doctoral coursework and was used in this study via existing documents. This research provides some insight into expected implications for practice, research, and theory. In the area of K-12 education it can be predicted that a similar program in other like settings would also increase intergenerational involvement and help grandparents feel more connected to their grandchildren's school. In another segment of society, retirement communities, the development of this type of program could engage non-grandparent elderly people in service to their local schools. Another implication for schools would be to carefully examine their school culture if they are aiming to increase communication and involvement of grandparents. The school culture at one research site contained elements that supported this type of outreach.

The findings from this research study have provided me with insight as to how the different types of participants perceived the communication methods. Also, these questions present the possibility of helping me explain specific elements of the communication methods that were very successful, need modification, or generating new ideas. As evidenced in Chapter 2, multiple research studies have cited and presented the case for the need for parent involvement in the education process. Even with the plethora of research that has been conducted, there are still unexplored areas in grandparent involvement. Through this study the exploration of grandparents' impact on the education process could provide even more ideas and solutions for schools to implement in order to provide their students with the best education possible. For each of the individual research sites, the findings from this study could provide valuable insight into the types of information that families find most helpful and useful.

Not explored in previous research, was the idea of using Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's theory of parental role construction as a lens to view the findings. The implication from this study would be a possible expansion of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model to include grandparent role construction through targeted school communication methods.

Limitations

One significant limitation of this study is the adaptation of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parent involvement to represent grandparent involvement. This limitation exists because both the studies that generated this line of thought and the data that supports its' use, are aimed at parental involvement only. Due to the fact that this study involved grandparent-school communication that utilized email as the contact method, a possible limitation is the exclusion of grandparents without email. Grandparents could choose to not use email as a communication method or socioeconomic barriers could prevent email use. Another possible limitation is the small scale of this study, being conducted in only three pilot sites in Oklahoma. Replicating this study in multiple sites in multiple geographical areas would lend strength to the findings. As with all qualitative research studies, my own perceptions, background knowledge, and personal experiences could inadvertently limit the study.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this chapter, I paralleled the qualities of a rare uncut gem to that of a qualitative research study. In the description of the specific steps related to study design, data sources and needs, and data collection methods, I further explained how this research study will achieve its own unique potential. Additionally, the analysis procedures, trustworthiness of the study, and possible implications from this study provide insight into the effectiveness of school based communication efforts with grandparents. The character from the chapter introduction ends her analysis of the uncut gem's future by stating, "She had felt the life in it even before she brought it up to her eye for a closer look...and she had known at that moment that she would be the one to release its light" (Richler, 2012, p. 200). Likewise, I have explained the process for conducting this research study, hopefully bringing new light to the communication efforts of public schools.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH SITES

As stated in the purpose for this research study, the communication effort, *The Wingman*, was created and distributed to family members at three Oklahoma public schools. An important consideration for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is transferability, and that is provided to the reader through rich, thick description of the research sites. In this chapter each school's environmental and cultural context and how they involve families is discussed in reference to observations, document and artifact examination, and my interviews with the lead administrators. This discussion creates a rich, thick description of each site. Also, the contents of *The Wingman* are explained. The information presented in Chapter IV provides the reader with a familiarity of the research sites and the contents of the monthly e-newsletter--important descriptive information that creates contextual understanding. Chapter V is a Presentation of the Study Data and contains only new data sources directly related to the research questions.

Research Site #1 – Charlie Public Schools

Charlie Public Schools was a rural district comprised of students from one small town and residents in the nearby area. During the 2012-13 school year, the district had a student enrollment of approximately 309 students. Charlie Public Schools was the only research site that decided to aim *The Wingman* toward grandparents of all students PK-12, rather than only for students at the elementary school. I believe this decision to include the entire student body was a result of the lead administrator for *The Wingman*, the superintendent, being my primary contact.

The superintendent wanted to use *The Wingman* to highlight the students at both buildings in his district. This could have also been due to the relatively small enrollment and rural nature of the district, where he felt that readers would enjoy learning about all the students. In July of 2012, I met Charlie's superintendent when attending a training workshop. A few weeks later when I was looking for a rural school district to participate in *The Wingman* research study, I called the superintendent; I visited Charlie Public Schools on August 13, 2012, and received research approval from the superintendent.

According to the 2010 United States census, Charlie Public Schools is located in a small town of approximately 1,013. The town is located in gently rolling hills with many acres of agriculture surrounding the main residential area. Of the school's three hundred and nine students in 2012-13, two hundred and fifty-one, or 81.23%, qualify for free or reduced lunch according to the national criteria for low-income students.

From October 2013 to December 2013, I had the opportunity to observe four different events (approximately 5 hours) that allowed me to gain some insight into the district's events, parent involvement efforts, and participation by parents in several settings. The 2013-14 school year was the first year in 19 years that an active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) existed. The current president spoke of the group's desire to create excitement for the student activities and school events. Further conversation mentioned the idea of including students in this organization and completing some fundraising to help pay for events; a board of education member inquired about how she might help. This observation suggested that numerous stakeholders are interested in working together to support the growth of the PTA and that the district actively encourages families to be involved in the educational process. I also attended three sports or music events and noticed that many spectators appeared to be parents, grandparents, or siblings of the featured students. At one event, a very special event that the superintendent told me can draw up to six hundred audience members, family units seemed to enter the gym together. The special event was the annual elementary school Christmas program. The gym bleachers were completely full,

and families seemed to be sitting near each other with parents, grandparents, and children present. Throughout my observations at Charlie Public Schools, it appeared to me that family members seemed to be comfortable and relaxed in the school environment and enjoyed seeing their students perform.

Another area of data that was explored were various documents and artifacts that added understanding in regard to school-grandparent communication and family involvement in general. For Charlie Public Schools the documents and artifacts that were reviewed included the student handbook, the school website, the A-F School Report Card, and emails from administrators, teachers, parents, and grandparents. Findings from the student handbook and school website support the notion that Charlie Public Schools encourages parents to be engaged and attentive to their students' education lives. The handbook states that, "Good communication between home, school, and parents is essential for your child's educational welfare," and "Parents are the most important role models for students when developing self-discipline." Additionally, the handbook provides clear procedures for visiting the school, keeping students safe, and allowing parents' access to their child's teacher. In reporting on Charlie Public School's academic performance, the A-F School Report Cards for the elementary school and high school were reviewed. Charlie Public School's high school earned a letter grade 'A' with 95% and Charlie Public School's elementary school earned a letter grade 'C' with a 76%.

The Wingman e-newsletter was published at Charlie Public Schools a total of 11 times from September 2012 to December 2013. *The Wingman* for Charlie Public Schools includes monthly pictures and identification of the Students of the Month, athletic and academic accomplishments, as well as special events such as career fairs and graduation news. In August 2012, the students at Charlie Public Schools were given a note to take home to their families. The note included information about how the families could sign up grandparents to receive *The Wingman*. The following table (Table 7) shows the growth in both the number of total email

addresses the *The Wingman* was reaching from the first year of publication to the second year and also shows the increase in the geographical reach.

Table 7

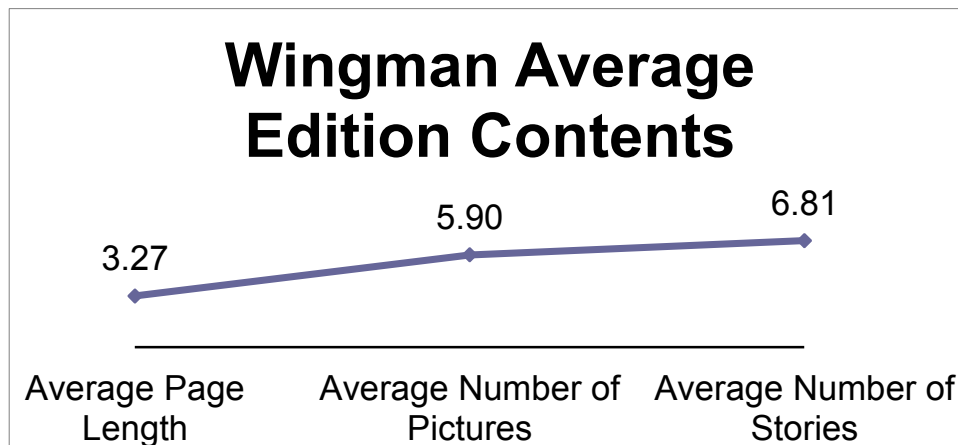
Charlie Public Schools – Wingman Distribution

	Total Email Addresses	Geographical Reach
September 2012	92	5 US States
September 2013	114	
December 2013		7 US States South Korea

During the two years of *The Wingman* at Charlie Public Schools, a total of 11 editions were distributed. A special column, titled “The World’s Coolest” was published in 7 of the 11 editions and contained quotes from students about their grandparents. The graph (Figure 6) below shows the average number of page length, pictures, and stories in Charlie Public Schools’ Wingman e-newsletter.

Figure 6

Charlie Public Schools – Wingman Contents



The lead administrator for *The Wingman* at Charlie Public Schools was the superintendent, Mr. Luke Rider (a pseudonym). Mr. Rider has spent 19 years as an educator within the Charlie Public School system, serving as a teacher, coach, and principal. For the past nine years Mr. Rider has been the superintendent of the school district. During my interview with Mr. Rider, I learned that Charlie Public Schools has never had any kind of communication tool that was aimed at grandparents or extended family members. He commented that *The Wingman* has, "...brought an entire new dimension to students, staff, and families." Specifically, he mentioned that *The Wingman* allows for the school to disseminate information about day-to-day activities, special awards, and activities to a much larger audience, especially out of state family members. Mr. Rider shared the excitement he has noticed from students, family members, staff, and board of education members. In his observation, even though board of education members frequently hear about the policy and finances of the district, *The Wingman* provides them a new perspective including pictures of students and details about activities that students are engaged in. One interesting idea that emerged from my conversation with Mr. Rider was the idea of extending *The Wingman* to include community news, perhaps from the chamber of commerce or city government. Since the town does not have a local newspaper, *The Wingman* could serve as a publication for community news as well. He commented that, "...maybe that would help build some stronger partnerships with the school and some of those community groups as well." When my publication of *The Wingman* ends in May of 2014, Mr. Rider expressed sincere interest in finding a way to continue this form of communication with Charlie Public School families due to its popularity and the familiar format that patrons now look forward to.

Research Site #2 – Robinlee Elementary

Robinlee Elementary was located in a mid-size district in a community that included a large research university. During the 2012-13 school year, the school had a student enrollment of approximately 580 students. Robinlee Elementary was one of six elementary schools in a district that has approximately 5,996 students in grades PK-12. *The Wingman* at Robinlee was aimed at

grandparents of students PK-5. I met the Robinlee principal in the same July of 2012 training workshop as the Charlie Public School superintendent. I completed a request to conduct research through the district office and, on August 10, 2013, I received my research project was approved, and Robinlee Elementary School had agreed to be a participating school site.

According to the 2010 United States census, Robinlee Elementary was located in a mid-sized community of 45,688. The community was home to a large comprehensive research university and, due to the university student population, includes many amenities one could expect to find in a much larger city. Of Robinlee's five hundred and eighty students in 2012-13, three hundred and twenty-seven, or 56.45%, qualified for free or reduced lunch according to the national criteria for low-income students.

During the five events I attended, I observed family members watching their students perform in musical programs, helping students prepare for the beginning of the school year, and discussing upcoming plans for the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). During the 2013-14 school the Robinlee Elementary PTA had one hundred and forty-seven members and an annual budget of approximately thirty-six thousand dollars. A copy of the PTA Agenda and annual budget showed that parents are very active in supporting Robinlee Elementary's PTA and the teachers. One example of the parents support for the teachers was a budget item that provided a two hundred dollar grant to each certified teacher. During the fall of 2013, Robinlee hosted a Veteran's Day assembly that included students performing and also recognized family members who served in the armed services. Approximately a dozen servicemen from different branches of the military attended this assembly. These different events showed ways that families at Robinlee are involved and ways that the school seeks opportunities to engage family members with learning opportunities. Three of the observations that I completed at Robinlee took place during the regular school day and two of the observations were during evening events. For school day observations, there was little opportunity to observe large groups of parents or families. As a visitor at the school during the school day, however, I noticed how friendly and welcoming the

front office staff was to both myself and parents. This suggested that parents are welcome visitors. I think that if I would have been able to attend larger evening events, such as a PTA movie night, I would have observed more instances of parent attendance and engagement.

In addition to interviews with participants and survey data, documents and artifacts were collected to provide me with a better understanding of the school communication efforts and family involvement in general. For Robinlee Elementary, the document and artifact examination included the school handbook, the school website, the A-F School Report Card, a PTA meeting agenda, a staff meeting agenda, and email communication from lead administrators and teachers. Reviewing the student handbook provided an understanding of how Robinlee provides policies and procedures for parents to visit classrooms, while still keeping students safe. The handbook states, "Please understand that we welcome parent and family participation in the education process and encourage visits to our schools. The procedures listed below are meant solely to safeguard your child." Additionally, the handbook specifically mentions the importance of parents attending parent/teacher conferences as a way to keep "communication open and ongoing." Various documents supported the idea that Robinlee is a school with a strong emphasis on community involvement. Two examples of this were a benefit garage sale that the school had for a student and the school's participation in a community recycling day in November 2013. Both of these activities provide students a model of how to be active, contributing citizens. Another example of Robinlee's commitment to involving many stakeholders is the list of organizations that helped to provide a family literacy night for students. According to an email from the lead administrator, the public library, children's museum, city's art institute and a college fraternity all helped with the event. In other document review it was discovered that Robinlee Elementary earned a letter grade of an 'A' with a 91%. Finally, an email from a staff member shared her enthusiasm for the content of the November/December 2013 edition, "Loved this edition! All the pictures and school work!"

The Wingman e-newsletter was published at Robinlee Elementary a total of 11 times from September 2012 to December 2013. *The Wingman* for Robinlee Elementary included a wide variety of information such as bookfair news and outdoor classroom updates, as well as stories written about school events by Robinlee students. In August 2012, the students at Robinlee were given a digital note about *The Wingman* in their weekly e-folder that included information about how the families could sign up grandparents to receive *The Wingman*. The following table (Table 8) shows the growth in both the number of total email addresses the *The Wingman* was reaching from the first year of publication to the second year and also shows the increase in the geographical reach.

