

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES  
OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

By

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1996

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
In partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE  
May, 2006

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Pam Brown for all her patience, advice, and optimism with this thesis. I appreciate her ideas and support. She has such a passion for teacher research and has truly passed that on to me and many others. Thank you for making your students strive to learn, understand, and expect more from themselves.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my family. My husband Sean, is my rock and without him I would not be able to be the person I am. Thank you for believing in me and encouraging me through this process. My wonderful angels Jessica and Joshua, you are the shining light to me. You are an amazing family and I am blessed to have you all.

I would like to thank my mom for raising me with family values and instilling in me the desire to be all that I can be, whether it be a student, a mother, a wife, a daughter, or a friend. Even though my father has passed I thank him for all the determination and hard work ethics that he taught me.

I would like to thank my Heavenly Father who has been the one to pick me up several times when I have fallen and given me the strength to go on.

Last but definitely not least, I would like to thank all of my wonderful friends who believe in me and my passions. Who are there to laugh and love through good and bad, who are honest and forgiving, who are truly the best

friends one could have: Veronica, Amy, Robin, Jill, Leslie, Cindy, and Keri. I love and appreciate you all.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

There is a desperate need in the United States today to put a stronger emphasis on family involvement within our secondary education system. This emphasis is needed not only from a legislative perspective, but from society as a whole. However clichéd the statement may seem, our students of today are truly leaders of tomorrow. Every community needs to work together to strengthen the schools. Educators, administrators, families, and students themselves all bear the responsibility of helping students learn and achieve standards of excellence. The need for parental involvement is widely recognized, as noted by Taylor (2000):

Considerable attention has been given to parental involvement in education during the past decade. Factors responsible for the increase include federal and state legislation, and national parental groups and organizations. The movement has empowered parents and has given them a legal and moral right to be involved as partners in collaboration with the schools and community agencies in the education of their children. (p. 67)

According to Callison (2004), family involvement in education contributes positively to students' achievement in school. When families are involved in

children's learning, at school and at home, everyone benefits -- schools work better, families become closer, and students improve academically. Evidence shows that parental involvement is not as strong as it once was. According to a Newsweek – PTA poll, 40 percent of parents all across the United States believe they are not devoting enough time to their children's education. "Thirty years of research shows that greater family involvement in children's learning is a critical link to achieving a high-quality education and a safe, disciplined learning environment for every student" ( U. S. Dept. of Education, 1994).

Research is abundant supporting the need for family involvement (Callison, 2004, Clark, 1983, Constantino, 2002, 2003, Epstein, 1992, 1994, 1995, Finn, 1998). Many schools are at maximum capacities in terms of the number of children in classrooms, state mandates, testing, and inclusion of students with disabilities. Considering what parents and the community as a whole are capable of, it is upsetting they do not do to help schools in dealing with these important issues. Parents can serve as partners with their teachers in the child's academic program. According to Callison (2004), injecting parents' involvement provides educators and administrators with a valuable support system, creating a team that is working for each child's success. Hartley-Brewer (2005) found that children enjoy their time in school better when parents follow their child's work and progress and stay involved.

The most important thing that a family can do is support their children at home. This is where it all begins. Children's first teachers are their parents (families). Learning then continues in the schools. According to Callison (2004),

student learning increases when parents are invited into the process by helping at home. Helping at home encompasses many different aspects: helping with homework, talking about daily activities at school, attending meetings, and games. "Parents' actions communicate to their children that education is important" (Callison, 2004, p. 98). Parents are the most important influence in a child's life. Epstein and Connors (1994) found in their research with thousands of parents that parents want to motivate, encourage, monitor, keep track of, interact with, and talk about school work at home. A 1989 Gallup poll asked teachers to identify the most important problems facing public school in their community. "Parents lack of interest/ support" was the most frequently cited problem, ranking substantially ahead of all other problems (Elam, 1989, p. 786).

There is an ongoing debate as to whether parental involvement or family involvement is the best terminology to describe the concept in today's culture. Because of the diversity of modern day American society, it is increasingly difficult to apply one all encompassing term. Although the majority of children reside with at least one parent there are still exceptions in which, for instance, the parental responsibilities may be executed by grandparents, aunts or uncles, older brothers or sisters or other relatives or friends. Adults other than a child's parents are taking on significant child rearing roles (Edwards & Young, 1992). The shift in family structure has placed burdens on single parents and kin raising children. Parents often struggle to provide adequate financial support, medical care, school-guidance, and support of the children. The rise in the number of children being raised in single parent households or by other guardians and kin is due in

part to divorce, separations, domestic violence, incarceration, money problems, and births outside of marriage. “Across the United States, more than six million children are being raised in households headed by grandparents and other relatives; 2.5 million children are in these households without any parents present” (Oklahoma State Fact Sheet, 2005).

Parental involvement is a deceptively ambiguous term. Involvement can vary in meaning and in description. Parental involvement in this paper is defined as the person(s) loving, nurturing, and responsible for the well being of the child. Parental involvement is basically the involvement of parents, relatives or other significant elders in a child’s education. Although the basic term indicates parents specifically, the concept can refer to several other sources of individual influence in a child’s life. Referenced by the U. S. Department of Education (1994):

The day to day reality of the American family is different today than a generation ago. Parents and children spend far less time together and almost all parents face an on-going struggle to balance the demands of their family life with their jobs. At a time when parents are under tremendous pressures that make them less able to participate in their children’s lives, there is a greater need for them to be involved, particularly in education.

However, heavy this burden for parents to commit time from their busy schedules to help support education of their children may seem, the rewards are indeed great. “Research confirms that, regardless of the economic, racial, or cultural background of the family, when parents are partners in their children’s

education, the results are improved student achievement, better school attendance, reduced dropout rates, and decreased delinquency” (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1994). Comer (1986) emphasizes that the lack of involvement from minority parents should not be interpreted as disinterest in their children’s education. Rather, these parents do not participate because they do not feel comfortable in schools. Comer’s (1986) work with the schools in New Haven, Connecticut, shows that many minority parents don’t involve themselves in their children’s schooling because they may feel intimidated or uncomfortable within the school environment due to unfamiliarity with the system or due to feeling that they are unwelcome. Schools have had particular difficulty in involving low-income parents and parents of color, despite research which suggests that these parents want to be involved in their children’s schools (Trumbull, Rothstein, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). Angell & Levy (2001) conclude that parenting practices and parent involvement in schools vary across cultures and social classes. Parents from countries which differ in cultural orientations and family patterns from those traditionally valued in the U.S. may react differently to overtures by the school to become involved (Angell & Levy, 2001). Parents from non-mainstream U.S. cultures have had a more difficult time becoming meaningfully involved in their children’s education. The 2001 Met Life Survey of the American Teacher interviewed 2049 public school students in grades 7 through 12 by means of self-administered questionnaires. This study found that students overall, and African American students in particular, have high expectations for their future, but desire more parental involvement.

## Purpose of the Study

Research done on the need for and the effects of parental involvement from the perspectives of administrators, teachers, and parents shows that it is pertinent and beneficial for students' overall school experience, but there is a missing research component part, the students themselves. High school is a difficult time for children. The pressures of school, peers, relationships, work, and parents can be overwhelming. The intention of this research was to seek out and explore the perspectives that high school students have on parental involvement in their education. Parental involvement is vital to student success, but what do the students feel about their parents' involvement? How do they want their parents to be involved? Schools exist to teach and train children for the future. Without the children there is no need for the school, yet so often the children are silenced and not looked upon as beneficial in contributing to change and reform. Their insight is relevant and it is important to listen to them and hear their perspectives and desires. Beyer, Patrikakou, and Weissberg (2003) found that by examining the students' perspectives there is a better ability to define roles that students can play in establishing and maintaining meaningful home-school relations.

In designing this study in a way that could reflect students' perspectives, a qualitative case study research design was used. Qualitative research seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved (Merriam, 1998). In this case study five students' perspectives were sought out through interviews. Interviews are a way

for people to tell their stories and stories are a way of learning and knowing. Seidman (1998) explains telling stories as a process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them makes them meaning-making experiences. Interviewing the students one on one gave me the ability not only to listen but to observe reactions, body expressions, and emotions. Berg's (2004) research on qualitative research methodology has found that qualitative techniques allow researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives.

Parental involvement is closely correlated to student achievement (Callison, 2004; Constantino, 2003; Edwards, 1992, 1995; Epstein, 1990, 1994; Finn, 1993; Taylor, 2000). However, research on students' perspectives regarding family involvement is lacking. This presents a problem. There is a large gap in understanding the issues surrounding family involvement. We know little still about what students think about schooling and engagement (Cothran & Ennis, 2000). This study examines the students' perspectives on the involvement of their parents (families) in their education. This study also looks into other key ways that parents are involved in their children's education, including friendships, jobs, church, and other activities. Byer, Patrikakou, and Weissberg (2003) state:

The lack of investigation of student perceptions creates a very significant research gap. As children enter adolescence, they begin to assert their independence from parents and develop their own opinions and ideas about a variety of issues, including school and their parents' involvement

in it. Although some studies ask students about parent involvement, few actually ask students how they feel about that involvement and what the "ideal" parent's involvement would look like. (p. 14)

This study utilizes qualitative research techniques in order to provide data in an area that needs to be further explored and conceptualizes parental involvement from a perspective that considers family, school, and community as overlapping "spheres of influence" (Epstein 1990, 1992, 1995). The spheres of influence recognize the three major contexts in which students learn and grow: family, school, and community. The students are placed in the center where the three spheres overlap to show the important role the student possesses in his/her education. Epstein (1995) states this eloquently "School, family, and community partnerships cannot simply produce successful students. Rather, partnership activities may be designed to engage, guide, energize and motivate students to produce their own success" (p. 703). Looking at family involvement as a sort of partnership, Epstein (1994) writes:

There are many reasons for developing schools, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and the community and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create partnerships is to help all youngsters to succeed in school and in life. When families are involved, students hear common messages from the

home and school about the importance of attending school, staying in school, and working hard as a student. (p. 41)

### Significance of the Study

This research attempts to provide insights that will help educators and parents have better understanding of the views of the high school students on what they desire from the involvement of their parents in partnership with the schools. Educators may gain knowledge that will help in developing strategies and integral programs to help bridge the gap between schools and families.

### Research Questions

The overall guiding question of this study was: What are high school students' perspectives of parental (family) involvement?

### Subordinate Questions

- (a) How much parental interaction do students want?
- (b) What types of interaction between students and parents seem to be most beneficial?

### Researcher

As researcher it is important to know and understand your own bias and background since it has significant impact on the research itself. I am an only child. I was adopted as an infant and was raised by my mother and father all the

way through my education. My father was an automotive mechanic and a pastor. He worked long hours to support our family. My mother stayed home to take care of us, but also did all of the clerical work for both of my father's work interests. We moved many times throughout my education and I attended nine different schools in three different states. This was hard when it came to making friends and building relationships. My mom was involved more than my father, but I desired more. This is where the interest and passion for this research arose.

