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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF A CHANGE IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Ronna B. Finley
Norman, Oklahoma
2001

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PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN INCREASE IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

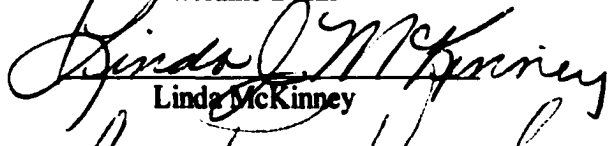
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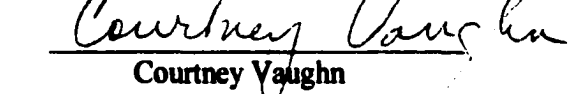
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Abstract

Public schools are all faced with the challenge of educating a growing population of low-income and minority children. This population of children is often considered at-risk for poor educational outcomes. The involvement of parents in their children's education has long been credited with helping improve students' educational outcomes. More recently it has been shown that poor children of color especially benefit when their parents are involved. At the same time it has been documented that communication between the school and low-income minority families is decreasing.

This qualitative study examined one urban school's successful attempt to increase parental involvement. The phenomenon was examined from the parents' perspective in order to expand the current literature base, to inform schools, and to help them improve their practices. Key findings were that low-income and minority families are highly aware of school efforts to involve them. Parents acknowledged the necessity of positive principal leadership, relationship development, and a strong sense of community in their decisions to become involved.

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF A CHANGE IN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background Information

Schools are all addressing the formidable task of trying to educate a population that is growing more diverse every day. In recent years, public education has been faced with the expansive challenge of serving an increasing minority population and an increasing population of children living in poverty. While at the same time, research has shown a decrease in communication between schools and minority and low-income families (Moles cited in Floyd, 1998). The traditional philosophy behind public schooling is no longer working for many students (Comer, 1988; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Hulsebosch & Logan, 1998). Students from low-income and minority homes are experiencing school failure at alarming rates. Much of the current research on school reform suggests that the focus has shifted to changing the culture of the school in order to improve student academic outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Holcomb; 1995). The most successful of these efforts occur when there is genuine collaboration between all of the stakeholders (Fullan, 1992; Giles, 1998; Glickmam, 1995). Consequently, in an effort to build resources and improve educational outcomes for these students, more and more schools are attempting to strengthen their efforts to involve parents.

There is an extensive body of research that suggests the importance of parental involvement in public education. Several studies have documented the relationship between parental involvement and student academic success (Carr, 1996; Dixon, 1992; Epstein, 1984; Fine, 1993; Griffith, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Loucks, 1992). Achievement scores, academic skills, attendance rates, and parent and community support of the school have all been positively correlated to parental involvement (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Coleman & Schneider, 1993; Comer, 1986; Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Griffith, 1996; Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989; Henderson, 1987). Further, it has been found that parental involvement is positively related to socio-emotional development, self-esteem, and motivation in students (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Henderson, 1987). Finally, decreases in behavior problems and drop-out rates have been connected to parental involvement (Chavkin & Williams, 1988; Henderson, 1987).

There are many ingredients that contribute to successful change in education. Among the key factors is an effective leader who focuses on developing relationships in order to create an environment of collaborative decision-making. Another critical component is a systematic plan for transforming the school culture. In addition, recent research indicates that successful school reform is only possible when parents are involved and valued as partners in the educational process (Davies, 1993; Plunkett, 1997). Finally, the influences on parents' decisions to become involved in their child's education are

key in determining whether or not parents will become partners in the change process.

Need for Study

Research has documented the importance of parental involvement. It is especially important for children from low-income and minority families; however, research has shown that low-income minority families participate in parental-involvement activities at low rates (Bauch, 1992). Further, research has indicated that schools, based on a deficit model approach, believe that these parents lack the capabilities and commitment to support students' learning (Chavkin & Williams, 1993). The current study focussed on a school that has experienced an increase in parental involvement while working with low-income minority families in order to understand why their experiences contrasted with the previously described research.

The majority of previous research has focussed on the deficits of low-income minority families and/or the difficulties that schools encounter when trying to involve them. The researcher intentionally focussed on low-income and minority parents' perceptions of a positive change in parental involvement in order to give voice to a population that is rarely heard. These parents have insights that can enrich the literature on the "interactions and simultaneous influence of school and family environments" (Epstein, 1988, p.59). There were at least two reasons that the study was necessary. First, it provided insights from the perspective of low-income and minority parents, and second, the study focused on

a positive aspect rather than a negative aspect of parental-involvement practices with low-income minority families. This data added a new dimension to the literature.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to describe the results of a phenomenological study of parental involvement in an urban school in the southwest. The main objective of this qualitative study was to describe a change in parental involvement from the perspective of low-income and minority parents. The intent of the study was to illustrate one school's transformation from little to no observed parental involvement to a program with highly visible parental participation. A phenomenological study allowed low-income and minority parents the opportunity to present their perspectives on this phenomenon in order to inform schools and to help improve parental-involvement practices. This study provided state and local administrators with information from the parents' perspective on effective parental-involvement practices and the reasons that parents decided to participate. The study also contributed information that will enhance teacher training and staff development. Finally, the current study provided information about one school that has achieved an increase in parental involvement. This information contributed knowledge that should encourage and aid other schools in making positive changes.