Table 8

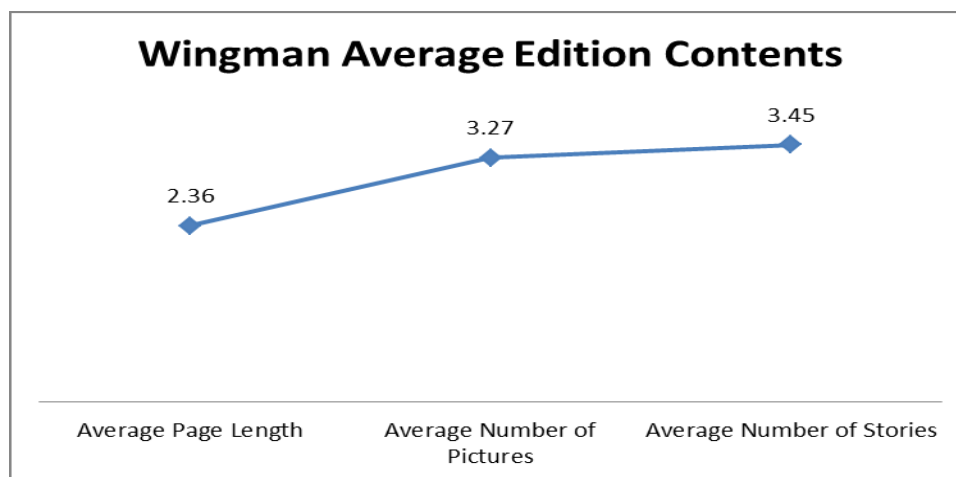
Robinlee Elementary – Wingman Distribution

	Total Email Addresses	Geographical Reach
September 2012	117	1 US States
September 2013	190	
December 2013		6 US States Germany

Over the course of the 11 published editions, a special column, titled “The World’s Coolest” was published in 8 of the 11 editions and contains quotes from students about their grandparents. In February of 2013, a teacher at Robinlee helped a small group of students write and submit stories to be included in *The Wingman*. The student group has contributed a total of twenty-one stories that were published. The following graph (Figure 7) shows a record of the monthly content for Robinlee’s *Wingman*.

Figure 7

Robinlee Elementary – Wingman Contents



The lead administrator for *The Wingman* at Robinlee Elementary was the principal, Mrs. Laura Moser (a pseudonym). Mrs. Moser started her career in education as a classroom teacher for 17 years and taught a wide variety of grade levels ranging from PreK to 5th grade. She is currently in her 9th year as an administrator. While discussing *The Wingman* at Robinlee, Mrs. Moser shared her perspective about the growth in the project and about how impressed she has been with the student’s contributions to the newsletter. She noted that during the first months of the project, if she mentioned it to other adults associated with the school, it wasn’t always well-known, but now, when she mentions *The Wingman*, it is often recognized. While expressing her ideas about how the staff thinks about *The Wingman*, Mrs. Moser said she believes they see, “...that we can reach out to grandparents or extended family and they can be an important part of learning,” and how important it is for, “...people to see that the community of support reaches beyond just the immediate family.” Mrs. Moser had two suggestions for other content that could enrich *The Wingman*. Her ideas included a simple presentation of the overall academic goals and performance for the school “so grandparents can feel good about the school they [their grandchildren] are going to.” Additionally, ideas that would provide grandparents with activities or games to support their grandchildren’s learning would be beneficial. Mrs. Moser stated that

she looks forward to reading *The Wingman* for enjoyment and wants to continue *The Wingman* e-newsletter after my publication efforts end in May 2014.

Research Site #3 – Wheatridge Elementary

Wheatridge Elementary was part of a rural, consolidated school district located in the sparsely populated western section of Oklahoma and represented what originally were four separate districts. During the 2012-13 school year, the school had a student enrollment of approximately 178 students, and was part of a small district with 249 students in grades PK-12. *The Wingman* at Wheatridge was aimed at grandparents of all students PK-6, most likely because PK-6 is all housed at one location and has one lead administrator. In July of 2012, I met the Dean of Students at Wheatridge in a course that I was teaching. On August 24, 2013, I met with the leaders of Wheatridge Elementary and received permission to conduct research.

According to the 2010 United States census, Wheatridge Elementary is located in a small community of 213 residents. While the town site where Wheatridge is located contains very few residents, the district includes students from four surrounding towns and numerous outlying residences. Of the school's one hundred and seventy-eight students in 2012-13, one hundred and two, or 57.30%, qualified for free or reduced lunch according to the national criteria for low-income students.

My observations at Wheatridge included four total events; two that were aimed specifically at inviting families to visit the school environment. A Grandparents' Tea was a fourteen-year tradition at Wheatridge and allowed grandparents to visit a classroom and participate in activities with their grandchildren. Additionally, a breakfast event was aimed at inviting fathers, grandfathers, and uncles to visit the school and enjoy donuts with the students; the especially high turnout for this event (when considering the number of students at the school), approximately fifty-eight men, suggested that family members in this school are very active. At two sporting events, a large number of family members showed up to support their young athletes. Particularly, at one outside sporting event the turnout was so large that I was unable to

obtain even a rough estimate of the people in attendance and families seemed comfortable to gather their lawn chairs and enjoy the warm and windy day. Through observations at Wheatridge, it seemed apparent that families are very active in, and feel welcome at, the school. While reviewing documents and artifacts related to *The Wingman* at Wheatridge Elementary, I studied the school website, the student handbook, A-F School Report Cards, and emails from the lead administrator and a grandparent. The school website contains a well-maintained and current page that lists all the district's upcoming student events by the month. I have used this page frequently during the publication period to add dates to *The Wingman*, so I know it is consistently updated. This maintained calendar of events is one way that Wheatridge provides opportunities for families to be aware of upcoming school activities. Also, the student handbook includes statements about how parents are always welcome at the school and how the school encourages parental involvement. Specifically, the student handbook states, "Our parents will be encouraged to act as advisors, resource persons, and coordinators in the following ways: attend school events and serve as advisors, use talents/resources to enhance the instructional programs, be school supporters and advocates, respond to memos, surveys, and questionnaires expressing ideas and concerns." This well-developed presentation of a parent's role is supportive of the notion that Wheatridge encourages parental involvement. Through emails with the lead administrator, I learned that in many ways the entire community of Wheatridge and the surrounding areas pull together to accomplish programs and events that benefit the students. One example of this is a high school service group that developed and leads a tutoring program for elementary students after school at a local church. Another example of this is the fact that for the annual cross country meet, the local prison clears the land to be used and helps mow the trail. Also, community members, parents, staff, and high school students help to work the cross country meet to allow the event to run smoothly. When reviewing the A-F School Report Card I learned that Wheatridge earned a letter grade of 'C' with a 73%. One grandparent commented in an email to *The Wingman*, "Enjoy the paper and seeing the kids!"

As at Charlie Public Schools and Robinlee, *The Wingman* e-newsletter was published at Wheatridge Elementary School a total of 11 times from September 2012 to December 2013. *The Wingman* for Wheatridge Elementary includes information about student’s progress on reading goals, field trip photos, and information about PTA events. In August 2012, the students at Wheatridge were given a note to take home to their families. The note included information about how the families could sign up grandparents to receive *The Wingman*. The following table (Table 9) shows the growth in both the number of total email addresses the *The Wingman* was reaching from the first year of publication to the second year and also shows the increase in the geographical reach.

Table 9

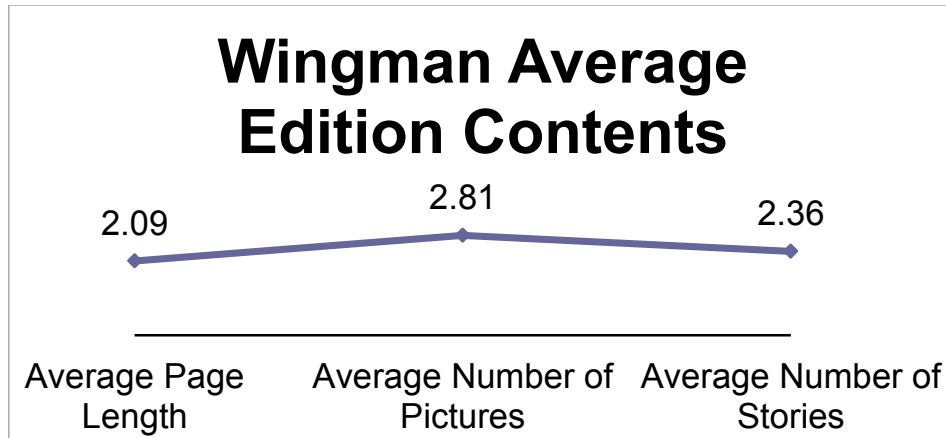
Wheatridge Elementary – Wingman Distribution

	Total Email Addresses	Geographical Reach
September 2012	61	3 US States
September 2013	102	
December 2013		10 US States

Over the course of the 11 published editions, a special column, titled “The World’s Coolest” was published in 7 of the 11 editions and contains quotes from students about their grandparents. The graph below (Figure 8) shows the average contents of the Wheatridge *Wingman* e-newsletters.

Figure 8

Wheatridge Elementary – Wingman Contents



The lead administrator for Wheatridge Elementary is Mr. Kent Smith (a pseudonym). Mr. Smith has worked in the Wheatridge district for a total of twelve years as a teacher, coach, dean of students, and elementary principal. During the first year of *The Wingman Project*, Mr. Smith was the dean of students and before the second year of the project began, Mr. Smith became the principal. During the course of our interview, Mr. Smith shared that prior to the start of *The Wingman*, the school did not have a monthly school newsletter for families. While the school did send home multiple notes about upcoming events, news, and activities, there was not a single source that provided a summary and overview of the school’s activities for a set period of time. Mr. Smith commented, “...I think at the beginning of it we were almost communicating through this better than we were to our local community...” Mr. Smith also thinks that sometimes the paper notes that are sent home with students get ignored because they come so frequently and that the format of *The Wingman*, including pictures, helps bring it attention. During the course of the publication of *The Wingman*, Mr. Smith reported positive comments from family members, observed the school receiving financial support because of a request published in *The Wingman*, and had student groups submit stories for publication. As we concluded our interview, Mr. Smith indicated that he has plans to continue *The Wingman* publication after my official work with the project ends in May of 2014.

Wingman Comparisons

The following tables and graphs show a comparison of the three research sites and their individual Wingman efforts. Figures 9 and 10 show a comparison of the content and membership increases for each school. Table 10 provides an overview of the research sites and their location, lead administrator, and target audience.

Figure 9

Wingman Content Comparison

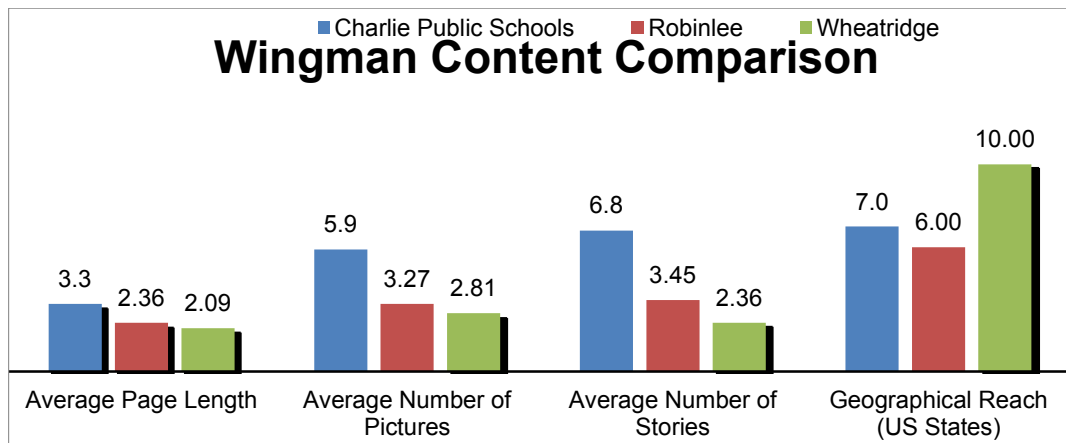


Figure 10

Wingman Member Increases

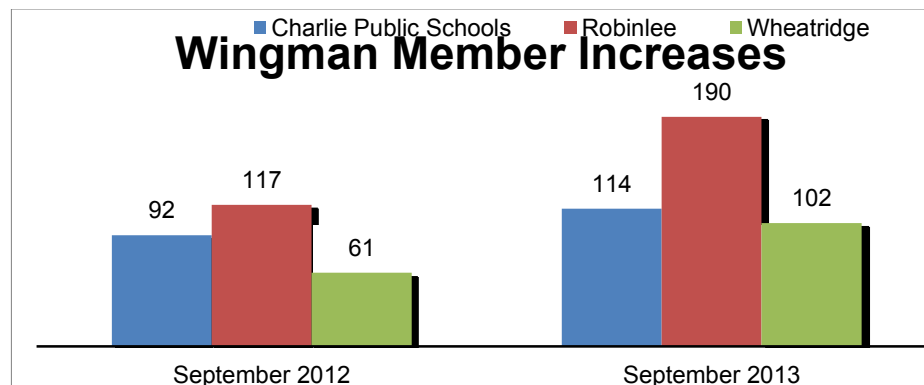


Table 10

Summary of Wingman Characteristics

	School's Geographical Location	Lead Administrator's Role	Target Audience for <i>The Wingman</i>
Charlie Public Schools	Rural	Superintendent	K-12 Families
Robinlee Elementary	Suburban	Principal	PK-5 Families
Wheatridge Elementary	Rural	Dean of Students/Principal	K-6 Families

Staff Involvement

At the beginning of *The Wingman Project* at each school the staff members were informed about the project through an informational letter that was copied and given to all staff members. The purpose of the project was explained and information was provided so that teachers would know how to contribute content. In addition to this initial letter I also sent reminder emails and a few special notes in the teachers' lounge to encourage staff members to contribute content. At Robinlee Elementary I was invited to attend a staff meeting and explain *The Wingman*. At each of the three pilot sites there was some involvement by staff. At Robinlee a teacher helped a group of students create stories, at Wheatridge some staff contributed pictures for editions, and at Charlie a few announcements about upcoming events were contributed by staff. All staff also received *The Wingman* via email.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a rich description of each school and *The Wingman* efforts at each. The description of the selection method, the school demographics, community information,

observations, *The Wingman* contents, and the lead administrator perspective help the reader better understand each school's environment. A summary of *The Wingman* e-newsletters' contents also provides an overview of the type of information that family members were reading each month. Chapter V is a Presentation of the Data and contains data collected that related directly to the study's research questions.

CHAPTER V

PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH DATA

The focus of Chapter IV was a thorough description of each research site's environmental and cultural context and how families are involved in the education process. In addition, the previous chapter included explanation of the contents of the monthly e-bulletin and helped to provide the reader with a rich, thick description of each research site and *The Wingman*. Since the reader is now familiar with the context of the research efforts being studied, Chapter V contains only new data sources directly related to the research questions.