I am now happily married with two children. We live in the area that the research takes place and my children attend elementary school within the district. I taught school for two years after graduating with an education degree and have had the privilege of staying home with my children since they were born. I am involved within their school. I serve on the PTA, assist as homeroom mom, and volunteer at the school tutoring children one day each week.

### Summary

This study will not only examine the benefits of parental involvement with high school students as discovered in previous research but also initiate and discuss new research into students' perspectives of their parents' involvement in their academic careers. The participants of the study have been given the opportunity to express their feelings and opinions about a very important aspect of their education. Parental involvement is a major influence in high school students' education and directly affects their academic success. School-family partnerships are necessary to promote and increase involvement so that both

teachers and parents can be as effective as possible in their efforts to help children succeed (Walberg, 1984). As students get older they seek more autonomy. "Parents may respond by decreasing their involvement, but that may not necessarily be what the adolescents want. Rather, they may want different help from their parents" (Beyer, Partikakou, & Weissberg, 2003, p. 6). This study seeks to learn what student perspectives of parental involvement look like and what students desire from parental involvement in their education.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

Educators value family involvement. According to Steinberg (1996), educators are aware that much of what influences students emanates from outside of the realms of the school to include families and student social networks. Ooms and Hara (1991) have found that teachers, principals, social workers, counselors, and school psychologists recognize that students spend 91% of their time from birth to age 18 outside of school. This is a remarkable percentage to not think of the family as an influence on children's education. Parents should not depend on the schools as the only place for their children to learn and be educated nor should they disregard their importance in the role they themselves play. Parent involvement is an important influence on a child's school success (LaBahn, 1995). Family involvement at home in the lives of maturing adolescents translates through to their educational achievements, attendance and progress (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1998).

### A Case for Family Involvement in Education

Students benefit tremendously when they can work together with their families and their educators. Rioux and Berla (1993) suggest that the benefits of

parent involvement are not confined to early childhood or elementary grades, but last through high school. As stated by Reeves (1963):

Parents help their school when they do what they can to keep their child in good physical, intellectual, and emotional condition for learning and properly equip them for school; support the teachers, inform themselves concerning school conditions and co-operate with the teacher and school authorities in their efforts to maintain suitable conditions for learning and teaching; when possible and practicable, assist in school or school related activities; and exercise leadership in, and support of, school public relations in the community (p. 184).

According to National PTA Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (1998), parents need to make sure that students arrive at school rested, fed, and ready to learn, set high learning expectations and nurture their child's self-esteem. Christenson and Sheridan (2001) state eloquently, "Schools can reward and demand, and provide opportunities for children to learn; however, families provide the 'building blocks' that make learning possible or the social capital needed by schools to enhance learner outcomes" (p. 34).

Alexander (as cited in Wolfendale & Bastiani (2000)), perceives families as being "the foundation of education." Whether one uses the term 'building blocks' or 'foundation', it is evident that parents play the most significant role in providing students with the support and structure to enable them to be successful throughout their education.

Clark (1983), in his in-depth study of ten families, has found a number of common family practices that made a significant contribution to their children's school success:

- Valuing schooling and developing a sense of pride and self-reliance;
- Establishing specific family routines such as homework time and bed time routines;
- Establishing family roles and responsibilities and assigning family chores;
- Supervising use of time;
- Encouraging reading;
- Talking with the child about schooling and other issues;
- Visiting the school and being an advocate for the child;
- Fostering hobbies and other extracurricular activities; and
- Playing games together, visiting parks or museums, or going on other family outings. (p. 205-208)

Finn (1998) collected empirical data that showed specific parenting practices are related to students' academic achievement: creating emotionally supportive home environments provides reassurance when the students encounter failure, actively organizing and monitoring student's time, helping with homework, and discussing school matters. Henderson and Berla (1994) have done numerous studies and found the adolescents need their parents to be

supporters of the learning thus enhancing and nurturing their sense of competence and self esteem.

According to Callison (2001), parents are a child's life support system. Consequently, the most important support a child can receive comes from the home. Cooke and Apolloni (1975) state that "parental involvement in the education of their children is justified, since, from our society's perspective, parents are both morally and legally responsible for their children's performance, behavior, and development" (p. 168).

Epstein (1995) concludes from her numerous studies of parental involvement that almost all parents from all backgrounds care about the education of their children. Epstein has identified six types of parental involvement in schools: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

A student's achievements are directly related to parent's attitudes toward education and their involvement in the school life of their child. Engle (1989) suggests that students whose parents remained involved through high school were much more likely to complete college. These students were three times more likely to complete a bachelor's degree than children of parents who were not involved in high school. In Engle's study, parental involvement was defined as frequency of talking to teachers, parent interest in planning for post-high school activities, and parent monitoring of school work. More than 11,200 students were involved in the study. Twenty-seven percent of the students whose

parents remained involved completed a bachelor's degree, compared to only 8 percent of those students whose parents were not very involved in high school.

## Partnerships

Educating a child well takes cooperation and involvement from educators, parents, families, and the community. "The partnership between parents and teachers is key to creating a climate at home and at school conducive to learning" (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1994). Research has shown the greater the family and community involvement in schools, the greater the students' achievement (Niemic, Sikorski, & Walberg, 1999). Marsh (1999) summarized some of the values of partnerships between the home, the community, and the school. Effective partnerships can improve school climates and programs, family support services, parent's skills and leadership, family and community relationships, and teacher effectiveness. "Research confirms that, regardless of economical, racial, or cultural background of the family, when parents are partners in their children's education, the results are improved student achievement, better school attendance, reduced dropout rates, and decreased delinquency" (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1994).

It would seem common sense for parents to want to be involved in their children's education and for teachers to want them to be involved, but at times there are perceived obstacles. Epstein (1995) states:

Many research studies report that just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed and are eager to obtain better information

from schools and communities to remain good partners in their children's education. Research also shows that just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs, and consequently are fearful about trying. (p. 703)

This research shows that teachers may need more training in order to facilitate involving not only the students but the parents in the education of all students. The difficulty of the perceived problem with parental involvement is not clearly defined in a way that students, parents, teachers, administrators, and legislature agree upon.

According to Shakiba (1984), parents and teachers working side by side to help the child is the essence of a true partnership between home and school. The children should be the main focus. The purpose of partnerships is to work together in order to enhance children's opportunity to succeed. According to Decker and Decker (2003), a team approach is necessary to develop meaningful educational partnerships that support academic achievement.

There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. Partnerships can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and the community and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create partnerships, is to help all youngsters to succeed in school and in life (Epstein, 1994, p. 35).

There is an ancient African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child,” that shows this is not a new or foreign concept. Educators cannot and should not be responsible for the entire upbringing of students. There is a vital need for the community to work together as a whole to enable the education system to be successful.

### Community

There are many variables in a student’s education, not just school and home. Factors include home, friends, and community (which incorporates jobs, church, extracurricular activities, clubs). It should be a community effort to support our children with the best education possible. Many more positive things can and will happen if the focus is taken off of the external factors and placed on the child. Zepeda and Langenbach (1999) think that parental involvement has evolved into partnerships between and among school, families, and the community. Community influence in students’ education and lives is increasingly important (Lewis & Morris, 1998).

Research has shown that community involvement and action can be powerful allies in transforming schools. Community involvement with the schools has been credited with: (1) improving the physical conditions and resources which support learning in the schools; (2) raising the attitudes and expectations of the parents, teachers, and students; and (3) improving the depth of the learning experiences of students through collaborative planning (Hatch, 1998, p. 70).

Increasing Parental Involvement (n.d.) has found that many parents, church leaders, business owners and older adult volunteers await only a friendly offer to help the schools. Callison (2004) has found that schools which have strong partnerships with and respond to the needs of the communities they serve have students that perform better than schools that do not have these valuable relationships.

Sharing vision, activities, and respecting others' education are community activities. According to Fasching (1997), it is important to have a way to describe communities because people develop their values and understandings from the communities they are part of. Alliances between schools and communities can be formed in countless ways including issues such as school safety, after school programs, physical improvements, student's health, and literacy programs (Lewis & Morris, 1998). According to Hatch (1998), "beyond changes in curriculum or improvements in self-esteem, meaningful community involvement sets in motion a chain of events that transforms the culture of the school and often the community that the school serves" (p. 16).

According to McLaughlin and Talbert (2001), today's students bring different levels of support, interests, and different academic and social needs into the classroom. The belief that parents are a child's first teachers is the premise behind the National PTA's inclusion of family involvement in their guidelines.

In 1997, the National PTA Organization developed the National Standards for Parental/Family Involvement Program to assist schools, communities, and parental groups to implement effective parent's involvement programs

with the goal of improving student's academic performance (Epstein, 1995). (p. 708)

As stated by the National PTA (2000), "Effectively involving parents requires understanding the four key roles they play in comprehensive and inclusive parent involvement programs" (p. 3). According to Christenson and Sheridan (2001), the roles, which are consistent with those identified in the objectives of the National Education Goal 8, are teachers/nurturers, communicators/advisors, supporters/learners, and collaborators/decision makers.

In President Clinton's Goals 2000 Educate America Act of 1994, "participation of parents in school" was cited as Goal 8. The National Education Goals Report (1995) Goal 8: Parental Participation states "by the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (Objectives listed in Appendix A). According to Christenson (2001), the goal of family involvement with education is not merely to get families involved, but rather to connect important contexts for strengthening children's learning and development.

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement (1998), have found that most schools have a PTA. Having a PTA has proven to be vitally important to many schools in their success as a whole. The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) reminds our country of its obligations to children and provides parents and families with a powerful voice to speak on behalf of every child while providing the best tools for parents to help their children be successful students.

According to Zepeda and Langenbach (1999), the PTA represents an infrastructure that could facilitate the establishment of all types of partnerships. Members of the PTA meet to study problems, support teachers, volunteer in schools, provide workshops on parenting, and become informed and take action on issues regarding children and youth (PTA brochure, n.d.).

### Homework

Homework is an interesting topic of discussion among researchers today. Many questions arise when dealing with this issue: how much, too much, benefits, or detriment. Homework includes all work that is completed at home. Many times teachers assign work specifically to be done at home and other times the work brought home was just not completed in the time allotted at school.

“Schools have the responsibility of assigning meaningful work; students have the responsibility to complete it. Time spent on academic work at home is directly related to achievement” (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1994). Materials that children bring home often in the form of homework enlighten parents about their children’s capabilities and performance and engages them in relations that they would have been unlikely to initiate on their own (Callison, 2004; Clark, 1993; and Taylor, 2000).