Research Questions

The research questions that served as a guide for this study are as follows:

1. How have parents in low-income and high minority schools perceived their

experiences with their children's school when parental involvement has increased dramatically?

2. How have parents in low-income and high minority schools perceived changes in parental involvement over a period of years? How do they explain those changes?

Limitations/Delimitations

There were certain limitations to the current study. First, it is not possible to generalize qualitative research; however, the rich information provided by a phenomenological study informs people interested in the phenomenon, adds to the literature base, and guides future research. Further, because phenomenology focuses on a particular phenomenon, in this case a change in parental involvement, the parent sample does not reflect the general parent population. However, as previously indicated, the low-income and minority population is growing and information on low-income minority parents' perceptions of parental involvement will help schools work more effectively with the increasing low-income and minority population. Another limitation was that the researcher began the interviews with two parents who were identified as highly involved: The P.T.A. president and a member of the Title I advisory committee. By using a snowball technique, in which the first two parents identified other parents to interview, the researcher hoped to gain access to a heterogeneous group of participants for the sample. This method of selecting participants may not have provided an accurate portrait of the entire population. Finally, the researcher had established a relationship with the school, prior to the study, because of on-going consultative work there. The previous knowledge of the school could have biased

the researcher's view of the data. On the other hand, this relationship allowed the researcher easy access to the sample population.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe parents' perspectives of a change in parental involvement in an urban school with a large low-income and minority population. The study also provided information that described how parents perceived their experiences with their children's school. This chapter briefly reviewed the history of parental involvement in the United States. Next, it described existing legislation that requires parental-involvement programs. Third, it described important components in current reform efforts that include parental involvement. Principal leadership was described in the next section. The chapter described how low-income and minority status variables influence parental involvement. In addition, the variables that influence parents' decisions to become involved were addressed. Finally, the importance of creating connections between the home and school was discussed.

History of Parental Involvement in the United States

There is a long history of parental involvement in public education in the United States. Works by Biehler (1976), Button and Provenzo (1989), Cohen (1978), Comer, Haynes, and Hamilton-Lee (1987-1988), Fuller and Olsen (1998), McHenry (1990), Schlossman (1976), and Sinclair (1980) lent understanding to the development of parental involvement. The first compulsory and school funding laws date back to 1647 when the colonial legislature of Massachusetts Bay towns required parents to provide for children's education. The reasoning

was that a literate society was needed to sustain the colony. This was the first evidence of a legal relationship between parents and schools in the United States. Parents had a majority of control over education during this time period. Many parents chose to educate their children at home or in church and ignored the legislation. Those parents who did participate in public schooling had complete authority. They selected and hired the teachers. They chose the curriculum and the text was often the Bible (Button & Provenzo, 1989).

During the eighteenth century, families maintained control over the schools. Teachers often lived with local families and were expected to teach and live by the morals and values of the community. The need for schooling was still not seen as vitally important to the majority of the population who were farmers and settlers (Button & Provenzo, 1989).

Button and Provenzo (1989) suggested that child rearing was based on several different theories during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first was the Calvinist doctrine. This theory suggested that evil was evident in the willfulness of the child. Strict discipline was suggested to enforce the adult's will upon the child.

Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel influenced the second theory (Biehler, 1976). These theorists believed that children were basically good. They believed that families played an important role by providing a nurturing environment for the child. Froebel's kindergartens included parental involvement because of his belief in the importance of the parents' role in the child's early development.

John Locke influenced the third theory identified by Biehler (1976). He suggested that children were influenced by their surroundings. All three of these theories had an impact on education at the time.

As populations of cities grew, so did problems in the public education system. There were inconsistencies with curriculum. There was a lack of governance, teacher training, and funding. The state legislatures became involved as the responsibility for schools fell on the states. Horace Mann and other reformers of the late nineteenth century encouraged legislatures to improve the quality of schools. Compulsory attendance, improved buildings, curriculum and teaching were all part of the new laws. Taxes were implemented to support the changes (Fuller & Olsen, 1998).

As new laws were created, control of the school became more removed from local parental control and was placed into the hands local government (Button & Provenzo, 1989). Local school districts were formed as populations grew. They were run by citizens elected to see to the implementation of state legislation. As state legislation increased, state departments of education were formed to oversee the legislation and local school districts (Fuller & Olsen, 1998).

During the 1920s the National Council of Parent Education was established (Button & Provenzo, 1989). Parent information was more readily available than at any previous time (Schlossman, 1976). In 1930 the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection recommended that public schools include parental education as a part of the school system (Button & Provenzo,1989).