In section one, participant selection is revisited and a brief overview of *The Wingman* at each school, including a view of the unique characteristics for each research sites' communication efforts, is presented. This provides the reader additional valuable understanding of each school's efforts with *The Wingman*. Next, I have fully explained my experiences interviewing two informants that possess specialized knowledge regarding grandparents' role in their grandchildren's lives. Section three includes both my inductive and deductive data analysis. Inductive data analysis is presented in terms of identified qualitative themes and deductive analysis is presented in relation to my chosen theoretical framework.

Section One – Participant Selection & Individual Site Findings

A full description of my original plan to obtain participants for one-on-one interviews and the actual results of my participant recruitment can be found in Chapter 3. Table 11, Results of Grandparent Email Invitations to Interview, provides an overview of the multiple attempts that were made and the resulting number of grandparent interviews that were completed. This table is

a duplication from Chapter III to remind the reader of recruitment efforts before the presentation of data.

Table 11

Results of Grandparent Email Invitations to Interview

School	Volunteers from 1 st email sent Sept 25-28	Volunteers from 2 nd email sent Oct 7	Volunteers from 3 rd email sent Nov 8	Volunteers from emails directed to individuals	Total Grandparent Interviews
Charlie Public Schools	1	0	0	1	2
Robinlee Elementary School	1	0	0	0	1
Wheatridge Elementary School	1	0	0	2	3

Additionally, Table 12 Grandparent Locations provides identification of the grandparents' home states. This table also shows how many grandchildren each of the grandparents had that attended the research site.

Table 12

Grandparent Locations

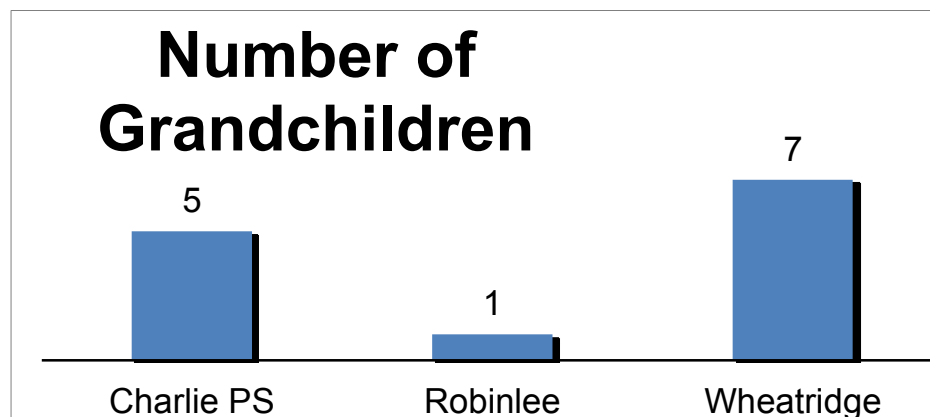
School	Local Grandparents	Distant Grandparents	Number of Grandchildren
Charlie Public Schools		South Dakota	2
		South Carolina	3
Robinlee Elementary School		Maryland	1

Wheatridge Elementary School	Garber, OK Helena, OK	Tennessee	2 3 2
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The following graph shows the number of grandchildren from each research site that were represented in the grandparent interviews. Wheatridge had the largest number of grandparent interviews and also the largest number of grandchildren represented with a total of seven.

Figure 11

Number of Grandchildren



In addition to one-on-one interviews, a larger number of grandparents were involved in the study as participants through an online survey. Email invitations to participate as a responder to the survey were sent out with the invitations to complete a one-on-one interview. Table 13 shows the number of grandparents who responded to the survey and their responses by their geographic location. The final question of the survey asked responders to submit their email if they would be willing to complete an interview. Three of six of the interviewed grandparents completed the interview based on their email submission at the end of the survey. For the other three interviewed grandparents, confidentiality prevented me from knowing if they completed a survey or not because they chose not to submit their email at the end of the survey. The additional three grandparents were recruited through personal emails as explained in Chapter III.

Table 13

Summary of Survey Responders

Survey Responders	Charlie Public Schools	Robinlee Elementary	Wheatridge Elementary
Consent Page (yes)	13	11	18
Wingman (family) member	12	9	12
Live within 300 miles of student (yes)	11	5	13
Live within 300 miles of student (no)	1	2	1

As shown in Table 13 a total of 33 survey respondents identified themselves as Wingman a member which indicates that they were grandparents of enrolled students. The total number of surveys distributed via emails was 406 and represented both school staff members and family members. The completion of 33 surveys is a completion rate of 8% and is limitation in my study. This will be further discussed in Chapter VI.

Later in this chapter the data sets from each school will be combined to provide collective presentation of qualitative themes and answers to my research questions. However, in an effort to preserve the unique experiences that took place at each school, I have chosen to first present a brief section that focuses on each school separately. I believe this provides the reader a valuable understanding of each school’s context and how *The Wingman* became part of the schools’ communication efforts.

Charlie Public Schools

I had the opportunity to interview two distant grandparents, each of whom had grandchildren at Charlie Public Schools. During the course of our interviews, both grandparents

mentioned the distance that they live from the grandchildren and how they keep in touch by phone. The grandparent from South Dakota mentioned that he sees his grandchildren three or four times a year and the grandparent from South Carolina mentioned that she and her husband visit the children for several weeks in the fall and spring. Both grandparents shared many comments about their role as a grandparent and how *The Wingman* adds knowledge and information to their lives. When asked about what kind of other stories and information that they would like to see included in *The Wingman*, both grandparents mentioned the idea of seeing students' accomplishments and even expanded their response to include the idea that it doesn't just have to be their grandchildren, they enjoy and value seeing about the activities and accomplishments of all students from Charlie Public Schools. Also, both grandparents mentioned their hope that *The Wingman* would expand to other schools because of the positive contribution it makes to their lives. A full discussion of grandparent ideas regarding *The Wingman* will be explored in section three of this chapter.

The survey about the Charlie Public Schools Wingman was sent to all current Wingman recipients on three separate occasions. A total of 13 survey respondents answered the first question giving their consent to complete the survey. Two survey respondents skipped the first question. Throughout the survey some respondents skipped different questions, thus skewing my full understanding of their thoughts regarding *The Wingman*. I believe that 15 total people completed portions of the survey, but not every respondent answered each question. Based upon the third question on the survey, "I am currently a Wingman Member (family member) of a student who attends a school with *The Wingman Project*.", 12 of the 13 survey participants were family members of students that attended Charlie Public Schools. Eleven of those family members lived within 300 miles of Charlie Public Schools and one reported that he/she lived farther than 300 miles from the school. Ten of the twelve participants answered question number twelve which indicated that they read *The Wingman* each month. A total of 66.7% of the responders agreed or strongly agreed that *The Wingman* contains useful information and that they

learn material from reading *The Wingman*. When asked if they feel more included in the school community through *The Wingman*, a total of 66.7% responded that they agreed or strongly agreed. A total of eleven responders noted that they consider *The Wingman* to be a positive addition to the school's efforts to connect with extended family members and that they believe grandparents have an important role to play in their grandchildren's school life. Finally, 55.5% of the responders agreed or strongly agreed that *The Wingman* had a positive impact on their ability to support their grandchild's school life. Each of the questions provided an opportunity for the respondent to add comments about the specific question or *The Wingman*. From the comments submitted, I learned that one survey respondent was disappointed that *The Wingman* did not include more information about volunteering, PTA, or assemblies. No other comments were provided that helped me understand the respondents' selection of 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree' on the survey. Survey responders did not provide me any details or explanations for their neutral or negative responses to *The Wingman*.

Several of the survey responders added positive comments to the survey questions. Three of the comments related to how beneficial *The Wingman* has been at keeping the extended family members informed about school activities. One comment mentioned that it would be great if older family members could receive a mailed copy of *The Wingman*. They suggested that families could provide postage to offset the cost for the school district.

Direct communication with the lead administrator, teachers, parents, and grandparents were also analyzed as documents for this study. In September 2012, the first month of publication, Mr. Rider contacted me via email and expressed that he had already received positive feedback from *The Wingman*. In February 2013, a high school staff member requested that we add information about yearbook purchasing to *The Wingman* so that families could see that yearbook orders were being taken. Later in the 2012-13 school year, a grandparent responded to *The Wingman* newsletter with a heartfelt thank you for *The Wingman*, and a parent responded that she forwards the newsletter to her child's grandparents each month.

Through data analysis, it appears that *The Wingman* at Charlie Public Schools has been a positive and popular addition to the school district. The qualitative themes resulting from analysis of the collective data will be presented in section three of this chapter.

Robinlee Elementary

Even after extensive efforts, I was only able to obtain one interview with a grandparent from Robinlee Elementary. The grandparent I interviewed from Robinlee was a distant grandparent, living more than 300 miles away in Maryland. She has one grandson who attends Robinlee and stated that she sees him three or four times per year. One of the things that she does before she visits her grandson is to research and try to discover what kind of skills and content he is working on at school. This grandparent then tries to bring some things with her that they can do together to support his learning. Also, she stated that she really values the one-on-one time that she spends with her grandson and works to give him a different perspective of the world, both an older view and a different view than his parents. Similar to my other interviewees, she shared several comments about how *The Wingman* contributes to her interaction with the school; those will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Her ideas for expansion of *The Wingman* content included adding more specific content about what each grade is studying and having a website where grandparents could log in and learn more. In summing up her beliefs about her role as a grandparent and her grandson's education, she said, "I am so far away, but it is something that's important and I want to be a part of it, too."

The Robinlee Wingman survey was also distributed three times to current recipients of *The Wingman*. Based on the survey data, 11 respondents answered the first question that provided their consent to complete the survey. One respondent skipped the first question, bringing the total survey respondents to 12. However, some questions were skipped by some respondents. Nine of the twelve participants answered "yes" to question number three, which asked if there were family members of the students and three participants skipped the question. Five family members lived within 300 miles of the school and two family members lived farther

than 300 miles. A total of five survey respondents skipped the two questions that provided geographic information. Six participants indicated that they read *The Wingman* each month, one responded that he/she do not, and five skipped this question. A total of 85.7% of the responders agreed or strongly agreed that *The Wingman* contains useful information. Seventy-one and a half percent answered that they learn material from reading *The Wingman*. When asked if they feel more included in the school community through *The Wingman*, a total of 71.5% responded that they agreed or strongly agreed. A total of six responders noted that they consider *The Wingman* to be a positive addition to the school's efforts to connect with extended family members and that they believe grandparents have an important role to play in their grandchildren's school life. Finally, 60% of the responders agreed or strongly agreed that *The Wingman* had a positive impact on their ability to support their grandchild's school life. While not all survey respondents indicated a positive response to *The Wingman*, there were no additional comments that allowed me to understand why they may have selected the answer options they did.

Several of the survey responders added positive comments to the survey questions. Two specific comments shared a grandparent's feelings about being included in the school environment. One said, "I love knowing what is happening at his school, and talking to him about it when we Skype." Another grandparent added, "What an awesome way for me to be connected to my grandchildren's school life!"

Through data analysis, it appears that *The Wingman* at Robinlee has been a successful project. While the distribution started out very small, the addition of students as authors and an increased membership shows that this project has the potential for growth. The qualitative themes resulting from analysis of the collective data will be presented in section three of this chapter.

Wheatridge Elementary

My efforts at Wheatridge Elementary yielded three interviews. The first grandparent I interviewed from Wheatridge Elementary was a grandparent who lived near the school and the

student. She was functioning in a traditional grandparent role and commented that her daughter gives her a calendar of her grandchildren's activities, and she tries to attend as many as possible. Through the course of our conversation, she shared that her own parents were not very hands-on with her educational experiences, so as both a parent and grandparent she has worked to be very involved. She views her role as a grandparent to be important for supporting the children and helping their parents. *The Wingman* helps keep her posted on different events. One special thing that this grandparent reported on was that, "I read it, and then I found out that my grandson said something very nice about me." In most editions of *The Wingman* at each school, "The World's Coolest" column includes statements from students about their grandparents; I believe this is the comment this grandmother was referring to.

The next grandparent I interviewed was currently in a unique situation. Her permanent residence was more than 300 miles away in Tennessee; however, she was in the process of relocating to north central Oklahoma so that she could be involved with her two grandsons who live there. She reported that she had been to Oklahoma to visit nearly every month in 2013 and that she stayed for two or three weeks at a time. Through our conversation I learned that her son and daughter-in-law travel frequently for their jobs and she helps provide primary care for the children when they are away. Because of her frequent visits and her role in providing day-to-day care for her grandchildren, she reported numerous interactions with the school and knows both of her grandchildren's teachers; she frequently attends school events. She helps her grandchildren with their homework, brings them to school, and believes that *The Wingman*, "means a lot because that means they want the families to be involved and I think that's important because you never know when those other family members will have to interact with the school..." When she is not visiting her family in Oklahoma, she says, "I get to see what's going on in the school and I can still stay involved with the activities long distance."

The final grandparent who volunteered to complete an interview has guardianship of two of her three grandchildren who attend Wheatridge Elementary. My goal in completing interviews

was to interview grandparents who are serving in a traditional grandparent role, meaning they do not live with or have full responsibility of the students. I did not learn of this grandparent's role as the guardian of two of the children until our interview had started. While discussing *The Wingman*, this grandparent shared that while the school is very efficient at sending home notes, her grandson doesn't always get the notes to her, so *The Wingman* helps keep her updated on everything and has been very helpful. She commented that she especially enjoys the World's Coolest column by the students and that, "Last year my granddaughter wrote about my husband...I made copies of those and kept for their scrap books and mine." In her dual roles as both a grandparent (of one grandchild) and primary care giver (for two grandchildren), this grandparent reported that she works to stress the importance of education and that she loves raising two of her grandsons.

On the Wheatridge survey, eighteen participants gave their consent on the first question to complete the survey. One participant skipped this question. Based on the third question from the survey, twelve of the participants were family members of the students, three were not family members and four skipped the question. While only 12 of the responders indicated that they are family members, 13 people responded that they lived within 300 miles of the school. This error could have been made if a school staff member answered the question on accident. All *Wingman* recipients email addresses were kept in a common contact list. This meant that each recipient received the same survey, however, the directions indicated that family members should answer specific questions and school staff members should answer specific questions. From interpreting the survey data, I believe that twelve family members completed the survey and that eleven of them live within 300 miles of the school. One grandparent lives outside of 300 miles from the school. Eleven of the twelve participants indicated that they read *The Wingman* each month. A total of 100% of the responders agreed or strongly agreed that *The Wingman* contains useful information. Approximately 83% answered that they have learned material from reading *The Wingman*. When asked if they feel more included in the school community through *The*

Wingman, a total of 100% responded that they agreed or strongly agreed. A total of fourteen responders noted that they consider *The Wingman* to be a positive addition to the school's efforts to connection with extended family members and that they believe grandparents have an important role to play in their grandchildren's school life. Again, only twelve of the responders indicated that they were family members, but school staff members could have accidentally answered this question and raised the total to fourteen. The question regarding grandparents' playing an important role in grandchildren's school life was directed only at family member participants, but it seems that two staff members also answered this question. Finally, 81% of the responders agreed or strongly agreed that *The Wingman* had a positive impact on their ability to support their grandchild's school life. None of the additional comments on the Wheatridge Survey explained a grandparent's feelings or thoughts about the newsletter.