According to Clark (1983) and Finn (1998), homework offers an opportunity for parents to show an interest and to take a direct role in their child’s schooling. Making certain that homework is completed, discussing the specifics of assignments and papers, explaining the assignments, checking accuracy, and

actively helping children complete assignments are all linked to student academic performance.

### Benefits for Teachers, Parents, Schools, and Students

A 1989 Gallup poll asked teachers to identify the most important problems facing public school in their community. They replied that “parent’s lack of interest/ support” was the most frequently cited problem, ranking substantially ahead of all other problems (Elam, 1989, p. 786). According to Christenson (1995), the benefits of parental involvement for teachers include but are not limited to recognition from parents for better interpersonal and teaching skills, higher ratings of teaching performance by principals, and greater satisfaction with their jobs, resulting in fewer requests for transfers. The benefits of being involved for parents include an increased understanding of the school program (Epstein, 1986),

Communication is a vital necessity in all relationships. In every way the link between home and school is a relationship. Callison (2004) states, “When parents and educators communicate effectively, positive relationships develop, problems are more easily solved, and students make greater progress” (p. 241). It is important to keep the lines of communication open and clear for the benefits of the students.

When parents are involved, students show improvement in grades, test scores, attitude toward schoolwork, behavior, self-esteem, completion of homework, academic perseverance, and participation in classroom

learning activities, lower drop out rates, fewer suspensions, and greater enrollment in postsecondary education. (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, p. 50)

### Role of School

Better results will be achieved in the partnership between home and schools if the schools initiate welcoming and encouraging parental involvement. According to National PTA Standards (1998), schools need to make it clear to the community that they value and need their input. As stated by Wolfendale and Bastiani (2000), a school's reputation for its approachability, the welcome it gives to parents, their inclusion in activities, is the whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Schools with the most successful parent involvement programs are those which offer a variety of ways parents can participate (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001).

Recognizing that parents differ greatly in their willingness, ability, and available time for involvement in school activities, the school should provide a continuum of options for parent participation. A 1993 Harris poll asked teachers to identify the issue that should receive the highest priority in the public education policy during the next few years. The teachers cited strengthening parents' roles in their children's learning as the most important issue (Louis Harris & Associates, 1993).

## Teacher – Parent Relationships

In order for schools to work effectively, teachers must respect the parents and parents must respect the teachers. It is imperative for there to be this mutual respect for the best interests of the students. The DES Plowden Report (1967) was the first major report in England and focuses on the theories written by Jean Piaget. The report states:

What matters most are the attitudes of teachers to parents and parents to teachers- whether there is genuine mutual respect, whether parents understand what the schools are doing for their individual children and teachers realize how dependent they are on parental support and involvement (p. 9).

When teachers initiate partnerships with parents the parents are more apt to participate in their children's education and teachers in turn perceive the children as being more actively involved. Parents of high school students who remain regularly informed about their children's progress can contribute to their academic success. Partnership between parents and teachers is integral to cultivating a productive learning environment at home and school. (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1994). Hornby (2000) suggests most parents prefer communication with teachers to be frequent and informal.

Schaffer and Gordon (2005) state mothers should help fathers stay connected to their daughters by supporting opportunities for them to be close. Mann (1994) reports that fathers play a critical role in how high their daughters aspire and in girls' future relationships with boys and men. In 1995, President

Clinton issued a memorandum requesting that all executive departments and agencies make a concerted effort to include fathers in their programs, policies, and research programs where appropriate and feasible. New research suggests that fathers' involvement in their children's schools and education does in fact make a difference in their children's academic success.

### Volunteering in Schools

Parents should be welcome in the schools, and their support and help sought by teachers, principals, and administrators to enhance the education of the students. Callison (2004) puts it clearly "when parents volunteer, both families and schools reap benefits that come in few other ways. Millions of dollars of volunteer services are performed by parents and family members each year in the public schools" (p. 65). Studies have concluded that volunteers express greater confidence in the schools where they have opportunities to participate regularly. Assisting in school or program events/activities communicates to a child, "I care about what you do here" Callison (2004).

Steinberg (as quoted in Finn (1998)) described parents who are "Disengaged"—that is, who are authoritarian in their interaction with their children, who fail to provide guidance or structure in the family setting, and who fail to provide the emotional support needed when the child encounters problems. Steinberg found that children whose parents are disengaged have the poorest developmental patterns.

## Summary

A great deal of research and analysis has been performed regarding parental involvement in children's education and the benefits it provides for the students, teachers and parents themselves. This section has cited several of these studies in an attempt to provide evidence that parental involvement is wanted as well as needed from the parents and teacher's perspectives alike and provides summary conclusions from these numerous studies theorizing that parental involvement is advantageous for the students. Yet the students' perspectives still remain unheard.

## Chapter III

### Method

Qualitative research places emphasis on words and feelings rather than on numbers. This style of research usually involves fewer subjects and deeper levels of involvement with each participant. This study is a qualitative case study which seeks to explore and understand high school student perspectives of parental involvement in their educations. Qualitative research does not measure, count or classify but focuses on the details of people's words and actions (Berg, 2004; Seidman, 1998; Yin, 1989). A case study often centers on delineating what is unique about the research design. They focus more on the questions asked and the relationship with the finished product than on the methods used (Merriam, 1998).

### Research Design

The purpose of this study was to determine what secondary students want and expect from their parents during their education since parents play a vital role in a child's life. Parental involvement is directly related to student educational success (Comer, 1986, Constantino, 2003, & Epstein, 1994, 1995). In order to more closely examine this connection it was essential to speak to the students to fully understand their perspectives. "At the heart of interviewing

research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth" (Seidman, 1998, p. 3). This research sample included five students, each interviewed individually. Data was then transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method to draw the conclusions of this study.

### Research Questions

The overall guiding question of this study was: What are high school students' perspectives of parental (family) involvement?

### Subordinate Questions

- (a) How much parental interaction do students want?
- (b) What types of interaction between students and parents seem to be most beneficial?

### Setting

The strength of this study was the inquiry into the feelings and emotions of each student interviewed by having the opportunity to meet with five students, talking openly and freely about their home lives and the participation with their parents and other family members. According to McLaughlin and Talbert (2001), today's students bring different levels of support, interests, and different academic and social needs into the schools.

Research was conducted in a large high school in a suburban metropolitan area. The school district encompasses Pre-K through grade 12, and

educates approximately 19,500 students within 27 schools (18 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 3 high schools, and 1 alternative high school). The ethnic makeup based upon fall enrollment, for the school where interviews were conducted, as of the 2003 – 2004 school year was: 73% Caucasian, 16% Black, 6% Asian, 3% Hispanic, and 3% Native American. Each school in the district has an active Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) with a district total of over 8,000 active members. Parents, grandparents, and business people volunteer more than 150,000 hours in the schools every year. The district also has over 250 formal partnerships with local businesses through Partners in Education programs.

### Access and Entry

In order to protect the rights of human research subjects the United States Government requires approval by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once approval was acquired from the Oklahoma State University IRB (Appendix E), I was able to contact the high school where the interviews were to take place.

Prior to entering the school to conduct interviews, the principal of the school was contacted and permission was sought to conduct the study. Purposive sampling (Merriam, 1998, Seidman, 1998) was used with the help of an expert, the high school counselor. Once permission was granted, I met with the counselor to discuss the study and the criteria for the students to be chosen (Pope, 2001). The counselor was familiar with the students and was aware of

their social categories, grades, ethnicity, and home life. Her assistance was necessary, with selection of students, to insure a broad research base.

Once the students were selected, I prepared letters to the subjects and their parents explaining the study and asking their permission to participate, along with Consent Forms and Assent Forms (Appendix D). Five students invited to participate returned their signed consent forms and agreed to participate in the study. All original participants completed the study.

### Participant Selection

The primary method used for data collection was semi-structured conversational interviews with each respondent. Five high school students were chosen by one of the school's counselors, who chose students she felt typified each of these general social categories: Athlete, Scholar, Popular, Rebel, and Average. These categories were chosen to draw a more diverse sample of students for the research. Subjects were chosen by purposeful sampling, using expert recommendation. Two sophomores, one junior, and two seniors participated in the study. Diversity in grade level gave more insight into how feelings change throughout the high school experience. Gender was also important in choosing students to represent different ideas, feelings, and opinions. Three girls and two boys were chosen to participate in this study.

## Organization of Interviews

Each interview was scheduled after the students' school schedules had been received. This was important so the interview took place at a convenient time for each student, when they would not be missing core class time. The student interviews were scheduled during their electives. Each student missed one class period in order to complete the interview.

The school counselor allowed the use of her office for the interviews. This was a familiar, comfortable, and private place for the students. It was important in the research that the students felt a sense of security and familiarity to be able to communicate their feelings and emotions freely and effectively. The sense of comfort that the environment provided contributed to the students' willingness to express themselves openly without feeling intimidated or intruded upon. The office environment also allowed for the assurance of privacy.

The interviews varied in length, from forty-five to seventy minutes. The interview process allowed the researcher to interact personally with each of the students. Each student's interview was distinct and personal.

According to Marshall and Rossman (as cited in Constantino, 2002), qualitative semi-structured interviews are much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories. An interview protocol adapted from Constantino (2002) was used to stimulate and uncover each student's viewpoints and ideas pertaining to parental involvement (Appendix C). The questions asked involved family involvement, school involvement, peers, and parenting styles pertaining to grades, friends, and other activities.

Each interview was different and took on a course of its own. The questions were open-ended and semi-structured which could be viewed, according to Spradley (1979), as “friendly conversations.” The questions were there as a guideline for the researcher, but did not necessarily get asked or responded to directly. With the open communication that each interview had the topics were covered and exciting opinions and feelings were expressed. Merriam (1998) defines semi-structured interviews as being:

Guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.

(p. 4)

All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher shortly after the conclusion of each interview. Field notes taken during the interview were added to the transcripts along with any reactions or details that may have been left out (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

### Ethical Considerations

All research was conducted within the guidelines of the Oklahoma State University’s Institutional Review Board. Once I had spoken with the counselor and she chose students who she felt would fit the social categories, she met with them each individually and asked them if they would like to participate. The students were not coerced to participate in the research but were given the

opportunity if they so desired. Once they expressed that they would participate, they were given the consent and assent forms to read with their parents to be signed and returned. After the five students had returned their forms, the counselor provided me with each student's schedule and home phone number. I then called each one of the participants and set up a convenient time to meet with them privately.

The interviews took place in the counselor's office to provide privacy and the comfort of a familiar place. The students came to the office to speak with me during the break in between classes. This enabled the students to not have attention drawn to them by being called out of class. After the conclusion of the interview they returned to class (if the interview was completed before the end of the class) with signed permission from the counselor.