World War II took more and more parents out of the home. Men were off fighting and women were working to keep the country running. Childcare centers were created and supported because of the need that arose as parents increasingly worked away from the home. The Lantham Act from 1941-1946 called for the government to provide childcare for families who supported the war (Button & Provenzo, 1989).

The 1950s were a time of economic boom for a large percentage of citizens. It was also the beginning of great change for the public education system. The *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education*, 1954, decision brought about desegregation. Because of public resistance to desegregation, the courts had to take an active role in implementing the decision. The "separate but equal" doctrine was the beginning of a changing relationship between families and public schools (Button & Provenzo, 1989; Fuller & Olsen, 1998).

In 1957, Russia's launch of Sputnik brought further change in public opinion toward public education. A concerned society wanted to know why we weren't the first to put a ship into space. The result was the Academic Reform Effort of the early 1960s (Comer et al., 1987-1988).

With social changes taking place in our society in the 1960s-Civil Rights and the Women's Liberation Movement-family life was changing rapidly. An extended family support system was no longer in place for most families. Interest in families increased with such legislation as the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, which began the war on poverty. A focus toward education of parents for the benefit of children was emerging. Federal programs such as Head-Start,

Home-Start, Follow-Through and The Elementary and Secondary School Act all included parental-involvement components (Button & Provenzo, 1989). These programs along with the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 brought a focus on partnerships between families and schools to the public's attention. The focus on parental involvement continued during the 1980s and 1990s as more of the public became disenchanted with the public school system (Button & Provenzo; Comer et al., 1987-1988).

Existing Legislation

At the time of this study, existing legislation required all schools to include parents in children's education. Title I, The Individuals with Disabilities Act, and Goals 2000 are briefly described in the following paragraphs. Title I or the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA) was amended with the Hawkins Stafford School Improvements in 1988. This amendment re-emphasized the importance of parental involvement in the education of low-income children. Further, it allows schools to involve parents in ways that fit the community. The new legislation requires Title I schools and parents to evaluate their parental-involvement practices (D'Angelo & Adler, 1991). ESEA requires each state to develop a plan that involves parents. It establishes the fact that parental involvement will be funded from allocation of Title I funds and that parents will be involved in determining how those funds are spent.

In 1991, Public Law 94-142-the Education for All Handicapped Children Act- was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). IDEA, as had Public Law 94-142, provided funding to schools who provided an individualized

education in the least restrictive environment to students with disabilities. This law required parents to be active participants in their child's Individualized Education Plan. The purpose of IDEA was to change the focus from the disabilities of an individual to the abilities of an individual (Fuller & Olsen, 1998).

The U.S. Congress enacted Goals 2000: Educate America Act in 1994. It is perhaps the legislation that has received the most recent attention. This act recognized the importance of parental involvement and its influence on student achievement. The eighth goal states: Every school will promote partnerships to increase the involvement of parents of preschool and school age children and the participation of parents in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of their children. "Federal and State requirements for parent involvement in schools such as Title I, [IDEA], and Goals 2000 and the prevalence of improvement programs with a parent involvement component necessitates their implementation" (Carr, 1996, p. 11).

School Reform

There were many ingredients to successful change in education. Among the key factors was an effective leader who focused on developing relationships in order to create an environment of collaborative decision-making. Another critical component was a systematic plan for transforming the school culture. Research had shown that staff development was necessary for establishing lasting change in schools (Wood, Killian, McQuarrie, & Thompson, 1993). Studies had proven that the RPTIM model of staff development, named for the five different stages:

readiness, planning, training, implementation and maintenance, had been successful because it provided a clear framework for creating sustained change in schools (Wood et al.).

Additionally, recent research indicated that successful school reform was only possible when parents were involved and valued as partners in the educational process (Davies, 1993; Plunkett, 1997). Seeley (1990), in a discussion about schools restructuring while reaching out to parents and the community, said "if *properly* defined, the two concepts are inextricably related; you can't have one without the other: schools cannot effectively 'reach out' without restructuring, and they cannot effectively 'restructure' without reaching out" (p. 38).

Principal Leadership

An effective administrator was fundamental to school change. A good leader understood the necessity of a shared vision. They knew the importance of creating an environment of shared responsibility and participatory management. They enabled the stakeholders to develop and carry out a plan for change.

Shared Vision

In his work, Covey (1989) discovered the importance of seeking first to understand then to be understood. Successful leaders recognized the importance of understanding the past and present conditions of the environment in order to effectively change the future. Schools that were focussed on changing spent a good deal of time developing a shared vision. Darling-Hammond (1997) suggested that "when common goals and commitments motivate school life, learning becomes more powerful" (p. 133).

Shared Responsibility and Participatory Management

Increasingly, principals have understood that collaborative decisions were bound to be better than individual decisions because they were based on multiple perspectives (Hergert, 1997). Davies (1993) found that mutual respect and two-way interaction were necessary to improve the quality of public education. Bennis (1989) said that "it is a true leader's task to create ...a climate that encourages people to learn and grow, prizes their contributions, and cherishes their independence and autonomy" (p. 146). Decisions that were shared meant accountability that was shared. When stakeholders were held accountable for their actions they were inclined to make careful decisions based on the common good.