Through data analysis, it appears that *The Wingman* at Wheatridge has benefitted both local and distant grandparents, and membership continues to grow. The qualitative themes resulting from analysis of the collective data will be presented in section three of this chapter.

Section Two – Informants

This section will report findings from interviews with two study informants who were chosen for their experiences with grandparents and education. The first informant is a staff member at a large comprehensive public university in the mid-west. One of her job responsibilities is to coordinate an annual event for grandparents and their grandchildren. The second informant is the former principal at the original *Wingman* Project pilot site in Oklahoma (a site that was not included in the primary three study sites). She was the principal during the project's implementation and operation at the school from Fall 2011 – Spring 2013. She is currently the Director of Elementary Education for the district.

The first informant that I interviewed was Sandra Butler (a pseudonym), who is currently the director of an annual program for grandparents and grandchildren called Grandparent's University (GPU). Mrs. Butler has been the program director for the past 6 years of the

program's 12 year history. This unique learning opportunity was started to create intergenerational learning between grandparents and grandchildren. Children attending GPU range in age from 7 to 13. During the first year, GPU, had a total of eighty participants and in 2013 the program hosted four hundred and seventy-two participants. Mrs. Butler was selected as an informant because of her extensive interaction with grandparents and grandchildren in a unique learning setting.

Mrs. Butler shared many interesting stories and observations from her involvement with GPU. Two of her observations have direct implications related to my research questions and grandparents' roles in their grandchildren's education. First, throughout our discussion she shared how she has observed that grandparents are really concerned with the happiness of their grandchild above all else. She mentioned many examples of this including: food choices, extra-curricular activities, and the majors or topics students study during attendance at Grandparent University. Mrs. Butler stated, "I notice with the grandparents that the happiness of the child is truly 1st and foremost." When choosing majors, or topics of study while kids are at GPU, Mrs. Butler had experiences of talking with grandparents to discuss different possible majors. Sometimes, due to space limitations, a certain major will be closed and Mrs. Butler notices that the grandparents do not want to take the chance of disappointing their grandchild with a different major choice.. Most of all, Mrs. Butler has come to realize, GPU must "...cater to the kids; grandma and grandpa will be happy because they will do whatever....if the kids not happy they're not happy."

Another observation that Mrs. Butler shared was the difference she notices in how grandparents interact with the academic content during GPU. Due to the design of the program, grandparents from all over the United States are welcome to attend with their grandchildren, as long as the grandchild is a legacy of a graduate of the university. So, some grandparents come to GPU and spend time with a grandchild that they may live hundreds or thousands of miles away from the rest of the year. On the other hand, some grandparents may attend GPU with a

grandchild who lives in the same town or whom they see on a daily basis. This means that some grandparents are entering this experience with a grandchild with whom they have a very close and influential relationship with and others may only see their grandchild a few times a year. Mrs. Butler reported that she sees these two dynamics play out very differently at GPU. She noted that, “Grandparents that get to see their grandkids more often are a little bit more parental in their way of doing things” and tend to have a little firmer hold on the children’s behavior. Also, she has noticed that sometimes the grandparents who live far away from their grandchildren have more the attitude that, “...we are together for three days, I want to just have fun.” Differences can also exist in how engaged the grandparent is with the academic content. Some grandparents are very engaged and active learners beside their grandchildren and some grandparents sit back more and watch.

My interview with Mrs. Butler offered a unique insight into how grandparents and grandchildren interact in a structured learning setting. It was also interesting to think about the fact the hundreds of grandparents are making the choice to come to GPU and, according to Mrs. Butler, “...develop a learning experience over just a vacation.” The two ideas of grandparents catering to grandchildren and how distance and depth of relationship may influence the focus on learning directly relate to two different qualitative themes emerging in this study and are further discussed below.

During the course of my research study, I published *The Wingman* and collected data from three pilot sites. The original Wingman site was not included in the research study. Historical data from the original Wingman school, where my second informant previously served as principal, was not included in my study or findings. Mrs. Kristine Ruoff (a pseudonym) was the principal during the project’s operation at the school from Fall 2011 – Spring 2013. Mrs. Ruoff has experience in three different schools in three different districts and is currently the Director of Elementary Education for a large district in Oklahoma. We discussed her interactions with grandparents in their grandchildren’s education both before and during *The Wingman*.

Mrs. Ruoff shared that over the course of her career she has observed grandparents being involved in a variety of ways both by being physically present and engaged at the school and by providing support or resources while remaining physically outside the school. Involvement that took place at the school included a grandparent who volunteered in a classroom each week for a certain learning activity. This grandparent fulfilled this commitment because the mother of the child was working and couldn't volunteer. Other grandparents have volunteered to visit the school regularly and let children read to them. Grandparents have also been involved while remaining physically outside of the school by providing resources such as coats or clothing and participating in fundraisers. In reflecting back on the grandparent involvement that she has noticed, Mrs. Ruoff stated that once *The Wingman* started she, "...had the highest participation of grandparents that I had experienced."

In Mrs. Ruoff's experience, the benefits of grandparents being involved in the school extended to the school's staff also. She reported that, "Staff enjoyed having the presence of grandparents...there's something very comforting to staff and students...it evokes feelings and emotions of their own grandparents." In addition to having a positive impact on the culture of the school, it was helpful for the staff to know that the grandparents were another group of adults willing to help children reach their educational goals.

When discussing the grandparents' reactions to being included in the school environment through receiving *The Wingman*, Mrs. Ruoff offered several insights. She noted that they loved being included and that they showed a "huge appreciation of being in the know." Furthermore, she found that *The Wingman* was a successful avenue for including grandparents because it, "...gave them a specific role and a specific title and gave them a specific job that was recognized and honored." She emphasized the importance of the specific opportunities for grandparents to make it easier for them to contribute. It is harder for a grandparent to ask a teacher directly how they can help, but *The Wingman* provided this opportunity, which grandparents willingly and eagerly took.

As we concluded our conversation about *The Wingman*, I asked Mrs. Ruoff to share what kind of information she thinks is ideal for *The Wingman*. She mentioned that including specific ways to contribute is very important and supports the grandparents' ability/desires to show support. Also, she believed that including information about how the school teaches character, student recognition, pictures, and basic literacy and mathematics components are important for grandparents. She stated that grandparents, "...want the feel good stuff, they want to feel good about their grandchild's school." When we discussed who would be the ideal creator and publisher of *The Wingman*, Mrs. Ruoff noted that it would need to be an adult, staff member or volunteer, "...who had an innate desire to include and reach out."

My interview with Mrs. Ruoff added to the understanding of the study data by providing the insight of a veteran school administrator and someone who had direct experience with *The Wingman*. Her comments and ideas helped to clarify how grandparents are motivated to participate in a school.

Section Three – Findings

After my initial and follow-up readings of all my data sources, in their entirety, I began the process of moving individual pieces of data from the sources to coding cards. The following sections will show the themes that emerged from collective data analysis.

From consulting Patton (2002), I was reminded of two significant things. First, my focus was to complete inductive analysis in which I would discover the patterns, themes, and categories from my data; this analysis step was primarily for the purpose of addressing research question number one. Then I would move to deductive analysis where I use Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) parental involvement framework as a lens for perhaps bringing greater or additional understanding of my data; this analysis would be specific to addressing research question number two.

Inductive Analysis - Collective Qualitative Themes

Data sources for this research study included the six identified categories from Chapter 3: surveys, interviews, document and artifact examination, observations and field notes, informants, and school data collection. The recruitment and participation for the survey for each school is fully explained in Chapter III and the findings from the survey respondents are summarized in Section One above. Data from document and artifact examination, as well as observation and field notes, are fully explained in Chapter IV in the Presentation of the Research Sites. As explained in Chapter III, the category of school data collection was not completed as planned; therefore, there are no findings to report in this area. Information learned from my informants is fully explained in Section Two above and information learned from my interviews with lead administrators is included in Chapter IV. Now, I will merge all data sources into collective themes.

First, I copied and pasted key bits of data onto separate coding cards. Then I sorted the cards into very specific groups of like content. This resulted in 32 groups. This process applied the idea of convergence, or finding out what things fit together (Patton, 2002). The groups were based on the cards containing similar statements or addressing the same broader topic. The name of each group was a broad label to summarize the cards. Table 14 shows the specific subcodes that were placed in each major theme.

Table 14

Summary of Codes and Sub Codes

Code	Grandparents – Non School/Wingman Related	Wingman – Technical Aspects	School Perspective – <i>The Wingman</i>	Reactions to <i>The Wingman</i>	Family Involvement in Education
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Subcode	Kids happy	Wingman design and format	Admin feedback and support	Grandparents experiences with <i>The Wingman</i>	Other people included
Subcode	How often grandparents see the kids	How did they receive	Admin thoughts	'Connection'	All kids
Subcode	Grandparents provide wider worldview	Who should publish	Wingman and staff	Talking by phone/skype	Parental involvement
Subcode	How grandparents make us feel	Wingman story contributions	School board	Future of <i>The Wingman</i>	Visitors and safety procedures
Subcode	Role of grandparents	Ideas to include/add			School involving families
Subcode	Godly influence	World's coolest			Do grandkids know
Subcode					Grandparent role in education

When completing the division of all my coding cards into relevant groups, I had a few remaining coding cards that didn't seem to fit with any group. I divided these up by source and discovered that I had coding cards from each of my research sites and from each of my informants. The information contained on these coding cards was very specific information, such as the A-F School Report Card grade that the school received the number of staff at the school, and the length that each person has served in their job. I determined that these coding cards were not relevant to the research questions of the study. Each coding card contained information that

was included in either the site descriptions in Chapter IV or in Section One or Two of this chapter where the individual schools, administrators, and informants are described. After removing these five groups, I was left with twenty-seven groups.

As I looked over my purpose and questions on my computer and my coding cards organized on the area rug in front of me, I started to see themes emerge. This required application of the concept of divergence, meaning that bridges between seemingly unrelated groups could support the emergence of a theme (Patton, 2002).

I discovered a total of five themes from my inductive data analysis: 1. Grandparents – Non School/Wingman Related, 2. Wingman – Technical Aspects, 3. School Perspective – *The Wingman*, 4. Reactions to *The Wingman*, and 5. Family Involvement in Education. A narrative portrait of each theme is provided, which offers a detailed look of representative and related data and an overall definition of the theme.

1. Grandparents – Non School/Wingman Related

In talking with the six grandparents I interviewed for my research and the two informants who had experience with grandparents, I discovered several commonalities among participants. First, in relation to the role of a grandparent, the participants shared overwhelmingly positive reactions to being grandparents. Each of the six interviewed grandparents referred to their grandchildren with affection and a commitment to be involved. They made statements such as, "...let them know that Poppa and I love them unconditionally," "The responsibility of course is to stay in touch...", "I love being a grandparent! I could talk all day about my grandchildren," and "...I just think being a grandparent is an awesome experience. It's just wonderful." The grandparents also mentioned that they have a responsibility to help the children learn respect, to support the parents, to be involved in their daily activities, to serve as mentors, and to engage in one-on-one time with their grandchildren. Two grandparents from two different research sites stated that they believed one of their roles in their grandchildren's lives was to help their grandchildren have God in their lives. Two of the grandparents also mentioned the importance of

sharing about their life experiences with their grandchildren and helping them develop different points of view. Interviews with my informants provided some additional data for this theme. The idea that grandparents are very focused on ensuring their grandchildren's happiness emerged from one of my informants and supported a notion that grandparents are usually associated with positive emotions that was shared by my other informant. For this first theme, there were not data pieces that came directly from the survey, my document and artifact examination, or my observations and field notes.

2. Wingman – Technical Aspects

In relation to the technical aspects of *The Wingman*, each of the administrators from the research sites mentioned the format of the e-newsletter and how the consistent presentation of the content and pictures are appealing. Grandparents also mentioned that they enjoyed seeing the pictures in each edition. Each of the three research sites had a staff member or members contribute particular content for *The Wingman*. This information included yearbook sales, field trip pictures, school event pictures, comics, and stories written by students. One monthly column in *The Wingman* is The World's Coolest, which features sentences written by students at the school that say, "My _____ really is the coolest because _____." Students complete this sentence about a family member and then a few statements were published in each edition. Two of the interviewed grandparents mentioned that they enjoyed reading The World's Coolest and that their grandchildren were published in this section. Another technical aspect of *The Wingman* was discovering the best way to distribute the newsletter to families. Students at all three sites were provided with paper invitations for their families to complete by listing email addresses. Interestingly, three of the six grandparents I interviewed did not know how they were signed up for *The Wingman*; it just started arriving in their inbox. One of the grandparents received an email from her daughter to sign up for *The Wingman* and one of the grandparents was signed up for *The Wingman* by the other grandmother in the family. Participants in the study had many, many ideas about the kinds of content that could be added to

The Wingman. Suggestions were made to include multiple kinds of student recognition, scholarship news, organization officers, pictures, and sports scores. Also, information about the academic side of the school environment was provided as an idea; this would include information about teachers, ideas on what children in specific grade levels were learning, ideas for grandparents to support learning at home, and school academic performance. Three final ideas that were provided included how the school teaches character, specific ways that grandparents can contribute to the school, and news from the community. No data related to the technical aspects of *The Wingman* were found in either the survey data or from my informants.

3. School Perspective – *The Wingman*

The four specific codes within this theme made clear connections among *The Wingman* and what the school administrators, teachers, and school board members experienced. Two of the lead administrators interviewed reported that they observed instances where family members knew about a school event because of the information provided in *The Wingman*. They stated, “They knew about an event from *The Wingman*,” and “...through *The Wingman*, now they have a whole new understanding of all the different activities we do month-to-month.” As a previous principal at the original Wingman pilot school, one informant added that *The Wingman* resulted in, “...the highest participation of grandparents that I had experienced.” As early as the first month of publication, September 2012, one of the lead administrators received positive feedback regarding *The Wingman*. This positive feedback came from an unknown source and was passed on to me by the lead administrator. Another lead administrator noted that their school received financial support from a request in *The Wingman*. Staff members at each of the research sites were aware of *The Wingman*’s monthly publication and received a copy emailed to their school email account. Two of the participants mentioned in our interviews that staff members appreciated knowing that grandparents are knowledgeable about their grandchildren’s education and that they might be another source of support for the student or school. School board members at two of the research sites also showed an interest in *The Wingman*. One school board

member made the comment, “As a serving school board member, I am grateful for *The Wingman Project*. Keeps me informed!” Four board members from another research site requested to have their addresses added to the distribution list. Additionally, one administrator shared that he had told some of colleagues about *The Wingman*, and some other districts have shown an interest in starting a similar e-newsletter. During the observations at each school and in reviewing my field notes, no additional data regarding the school experiences were identified.