In order to protect the privacy of each of the participants, pseudonyms were used with written and tape recorded materials. The interview transcriptions, tape recorded data, field notes, and research documentation are kept at the researcher's home.

### Data Analysis

After the interviews took place, the tape recordings were transcribed by the researcher to ensure that nothing was lost in translation. All pauses, silences, 'ums' and 'ahs' were noted, along with sighs, laughter, and tears. When working with qualitative data it is critical to capture the whole situation, as much as possible, not just words but body language, facial expressions, and long silences.

In some instances these characteristics of the interview may speak more loudly than the actual words spoken. Any field notes that had been taken during the interviews describing the previous examples were added to the transcriptions. It was through the use of triangulation of this data that themes emerged.

Once transcription was completed, careful reading of each interview began. After reading and re-reading the transcripts, several key topics became apparent. Many copies of each transcript were made so there was always a clean copy available to use.

Each transcribed interview was then cut up into parts and combined with other interviews using the constant comparative method. Merriam (1998) describes this method by comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. The object of this method is to seek patterns in the data. These patterns are then arranged in relationship to each other in the building of grounded theory through emergent themes. I had difficulty not including every part of each interview. It was extremely hard to discard feelings, views, and personal stories that were not relevant to this particular study. Once the interviews had been separated into like categories, related themes became apparent.

### Trustworthiness

Throughout this case study truthfulness (Henderson, 1991) was sought in a variety of manners: thick description of the research process and student interviews, prolonged engagement with the culture and school to be studied,

persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), triangulation of data (Silverman, 2000, Wolcott, 2001), peer debriefing with a fellow educator and referential adequacy (audit trail) of tape recorded material and progressive subjectivity (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the researcher provide the widest possible range of information for inclusion in the thick description through purposive sampling. The participants in this study were chosen through purposive sampling and described throughout this paper using thick description to enable readers to almost visualize the participants and the setting of the study through the use of quotations to convey feelings as well as the facts of the event. By using persistent observation through the triangulation of data including interviews, observations, and document reviews, identifying characteristics and themes relevant to the research emerged.

Peer debriefing (Mertens, 2005) was used to explore a disinterested peer's findings and conclusions of the study. It is important in qualitative research to have a peer who is a professional outside of the research itself who has some understanding of the study to analyze materials, look at emerging designs, and listen to the researcher's ideas, strategies, and concerns by providing objectivity and support (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

The audit trail of this study is shown here using categories by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- Raw data: interviews, field notes, and literary research

- Data reduction and analysis: constant comparative method and peer debriefing notes
- Data reconstruction: grounded theory
- Process notes: reflexive journal entries
- Materials related to intentions and dispositions: IRB approval, signed consent and assent forms, signed permission from principal, journal, and peer debriefing notes.
- Instrument development: protocol

### Summary

Methodology is a critical factor in any case study. In this study the methods by which the research was planned, executed and analyzed were very carefully considered and verified to not only ensure adherence to IRB standards in order to provide a valid basis for the study but also to ensure the integrity of the project.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

This research attempted to discover the perspectives of high school students on parental involvement in schools. In addition, the study sought to identify what types of interaction between students and parents seem to be the most beneficial to the students in their high school careers. A thorough analysis of the five interviews with high school students provides a deeper understanding of the student's views through themes that emerged from the qualitative data. This chapter will provide a discussion of the research and the themes that were a result of the analysis: Parental Involvement Through Student's Eyes, Listening, Casual Conversations, and Church/Religion. Each theme will be discussed and student perspectives will be included to support the various conclusions.

### Study Participants

Each of the five students in this study was assigned a student number based on the chronological order of the interviews. They were also assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Interviews were scheduled randomly at the students' convenience, therefore, neither interview scheduling nor student number assignment bore any subjective relation to individuals or specific characteristics in any way.

The first student interviewed was Mark, a senior in high school. Mark lives with his mother and father in a neighborhood within walking distance to the school. He grew up attending elementary and high school in the district. He attended a private school for middle school (grades sixth through eighth). Mark has one brother who is three years older than he is. His brother was very popular in high school, excelling both in academics and sports. He is now attending college at the University of Texas in Austin. Mark enjoys spending time there with his brother on breaks during the school year. Mark works part time and does not participate in many activities at school. He has a group of friends that he feels close and comfortable with. Mark's father works as an engineer for a company in the city and his mother has the ability to choose to stay home and care for the family. She is actively involved within the high school. Mark would be described as an average European American middle class student.

When I telephoned Mark to set up the interview, his voice caught me by surprise; it is very deep and strong. I was expecting him to be very strong and manly in stature when I met him. Mark is tall, thin, and a very nice looking young man. He was quiet and reserved at first but once he became more comfortable with me he loosened up and became himself which is very fun and humorous. According to a classmate, he is not rude or disrespectful in his classes, but he is a fun guy who might be seen as a class clown. Mark usually dresses stylishly in comfortable jeans and nice T-shirts. He does not currently have a girlfriend. He enjoys hanging out with his friends and watching movies and sports. Mark is an average student who works extremely hard to keep his grades up. He has a

private tutor who works with him several days a week to help him understand and comprehend what he is learning at school. He had trouble reading when he was young and that has carried over into high school in classes such as history, science, and English that require a significant amount of reading. He is doing much better, but has difficulty comprehending what he reads, and therefore has difficulty completing assignments.

Beth is a junior in high school. She also lives with her mother and father. She has an older brother who attends a junior college in the city. Beth grew up attending elementary, middle and high school within the district. She does not live within walking distance from the school. Before she was old enough to drive, she either rode the bus or rode with friends to school. Beth's father is a car salesman in the city and her mother works part time at a dry cleaner close to home. Beth has other family members that also work there. Beth has an open relationship with her mother and considers her to be one of her best friends. She has two close friends with whom she is in constant communication and others that she likes to "hang out" with but does not consider being as close. Beth is not involved in activities within the school. She works part time at a pizza place and enjoys having time to just be with her friends. Beth's family members are not actively involved in the school in any way. Beth would be described as a popular, European American, lower-middle class student. She is a pretty young lady who dresses trendy and has a fun and outgoing personality. She would not be described as the quiet or shy type. Beth is an average student. She does what is expected and that is about it, as far as school work is concerned. She plans on

going to college after graduating, but does not know where she would like to go (somewhere close) or what she wants to study. Beth does not currently have a boyfriend, but rather looks forward to the time she spends with her friends just hanging out.

Carly is a sophomore in high school. She is part of a blended family. Her mother and father divorced a few years ago due to her father's alcoholism, and Carly remembers it as an extremely hard time for her and her older brother. Carly's mother has since remarried and her stepfather has three children from a previous marriage. Her father is getting remarried in the summer and her stepmother has a daughter. Her father also has a son from a previous relationship. Beth's stepfather works long hours in the evening as a recruiter for the United States Military and her mother works full time in an office environment. Carly tried out for the school's color guard and recently made the team. She is very excited to be part of that program. She also participates in the Native American Society at the school. Carly is looking forward to making new friends in the color guard. Carly does not work yet; she is waiting until she turns sixteen and then plans to work and make money to purchase a car. Carly's parents are not actively involved in the school. Carly would be described as an average, Native American, lower-middle class student. Carly has a genuine spirit and is a lovely young lady. She has a very laid back personality. She is an average student with B and C grades. She enjoys the time she spends at school, but she does not have a close group of friends within the school. Her close friends attend other schools in the area. She likes to eat her lunch in the counselors' office

where she feels comfortable and enjoys talking to people as they come in and out. Carly is a bit overweight and has been attending Weight Watchers with her Aunt and Grandmother to lose weight and help her feel more confident. Becoming part of the color guard will hopefully help build her self esteem and give her the chance to make more friends within the school.

Jake is also a sophomore in high school. He lives with his mother in a neighborhood close to the school. Jake is an only child. He grew up attending elementary, middle and high school in the district. Jake's father passed away suddenly, at a young age (in his forties), while Jake was in middle school about five years ago. Jake has a close group of friends that give him comfort and strength through difficult times. He is involved at a non-denominational church where he has male role models who speak into his life through the youth program. His mother works part-time Monday through Thursday and is off on Fridays. She is very involved within the school. Jake would be described as an athletic scholar, European American, middle class student. Jake is a handsome young man with an athletic build. Jake is on the junior varsity football team and plans on joining pep club next year. He dresses in a stylish casual manner. He is shy to talk with, but has wonderful manners. Jake seems comfortable with who he is and confident in himself. He is very intelligent and this shows with the honors classes he takes. He is an 'A' student, who enjoys learning and the school environment. He plans on attending college and majoring in Business.

Julie is a senior in high school. She lives with her father, mother, and brother, who currently attends college. She grew up attending school in the

district and living in the same house. She continues to maintain friendships that she acquired as a young child with children in the neighborhood and schools. Julie's father has recently lost his job of many years due to lay offs and found a job in a new city about one hundred miles away. They currently have their home for sale and as soon as it sells, her mother will relocate to join her father. Julie will then be in college. Julie's mother works part time as a speech pathologist within the school district. Julie has been involved in many activities throughout her time in high school. She was on the swim team, LDI (Leadership Development Institute), and others that she had forgotten. She works part time throughout the school year as a hostess, at a restaurant and in the summers she enjoys being a lifeguard at the pool in her neighborhood. Julie says she had some difficult times throughout her high school journey, but has become a stronger person because of them. Her parents are not actively involved within the school. Julie would be considered a popular rebel, European American, middle class student. Julie is the life of the party and extremely spontaneous. She is a very cute young lady who dresses very trendy, but could also show up just about anywhere at anytime in her pajamas and slippers. Just being around her makes people feel happy. Julie is not afraid to speak what is on her mind or her opinions of others. She has many friends that she enjoys spending time with shopping, watching movies, surfing the web, and hanging out. She is dating someone who lives in another state while going to college.

Though I had asked the counselor to recommend students based on social categories, gender, and grade level, I did not look at her categorization of

the students before I interviewed them. Instead, I intentionally avoided reading that part of the information when I received it from her so it would not cause any bias in my questions, comments, or attitude with the students. I then looked at how the counselor had classified them after the interviews and realized we each saw different things. The counselor has known the students throughout their time in high school. I only spoke with them a short time on one occasion, but interestingly the Counselor and I defined two student's social categories differently.

## Research Results

Students, regardless of age, gender, and social description, seem to yearn for a meaningful relationship with their parents. The key is to listen and understand the student well enough to know what "intimate" means to them. Each student I interviewed is different in his/her desired amount of parental involvement and in their views of what parental involvement means, but each student did feel it played a vital role in their education as well as their future.