Schools have traditionally approached involving the public by making curriculum decisions and then informing the public on what was going to be happening in the school or classroom. The result of this practice was a backlash against any new methods or approaches regardless of the research to support it. Dodd (1996) stated that "unless educators involve parents and other community members in developing the standards and implementing the new teaching strategies, what may begin as a journey toward promising change will probably end in frustration, failure, and community conflict" (p. 44). Despite the difficulties in initiating dialogue over curricular decisions, these discussions have led the way to finding common ground that both parents and schools could appreciate.

Historically, principals have retained decision-making power in the schools. Only recently have administrators learned a lesson from the business

world and begun to share decisions and, therefore, responsibility with their faculties. Glickman (1993) suggested that all constituents should be represented in the in the decision-making entity. Research has shown that although parents have an interest in and believe that they are capable of making school-related decisions (Chavkin & Williams, 1987, 1993), principals and teachers have not been comfortable allowing them to participate in this capacity (Henderson, 1988). Dixon (1992) said that shared decision-making "...requires building support, learning new roles, developing behavior and strategies congruent with aims, developing a climate of acceptance, changing original plans, and depending on provisions for continuous feedback" (p. 17).

Research has shown that the largest unit of possible change in education is the school (Wood & Thompson, 1993). There were no formulas or menus for transforming schools. For this reason, reform was happening as a school-by-school process. Wood et al. (1993) described the RPTIM model of staff development as advocating "the development of commitment, ownership, and a positive supportive school climate" (p. v) in order to create significant improvements. There were many examples of schools involving parents in different parts of the change process. There were fewer models of schools creating sustained transformations while involving parents throughout the entire course of school reform. The following descriptions identified how different schools were incorporating this research into their practice.

Description of Programs Incorporating Participatory Management

The School Development Project as described by Comer and Haynes (1991), considered parents an important component of their school management team. "This team carries out three critical management operations: development and implementation of a comprehensive school plan that focuses on both the school climate and the academic program, staff development based on the plan, and assessment and modification of the school program as indicated" (p. 272). In addition to the Comer Schools, Glickman (1995) identified schools belonging to "networks such as the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Accelerated Schools, the Effective Schools, the Outcomes Based Education Schools..., and the League of Professional Schools" (p. 83) as having participated in substantial collaboration. This type of collaboration was also found in many individual school efforts around the country.

La Escuela Fratney was such a school described by Peterson (1995). "It is the site of a continuing journey to create a school governed by parents and teachers" (p. 59). La Escuela Fratney was a small school that was salvaged and was then governed by a group of committed teachers and parents. They had a site-based council that consisted of parents and teachers who made all major decisions for the school. This was just one of the many examples of schools that were working individually to transform themselves through involvement and commitment of the stakeholders.

A look at current research indicated that parents were often left out of certain stages of school change. There were many examples of their involvement

at incremental stages in the process, but there were fewer examples of their involvement from start to finish. Parents were often expected to lend their support to change efforts, of which they had little or no knowledge, during the readiness element of school improvement. The parents expressed frustration at being excluded from the development of strategies that the schools intended to implement. Furthermore, parents were then left out of the training, implementation and maintenance portions of school reform.

Research has shown that parents were interested in participating in a more collaborative manner than traditional parent involvement activities allowed (Bermudez, 1993); however, current practice has left little room for input on what parents actually wanted and expected from public schools. The resulting relationship was often built on mutual distrust. Much of the literature has suggested that parents must be a part of school reformation (Finn, 1998; Gaustad, 1997; Glenn, 1992; Sexton, 1993); therefore, administrators who were interested in transforming their school culture needed to focus on expanding their definitions of parental involvement. Schools should have focused on developing collaborative relationships with parents by encouraging them to participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of school practices. Davies (1993) said, "if its definitions and practices are redefined, parent involvement can make a powerful contribution to mainline efforts to reform urban schools and to make good on our national aspiration that all children of all backgrounds and circumstances can succeed academically and socially" (p. 213).

Influence of Socio-Economic and Minority Status Variables on Parental-Involvement

In recent years, public education has been faced with the growing challenge of serving an increasing minority population and an increasing number of children living in poverty. One of the most alarming issues identified by current research, was that poor minority children have been undereducated or were experiencing academic failure in public schools around the country (Bonilla, 1997; Comer, 1993; Fujiura, & Yamaki, 2000; Lucas, Henze & Donato, 1990). While at the same time, research has shown a decrease in communication between schools and minority and low-income families (Moles cited in Floyd, 1998). Parents could prove a key resource in solving this huge problem. Schools needed to examine their parent involvement practices focussing on issues for families in poverty and families of minority cultures in order to create collaborative relationships that will support students' learning.