4. Reactions to *The Wingman*

All of the coding cards included in this theme referred to reactions to *The Wingman* that were either explained or observed from the grandparents' points of view. Some statements were made by administrators and informants, but they explained that person's understanding of the grandparents' reactions to *The Wingman*. One of the most tangible reactions to *The Wingman* were the grandparents' explanations of how reading the monthly e-newsletter provided them with topics to talk about with their grandchildren when they talk on the phone or Skype. Three grandparent interviews and one comment from *The Wingman* survey shared this finding. Two of the three research sites were included in these comments about phone calls or Skype. Similarly, three different grandparent comments included the specific term "connect" or "connection" to describe how they felt about *The Wingman*. The largest coding card collection for this theme was the collection grouped as 'Grandparent experiences with Wingman' and included 30 different statements. Each of the six grandparents interviewed made positive comments reflecting on *The Wingman* and its ability to help them stay informed about their grandchild's school life. Specific statements included, “We don't get to see them as often as we'd like and this just gives us another venue to keep up with the kids,” “It is just exciting to know that I can stay in touch even if I'm not here with what they are doing in school,” and, “You know it just kind of puts everything out there for the parents and grandparents, especially those who don't live around close.” Additional comments that reflect these same sentiments were made via *The Wingman* survey and two additional emails directly from grandparents to *The Wingman*. In talking about the future of *The*

Wingman, each of the lead administrators indicated that due to the positive response *The Wingman* has received, they would like to find a way to continue the publication after my research is finished. Finally, three of the six grandparents made encouraging statements about the need for this project to grow and expand. One hopes that their other grandchildren's school would start a similar program. The only data source not present in this theme was observation and field notes.

5. Family Involvement in Education

My final theme was also the broadest of my five identified themes. Family Involvement in Education included visitor and safety procedures, parental involvement, schools involving families, grandparent's role in education, do grandkids know (referring to the fact that grandkids know and understand *The Wingman*), all kids (referring to the idea that grandparents enjoy reading about all the kids at the school, not just their grandchildren) , and other people included. Each of these topics relate in some way to family members being involved in the school environment. The first two coding groups, visitor and safety procedures and parental involvement, included data about how families are instructed to visit the school and attendance at parent/teacher conferences. Each of the research sites' handbooks makes specific mention of the importance of open communication between the parents and school.

Grandparents indicated that they appreciated how the school is working through *The Wingman* to involve more family members, especially those who live far away. A total of thirty-four statements in this theme related to grandparents' roles in their grandchildren's education. Among the actions mentioned were: participating in fundraisers, making donations to the school, visiting the school to volunteer, purchasing gifts that supported learning, and being proud of their grandchildren's education. Attending school events and donating supplies were also mentioned as ways to be involved in their grandchildren's education. One grandparent revealed that he is providing funds for each of his grandchildren to attend college, if they choose. One grandparent

summed up her role in her grandson's education by saying, "I am so far away, but it is something that's important and I want to be a part of it, too."

Two of the six grandparents that I interviewed indicated that their grandchildren knew about *The Wingman* and that they like the fact that their grandparents know about their school. Over the course of my interviews, three of the six grandparents made reference to the idea that they enjoy reading about all the students at the school, not just their own grandchildren. One mentioned, "It's bigger than just your own grandchildren, too." The final subcode in this theme is the idea that other people are included. Various interviews revealed that *The Wingman* is shared with other family members via email or because a family member prints it off and shares it with a family member. No data emerged from the surveys or from my observations and field notes that belonged in this final theme.

During the first evaluation of my data set, I followed an inductive process of sorting my coding cards into twenty-seven groups that represented ideas that fit together. The groups were based on the cards containing similar statements or addressing the same broader topic. The name of each group is a general label to summarize the cards. These groups are the basis for my inductive analysis section in this chapter. Each individual coding card belonged to a coding group of similar statements and also a larger theme group which contained all coding groups that belonged to that theme. Each coding card was labeled with a color and numbered system to identify its membership to both the coding group and theme group. The color coding system allowed me to deconstruct my original groups when forming new coding groups under the lens of my theoretical framework.

Deductive Analysis - Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) Parental Involvement

Framework

According to Patton (2002), "...deductive analysis [is] where the data are analyzed according to an existing framework," (p 453). This section is a deductive analysis of my second

research question through application of my theoretical framework, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model of the parental involvement process.

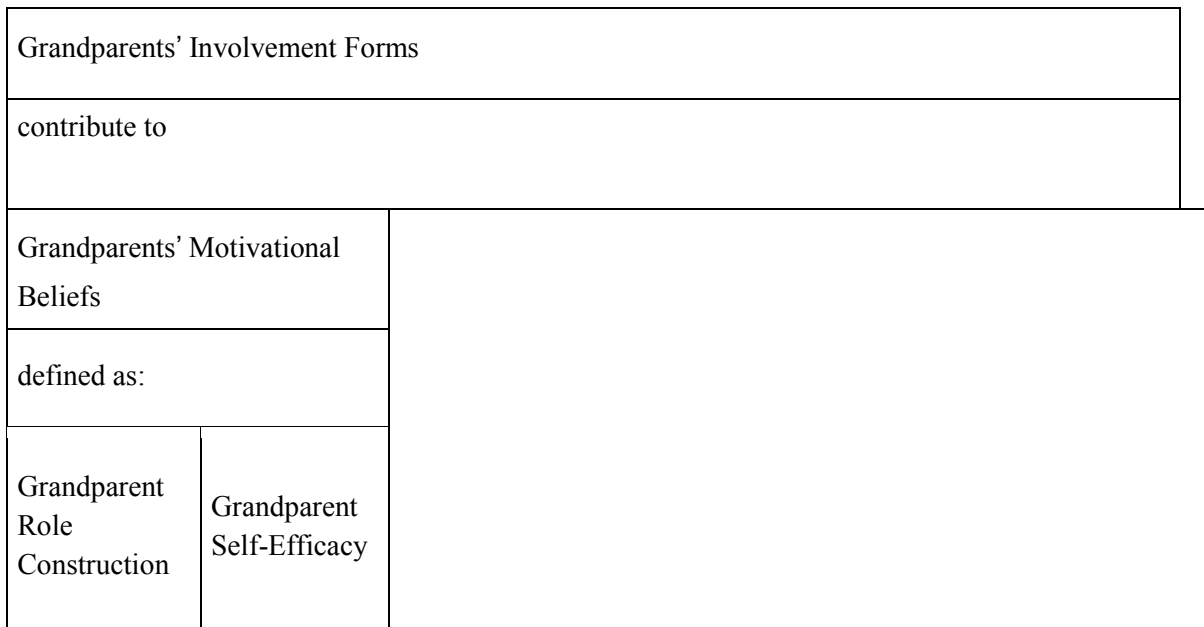
As explored in Chapter III, the theoretical framework that was chosen for this study was the 2005 revised version of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model of the parental involvement process. Since the purpose of my study was to explore outcomes of regular written communication between school and grandparents, I modified the framework's original application to refer to grandparents instead of parents. This modified theory was selected a priori and used as an influencer on the design of the study, methods, and data collection processes. I referred to the theoretical framework when creating my research questions and as I wrote my interview guide. I used Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's framework as a lens through which to evaluate the data.

The proposed definition for grandparents' motivational beliefs included grandparent role construction and grandparent self-efficacy. Role construction includes grandparent beliefs about child rearing, child development, and how the home should support children's educational experiences. This role construction is based on grandparents' own experiences as parents, an assumed influencer of their beliefs. Another important indicator of grandparents' motivation for involvement is related to the research by Bandura in the area of self-efficacy. Grandparent self-efficacy indicates that grandparents make choices on their involvement based on what they expect as outcomes of their efforts. According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1997), Bandura's research has explained that people with strong self-efficacy believe that they have some control over the events in their life, they set higher goals for themselves, and they are more likely to believe they can overcome challenges. Grandparents who have experienced personal success in life, thus have developed the beliefs associated with strong self-efficacy, are more likely to become involved and believe their actions will have a positive effect on their grandchild's education. Both role construction and self-efficacy are influenced by the social forces that surround grandparents. This influence of social forces reflects the child's grandparents' involvement in school, lack of

involvement in school, and the grandparents' role in child rearing. Figure 12 provides a visual description of the relationship between each of the factors influencing grandparents' motivational beliefs.

Figure 12

Grandparents' Involvement Forms



In the deductive analysis of my data set, I first combined all of my data cards into one large group undivided by their previous inductive themes. The next step was to devise a system to help me sort the cards based on the proposed definitions of Grandparent Role Construction and Grandparent Self-Efficacy from Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model of the parental involvement process. I created a sorting grid that included the following definitions of role construction: 'beliefs about child rearing', 'beliefs about child development', 'how the home should support children's educational experience', and 'based on their own experiences as parents, thus enhancing their knowledge and influencing their beliefs.' According to Hoover-Dempsey et. al (2005), parent's knowledge can be enhanced through their involvement with individuals and groups related to schooling. In adapting Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005)

model of the parental involvement process this same understanding was applied to grandparents. Grandparent's knowledge about how and why to become involved with their grandchildren's education is influenced by experiences with schooling, as students or as parents. The sorting grid also included the definitions for self-efficacy: 'make choices on their involvement based on the outcomes they think their efforts will produce' and 'grandparents who have experienced personal success in life, thus developing strong self-efficacy, and believe their actions will have a positive effect on their grandchild's education, are more likely to become involved'. Within my sorting grid, I created three different categories that my data cards could be placed in: 1. Supporting data, 2. Conflicting data, and 3. Other emerging realities.

My next step was to sort my coding cards into both the definition column and category row where they best fit. For example, a card that contained information about grandparent's ideas on child rearing would either be placed in the category of supporting data, conflicting data, or other emerging realities. During this portion of my analysis, I will discuss each definition area and data cards that function as either supporting or conflicting data. During Chapter VI, I will discuss the data cards that qualified as other emerging realities and may identify weaknesses in my chosen theory, areas it may not fully explore, and my ideas to possibly strengthen this theory in relation to grandparents' motivational beliefs.

Within the definition of beliefs about child rearing, a total of four grandparents made specific comments that support their belief in the importance of child rearing and their role in their grandchildren's rearing. Two different grandparents mentioned the importance of supporting the parents in the process of raising their children and also helping the parents with the children when possible. One grandparent mentioned the very specific role of helping the grandchildren respect their parents and their authority. The idea of communicating frequently with their grandchildren and serving as a mentor to help them grow was also mentioned in relation to child rearing. One last area that two different grandparents mentioned in relation to child rearing was the idea that they want to help their grandchildren develop Godly characters.

Within the data set, there was not any discovery of data that presented a conflicting view of grandparents' views or beliefs about child rearing.

Two interesting data cards were identified to provide a brief glimpse at the definition of child development. First, one grandparent mentioned the importance of role models influencing a child's development and specifically stated, "You never know when you might spark some child to do something extra or take a better path." I believe this connects to child development because it shows how influences outside the home can help a child develop into an adult. Also, one informant mentioned the importance of informing grandparents of the many ways that schools teach character to students. Again, I see direct connections between this idea and long-term development of the students. No data emerged as a conflict to grandparent's view of child development.

The third area that helps define grandparents' role construction is their beliefs about how the home should support children's educational experiences. Within the Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005) framework, the home referred to in this category is the child's home. For the purposes of my study, I will maintain this understanding of the 'home' in the definition of grandparents' role construction. Study participants had many ideas about the ways that the home should support children's educational experiences. One of the broad ideas, mentioned by seven different data sources, was the idea that grandparents should stay informed about what is happening at the school and know about the student's activities. Specific ideas for support at the school grandparents included: volunteering in a classroom, providing needed resources, participating in fundraising efforts, going on field trips, attending open house, and attending sporting events and other school functions. Ideas for support of the educational experiences away from the school included giving education or learning related gifts and providing funding for post-secondary education. One grandparent mentioned that she could call the school if she had any questions and I determined this is also an example of supporting the educational experiences.

No data was discovered that conflicted with the belief that the children's home should support the children's educational experiences.

Through the course of my interviews, only two grandparents mentioned anything regarding their own experience as parents, which is the fourth area that comprises role construction. One grandparent that mentioned her experience as a parent referred to the fact that her own parents were not very involved in her education or extra-curricular activities, so it was a priority for her to be involved with her own kids' activities. The other grandparent made mention that, "You don't seem to have the same kind of time when you are raising as you do when they are your grandchildren." This comment was in reference to how she enjoys spending one-on-one time with her grandson. These first four definitions all contribute to an understanding of how grandparents form their ideas and beliefs about their role construction as grandparents.

Next, the definition of self-efficacy was explored by looking at two specific areas: 1.

Grandparents making choices on their involvement based on the outcomes they think their efforts will produce and, 2. Grandparents who have experienced personal success in life, thus developing strong self-efficacy, and believe their actions will have a positive effect on their grandchild's education, are more likely to become involved.

First, I explored the coding group that showed how grandparents make choices on their involvement based on what they think the outcomes that their efforts are likely to produce. When sorting the coding cards I was careful to place cards in this category if they mentioned a specific outcome for the grandparent or the grandchild. Many different outcomes for the grandparents emerged as I sorted the coding cards. Grandparents knowing what was happening at the school and grandparents having topics to discuss with the students were two of the outcomes supported by multiple participants. Four participants made statements that supported both of these conclusions. Additionally, one grandparent mentioned that their receiving of *The Wingman* provided them with information to help them make travel plans and one other grandparent mentioned that receiving *The Wingman* helps their families stay closer. One grandparent

mentioned that being involved in their grandchildren's school life helps them know how they can pray for the students. Another grandparent mentioned that she likes knowing what her grandson is learning in school so that she can support his academic growth with activities she plans for them to enjoy together. One interesting piece of data in this group was an idea presented by an informant. She believes that grandparents are more likely to become involved in financially supporting the school if the school provides very specific needs that can be met by donations. I found this idea to have a connection to the idea of involvement based on likely outcomes.