### Parental Involvement through Students' Eyes

#### *Parent Jobs*

This theme is important in understanding how parents are and can be involved based on the type of job they have and how often they are at work. It is also important to see how much time is available for dinners, talking, help with homework, participation in activities (such as PTA), ball clubs, dance recitals,

and so on. Only one student's mother stays home and takes care of the family. Three of the mothers work part time anywhere from twenty to thirty hours a week. Carly's mother works full time and is extremely tired when she comes home from work. Carly's stepfather is a recruiter for the military and works almost every evening. He is rarely home. Beth's father is a car salesman and works a different schedule every week. Mark's father is an engineer and is home for dinner and family activities each evening.

### *Family Traditions*

Family traditions can be as simple or complex as the family itself. Interestingly, when the students were asked about family traditions they immediately thought about holidays, such as Christmas and Thanksgiving. Carly enjoys going to her Aunt's house on Thanksgiving and her Grandma's on Christmas. Jake explains his traditions, "Um, I guess for Christmas everyone comes to our house so we can have breakfast and then we all go to Frederick, that's where lots more family live, and we go there for lunch and dinner and then come back." This is a special time for him and his mother. Mark talked briefly about family vacations and responded that they go on one every two years. He also said "We go out to eat after church every week, I don't know if that is a tradition or not." He then decided it could be considered a tradition because it is something that happens the same way each week and he can depend on it. Mark also explained, "I guess now that I think about it that I look forward to it each week because I know we will be together and we can talk or whatever." He was a

bit surprised after the words came out of his mouth. He sat silent for a second with a puzzled look on his face.

### *Jobs*

The idea of children working throughout their high school years is an on-going debate among parents and researchers. Some philosophies claim it is important to teach teens to have good work ethics, learn the value of a dollar, and earn their way, while others feel that expecting teens to work during these years does not allow them to be as involved in school, takes time away from their studies, and also keeps them from having a social life.

The students enjoyed talking about their jobs. Carly is the only one that does not have a job, but she does baby-sit and plans on working as soon as she turns sixteen in two months. She is excited about earning money to buy a car. Mark works close to the school at an animal hospital and boarding facility. His duties include walking the dogs, cleaning cages, and helping out wherever he is needed. He has worked there for three years. Julie has had a few jobs; she has been a life guard during the summer months and works as a hostess during the other part of the year. Beth works at a pizza place answering phones and running the register. She says, "It is not a pretty job, but it is spending money and if we're not busy I can do my homework." Jake is the entrepreneur of the bunch. He has an interest in computers and he builds web sites for individuals and a few small companies. His mother has even allowed him to turn the guest room into his office. Each of the students works for extra money for gas, clothes, cars, CD's,

and all the extras. They have all said their jobs have been known to keep them busy and out of trouble. Two of the students' parents encourage their children to work, but also warn of the importance of school and finishing their homework and having energy to complete other tasks such as school projects and chores around the home. Jake's mom seems to be the most encouraging. She promotes his web site business and has even brought him a few clients. He feels very proud and encouraged to do more with his business.

### *School Activities*

All of the students were proud of their school. They all enjoy going to football, basketball, and baseball games as well as other school activities. Jake plays football. He is on the junior varsity football team and enjoys playing the game. He is planning on being in the pep club and the National Honor Society next year. Carly is in the Native American Club and she just tried out for the color guard and made it. She is ecstatic about her accomplishment. She could not talk enough about it. Julie was on the swim team her freshman year and has been on LDI (Leadership Development Institution). LDI is a weekend during the school year (usually early fall) where 270 students (half boys and half girls) go to a camp and learn leadership skills through interactive hands-on activities.

The others students just enjoy hanging out with friends and attending school activities, but not necessarily participating in them. Each of the students agrees that the school offers a wide variety of activities in which to be involved. Some of them require people to try out but there are several other programs and

activities that welcome everyone who wants to be involved. As the students get older, it seems they lose some of the excitement of the activities and are looking past the high school setting and on to the future. This shows in their involvement in their prior grades compared to what they participate in now.

### *Future Plans and Goals*

Throughout the interviews I never questioned the students about future ambitions and goals, but it was clear through comments that each student made, this is an important topic. The students expressed their reason for working hard in high school being eligible for college and future success. As stated earlier, Mark plans on going into the military. He will be leaving for boot camp a few short weeks after graduation. Even though his plans take him somewhere other than full time college, he plans on taking a few college hours each semester at a community college on the military base. Julie, also a senior, has already been accepted to a state university not far from home. Neither her grade point average nor her ACT test scores were as high as the school requires, but she was accepted under academic probation. She is excited and plans to work very hard to stay in school. She does not know the career path that she will choose yet. Julie said, "I am keeping my options open."

Beth is working hard to get her GPA up to college admittance level. She admitted to taking it too easy in high school and not keeping up her grades. She said "they didn't seem important until I saw what the colleges were looking for,

now that my junior year is almost finished, I don't have much time to change it." She plans on attending a college here in the state after her graduation next year.

Jake is an extremely hard worker. His GPA as a sophomore is very high due to the honors classes he has already been taking. He is not sure what he wants to do later but would like to attend a prestigious university and study business.

Carly, also a sophomore, does not have "any idea" what she wants to do later in life. She has a love for children and has thought about teaching, but is not sure. This semester she has taken a photography class and has found a new interest. According to the counselor, she's good at it. She is planning on attending college after graduating from high school, but is not set on any college in particular.

### *Friends*

Friendship is crucial during the high school years. Each of the five students placed significant emphasis on their friends and the amount of time they spent with them. Beth said, "I have two best friends and we're always together, but we don't really get involved in extra-curricular activities. We just like to do our own thing outside of school, you know, hang-out." She even went on to say "when my friends and I get our work schedules we get together and plan what we are going to do when we are all off."

Carly, who has just made color guard, said, "Two of my friends got me interested in color guard actually, and we have classes together also." She

enjoys the time she spends with them and that they now have the same activities in common.

Both Jake and Mark have grown up in the same school district and even though they do not know each other or have the same group of friends their situations are similar. Both have grown up with a group of close friends that they feel comfortable. Their groups are interested and participate in the same activities. Their bonds are tight and they have an inward security built around the relationships that they have made with these friends.

Julie is the only one of the students who claims to have friends that are all unique and different. Julie said, "We all have different interests, classes, and jobs, but we just click and enjoy hanging out." She compared the group of friends to a well-known movie, *The Breakfast Club*. Julie began to talk about how her close group of friends has changed throughout her high school career. The friends that she was close to in middle school are still her good friends now, but for a few years they drifted apart because of choices she had made, and she became friends with others that her parents did not know about and would not have approved of.

When the students were asked if their parents knew all of their friends the responses were the same. They all said that their parents knew their good friends but that they had other friends that they did not know. Beth explained, "They know like my best friends, the ones I am with all the time...like they know Lisa and Christy and some people that I like to hang out with once in a while, but they don't know every one of them." When questioned more about this Mark

said, “There are people that I don’t always hang around, but I might see at a party or a game or something and I’ll talk to them.”

I inquired more about this by asking each of them if there was a reason for their parents not knowing each of their friends. Beth was quick to respond, “No, it’s just I never really bring them home ‘cause we just kind of do casual or group things.” Others commented on the fact that they were not trying to hide them or keep them a secret but rather their friendship was not deep enough to bring them home.

Julie went on to explain a very difficult time in her life where she separated herself from her family and her old group of friends due to some issues she was facing. Her parents did not question her or her choice of friends during this period of time.

There was importance in understanding the complexity of the relationships the parents had with their child’s friends due to the fact that it is a significant way for them to be involved with their child. When the students were questioned about their family supporting their friendships they all responded with an overwhelming “Yes.” Beth was happy and excited to talk about the support of her family.

As far as I know they [parents] love my friends, they haven’t told me any different [laughing]. My friends are very close to my mom, they consider my mom like one of their moms and, I don’t know, but I am also really close to their mom. We all have thick relationships.

Her expressions, as well as descriptions of the things that she, her mom and friends do together, showed me that this was meaningful to her. It is important to her that her mom likes her friends and her friends like her mom.

Mark and Jake both included food in their comments. They both talked of friends coming over for dinner or just to hang out. Jake said, "My mom makes dinner for us or if it's not dinner time she'll fix us a snack while we hang out or watch a movie or whatever." It was obvious that Mark and Jake both feel complete comfort in bringing friends to their home. They are confident that it is accepted and to some degree promoted.

#### *Unwelcome Comparisons*

Each student was asked if they were compared to others by their parents. The girls all responded with a quick and loud, "Yes". Beth replied,

My mom does a lot. I have a friend who is, like, always respectful and really nice and she has really never done anything, like, really bad so if I say something rude to my mom and she doesn't like it, she says would Lisa talk like that to her parents. I mean she like always brings that up.

As she talked it was obvious that this reaction bothered her.

Julie is compared to her older brother. "My brother is the holiest of all holy and they don't know what to do with me so they say things like, see how your brother does this, maybe you should take what he is doing and learn from it." To deepen my understanding of Julie's feelings on this matter I asked how her being compared to her brother made her feel. She answered:

Um, not very good, but like whenever I ask why are you comparing me to my brother, they [her parents] say, "We're not comparing you. You guys just have different strengths, like your brother doesn't know how to deal with social situations and you are a little overly good in social situations." They compare me to my brother also. They say things like "make some new friends like your sister." So I guess we both get that.

Jake felt that he and his friends were too much alike for there to be any comparisons made. They make the same grades, play the same sports, attend the same church, and have the same extra activities. He said, "I have never really thought of it before, we really do all the same stuff."

### *Cell Phones*

Several students discussed cell phones and the ability of the parents to know where they were at all times. Jake said, "I have a cell phone and my mom calls and checks up on me quite a bit, but it doesn't bother me, I have nothing to hide." Beth talked briefly about phones and parents calling and said it was just part of being a teenager. She referred to her parents as caring enough to call and make sure she was where she said she would be and doing she said she would be doing. Mark said, "I do have a cell phone, but not for my parents to call and check in, but for them to tell me if they are going somewhere or if plans have changed. It is more in case I need something."

## *Grades*

Each of the students agreed that grades were an issue at home. They all agree that their parents want them to do the best that they can do. Casually Beth said, "I bring home the report card and they'll ask me like if I have a lower grade than they think I could have done better in and then they'll tell me to make sure I do my homework and study more." Jake is a very intelligent young man. He has taken honors classes as a freshman and now as a sophomore. His grade point average is high and he works hard to keep it that way. He informed me that his mom has only questioned his grades once and that was because he made an 89% in a class and the teacher would not give him an "A". The "B" visibly still upsets him.

Julie claims to be an average student. She told me a story of an incident after coming home with a report card of straight "C's". "My mom would sit down with me and make me memorize my study guides, like that is the only time I would study is if she would sit me down and go over every single one with me until I got it. It would make me insane." She went on to explain in more detail the feelings that this causes. She did not understand what studying for one test would do. She does respect her parents and acknowledges that they are just trying to help in the only way they know how.