Numerous articles and studies have shown that a recognized way to improve student performance was to increase parental involvement (Comer & Haynes, 1991; Epstein, 1996; Fowler & Corley, 1996; Griffith, 1996; Lowden, 1999; Marcon, 1999). Parental involvement, even in minimal amounts, was sufficient to affect a child's academic work (Marcon, 1999). It has been shown that children from low-income and minority families benefited the most from partnerships between families and schools, even when the parents had little education (Henderson, 1988). Unfortunately, for this large and growing proportion of the population, however, studies in the past 30 years have

consistently shown a reduction in the number of contacts between school and low-income and minority parents (Come & Fredericks, 1995; Moles, 1993).

Current research indicated that most parents wanted to be involved in their child's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995); however, many, especially those in poverty or from a minority, have not regularly participated in school related activities (Aronson, 1996; Bhagwanjii & McCollum, 1998; Yon, Nesbit & Algozzine, 1998).

Changing Demographics

"By the end of the 1990's, children from racial and ethnic minorities will constitute one-third of the school-age population. In several major U.S. cities, such children are already the majority" (Bauch, 1993, p.121). Research suggested that both race and class affected school failure and underachievement. Generally, children from poor families were less successful in school than children whose families had moderate or high incomes. Minority children were overrepresented in low-income settings. Yet, even when income was controlled, evidence suggested that "although middle-class Black and Hispanic children do not experience high rates of school failure, they do tend to underachieve in school" (Bauch, 1993, p. 121).

Barriers to Parental Involvement

Research indicated that disadvantaged parents and teachers were caught in a variety of obstacles that impeded the development of partnerships such as blame, misinterpretations, negative expectations, stereotypes, intimidations, and distrust (Bhagwanjii & McCollum, 1998). Part of the problem was that schools

have developed their parental-involvement programs from the deficit model approach that assumed the parents lacked the interest and skills necessary to help their children in school (Bhagwanjii & McCollum, 1998; Yon, Nesbit & Algozzine, 1998).

The deficit model was created by a system that functioned from a traditional white, middle-class perspective. Floyd (1998) suggested that miscommunication and misinterpretation developed because schools interacted from an analytical perspective; while minority families, who made up a large percentage of those living in poverty, interacted from a relational perspective. Payne (1998) suggested that schools and families used different registers of language, which influenced their ability to communicate with one another.

Lightfoot (cited in Come & Fredericks, 1995) said "to many economically deprived families the school exists as a frightening monolith, not only in the sense that the power of knowledge makes them feel inadequate...but because every bit of communication from the school comes as a negative appraisal of their child, a destructive comment about their lives" (p. 566). Regardless of such barriers, some low-income parents made positive decisions to become involved in their child's education. Current research into the reasons why parents made decisions to participate provided insight for schools desiring to improve parental-involvement practices.

Parents' Decisions About Involvement

Parents' decisions to become involved in their child's education were influenced both positively and negatively by the behavior of the school

(Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Epstein, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; McGillicuddy-DeLisi & Sigel, 1995). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler have shown how each of the constructs; parents' construction of the parental role, parents' self-efficacy and parents' perceptions of the school, can impacted their decisions. Furthermore, each of these constructs carried different weight in parents' decision-making.

McGillicuddy-DeLisi and Sigel's work (1995) on parental beliefs led them to state that parents' actions with their children and others were determined by their beliefs. Parents living in poverty had a strong belief in fate. This belief, led them to determine that they could not do much to change their circumstances (Payne, 1998). With the belief complex in mind, it was evident how the interrelations between schools and homes could have affected parents' beliefs about child development, goals and outcome priorities for their child.

Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres (1996), about which Epstein indicated that "the degree of overlap between spheres influences parents' attitudes and behaviors" (p. 133), added additional weight to the research. As these studies indicated, relationships and interrelationships were very influential in parents' decisions about their involvement in schools. Recent research on families in poverty shed light on the importance of these relationships.

Connections Between Home and School

Ruby Payne (1998), in her work with families in poverty, defined poverty as the extent to which someone does without resources. She suggested that while financial resources were important, families in poverty also lacked other

resources. The key to helping low-income families create a foundation of support was through the development of relationships.

In their work, Yon, Nesbit, and Algozzine (1998), found that low-income parents experienced isolation due to lack of time, transportation, employment restrictions, low-self-esteem, and perceived inadequacies. Their middle-income counterparts developed relationships and a sense of ownership visible through their school involvement. Low-income parents needed opportunities to establish relationships in order to build their support systems.

Research has shown that a child's education depended on what happened in their whole world, not just in the life they experience at the school (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Epstein, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lowden, 1999; McGillicuddy-DeLisi & Sigel, 1995). Schools needed to understand that families have "...ideas, skills, understandings, and ways of speaking and interacting," (Hulsebosch & Logan, 1998, p. 31) that differ from those usually emphasized in school. An understanding of these differences would strengthen relationships with families that would support students learning. Plunkett (1997) said "we must intensify our efforts to alert and assist parents in understanding the importance of their role in supporting children's learning at home" (p. 326). Schools needed to value the parents' beliefs, thereby, developing strong partnerships that advocated for children both in and out of school.