Lastly, the final idea presented within the definition of self-efficacy is that grandparents who have experienced personal success in life, thus developing strong self-efficacy, and believe their actions will have a positive effect on their grandchild's education, are more likely to become involved. While none of my participants connected their success in life to being an involved grandparent, two different participants explained feelings of success and enjoyment that come from being an involved grandparent. One grandparent became emotional and explained how wonderful being a grandparent is and how it has turned her life around. I believe these comments demonstrate that she has experienced personal success as a grandparent. Another grandparent likewise mentioned how much she loved being a grandparent and "could talk all day about my grandchildren." Again, her statement demonstrates that she experiences success as a grandparent. During the process of completing my deductive analysis, there were pieces of data that did not fit within my theoretical framework. In some cases the data presented a new or different perspective based on participant experiences and in some cases the data was completely unrelated to the theoretical framework. Chapter VI will include a thorough discussion of these additional data sets.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have presented a description of the data that I collected during my study. In section one, I provided a brief overview of *The Wingman* at each school and a view of the unique characteristics for each research sites' communication efforts. Next, I fully

explained my experiences interviewing two informants that possess specialized knowledge regarding grandparents' role in their grandchildren's lives. Section three provided my inductive data analysis, which resulted in my five qualitative themes and second, my deductive data analysis, which viewed my data through the lens of my theoretical framework. Chapter VI will discuss the meaning of the outcomes of the data analysis, study limitations, related literature, needs for future and related research, and conclusions.

CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter of my study I offer both analysis and conclusions in terms of my purpose and research questions. The purpose of this study was to explore the outcomes of regular written communications between schools and grandparents of enrolled students. The method of written communication was *The Wingman* e-newsletter. The research questions for my study included:

1. How is school-grandparent communication influenced by the implementation of *The Wingman Project* in selected schools?
2. How is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) description of motivational beliefs established in regular participants of *The Wingman Project*?
 - a. How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent role construction in the education of their grandchildren?
 - b. How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent self-efficacy to become involved in their grandchildren's education?

The first section of this chapter will revisit my earlier discussion about my role as observer as participant. Sections two through four will present my analysis of the data through explanations of my first research and second research questions, and the discussion of my complete findings. The next four sections will include implications of the findings, limitations, future research, and a conclusion. The final section will be an afterword that shares my personal comments about this study.

Researcher as Observer Participant

In Chapter III I introduced the idea of my role as an observer as participant, as defined by Merriam (1988), during this study. For each of the three pilot sites I served as the creator and publisher for each monthly e-newsletter. This responsibility as *The Wingman* creator led me to be in frequent communication with the lead administrators and also led me to ask questions or seek clarification when I was preparing editions of the e-newsletter. Due to my unique position as both the publisher of *The Wingman* and my role as the researcher it is important to consider how this dual role may have impacted my study. My own knowledge of public school issues, my experiences as an educator and administrator, and my own beliefs about what content would be most interesting to grandparents influenced the content, organization, and structure of *The Wingman*. At each of the schools I attended multiple events to conduct observations and gain additional insight into the school's operation and family attendance at events. Over the course of the research project's timeframe, I developed professional relationships with school administrators and some other staff members. It was not uncommon for these school employees to visit with me at events and add extra detail that I would not have gathered from the observation alone. Throughout the study my primary role was always to be an observer first and to record information that would help me describe each school environment, however, since I did write each newsletter, I was also a participant in *The Wingman*. This dual role did influence my study by providing me with more knowledge and understanding about each school than if I had purely been an observer only of a communication method with grandparents. What, if any, impact my dual role may have had on others' interactions with or responses to *The Wingman* is unknown.

Research Question #1

In reflecting back on my findings as presented in Chapter V, it is now time to consider my first research question:

1. How is school-grandparent communication influenced by the implementation of *The Wingman Project* in selected schools?

Through my inductive analysis, I generated three possible conclusions related to this research question. First, school-grandparent communications were influenced by creating a one-way communication method between the school and the grandparents. None of the three schools had a formal communication method in place designed to communicate with grandparents. So, the implementation of *The Wingman* created an avenue of communication primarily from the schools to the grandparents regarding their grandchildren's education. It provided grandparents and other family members with a consistent and accessible publication including: school events, academic information, and pictures. The school's role, since it was the source of *The Wingman*, seems to have been a facilitator of the communication.

Next, after reviewing the statements made by my participants and looking at the collective themes, it appears that *The Wingman* did very little to influence communication between the grandparent and the school sites. The grandparents rarely communicated back with the school. However, *The Wingman* did influence communication between the grandparent and the grandchildren and how the grandparent may contribute to or participate in the grandchild's schooling. As mentioned in my qualitative theme number four, Reactions to *The Wingman*, grandparents used the content from *The Wingman* to hold conversations with their grandchildren.

My final finding related to research question number one is that as a result of *The Wingman*, grandparents felt much more included and knowledgeable about their grandchildren's school lives. The very idea of communication necessitates the idea that information, opinions, or thoughts are interchanged between individuals. Through *The Wingman*, the interchange of information between the school, grandparent, and grandchild was created.

In all three of my findings the establishment of one-way communication to grandparents increased communication between grandparents and grandchildren. Grandparents felt more included and knowledgeable. All three findings demonstrate that the greatest impact of *The Wingman* had was this specific interchange of information. Because the school prioritized communicating in a regular and systematic way with grandparents, information was often

interchanged between grandparents and grandchildren and sometimes exchanged between the school and the grandparents.

Research Question #2

To fully consider the findings related to my second research question, I chose first to consider each of the sub questions and then combine my findings collectively in terms of the main question. My inductive analysis completed in my first phase of analysis provided some insight into each of my sub questions. As I completed my deductive analysis of my data in my second phase of analysis, I gained additional understanding of each sub question and a thorough understanding of my second main research question. My second research question and two sub questions were:

How is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) description of motivational beliefs established in regular participants of *The Wingman Project*?

- a. How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent role construction in the education of their grandchildren?
- b. How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent self-efficacy to become involved in their grandchildren's education?

In drawing conclusions about my sub question: How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent role construction in the education of their grandchildren?, *The Wingman* had direct influence on role construction and supporting the grandchildren's educational experiences. In the area of role construction, the publication of *The Wingman* provided information, pictures, stories, and essentially a personalized tool to help grandparents stay connected, be informed, and be involved with their grandchildren. Of the six grandparents who were interviewed, four said that being involved in the day-to-day activities of their grandchildren is important. *The Wingman* focuses on exactly those kinds of day-to-day topics at each school. In the same way, *The Wingman* provides specific ways that grandparents can support their grandchildren's educational experiences by keeping them informed about school events,

providing dates and times to attend functions, and communicating any special requests from the school for the grandparents. *The Wingman* establishes and allows the school to have the opportunity to contact grandparents and gives them ways to support the educational experiences of their grandchildren. In addition, one of my informants identified and described the different types of involvement and attitudes she noticed from either local or distant grandparents. While not specifically mentioned by the grandparents at this study's three school sites, the idea of different types of involvement and attitudes could be related to grandparents' perceptions of their roles in the grandchild's education. *The Wingman* allows both local and distant grandparents to have access to school information that supports their roles in the grandchildren's school lives.

In drawing conclusions about my sub question: How has *The Wingman Project* influenced grandparent self-efficacy to become involved in their grandchildren's education?, *The Wingman* had a direct influence by providing grandparents with more knowledge about their grandchild's educational experience. This additional information appeared to increase the grandparents' knowledge about what was happening at the school in a way that encouraged grandparents to talk to their student(s) about their school experiences. Grandparents may believe that conversations about school will be more effective and supportive of the child's learning if they have specific knowledge about what is happening at the school. Additionally, distant grandparents may be more inclined to call their grandchildren after specific events take place to ask them questions or inquire about the event. Grandparents could also plan to see their grandchildren during school breaks because they have access to the school's release dates.

Through the use of both my inductive analysis and deductive analysis I developed a clear understanding of my two sub questions. In considering the analysis of each sub question I am now able to answer my second main research question: How is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) description of motivational beliefs established in regular participants of *The Wingman Project*?

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) description of motivational beliefs were fully established in Wingman participants. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) identified role construction and self-efficacy as two of the factors that impact motivation and thus impact involvement. I discovered that these same factors impact motivation and involvement of Wingman participants. *The Wingman* enhanced the role construction of grandparents, the ability of grandparents to support the educational experiences, and grandparent knowledge of schooling developed their self-efficacy. Each of these factors supports the notion that recipients of *The Wingman* are likely motivated to be involved in their grandchildren's education experiences. The unique design and delivery of *The Wingman* does suggest some possible limitations to understanding all grandparents' motivational beliefs and those limitations will be discussed in a later section. For grandparents receiving *The Wingman* at the three research sites the motivational factors of role construction and self-efficacy have been observed.

Discussion

In my discussion of this research study I consider three important threads of conversation. First, what is my overall understanding from my study and why this understanding matters. Second, I will consider questions that are raised by my study. Lastly, I will consider my findings in relation to existing literature.

The findings from this study suggest that when schools make an effort to facilitate a direct communication tool with grandparents, some grandparents are better prepared to support the educational experiences of their grandchildren. It is important to recognize that the schools in the research study truly did facilitate *The Wingman* by completing a few specific and easy steps. The schools allowed for paper invitations to be sent home with students, and they collected these forms. Next, either the lead administrator, secretary, or involved teacher contributed pictures, upcoming events, and news stories to be included in *The Wingman*. These were submitted in a rough format, usually via email and the researcher created the newsletter design. The researcher was responsible for the costs of the paper invitations, inputting the email addresses, and also

distributing the e-newsletter each month. I think this is important to understand because it doesn't appear that *The Wingman* needs to be a publication that includes every possible detail about a school or creates a heavy burden on the school staff. As the researcher, I lived at least 45 miles away from each school and visited the schools only occasionally to deliver or retrieve paperwork. Yet I was able to create an e-newsletter that, based upon participant reports, was informative, enjoyable, and helpful to grandparents. Similarly, schools could recruit a parent, grandparent, or retired teacher to undertake this type of communication effort. With the investment of copies to recruit *Wingman* members and by training a volunteer to lead *The Wingman* effort, a school could have a personalized communication effort to reach grandparents and other family members at very little cost.

Another important understanding from my study and *The Wingman* is the knowledge that grandparents are an available and abundant resource, many of whom appear to want to be involved in their grandchildren's schools. As supported in my literature review, contemporary grandparents are healthier and have a longer life expectancy than ever before. Many grandparents desire to be involved and communicating with grandparents supports their involvement in the educational process. When considering these two factors it seems negligent for public schools to miss out on the opportunity to communicate with and involve grandparents. I would also argue that the delivery method of *The Wingman* eliminates almost all cost to the school and makes email or another type of social media the most fiscally responsible and efficient way to communicate with all stakeholders about general school news.

A third finding from this research study is the hesitation of grandparents to participate in the data collection efforts related to this study. As fully explained in Chapter V, I sent the electronic survey to a total of 406 recipients and 33 grandparents responded for a total of 8%. Additionally, I made exhaustive efforts at each school to recruit grandparents to complete interviews. I invited participants via the survey, via personal emails, and by a general invitation printed in *The Wingman*. Even with these great efforts only six grandparents volunteered to

complete the interview. Grandparents seemed resistant to participating in data collection efforts, an unexpected event given their existing engagement with *The Wingman*. Limited clues, such as the grandmother who stated she was not sure she had anything to offer, were available for understanding the seemingly widespread reluctance. I discuss ideas for future research related to this finding in the Future Research section later in this chapter.

These three main understandings matter because in a time of unrest and financial strain for public schools, it is imperative that all available resources are used to support our nation's future leaders. By facilitating *The Wingman*, or a similar communication tool and actively working to involve grandparents in schools, the educational process will be enhanced and our students will benefit.

This study raises three important questions. First, the participants in this study were grandparents who were related to an enrolled student. *How would non-related grandparents (in loco grandparentis) or other mature adults in a community react to being included in a communication effort from the area schools?* Second, *The Wingman* in each of these schools was facilitated by a staff member or several staff members working together, and then published by myself. *How could schools that rely on a volunteer to publish *The Wingman* ensure that the effort is maintained and successfully completed over a long time period?* A final question is, *How are grandparent role construction and grandparent self-efficacy related to each other?* These questions will be further considered, within the context of this study, in the following paragraphs.

How would non-related grandparents (in loco grandparentis) or other mature adults in a community react to being included in a communication effort from the area schools?

The participants in this study were grandparents who were related to an enrolled student. If a grandparent lives a great distance from their own grandchildren, or doesn't have grandchildren, could he/she be a support resource for a local school? If local schools reached out to these in loco grandparentis or other mature adults in their neighborhood, they could potentially

tap into an unconventional set of resources. Since *The Wingman* is delivered via email with very little cost to produce or publish, schools could communicate with a large number of possible pseudo grandparents, family members, volunteers, or financial contributors. This question also suggests that possibly public schools as a whole need to find more consistent and frequent methods to communicate with all stakeholders. If businesses were informed about school events or needs, they may take an active role in supporting schools as well. An additional outcome of in loco grandparentis, other community members, and businesses becoming more involved in directly supporting the school may be an influence on voting behaviors. These local stakeholders are also voters whose participation in the voting process can lead to direct benefits for the school district. If voters have been regularly informed about school events, news, progress, and needs they may be better able to make informed decisions at the polls. Additionally, distant grandparents who may not be able to vote and impact local policy are still voters on the national level of consideration of educational policy.

How could schools that rely on a volunteer to publish *The Wingman* ensure that the effort is maintained and successfully completed over a long time period?

The Wingman in each of these schools was facilitated by a staff member, or several staff members working together, and then published by myself. At the original *Wingman* site, not included in the data set for this study, a parent was the original publisher of *The Wingman*, and then handed this responsibility over to a school staff member. With turnover in school staff, *The Wingman* effort was not maintained and now lies dormant. One idea to address this question is the possibility of paying a staff person or a parent to produce *The Wingman*. This solution would create an added cost to the relatively inexpensive communication effort, but it could support its longevity. In an attempt to rely on a volunteer to maintain the database and publish *The Wingman*, this job could be delegated to the Parent Teacher Association or another service organization within a school.

How are grandparent role construction and grandparent self-efficacy related to each other?

My study identified the need to further understand how grandparent role construction and grandparent self-efficacy are related to each other. For this study grandparent role construction was defined as what grandparents believe they should do in relation to their grandchildren's education and the educational process. Grandparent self-efficacy is defined in this study as the beliefs that grandparents have about the outcomes of their own involvement in their grandchildren's school lives. This is based on what they think their involvement will produce. One understanding emerging from this study is that the grandparents who chose to receive *The Wingman* are probably grandparents who already had developed ideas about their role construction as a grandparent, and they might have already believed that being involved in their grandchildren's school lives was important. Additionally, if these grandparents believed their involvement would make a difference, they may make up the most efficacious of all grandparents groups. The dynamics of each family could also play an important role in the grandparent's role construction and self-efficacy. If a grandparent's relationship with his or her own son or daughter is healthy, they may be more inclined to participate in their grandchildren's lives in general, as well as in their school lives.