Several of the students mentioned that if and when they did make poor grades there were repercussions at home. Julie stated, "If I get less than a 'C' I get grounded from my car until the next report card and sometimes I can't leave the house [grounded]." Mark said, "It's a lot more my dad. He takes the car away,

but just for school. I can drive to work and on the weekends. It's not that bad."

Carly said, "There really is not any punishment, they [her parents] just tell me to try harder and do better next time. Maybe do extra credit and stuff like that." Beth said, "My parents might say something like, I think you could have done better, but they're nice about it. I don't get in trouble or anything."

The students each took responsibility for their own grades and placed no blame on other people or circumstances. Beth has found that "it's usually something that I have done. I guess like I mean any bad grade that I've got is because I didn't really try or put any effort into doing my work." Julie says her bad grades are a result of: "not trying, lack of effort, laziness, and an attitude like I'll let this one slide, I'll let this one slide too."

### *Teachers*

The topic of teachers oddly enough, was only mentioned briefly by a few students. I was surprised but the more I thought about it the more I realized that the interview was focused more on the family and not on other issues surrounding their education. Beth gave her English teacher a compliment. "My English teacher is really good about being available if you need to come in and talk to her you can come in after school and have a conference with her and stuff like that which is really nice." Other students agreed that teachers were willing to help if students needed extra help. Mark has found that most of the teachers are encouraging and help with homework because they know he can do better and give him the opportunity to do so. After a long pause Beth explained more: "most

of the teachers are like, if you need to talk to me I'm here. It's really nice to have teachers that seem like they really care and actually like to help you whenever you need help."

### *Parent Communication with Teachers and Schools*

One of the students informed me that their parents had never been into the school. "Oh my gosh, [laughing] I don't think they ever come up here." Two other students' parents have only been into the school to check their child in or out of school. Carly laughed and then said, "I don't think my mom has ever been up here besides picking me up and well, maybe to enroll me." Carly mentioned that once the football games start in the fall and the color guard was active and not just practicing that hopefully her parents would be up at the school more.

Because of Mark's learning difficulties his parents are in communication with the teachers quite often. The teachers at the school have e-mail and homework sites that can be checked at home. If Mark's parents have any questions or concerns they have the ability to e-mail the teacher. I asked Mark if all the communication between home and school bothered him in any way. "I don't really mind, I guess it's better for my parents to e-mail or call the teachers than it is for the teachers to call them [laughing]." Mark's mom is involved in the PTSA. "My mom comes up here and sells tickets for stuff, like prom bids and stuff."

Jake's mom is also involved at the school in many ways. Jake said, "She is in the PTSA and she organizes, plans, and calls parents to come to the school

to volunteer and help teachers and um, she helps at all the dances and just a lot of stuff.” We discussed how his mother’s involvement made him feel and Jake said, “A lot of times when she is up here [school] I don’t even know about it.” He was proud of his mom for helping. He shows no signs of embarrassment or shyness of the matter.

Through these findings, it is noteworthy that every one of the students interviewed valued and respected their parents’ involvement in their lives in even the most intimate of circumstances. Furthermore it is very apparent that the amount of involvement from parents is affected by a variety of different factors including the parents’ career demands, students’ friendships, after-school jobs, extra-curricular school related activities, academic performance and others.

## Listening

### *Students’ Opinions of Parental Involvement*

I asked the students if they had any advice on how parents could be more supportive of their children. Beth sincerely spoke on the issue:

I guess just talk to them and listen to them like when they have something to tell them, just make sure that they are not opinionated about their problems just be there to help them and talk to them and give them advice. They can say something if there is something productive to say, but don’t just try to fix it because sometimes there is not a fix.

Each of the students stressed the importance of parents listening to their children. They described the frustration they feel when they talk to their parents

and either their parents do not listen or try to solve their problems. Beth said, "Parents should not try to tell their kids what to do, like if they like need to talk to you like don't try to make them do what you want them to do... and don't make an example out of their friends, that's the worst." Julie also gave her words of wisdom: "Let kids make some of their own decisions because if parents are too strict when they get older they're going to go crazy... and do worse stuff because they had never had the chance to do anything."

### *Student Advice to Parents*

At the end of the interview each student was asked an open ended question: How can parents be more involved with their children? Their responses varied, but commonalities existed. Mark said, "It's important to know your child's teachers and the classes they are taking." During his interview the involvement between his parents and teachers became apparent. He talked about some of his friends whose parents have no clue about their child's classes and teachers and when their grades come out the parents cannot figure out what went wrong. This was his reason for his statement.

Beth showed wisdom with what she had to say:

I would say, um, whenever they're out [kids], keep in contact with them because you don't really know what their doing. I mean call them regularly. Um, just listen to them when they have something to talk about, um and get involved in their school work because it's easy for a kid to get

off track and start doing bad in school if they don't have anybody to make sure that they are on track.

Beth was able to respond to this question quickly. She did not ponder the question, but almost felt that she was relieved to be able to speak and be heard.

Carly also responded quickly, but her response had more heart strings attached. She did not cry, but she was saddened. She said, "Parents could come up to school and get involved in the PTSA, maybe go to back to school night and go to their child's competitions and games." It was obvious that her parents' presence or lack thereof was extremely important to her. Her parents' involvement is desired by her.

Students are just like anyone else, they want to be heard and respected by their parents especially when it comes to issues that involve themselves. It is not only important for parents to be involved but for them to listen to their kids' wants and needs and respond to that, not just dictate their lives to them.

### *Casual Conversations*

High school is a difficult time for teenagers regardless of grade, gender, or social description. Each student was asked how their families talk about the pressures they are faced with and interestingly they all responded with answers pertaining to sex, alcohol, and partying. Carly was the only one who brought up family meetings. She said, "Most of the time we have a family meeting when my step sisters and brother are in town since they don't know the rules."

She went on to describe the meetings and how uncomfortable it was to discuss some of the topics as a family versus one-on-one.

Jake thought for a moment; we then had a conversation about how responsible he is and the choices he has made in the past to ensure trust between he and his mom. He said, “My mom tells me to make sure that I have friends that are smart and make good decisions. Sometimes my mom brings up things in the car, but it’s just casual conversation.”

Beth’s comments were similar to Jake’s. She said, “My mom usually brings that stuff up in casual conversations. Sometimes she mentions stuff but nothing like, ‘sit down and listen to me’. Beth described her situation a little more in depth and it was apparent that she felt comfortable to speak with her mom about arising issues but not necessarily with her father.

### *When Issues Arise*

As the students were talking about pressures that they are faced with, a few of them briefly discussed what happens in their homes when problems or issues arise. Beth talked openly about the relationship she has with her mother. She believed they had built it on trust and if things go wrong or problems arise she can and does go straight to her mom. She also included her friends in her inner circle. She said,

There has been a time that two of my friends and I sat down with my mom and discussed a hard topic and she was understanding and kind to us.

She was not judgmental and did not accuse us of doing anything wrong.

She was helpful and loving to all of us.

Beth thinks highly of her mother based on the relationship that they have together.

Carly interestingly brought her brother into the conversation at this point.

Since he is older he has experienced many of the pressures and issues that she is faced with and if she needs help she said, "I would call my mom or my brother. It is sometimes easier to talk to him. He has been there, done that, and he gives pretty good advice."

One student talked honestly about a tough time in her high school career.

Julie, as stated earlier, had a core group of friends in middle school and somewhere during her high school career they started drifting apart. She talked about how they all became interested in different things. Some examples of extracurricular activities she gave were sports, S.U.N, jobs, boyfriends and girlfriends. She never lost touch with them altogether, but they were not as close as before. She started making new friends and hanging around with a different crowd. Before long she was participating in activities that were not the norm. She was partying, drinking, smoking, skipping classes, and before long using drugs. Julie went down this road for quite awhile before her parents found out. Julie explains the day her parents found out:

Well, when they found out, my dad grabbed my arm. I was asleep in bed and he pulled me out of the bed. He had found half a cigarette in my car and the school had called and said they had reason to believe that I was

doing some drugs. I was coming down off cocaine and hadn't slept in like three days, I was like, let me sleep cause I'm not even thinking straight otherwise I'd be like, I don't know, those aren't mine.

Julie has changed and is back to her same old self again. She is hanging around with the group of friends she did in middle school and others she has made along the way. She was not sad about the struggles she had during her time in high school and assured me it helped make her the person she is today. Although there was more to the story that did cause sadness, Julie said "once my parents found out they were like we are not telling anyone, no one finds out...nobody not even grandparents, not your brother, you can't tell anybody... you'll just stay home through all your withdrawals." Julie still did not know exactly the reason for the reaction other than they were embarrassed and did not have a clue how to deal with the situation. Even now it is never brought up or discussed. She claims there is still more to the story that they don't know, more that she would like to share and explain, but she feels that it should be kept silent. She has opened up to her friends and they have been wonderful and supportive and given her strength to make it through the hard times.

The importance of casual conversation between parents and children cannot be overstated. It is extremely beneficial for both parents and kids to maintain an open understanding relationship through this type of interaction. Important details can be revealed to both parent and child through relaxed communication that may not otherwise be discovered.

## *Church/Religion*

Including church/religion in the findings of this research study was important mainly because it was not a question on the interview protocol but came up in each of the five interviews. Three of the students claimed that being a Christian was an important factor in the person that they were and in order to describe themselves church played a role. Carly goes to church with her mom and she was quick to point out that they go to two separate buildings and the youth service is geared for youth and is entertaining and not boring. Julie is not a member of a church, but she does enjoy going with her friends. Both Carly and Jake look forward to going to church camp each summer and were saddened to find that because of activities they are involved with at school and had already committed to neither of them would be able to attend camp this summer.

Jake has been very involved at his church. He is an active member of the youth group where many of his friends also attend. He enjoys his church activities and has some strong mentors there within the youth group. "The youth pastor and the parents that help out are awesome." It is important for Jake to have male role models in his life since he lost his father at a young age. He has a comfort and a bond with the people that attend the church.

Although each student did not discuss church, the effects of church relationships and church activities appeared to have a significant impact in the socialization and development of those that were involved.

## Summary

Hearing from the students themselves was very compelling throughout this interview process, not only to validate some of the theory of the benefit of parental involvement in education, but to get a glimpse into the hearts of the objects of that education, the students. Although strikingly diverse in their backgrounds, the students interviewed in this study are very similar in their thoughts on the subject of parental involvement. No matter how much teenagers seem to want to be independent of their parents, their thoughts tend to gravitate toward a longing to have their parents involved in their education and their lives in general.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to seek to understand high school students' feelings and opinions pertaining to parental involvement. This qualitative study involved interviewing five high school students, transcribing the data collected, and analyzing it to have a deeper understanding of the students' feelings. The research question was:

How do high school students view parental involvement in schools?

### Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study include the small number of participants, the limited number of ethnically diverse participants, and researcher bias. The small number of participants chosen through purposive sampling supplied the research with various ways parental involvement is portrayed. In hind sight, when I spoke with the counselor about choosing participants based on social categories, grade level, and gender, I should have addressed ethnicity to possibly provide a more diverse pool.

## Implications

This study supports previous research pertaining to the need of parental involvement. Furthermore, it adds depth into the students' perspectives pertaining to parental involvement, which is an area that has received very little attention. These high school students not only need the involvement of their parents in their lives, but they desire it. By carefully listening to the students and reading their interviews it is overwhelmingly apparent that this is so.

The findings of this study support Epstein's six typologies: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. The students interviewed stressed communication and guidance (decision making) the most. Although, throughout the interviews each of the six typologies were discussed.

All of the students expressed a desire for their parents to be involved in their education, though they differed in the degree and manner of the desired involvement. Two of the students' parents were already participating within the school through various ways (previously described) and this pleased the students. They were proud of their parents' involvement and were not bothered by their presence within the school. I do believe that these student's feelings would be different if their parents had had more interaction with them at the times they were at school. Jake, as stated earlier, pointed out that sometimes he doesn't even know his mom has been at the school.

The other three students wanted their parents to be more involved with their school environment. They each commented on the fact that their parents

were hardly ever at the school. They would have liked their parents to have attended “back to school nights” and “open house.” Julie commented on an event that her parents did not attend pertaining to college.

By “being involved in their child’s education” the students interviewed felt I was speaking mainly about the school itself, but as the interview progressed and they became more comfortable with me and the situation, they opened up more about the environment of their homes. Each student felt proud when he/she was asked by their parents to see their projects or papers that they had done well on. They also liked to be able to ask for help on homework, but felt that some of their work was too difficult for their parents to understand. Jake said, “I usually just ask my friends about homework because a lot of it my mom can’t help me with because she never did any of it.” Carly’s stepfather helps her with her math homework. She commented, “He’s good at that stuff.”

#### *For Parents*

### **Don’t act and react.....interact!**

Each of the students had a realization about how their parents are involved. When first asked about the involvement of their parents they thought about the school itself, and it became apparent that each student’s parents were involved in an assortment of ways. The ways parents were involved differed depending on the family and the families’ framework. There is not a perfect book or explanation about what makes the perfect parent or the best way to be involved with your teenager, but there is a manual to read. The manual is the

teenager. Parents need to look into and see beyond the exterior of their children and listen and learn from them. Teenagers all have some things in common, but each one is different and unique and offers and plethora of information if one would just listen and possibly observe. All children are not vocal; some must be listened to and heard by watching and looking beyond the obvious and into the not so obvious.

In the students' opinions some ways mentioned to stay involved with children are going to church together, having dinner together as a family whenever possible (even though it is hard with everyone's schedules), having and participating in family traditions, believing in, encouraging, supporting and standing behind your child, being open and honest, having casual conversations, and most of all listening to your child.

### *For Schools*

The children of today are the future of tomorrow. Parents need to look at the schools as partners in their child's education, but recognize the school is not the only place where learning is occurring. Parents need to be aware of the role they play in their child's education. The schools facilitate the learning process, but that needs to be supported at home through a variety of avenues. When children are young they need help with homework, science fair projects, and rides to and from extra curricular activities. As they get older they become more independent and do many things for themselves as they begin a process of separation from their parents. Children of high school age do need to have

independence and responsibilities of their own, but parents still need to not only supervise but take an active role in helping them make the decisions they need to make, guiding them without being insulting or commanding (Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander, 2000). Families are more complex and diverse than in the past, but that does not change the need or the desire for the role of the parent. If anything the children need more of their parents' influence and guidance. As the children start to gain more independence it seems as the parents feel pushed away and experience a bit of separation from their child. These feelings are normal, but it is important during this time not to separate completely but to stay involved and be aware of not only the activities the child is involved in but the relationships and the decisions the child are making. The school is a significant way for parents to stay connected to their child. Parents need to know their child's schedule, teachers, principal, and counselors. Parents need to be familiar with the school. If parents can be involved at the school through the Parent Teacher Student Association or other avenues it is a great benefit to the parents, students, school, the community. With heavy schedules that may not be an option and the parents should not feel badly for not being able to participate in those ways, but should make every effort to be familiar with the school their child is attending. The students whose families were more involved in the school had more pride in the school and the community than those who were not. Students also had a better feeling of belonging and fitting in than the students who were not involved in activities and whose parents were not involved in any way.

### *For Friends*

Parents also need to know their child's friends. The students that were interviewed felt a comfort about their parents knowing their friends and being accepting of them. It was important for the participants to be able to have their friends over to their homes without feeling embarrassed. Each of the student's friends shared common life goals. This is interesting to see how at a young age children surround themselves with not only people whom they are comfortable with but who share common goals, dreams, and ambitions. Beth and Julie both had friends who wanted to have a good time, get through high school and go to college, but neither had a direct path they wanted to travel. Mark and Carly cherished the comfort, security, and acceptance of their friends. Jake shared with his friends: the love of sports, strong grades, and a passion for the future. Parents need to be observant of the similarities in their child and their child's friends and build them up in those areas. The confusing part is knowing how much to be involved. From the students' suggestions, the answer lies within each individual child. Each student stressed a desire to be appreciated and accepted for who he or she was. Children need to have the feeling of comfort, safety, and support in their home and their families. High school is a confusing and difficult time and students need a solid strong ground to back them up. Friends form their support system during this time in their lives. Children during this time do not need to be compared to others but need to be built up by their families for their strengths and encouraged in their weaknesses.

Children are insightful. They have interesting and fresh ways of looking at things. There is knowledge to be learned from listening and observing students and giving them an opportunity to be involved in the planning and governing of schools.

### Recommendations

The case study represented by this research pertains to the five students' perspectives on parental involvement. The key findings suggest that students desire interaction with and involvement from their parents. This study had limited diversity with gender, social status, family structure, ethnicity, and different levels of school achievement and participation. Future studies are encouraged to replicate this study in rural, more culturally and ethnically diverse areas to determine the degree in which the findings remain consistent. Further, it would be interesting to replicate this study with low achieving students who are not actively involved with the school in positive ways but may be experiencing difficulties with the school environment.

### What I Have Learned as a Researcher

I have learned that I have many biases when it comes to parental involvement. I do not see any reason for selfish behavior when it comes to children. I believe that each and every child is different and that they need different amounts and kinds of parental involvement. Before starting this research I felt that parental involvement meant parents being involved at and within the

schools, but throughout this wonderful process I have learned that parental involvement encompasses all involvement parents have with their children in and out of school. After my involvement with this study, have a deeper passion and interest in the subject of parental involvement and the students' perspectives. There is little research written thus far on student perspectives and desires and I believe with all that I am that there is knowledge to be gained from the students themselves. There are large amounts of research on the perspectives of teachers, administration, and the parents, but why not the students? Aren't they the reason we are all there...to teach and guide them? I feel the students have some missing pieces of the research. Since doing this research I have a realization that parental involvement encompasses each and everything parents do. Parental involvement does not just occur at school. The school is a very important role in the child's life and the family itself, but it is just one way for parental involvement to reveal itself. Parents are the child's first teachers. They lay the foundation for what is going to be built upon by the teachers, the schools, and life. It is also the role of the parents to provide support and assistance throughout their child's educational career. This is where I think I have learned the most. If the parents take pride in the school and the environment in which their child is spending a majority of their time then the students, in return, have a better sense of pride and belonging. In saying that, it is important for me to stress that being involved at the school is a great way to know the environment in which the child is learning including teachers, administrators, friends, counselors, but it is not the only way. According to the student's interviewed, supporting the school

can also happen at home through knowing the child's schedule, classes, teachers' names and personalities, assignments, and extra activities, and most importantly by supporting and believing in the child.

It is important for every child to be involved somewhere in the school. This gives them the opportunity to meet and associate with people they might not have met another way. Their involvement within the school gives students a sense of belonging and pride in their school. Students expressed a desire for their parents to be interested in their school work. Students feel proud when they complete a big project, a paper, or have studied hard for a test. Parents need to acknowledge students' efforts and applaud their accomplishments. Students also have a strong desire for their parents to attend their events such as: games, recitals, programs. This is the area that I felt the strongest desire from them. They each longed for their family members' attendance at their extracurricular events.

### Concluding Remarks

This case study shows that high school students desire parental involvement in their education. Parental involvement in children's education entails more than helping with homework and attending school functions. Parental involvement involves the interaction of parents and children throughout the journey of their entire education. Schools need to place importance on promoting parental involvement through a variety of ways to draw response from

parents. Parental involvement is critical in the success of children's educational futures.

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## APPENDIX A

### National Education Goals Report Goal 8 Objectives:

- Every state will develop policies to assist local school and local educational agencies to establish programs for increasing partnership that respond to the carrying needs of parents and the home, including parents of children who are disadvantaged or bilingual, or parents of children with disabilities.
- Every School will actively engage parents and families in a partnership which supports the academic work of children at home and shared educational decision making at school.
- Parents and families will help to ensure that schools are adequately supported and will hold schools and teachers to high standards of accountability (National Education Goals Panel, 1995, p. 13).

## Appendix B

### Study Sample of Interviewed Students

<b>Subject Number</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Social Description</b>
1 (Mark)	Senior	Male	Average
2 (Beth)	Junior	Female	Popular
3 (Carly)	Sophomore	Female	Average
4 (Jake)	Sophomore	Male	Scholar/Athlete
5 (Julie)	Senior	Female	Popular/Rebel

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

#### 1. Tell me about your family. (Family Involvement)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Size of family (who lives in home... be specific. If not parents, why)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Parents (s) work outside the home (what do they do)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Likes and dislikes about your family (size, structure, ect)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfaction with where subject lives (describe home and neighborhood)
- \_\_\_\_\_ What traditions do you and your family hold dear?
- \_\_\_\_\_ How does your family talk with you about the pressures you are faced with?

#### 2. Tell me about how you feel about school. (School Involvement)

##### \_\_\_\_\_ School encouragement/discouragement of subject

- What about your school encourages you to do well in classes and participate in activities?
- How does the school promote your family's involvement?
- How can the school do anything to influence your family or friends to become more involved? Can you give me an example?

##### \_\_\_\_\_ After school activities (Level of involvement)

##### \_\_\_\_\_ Important non-school related activities

##### \_\_\_\_\_ Information about job

- Why do you have a job?
- How do you handle your job and school?

What types of strategies do you employ to make sure you get everything done?

- Are your parents supportive?