Research has shown that parents were interested in participating in a more collaborative manner than traditional parent involvement activities allowed (Bermudez, 1993). Philipsen (1996) stated that "it is important to listen to these

voices [parents] rarely included in the literature in order to learn from these individuals directly as to why they are (perceived as) uninvolved in the schooling of their children" (p. 3). This study attempted to enhance the literature by examining the perceptions of a group of parents that were involved and describing their perceptions of why they were involved in their children's education.

The first three sections of the literature review; the introduction, the history of parental involvement, and the legislation that existed at the time of the study; illustrated the need for parental involvement, the way that relations between schools and families have developed, and the laws that have been created to encourage schools to work with families. The next sections of the chapter described how and why schools were attempting school change. These sections included descriptions of school reform and the influence of socio-economic and minority status variables. The final three sections of the literature review described the problems that prevent schools and families from developing partnerships, the reasons that parents make decisions to become involved in their children's school, and the importance of building relationships between schools and homes.

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Study

Introduction and Research Questions

The recent research on school reform and parental involvement has created interesting questions for researchers. The research indicated that although educational outcomes were poor for students from low-income and minority backgrounds, the future of these students could be improved if the parents of these children were involved in their education. Little research has been done to study how low-income and minority parents perceived their parental-involvement experiences. The current study attempted to illustrate parents' perceptions of a change in parental involvement by addressing the following questions: How have parents in low-income, minority schools perceived their experiences with their children's school when parental involvement has increased dramatically? How have parents in low-income and high minority schools perceived changes in parental involvement over a period of years? How do they explain those changes?

This chapter describes the process used during the study. In the first section, phenomenology, the type of research used for the study, is described. The next sections describe the participants and the sample selection. The third section describes the research design and the data sources. The protocol for the research is outlined in the fourth section. Finally, the analysis procedures are described.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a method of research that was derived from philosophy. Phenomenology, as it is currently understood, was defined by Edmund Husserl, a

German philosopher, around the beginning of the 20th century (Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagaard, 1994; Moustakas, 1994). Husserl's intent was to create a method of describing phenomenon not their causes. Giorgi (cited in Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagaard) said, "phenomenology is the study of the structure and the variations of structure, of the consciousness to which anything, event, or person appears. It is interested in elucidating both that which appears and the manner in which it appears, as well as in the overall structures that relates the 'that which' with its mode or manner" (p. 144).

Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagaard (1994) suggested that Ton Beekman has been the most influential individual in introducing United States educators to the practice of phenomenology. He was a student of Martinus Langeveld, a Dutch educator. Langeveld held the view that we could understand others and ourselves better through phenomenological research. Beekman lectured around the United States and co-wrote a workbook on phenomenological methods.

A general description of phenomenology has been given by several authors (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; DeMoss & Vaughn, 1999; Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagaard, 1994). They described phenomenology as the attempt to understand a phenomenon through a person's or groups' perception of experiences with a particular phenomenon.

Epistemology of Phenomenology

Moustakas (1994) quoted Husserl as defining reflection as a process through which the "stream of experience (Erlibris) with all its manifold events

(phases of experience, intentionalities) can be grasped and analyzed in the light of its own evidence" (p. 97).

As demonstrated by the researchers, phenomenological research can differ somewhat; however, there are some common steps in all approaches. The researcher will select a problem or phenomenon to study. They will then locate participants and encourage them to reflect on and describe their perspective of the phenomenon. The researcher will then examine the collected data for common patterns. Finally, the researcher will organize the patterns into a narrative using the participants' own words to describe their perception of the phenomenon.

Limitations of Phenomenology

There are some common concerns that arise when using phenomenological research. These critiques come from more traditional scientific fields and generally fall into two categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Langenbach, Vaughn & Aagaard, 1994). One type of concern addresses mainly the methods of phenomenology including questions about the researcher's opinions and biases and the presence of the researcher in the research. The second type addresses mainly the results and questions whether or not phenomenological research is actually scientific.

The question over the researcher's previous experiences, opinions and biases can be addressed in two ways. First, many qualitative researchers include a statement about their own ideology as a part of the report. Stating their beliefs and values outright relieves them of the burden of removing themselves from the study. The second way that qualitative researchers handle this issue is to bracket

the problem. Bracketing the phenomenon allows the researcher to separate their previous knowledge in order to examine the data more objectively. The concern over the presence of the researcher influencing the participants is an issue in all research fields. A phenomenological researcher could argue that questions and methods are influenced by the researcher's previous experience in all types of research.

In the case of the present study, it could be said that the researcher's interpretation of the data could have differed from other's interpretations. The researcher had, after all, spent the previous ten years focussed on how to increase parental involvement in public schools as a public and private school teacher, and as a university professor. However, the researcher did not have to address the issue of increasing parental involvement, in this school, that had already been documented. The researcher was attempting to examine that increase from a different perspective, that of the parents.