As reported extensively in Chapter II, Review of the Literature, it is a firmly supported statement that parental involvement in schools is beneficial for the students. Furthermore, the limited amount of studies that exist concerning grandparent involvement point to that same conclusion. Simply put, when adults in the family care about a child's school experiences, invest time in helping them be successful, and value education, the outcomes for the students are more likely positive.

In considering my findings from this research study, it appears that involving grandparents, even distant ones who have little access to the school, has the same potential for producing positive outcomes for students. If adults know about a child's school, help the child see the importance of school, and help the child believe that they can be successful then the child is more likely to thrive. Also, grandparents are more likely to talk to their grandchild about the

school and have a higher self-efficacy for what their involvement could produce when they have current relevant information pertaining to the school environment.

It appears that *The Wingman* has unearthed an affordable, sustainable, and powerful way to expand the number of people who may work together to support children's success in school. By utilizing email as a delivery method for important school information, the number of people who can be included in the communication loop with the school can be greatly increased, and we may provide opportunities for them to engage in conversations about school that might not otherwise have as much depth.

This study helps generate understanding about how grandparents can feel motivated to become involved in public schools, and it provides knowledge to contribute to current literature on family involvement in education. Furthermore, this study helps to bridge the gap between what is known about how parents are motivated to become involved and how the grandparents in this study reacted to being involved via *The Wingman*.

Implications

The findings from this research study lead to implications in the areas of research, theory, and practice. In the section that follows I will report on what these findings suggest for research and imply for theory; I will then recommend steps for current practitioners. The implications for theory in terms of this study and future studies is particularly robust due to the nature of theory modification that I employed during my study.

Implications for Research

As noted in my Future Research section later in this chapter there are several specific research studies that would add to the body of knowledge about grandparents' motivational beliefs. As a brief introduction to this later section, my research study implies that additional research is needed in the areas of grandparent involvement with schools, electronic communication between school and families, and concentrated research that discovers what

keystone habits lead to grandparent involvement in grandchildren's educational experiences.

These three implications for research are further explored in a later section.

Implications for Theory

As I have explained in several other areas throughout my study I chose to utilize Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model of the parental involvement process as the theoretical framework for my study. I chose this model because it focuses on explaining the motivation for, and process of, parental involvement. In making the decision to use Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model I knew that it would require modification in order to be used as a lens for my study. My study focuses on communication with grandparents and grandparents' motivational beliefs. There have been several observable strengths with using the model. First, the model has been in existence for seventeen years in the original form, and it has been used in numerous studies by Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler, and others. I believe the longevity of the framework's existence adds to its credibility. Second, the model is extensive in its exploration of factors that contribute to parent involvement. I chose to focus on motivational beliefs, but the model also includes specific definitions of how parents perceive invitations from others and how the parents' perceived life context impacts involvement.

In addition to the observable strengths, there are also weaknesses associated with the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model of the parental involvement process that impacted its usefulness in my study. First, the most obvious weakness is that the model and the studies that utilize this model do not offer any inclusion or explanation for grandparent involvement. I did not find any information during my literature review that offered an accepted modification of this model for grandparents. This weakness required that I use the presented definitions of role construction and self-efficacy and interpret those in relation to grandparents. In completing my deductive analysis I had trouble distinguishing between pieces of my data that explained how grandparents thought the child's home should support the educational experiences and how grandparents thought they should support the child's educational experiences. The model

identifies the home as the child's home; however, grandparents spoke of their support as if it was part of the home.

Another weakness of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model of the parental involvement process in relation to my study was that it does not distinguish between resident and nonresident parents or, in my study, near or distant grandparents. Role construction is likely to be influenced by how often and in what capacity a parent or a grandparent interacts with the child. The model does not provide insight into how nonresidential parents or distant grandparents might use other avenues to construct their roles as an important figure in the child's educational experiences.

I found using the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model an interesting experience in expanding current application of theory. Essentially, I was using my data to determine which aspects of the accepted theory seem to hold true and which aspects need more serious modification to work with grandparent involvement. Of course, this exploration was regarding only a small portion of the entire theory and would need to be replicated many times to establish a final line of thought regarding adaption to grandparents.

During my deductive analysis I worked to interpret my data in terms of the presented definitions of role construction and self-efficacy. Within each definition, I categorized data as supporting the definition, conflicting with the definition, or presenting an idea not currently included in the definition. In the area of role construction, three ideas not currently included in the definition presented themselves as other emerging realities. These three ideas were that grandparents associate their grandchildren with a great sense of enjoyment and love, grandparents are interested and supportive of all kids, and grandparents show an abundance of appreciation for information provided by *The Wingman*. In the area of self-efficacy there was one other emerging reality: the need for specific ways for grandparents to contribute.

Other Emerging Realities – Role Construction

First, it was observed from many participants that grandparents' perception of their role is one of great enjoyment and to serve as an encourager for their grandchildren. This was mentioned in terms of grandparents' desires to spend one-on-one time with their grandchildren, to cater to their grandchild's wants, and to love them. Another idea that emerged was the observation that grandparents are typically interested, supportive, and happy to hear about all students in a school. While they do place a special value and enjoyment on their own grandchildren, they seem to also have reached a place in life where being involved with young people, as a collective group, is rewarding. Finally, as noted by grandparents, an informant and a lead administrator, grandparents simply love the fact that the school is communicating with them. Many spoke of how much they appreciate *The Wingman* and all of the information it provides to their family. I feel certain that this fact stood out to me because of my former role as an elementary school principal. Each month for five years our school published a monthly newsletter. Teachers contributed stories and pictures and I served as the publisher. I cannot remember a single instance when a teacher or parent thanked me for preparing the newsletter. In interacting with the participants in this study I was thanked many times.

Other Emerging Realities – Self-Efficacy

The definition of self-efficacy included an idea the grandparents will make choices to become involved based on what they think might happen for the student or school. In analyzing my data, I found that for grandparents to actually contribute time or financial support to the school there must be very specific needs presented. In the pilot study this did happen and grandparents responded eagerly. In the three research sites in this study, the requests were infrequent and broad which may have limited grandparents' contributions.

One important implication in the area of theory is the need for a theory developed solely to interpret, understand, and predict grandparent involvement with schools. This would need to be developed from studies that focus on not only the establishment of communication with grandparents, but on the specific ways that both near and distant grandparents choose to

contribute to the school. This developed theory should take into account the importance of conversations that grandparents have with grandchildren that could indirectly have a positive impact on the schools if they influence student performance or behavior. Studies of this type could be replicated in many additional schools and perhaps provide a lens from which to define grandparent role construction and grandparent self-efficacy.

Implications for Practitioners

The implications for current practitioners are in a sense very simple, yet have the potential to produce profound effects on the school environment. *The Wingman* has been shown to be beneficial in involving grandparents in their grandchildren's educational experiences. In some instances involvement has included being directly involved at the school or providing donations that fulfill school needs. Grandparent involvement also manifests itself in the form of grandparent-grandchild communication that supports the child's success in school.

In terms of donations to the school and financial support there are two specific understandings that should influence practitioners. First, at the original pilot site, not included in this study, there were numerous examples of grandparents donating needed items or providing monetary donations to buy needed items. These donations were a result of specific requests being published in *The Wingman* and grandparents being motivated to help meet the need. In one story, a grandmother actually contacted *The Wingman* publisher in order to facilitate her ordering a needed item and having it shipped to the school from the site of her vacation. This story, and others like it, demonstrate that when needs were presented to grandparents they were eager to contribute. In the three pilot sites used for this study, there were very few broad requests published in *The Wingman*, so there were not as many opportunities for grandparents to donate. Also, the school data collection of such donations was not completed accurately at the three sites.

A second important understanding for practitioners is that by communicating with grandparents the school is developing a constituency of financially secure and committed community members. These mature community members may remain loyal to the school over a

long period of time. This implies that a school could actually be better poised to recruit volunteers, secure donations, and provide for needs within the school, especially in economic downturns.

In conclusion the simple, yet profound, recommendation for practicing teachers and administrators is to develop a consistent and cost-effective method for communicating with as many grandparents as possible. Additionally, practitioners should provide specific ways that the readers can contribute to the school either through service or donation. Evidence from this study and the original pilot site indicate that grandparents are eager to engage with the educational system.

Limitations

As I approach the end of my intense focus on this research study, a consideration of limitations to my study is appropriate. Three major limitations are the application of the Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005) model of the parental involvement process, aspects of my participants, and my limited number of research sites.

First, adaptation of the Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005) model of the parental involvement process to represent grandparent involvement is a notable limitation. The model was developed for parent involvement and was modified to provide a lens for *The Wingman* participants' motivation. This limitation exists because the studies that generated this line of thought and the data that support its use are aimed at parental involvement only.

In regard to my study participants there are several limitations. First, the fact this study involved school-grandparent communication that utilized email as the contact method is a possible limitation in that it excludes grandparents without email. Grandparents could choose to not use email as a communication method or socioeconomic barriers could prevent email use. Also, all of the interviewed grandparents were motivated to receive *The Wingman*, so I didn't find out about the larger population of grandparents who may or may not be motivated at all to be involved with their grandchildren's educational experiences. Three additional limitations presented themselves

from my data collection with participants. There was some confusion on my survey completion because both school staff and grandparents received the same survey with specific directions about which questions to answer. My survey to staff and grandparents should have been presented as two separate surveys. Also, a total of 406 surveys were distributed via emails to *The Wingman* recipients; 33 survey grandparents responded. This is only an 8% completion rate and limited the depth of my understanding in regard to the entire grandparent population. Also, my interview guide failed to include a question that asked the participants to describe their own experience as parents. This would have enhanced my understanding of their role construction. A final limitation with my participants is that I did not interview additional school staff about their experiences or perceptions of *The Wingman*. By interviewing school staff I could have discovered additional impacts on the school itself.

A third limitation is the small scale of this study – three sites in Oklahoma. Replicating this study in multiple sites, in multiple geographical areas, would lend strength to the findings. As with all qualitative research studies, my own perceptions, background knowledge, and personal experiences could inadvertently influence the study.

The recognition of these limitations with this study is an outcome of my growing knowledge and creativity in the area of qualitative research.

Future Research

As I conducted this research study several additional ideas for research studies presented themselves. First, an unexplored topic in this area includes the use of more instant forms of technology communication including text messaging, Twitter feeds and Facebook posts. A research study could be designed to explore the outcomes of more instant information on grandparents' motivational beliefs. Additionally, it is noted that more studies aimed at discovering the impact of all types of electronic communication between schools and families are needed to better understand these methods of communication.

Similar studies should be conducted at other schools that have a method of grandparent communication. Both technology based and non-technology based studies would add additional information. If both types of communication methods were studied, it could be better determined which results in the most desirable effects. At the current research sites, research should be continued to explore long lasting experiences for schools, students, and grandparents. An additional research study could be conducted to see if a program focused on involving community member at large, not only grandparents, could result in similar experiences for the school and adults. Additional research could also focus on social justice and could consider the idea that possibly we could strengthen the educational system in America by tapping into retired adults and/or grandparents.

In relation to my theoretical framework I only explored one aspect of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model. Further research could focus on other components of motivation. For instance, Grandparents' Perceptions of Invitations for Involvement from Other and Grandparents' Perceived Life Context are two other broad areas that impact motivation for involvement and could be studied. Also, in these two areas, the grandparent's relationship with their own children, the grandchildren's parents, would be an interesting component to measure. How do grandparents perceive invitations for involvement from the child's parents? How is the grandparent perception of their relationships with the grandchildren and parents tied to their life context?

After completing my data analysis I discovered two areas that would provide for rich research studies tied directly to *The Wingman* at the three pilot sites. First, I realized that as I interviewed grandparents I failed to ask grandparents a very important question that would have added knowledge to my second research question: "As a parent, how were you involved in your child's education?" This question may have allowed for greater conclusions to be drawn regarding the influence of a grandparent's role construction as a parent on that of a grandparent. Another idea for further research connected specifically to this study is to seek out information

about why grandparents did not choose to volunteer for an interview. I could have easily added a question to my survey that asked the survey respondents to list reasons why they did not want to be interviewed. Through the course of my interviews I had one grandparent mention that she didn't know if she could help me, but she would interview. It's possible that more grandparents may have shared her assumption that they needed to have some kind of expertise in the school or their grandchildren's school efforts. A future research study could focus on developing a better understanding of this hesitation to share their experiences.

Additional future research is related to the book, *The Power of Habit*, by Charles Duhigg. Duhigg (2014) suggests the existence of "keystone habits," which are habits of behavior that people employ that over time transform many areas of their lives. Would our understanding of grandparents' motivational beliefs be enhanced by exploring their "keystone habits" in regard to their families or grandchildren? For instance, if a grandparent has made herself/himself available to provide after school care for a grandchild, frequently calls their grandchild, or regularly hosts family meals at their home, are they more likely to be motivated to be involved with their grandchildren's educational experiences? During the course of my interviews I did not specifically ask what steps grandparents took to originally become involved with their grandchild's life, but an exploration of keystone habits related to family could be insightful.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study of *The Wingman* at three schools sites has resulted in the following findings. First, school-grandparent communication was influenced by creating primarily a one-way communication method between the school and the grandparents. Implementation of *The Wingman* created an avenue of communication between the schools and the grandparents regarding the grandchildren's education. *The Wingman* influenced conversations between the grandparent and the grandchildren and how the grandparent may contribute to, or participate in, the grandchild's schooling. My final finding related to research question number one is that as a result of *The Wingman* grandparents felt much more included

and knowledgeable about their grandchildren's school lives. In all three of my findings from my first research question, it is demonstrated that the greatest impact of *The Wingman* seems to have been this interchange of information. Because the school prioritized communicating in a regular and systematic way with grandparents, information was often interchanged between grandparents and grandchildren and sometimes exchanged between the school and the grandparents.

In regard to my second research question, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (2005) description of motivational beliefs were fully established in Wingman participants. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005) identified role construction and self-efficacy as two of the factors that impact motivation and thus impact involvement and I have discovered that these same factors impact motivation and involvement of Wingman participants. *The Wingman* enhanced the role construction of grandparents, the ability of grandparents to support the educational experiences, and grandparent knowledge developed their self-efficacy. Each of these factors supports the notion that recipients of *The Wingman* are likely motivated to be involved in their grandchildren's education experiences.