##### \_\_\_\_\_ Peer involvement with school activity

- Are your close friends involved in the same activities you are? If yes, why is it important for you and your friends to be involved in the same things? If not, why not?
- What kinds of differences in activities are there between you and your friends?
- Are your parents supportive of your friends? How do they let you know their feelings?

#### 3. Tell me about how your family is involved with you, your friends, and your school. (Parenting Style)

##### \_\_\_\_\_ Family expectation of/involvement in school

- Does your family know that you have your work completed? How?
- Who do you go to for help and why?
- What kind of school events are your family members involved in?
- How does your family promote school involvement?
- How often are your parents at school?

- What types of things could parents do to be more supportive of their children?

\_\_\_\_\_ **Family expectation of grades**

- What do your parents think and discuss with you about your grades?
- Is it important to you and/or your friends to do well in school? Why or why not?
- How does your family involve your friends as a reason for good/bad grades?
- Does your family ever use a friend who does better than you as an example for you to follow? Give an example.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Consequences for poor performance**

- What happens when things do not go well in school?
  - What do your parents think about your schoolwork?
  - What do you think the reason is for poor grades when they happen?
- Does it bother you?

\_\_\_\_\_ **Family monitoring of school activities.**

- How do you feel when your family contacts your teachers?
- What kinds of things do you and your family discuss about school and school activities?
- How does your family feel about contacting the school? Do they avoid it? Why or why not?

\_\_\_\_\_ **Family impression of relationship with subject's friends**

- Does your family know all your friends? Why do they or don't they know...
- How does your family encourage/discourage particular friends, kinds of friends?
- Are all your friends welcome at your house?
- What kinds of advice about friends do your parents give you when it comes to school and school activities?

## Appendix D

### Human Subject Research Consent Form

Oklahoma State University

Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Project Title: The effects of parental Involvement in students' engagement in their educational career.

Investigators:       Faith Whitfield       Dr. Pamela Brown (Faculty Advisor)

Purpose of This Research/Project

The purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of the different levels of involvement students experience from their parents in their educational lives and how that involvement or lack thereof impacts their educational experience.

Procedures

The procedures for this study include individual interviews with 5 students. Interviews will be scheduled with students at Putnam City North High School. Interviews will take place at school during a time acceptable to the student, parents, and staff. Interviews will last from 30 to 60 minutes and will be audiotape recorded, and then transcribed at a later point in time.

Risks

There are no risks to you as a subject in this study. One potential discomfort to you might be discussing your personal feelings or experiences related to your friends, families, and school.

Benefits of this Project

This research should provide insights that will help educators have a better understanding of the views of the students on what they desire from the involvement of their parents in partnership with the school. Based on the results

of the research educators may gain knowledge that will help in developing strategies and integral programs to help bridge the gap between schools and families.

Students who participate in the research should gain a greater degree of self-awareness about their relations with their parents and the school through the interview participation.

#### Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anything you say to me will be held in the strictest of confidence. I will never share your identity with anyone. Only I will know who you are. Your name will never be used in the report of this study, and when I transcribe the tapes, I will give you a pseudonym. Your name will never be included, so you will be anonymous.

#### Compensation

No monetary compensation is connected to participation in this study.

#### Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions during interviews.

#### Research Approval

#### Your Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

To participate in a tape-recorded interview lasting between 30-60 minutes  
To review a transcript of my interview and make and changes I see fit  
To be available for a potential follow-up interview

#### Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give consent for my child to participate in this project.  
If my child participates, he/she may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Faith Whitfield, Investigator (405) 728-8139  
Dr. Pamela Brown, Faculty Advisor (405)  
\_\_\_\_\_, IRB Research Division

Subjects and parents must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.

Certification of Primary Investigator

This informed consent has been created to ensure that the students and parents involved in the project understand the purpose of the research, procedures, of the research, risks to the subjects, and benefits of the research. I agree to allow any student the opportunity to remove themselves from this study at any time of their choosing.

\_\_\_\_\_, 2004\_\_\_\_\_

## Oklahoma State University

### \Informed Consent for Audio Tape Recording of Interviews

Project Title: The effects of parental Involvement in students' engagement in their educational career.

Investigators: Faith Whitfield Dr. Pamela Brown (faculty advisor)

In order to fulfill requirements of human subject research at Oklahoma State University, you and your parent(s) are required to provide a separate signature of consent for audiotaping. The procedures for audiotaping are as follows:

1. You will not be identified on the tape. You will be referred to as "subject 1, subject 2, etc."
2. Faith Whitfield will conduct the interview. Only she will know who you are. She will not reveal your identity to anyone.
3. You will have the opportunity to review the written transcript of your interview and make any changes, corrections, additions, or deletions you deem appropriate. You are free to change your mind about your answers when you view the transcript.
4. You will have the right to listen to the tape of your interview if you wish.
5. The tape of your interview will be located in a secure location that no one will have access to. No information on the tape will ever be revealed to anyone.
6. You have the right to not answer any question that is asked of you.
7. You can remove yourself from the interview process at any time.
8. Nothing said in your interview will ever be levied against you for any reason nor will anything you say be shared with anyone outside of this study.

I agree to abide by the procedures above in the audio tape recording and transcription of the interviews used in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_, 2004 \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to allow my child to participate in an audiotape-recorded interview for this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Name(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Human Subject Research Assent Form

Oklahoma State University

## Informed Assent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Project Title: The effects of parental Involvement in students' engagement in their educational career.

Investigators: Faith Whitfield Dr. Pamela Brown (Faculty Advisor)

### Purpose of This Research/Project

The purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of the different levels of involvement students experience from their parents in their educational lives and how that involvement or lack thereof impacts their educational experience.

### Procedures

The procedures for this study include individual interviews with 5 students. Interviews will be scheduled with students at Putnam City North High School. Interviews will take place at school during a time acceptable to the student, parents, and staff. Interviews will last from 30 to 60 minutes and will be audiotape recorded, and then transcribed at a later point in time.

### Risks

There are no risks to you as a subject in this study. One potential discomfort to you might be discussing your personal feelings or experiences related to your friends, families, and school.

### Benefits of this Project

This research should provide insights that will help educators have a better understanding of the views of the students on what they desire from the involvement of their parents in partnership with the school. Based on the results of the research educators may gain knowledge that will help in developing strategies and integral programs to help bridge the gap between schools and families.

Students who participate in the research should gain a greater degree of self-awareness about their relations with their parents and the school through the interview participation.

## Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Anything you say to me will be held in the strictest of confidence. I will never share your identity with anyone. Only I will know who you are. Your name will never be used in the report of this study, and when I transcribe the tapes, I will give you a pseudonym. Your name will never be included, so you will be anonymous.

## Compensation

No monetary compensation is connected to participation in this study.

## Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions during interviews.

## Research Approval

## Your Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

To participate in a tape-recorded interview lasting between 30-60 minutes  
To review a transcript of my interview and make and changes I see fit  
To be available for a potential follow-up interview

## Student Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Assent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary assent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Student Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Faith Whitfield, Investigator (405) 728-8139  
Dr. Pamela Brown, Faculty Advisor (405)  
\_\_\_\_\_, IRB Research Division

Subjects and parents must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Assent.

Certification of Primary Investigator

This informed assent has been created to ensure that the students and parents involved in the project understand the purpose of the research, procedures, of the research, risks to the subjects, and benefits of the research. I agree to allow any student the opportunity to remove themselves from this study at any time of their choosing.

\_\_\_\_\_, 2004\_\_\_\_\_

## Oklahoma State University

### \Informed Assent for Audio Tape Recording of Interviews

Project Title: The effects of parental Involvement in students' engagement in their educational career.

Investigators: Faith Whitfield Dr. Pamela Brown (faculty advisor)

In order to fulfill requirements of human subject research at Oklahoma State University, you and your parent(s) are required to provide a separate signature of assent for audio taping. The procedures for audio taping are as follows:

9. You will not be identified on the tape. You will be referred to as "subject 1, subject 2, etc."
10. Faith Whitfield will conduct the interview. Only she will know who you are. She will not reveal your identity to anyone.
11. You will have the opportunity to review the written transcript of your interview and make any changes, corrections, additions, or deletions you deem appropriate. You are free to change your mind about your answers when you view the transcript.
12. You will have the right to listen to the tape of your interview if you wish.
13. The tape of your interview will be located in a secure location that no one will have access to. No information on the tape will ever be revealed to anyone.
14. You have the right to not answer any question that is asked of you.
15. You can remove yourself from the interview process at any time.
16. Nothing said in your interview will ever be levied against you for any reason nor will anything you say be shared with anyone outside of this study.

I agree to abide by the procedures above in the audio tape recording and transcription of the interviews used in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_, 2004 \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to the audio tape recording of my interview for this research project

---

Students Name

Date

## APPENDIX E

### Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Friday, March 11, 2005  
IRB Application No ED0564  
Proposal Title: The Effects of Parental Involvement in Students' Engagement in their Educational Career  
Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited (Spec Pop)

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 3/10/2006**

Principal Investigator(s)

Faith A Whitfield  
12200 Asbury Dr.  
Okla. City, OK 73162

Pam Brown  
237 Willard  
Stillwater, OK 74078

---

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, emct@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Sue C. Jacobs, Chair  
Institutional Review Board

Vita

Faith Adele Whitfield

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Major Field: Teaching, Learning, and Leadership

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Glensfalls, New York, On June 26, 1975, the daughter of John and Kathleen Sanders.

Education: Graduated from Kiefer High School, Kiefer, Oklahoma in May 1993; attended Tulsa Junior College, Tulsa, Oklahoma 1992-1993; attended Oklahoma University, Norman, Oklahoma 1993-1995; received a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Langston University, Tulsa, Oklahoma in December 1996. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a major in Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University in May, 2006.

Professional Experience: Middle school teacher in Byrd Middle School, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1996-97; Elementary teacher in Eugene Field Elementary, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1997-98. Pre-school teacher in Crossings Christian School, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 2004-05.

Faith Whitfield

Date of Degree: May, 2006

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Pages in Study: 95

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Teaching, Learning, and Leadership

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this research was to seek out and explore the perspectives that high school students have on parental involvement in their education. Parental involvement is vital to student success, but what do the students feel about their parents' involvement? How do they want their parents to be involved? Five high school students were chosen by one of the school's counselors, who chose students she felt typified each of these general social categories: Athlete, Scholar, Popular, Rebel, and Average. The primary method used for data collection was semi-structured conversational interviews with each respondent.

Findings and Conclusions: This case study shows that high school students desire parental involvement in their education. A thorough analysis of the interviews with high school students provides a deeper understanding of the student's views through themes that emerged from the qualitative data: Parental Involvement Through Student's Eyes, Listening, Casual Conversations, and Church/Religion.

ADVISOR'S APPROVAL: Pamela U. Brown