The researcher and a university professor reviewed the data and discussed the developing categories at length in order to determine them reliable. The trustworthiness of the qualitative data was determined by an examination of how well the data and what the participants actually experienced fit together (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The issue of whether or not phenomenology is scientific or not includes concerns about whether the methods are rigorous and contain external validity. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) addressed the issue of being rigorous by using a broad definition of scientific. They said, "the scientific attitude...is to be open-minded

about method and evidence" (p. 38). Further they suggested that qualitative research meets the requirements of "rigorous and systematic empirical inquiry that is data based" (p. 38).

The questions about the results in phenomenological research generally fall under generalizability and reliability. Most qualitative researchers are not concerned with the issue of generalizability because they are interested in looking at phenomenon from a particular perspective. At times, phenomenologists attempt to answer the question of what other settings and subjects they might be able to generalize the phenomenon to (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Often, however, the job of finding how his or her data fits into the general world is left for someone else. Philipsen (1996) stated that "much can be learned from in-depth studies of cases which may be unique in many ways, and yet nevertheless teach lessons and provide challenging questions to educators and parents generally" (p. 3).

Participant Description

This study focused on the parent population from a small urban elementary school in a city in the southwest. The city had a population of just less than 500,000. The schools within the district included both urban and suburban populations. The school itself is a small, red-brick, two-story structure situated about one-half mile from an interstate highway. The average enrollment of 244 students consisted of about 45 percent Latino, 29 percent White, 14 percent American Indian, and 11 percent Black children. One hundred percent of the students were on the free/reduced lunch program. The school had a 92 percent attendance rate, with a mobility rate of 44 percent. Students with limited English

skills made up 41 percent of the population. Fifteen percent of the students were placed in special education and eight percent were enrolled in the gifted program. There were 18 teachers on the staff, two of whom were minority. The teachers had an average of 12 years teaching experience and 33 percent had a master's degree or above.

The school in the study came to the attention of the researcher initially because of negative publicity dealing with problems between the administrator and the parents from the building. At the end of the 1998-1999 school year, that administrator left and a new principal was transferred into the position. The researcher was familiar with the new principal because they had worked together previously. The researcher expected that the new administrator would put energy into improving the relations between the school and the families of its' students. The researcher conducted some early childhood training in the building during the 1999-2000 school year. The climate in the school was unexpectedly cooperative. Students, parents, faculty and the administrator seemed to be working together as a community. This was a surprise given the animosity during the previous year. In addition to the improved atmosphere, the change in parental involvement was evident in the increase in Parent Teacher Association memberships. The fact that these improvements had occurred in an urban school setting heightened the interest for the researcher.

Sample Selection

Participants for the qualitative study were selected in two purposeful ways. Purposeful defined by Patton (cited in Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996) refers to

"the practice of selecting cases that are likely to be information-rich with respect to the qualitative study" (p. 231). The first is criterion sampling. A parent was selected from each the P.T.A. board and the Title I advisory board because they were actively involved in the school. Another condition for the criterion selection was that each of the parents interviewed had to have a child that had been in the school for at least three years. Second, a snowball technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) was used by having these key parents recommend other parents to interview.

The ten participants selected were all women. The variety of ethnic backgrounds of the participants closely resembled the ethnic make-up of the school population. Five were Latino, two Black, two Caucasian, and one Native American.

The participants' ages ranged from the late twenties to the early fifties. The mean age was 36, the median age was 32, and the mode was 31 years old.

Nine of these parents were married with their spouse living at home. One parent was a single mother. One of the nine married participants was a grandmother that had legal custody of her grandchildren. While all of the participants had multiple children, family size among the participants' varied. One family had two children, the remainder of families had three or more. The largest family had six children. The children of the participants had been enrolled in the school for and average of four years. The participants had three children in the Pre-school program, one in kindergarten, three in first grade, one in second grade, four in third grade, seven in fourth grade, and two in fifth grade.

Two of the mothers were employed full-time, five part-time, and three were not employed. Seven participants had spouses that were employed full-time and two part-time. Three of the participants had only completed elementary school, three had completed some high school hours, three had graduated from high school, and one had taken some college courses. Seven of the participants were active members of the P.T.A., while three were not members. Two of the participants had been P.T.A. officers.

Research Design and Data Sources

This study combined both quantitative and qualitative components. A brief parent questionnaire (Appendix A) was used for descriptive purposes. It was composed of 14 questions that provided demographic data such as gender, age, marital status and number of children for each of the participants.

Phenomenology usually involves interviewing 5-15 participants, who are viewed as co-researchers. Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagaard (1994) suggested that a researcher begin collecting phenomenological data by asking the question-what does the phenomenon mean? -to the parties involved. The participant is encouraged to reflect on his/her experience through conversation or answering open-ended questions. The researcher then identifies meaning units or themes within the interview. A narrative evolves that describes patterns of the particular experience. phenomenological researchers often return to the participants to clarify the narrative in an effort to achieve trustworthiness.