Afterword

In November of 2011, the original pilot effort of *The Wingman* was shared with me by Dr. Kearney, my advisor and the parent volunteer who initiated *The Wingman* at her children's school. I remember thinking, as we discussed the possibility of *The Wingman* becoming a qualitative research project, "Wow, this research could really be fun!" After years of completing doctoral level coursework and thinking that the dissertation phase would never begin, let alone end, I was excited to have a project in mind. As we discussed the operation and potential outcomes of *The Wingman* it seemed to make perfect sense that this research study could add important knowledge in the area of supporting children's success in school. As a former teacher and principal this goal of supporting children's success in school and life has been a long standing personal aim of mine. Thus, began the dissertation phase of my life.

During Chapter II, I mentioned that the addition of the Emancipation Proclamation, the Fourteenth Amendment, and the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution established the equal treatment of all people, which included the equal educational treatment of children. When I take notice of the current reforms in education, both at the state and national level, I can't help but recognize that in many ways, we are still trying to achieve equal educational treatment for every child in every school, regardless of his/her background or socioeconomic level. My next question is, "How can we utilize *The Wingman* to support children in every school, regardless of their family's current involvement or socioeconomic status, to achieve equal educational treatment?" Could *The Wingman* be extended to community members or groups of retired men and women to engage them with a local school and provide support for a child in the same way that the grandparents in my study are providing support for their grandchildren both near and far?

During the final stage of my data analysis I realized that what I really need to do is continue to study grandparent involvement in schools and develop a framework that identifies why grandparents become involved, in what ways they are involved, and what the direct outcomes are for students, schools, and grandparents. Connected to a framework of grandparent involvement would be a full understanding of how and why grandparents are motivated to be involved with their grandchildren's lives. I can't help but think of Daniel Pink's recent book, *Drive*, that identifies three elements that support motivation: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Does being involved with their grandchildren's school give grandparents the satisfaction of these three elements?

As my first study of *The Wingman* draws to a close, I already find myself thinking about how to expand the project to other schools and specifically how to help this program benefit as many students as possible. This study has been a positive and powerful experience and provided valuable insights into school-grandparent communication.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Email Invitation for Participants

Subject Line: Wingman Research Project

Hello Wingman Community,

My name is Meghan Eliason and I am currently a PhD student at Oklahoma State University in the Educational Leadership program. As a PhD student I have had the opportunity to learn about The Wingman Project and find this project very fascinating as a potential research study.

I would like to have the opportunity to gain some firsthand knowledge from your participation in The Wingman Community. Your participation in my study is completely voluntary and will include three items:

- 1. Completion of an Informed Consent Document – which is just an official form that states you understand I am using the information I collect to conduct research.*
- 2. A short electronic survey that will provide me with a basic amount of information about The Wingman's impact on your involvement at your associated school.*
- 3. The possibility of an in person or phone conversation that will expand on the information collected in the survey.*

My hope is that I can fully capture the impact of The Wingman Project and help inform other schools about the potential of enlarging the school community to include family members from all around the world.

If you are willing to complete the short electronic survey and possibly be interviewed, then please reply to this email.

Thank you,

Meghan Eliason

Appendix B

Example Student Invitation for Wingman Members – Fall 2012

September 4, 2012

Dear Parents and Students:

Very soon, we will unveil our new Wingman e-bulletin for grandparents, "like extended family" members, and other allies of Timberlake elementary students. In this way, we hope to further strengthen the Timberlake community of commitment to our students. E-bulletins will include items such as: (1) what's happening at Timberlake, (2) upcoming events and activities, (4) opportunities to volunteer from near (Timberlake) and afar (anywhere), (5) "Wee Needs" of Timberlake students or the school, and (6) thoughts contributed by members of our Wingman community. Receipt of the e-bulletin is strictly voluntary and is created for those in any geographical area (not just Oklahoma).

The Timberlake Wingman

An e-bulletin for grandparents and other allies
Of Timberlake students

Please provide below the names and email addresses of those who wish to be included in the Wingman e-bulletin, and return this information to your child's teacher OR email this information to **timberlakewingman@hotmail.com**. The inaugural edition is planned for the last week of September.

Please list the name(s), grade(s), and teacher(s) of your Timberlake student(s):

Please send the Wingman e-bulletin to my:

___ Grandparent(s) ___ Aunt/Uncle ___ Other allies: (babysitter, etc. _____)

Their name(s) and city, state:

Their email address:

___ Grandparent(s) ___ Aunt/Uncle ___ Other allies: ("babysitter, etc. _____)

Their name(s) and city, state:

Their email address:

"What is a Wingman? The term Wingman stems from a time-honored tradition within the Air Force flying community that essentially says a lead pilot will never lose his or her Wingman. It's a promise, a pledge, a commitment between Airmen who fly . . . Wingman Culture affirms that each and every person is essential to our mission."

– from the website of the U.S. Tinker Air Force Base, Midwest City, OK

"A child needs a grandparent, anybody's grandparent, to grow a little more securely into an unfamiliar world." – Charles and Ann Morse

Be a WINGMAN!

August 30, 2013

Hello Timberlake Families,

Would you like to receive a monthly e-newsletter about Timberlake Elementary School?

Do you have a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other extended family member that would love to know what's happening at Timberlake?

Then The Wingman is for you! The Wingman is a monthly e-newsletter that is sent to email addresses provided by Timberlake families. The e-newsletter includes: (1) what's happening at Timberlake, (2) upcoming events, (3) "The World's Coolest," a column by Timberlake kids (4) opportunities to volunteer, and (5) donation requests. Participation is strictly voluntary.

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____ Teacher: _____

Please send The Wingman e-bulletin to:

1. Name of Wingman: _____

____ parent ____ grandparent ____ aunt/uncle ____ other

City, State of Wingman: _____

Email Address (please print carefully): _____

2. Name of Wingman: _____

____ parent ____ grandparent ____ aunt/uncle ____ other

City, State of Wingman: _____

Email Address (please print carefully): _____

Return completed forms to your child's teacher OR email the information to timberlakewingman@hotmail.com.

"A child needs a grandparent, anybody's grandparent, to grow a little more securely into an unfamiliar world." – Charles and Ann Morse

Please note: The Wingman is for those in any geographical area (not just Oklahoma).
**List additional Wingman addresses on the back.*

Volume 2, Issue 4
November/December 2013

Happy
Holidays

THE SCHOOL WINGMAN

The School Wingman

An E-Bulletin for Grandparents and Other Allies of School Kids

**Welcome back to the School Wingman!
Read below to learn important information about our school!**

Upcoming Events & Activities:

- Monday, Dec. 9th—MS Bball @ Red, 4:30pm
- Tuesday, Dec. 10th—HS Bball @ Dark Blue, 6:30pm
- Dec. 12th-14th—HS Basketball Tournament @ Orange
- Monday, Dec. 16th—MS Bball @ Dark Blue, 4:30pm
- Tuesday, Dec. 17th—Christmas Program, 7:00pm, HS Gym
- Thursday, Dec. 19th—MS Bball @ Dark Purple, 4:30pm
- Friday, Jan. 3rd—HS Bball @ Orange, 6:30pm
- Monday, Jan. 6th—MS Bball @ Yellow, 5:00pm
- Tuesday, Jan. 7th—HS Bball @ Green, 6:30pm
- Jan. 9th-11th—HS Basketball Tournament @ Dark Purple
- Monday, Jan. 13th—5th/6th Bball vs. Pink, 5:00pm
- Tuesday, Jan. 14th—HS Bball vs. Copper, 6:30pm
- Thursday, Jan. 16th—MS Bball vs. Orange, 4:30pm
- Friday, Jan. 17th—HS Bball vs. Red, 6:30pm

What is a Wingman?

The term Wingman stems from a time-honored tradition within the Air Force. . . that essentially says a lead pilot will never lose his or her Wingman. It's a promise, a pledge, a commitment. . . Wingman Culture affirms that each and every person is essential to our mission.

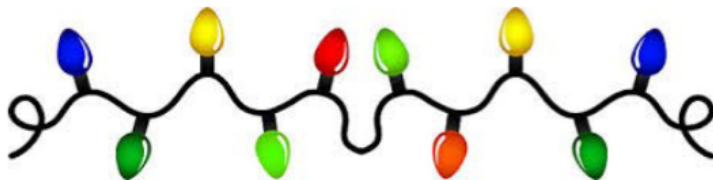
U.S. Tinker Air Force Base, Midwest, OK



The Geographical Wow! Factor. . . *The School Wingman currently reaches members in the following (known) states:*

List city and states here. Also include foreign countries!

If you receive The School Wingman, but your location isn't listed, please email: charliewingman@hotmail.com



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An E-Bulletin for Grandparents and Other Allies of School Kids



November Students of the Month

- Student Name - K
- Student Name - 1
- Student Name - 2
- Student Name - 3
- Student Name - 4
- Student Name - 5
- Student Name - MS
- Student Name - MS

On Wednesday, November 6th the 8th grade students from School visited a Technology Center in Town, ST. They attended an event called "Career Connection" where students learned about various career opportunities available through a Technology Center



IT'S BASKETBALL SEASON IN SCHOOL!!!



On Thursday, November 14th the School basketball teams faced the Apple teams. The 5th/6th grade girls lost 3-12, the 5th/6th boys won 32-15, the 7th/8th girls won 24-16, and the 7th/8th boys won 34-33. Pictured above is the tip off of the 5th/6th grade boys' game.

Happy
Holidays

THE SCHOOL WINGMAN

The School Wingman

An E-Bulletin for Grandparents and Other Allies of School Kids

FFA Fear Factor Event

Mr. Teacher Name and the School FFA officers held an FFA Fear Factor event on Thursday, November 21, 2013. The event was held in conjunction with the canned food drive sponsored by the local chapter. The officer team lead students through a series of challenging food tastings to determine what team could successfully eat the unknown food items the quickest without loosing any of the food. Winners of the FFA Fear Factor event were Student Name and Student Name.



FFA Officers (Student Names) give instructions to Fear Factor participants.

Fear Factor participants (Student Names) prepare for tastings.



School FFA members participate in Fear Factor.



Happy
Holidays

The School Wingman

An E-Bulletin for Grandparents and Other Allies of School Kids



Keep Reading over Break!

Encourage your School student to read over the winter break by trying these fun ideas:

- * Have your children read holiday cards when they are received in the mail, and let them write a message in outgoing cards.
- * Let children read ingredients from holiday recipes while you bake together. It's a great way for them to learn measurements and temperatures.
- * Set aside time for kids to "show off" their new reading skills to visiting relatives. Children love being the focus of attention, and family members are usually more than willing to see their progress.
- * Even if no books make your child's wish list, make sure you give at least one as a gift, and encourage them to read it.

(from www.education.com)

THE WORLD'S COOLEST . . . a column by School Kids

Student Name from 6th grade says, "My Grandma Name really is the coolest because she taught me how to sew, lets me come over a lot, and she cooks me pancakes."

Student Name from Kindergarten says, "My Grandpa Name really is the coolest because he's my best friend. He takes me golfing, plays catch with me, takes me on his motorcycle, and lets me sleep on him watching t.v."

"A child needs a grandparent, anybody's grandparent, to grow a little more securely into an unfamiliar world."

- Charles and Ann Morse

If you know of someone who would like to receive The School Wingman, have them email:

schoolwingman@hotmail.com

Thank you to the administrators, teachers, support staff, and students that contributed news, pictures, and quotes for the November/December Wingman!

Appendix D

Wingman Survey Questions

Electronic Survey – The survey will use a Likert scale and open ended responses to obtain participant opinions.

Each question will have a Likert scale to complete:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

A. School Staff Survey:

- a. I am aware of *The Wingman* and its intent.
- b. I have participated in some way in *The Wingman*-related activities.
- c. *The Wingman* community has contributed needed assistance and/or support to students.
- d. *The Wingman* community has contributed needed assistance and/or support to the school.
- e. The benefits of *The Wingman* are greater than the effort required of staff.
- f. I have submitted a student need that has been met by *The Wingman* community.
- g. I have had a conversation about *The Wingman* with another staff member or student.
- h. A student I know personally has a family member that is a member of *The Wingman* community.

B. Wingman Community Survey:

- i. I live outside of the town in which the school is located.
- j. We read *The Wingman* every month.
- k. *The Wingman* contains information that is useful to me/my family.
- l. I have learned something from reading *The Wingman* that I did not know before.
- m. I feel more included in the school community through *The Wingman*.
- n. I consider *The Wingman* to be a positive addition to the school's efforts to connect with extended family/the community.
- o. I found out about no school days from *The Wingman*. I then planned to see my students on one of those days.
- p. I had visited the school website before *The Wingman* existed.
- q. I have visited the school website since I began receiving *The Wingman*.

Appendix E

Wingman Interview Guide

Interview Guide

A. Staff Interview Guide:

1. Tell me about how you became aware of *The Wingman* effort at your school.
2. Describe what your involvement or interaction with the project has been.
3. What impacts have you observed on students, staff, or the school site?
4. Have you submitted a request for assistance that *The Wingman* was able to meet?
5. From your perspective, what ways does an effort like *The Wingman* contribute to the students? The staff/teachers? The school?
6. What does *The Wingman* seem to add to your school community that was not already present? Or what does it enhance?
7. What other types of information or efforts should be incorporated into *The Wingman*?
8. Why do you believe people sign up for, and participate in, *The Wingman* community?

B. Wingman Community Interview Guide:

1. How did you become involved with *The Wingman* community?
2. What caused you to sign up?
3. To what extent (and how) have you interacted with those who coordinate the program?
4. Describe any specific efforts you have made (donation of items, volunteering, etc.) because of information you received through *The Wingman*.
5. What have been the benefits of *The Wingman* for you? Your family members?
6. From your perspective, what ways does an effort like *The Wingman* contribute to your family? The students? The school?
7. What other types of information or efforts should be incorporated into *The Wingman*?
8. How has being a member of *The Wingman* affected your student(s)?

VITA

Meghan Kathleen Eliason

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: *THE WINGMAN PROJECT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SCHOOL-BASED COMMUNICATION WITH GRANDPARENTS*

Major Field: Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2014.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Educational Leadership at Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri in 2006.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education at Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Alva, Oklahoma in 2003.

Experience:

Instructor, July 2012-Present, Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford, Oklahoma

Principal, August 2007-May 2012, Ponca City Public Schools, Liberty Elementary School, Ponca City, Oklahoma

Adjunct Instructor, June 2010-May 2011 Northwestern Oklahoma State University, Alva, Oklahoma

Principal Intern, August 2006-July 2007, Ponca City Public Schools, Lincoln Elementary School, Ponca City, Oklahoma

Teacher & Coach, August 2003-July 2006, Savannah R-III School District, Savannah, Missouri