An interview schedule was created (Appendix B) as a guide for the interviews. It was loosely structured with the intent of adapting the interview

according to data provided by the participant. This study involved in-depth interviews of parents who had children who had been attending the school for at least three years. Of particular interest in this study was the increase in parental involvement that had occurred over the previous three-year period in a low-income, "minority-majority", urban school. The interview questions were used to determine the parents' knowledge of their participation in the school. In addition, the interviews were used to determine the parents' knowledge of any changes in parental involvement in the school and the reasons for any perceived changes. In addition, public records and artifacts were examined to add descriptive information to the study and to provide validity to the study by supporting the selection of the school as an example of one whose parental participation had increased.

Protocol

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board based on the following protocol:

The procedures were:

1. Obtained consent from School District's Central Administration Office.
2. Made contact with and obtained consent from the building administrator.
3. The principal identified the P.T.A. president and a parent member of the Title I advisory committee. Those parents were given consent forms and a short questionnaire (Appendix A).
4. Upon receipt of the consent form, parents were asked to schedule an interview appointment.

5. The participants were interviewed individually in an agreed upon location. The interviews were loosely based on the interview schedule (appendix B). The participants were encouraged to discuss their experiences freely so the interview may not have followed the schedule completely. The parent questionnaire was collected at the time of the interview. Using a snowball technique, these parents were asked to recommend other parents that they believed would be able to inform the study. An interpreter was used for the non-English speaking parents.
6. Each additional parent was given a consent form and questionnaire and interviewed in a similar manner.
7. The participants were called to clarify any questions that arose during the data analysis.
8. Public records and artifacts from the school were examined for data on parental involvement.

Analysis

The parent questionnaire was used to provide demographic data. The information from the questionnaire was used to help describe the participants without having to ask these personal questions during the interview.

Data were analyzed according to the description of phenomenological research previously described. The interviews were tape-recorded. The interviews were transcribed by an experienced typist. The researcher proofread the transcripts against the interview tapes. Through the use of the open-ended interviews, data were produced coded and analyzed. The names of the participants and the school were changed to ensure confidentiality. Coding was

used to develop themes. A narrative was created to describe the change in parental involvement from the perspective of the parents. Participants were contacted as needed for clarification of data.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Study

Introduction

This study was conducted to answer two primary research questions. The first question was how have parents perceived their experiences with their children's school over the last several years. The second was how have parents perceived recent changes in parental involvement and how do they explain those changes.

Ten parents were interviewed for this qualitative study. The first and second were selected because they were members of the Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A.) board and the Title I advisory committee. Using a snowball technique, each of the parents suggested others for the study, eight further participants were identified to talk about parental involvement in the school. The sample included five Latino, two Black, two Caucasion, and one Native American participants.

Each participant was asked to complete a short questionnaire prior to the interview. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions. It provided descriptive data to the study such as age and ethnicity of the parents.

The interviews were conducted using an interview guide consisting of 16 questions. The interviews were set up and conducted in a setting comfortable to the participants. Most of the parents elected to meet and conduct the interviews in the parents' resource room at school. One parent chose to meet at her workplace and another requested that the interview take place in her home. All of the

interviews with Spanish-speaking parents took place at school. An interpreter was used to help with those interviews. Each of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The data was analyzed for patterns and written into a narrative.

Parents' Perceived Experiences With the School

Three major themes emerged under parents' knowledge of parental involvement. First, several parents discussed the impact of parental involvement on children. Second, parents discussed their involvement within their community. Third, parents addressed several barriers to parental involvement.

Impact on Students

Both English and non-English speaking parents addressed the importance of parental involvement on students. The parents identified three reasons for parental involvement. The first was that it shows children that parents care about them. The second was that it improved the students' attitudes. Finally, parents felt that teachers gave more attention to the children whose parents were involved.

Many of the parents participated at school. The parents felt that children were proud to have their parents involved. Andrea said:

> If you are there and they see you there, they know that you care. If a parent is there at least once a month at least to say hi and stuff kids feel that you care about them. They know that you care about them and that you check on them so they better behave.

Natalie added:

> My daughter loves to see me up here. It makes them know you care.

> Take time out to come up and do whatever. Some of the kids in her class said 'I wish my momma would come up here with us.'

Parents also described how their involvement influenced student attitudes. Mary said:

> This is the first year that I have got to work part time. I have always worked full time. I have never got to attend. I didn't really think of it at the time because I was thinking I have to make a living for my family. Put clothes on their back....It was before I went part time so last year, something was coming up with Sara at school, I told her 'I can't make it I've got to work.' Her older sister stepped in and ...pointed out a few things [like] 'When I was on stage having to do a play, I looked out there and my mom wasn't there so I didn't feel like doing nothing.' ...So it does mean a lot for a parent to be involved with her kids.

Alicia's statement further supported the belief that parental involvement impacts student attitudes.

> I think that if the parents are involved it shows in their kids. Some kids may feel left out if their parents aren't involved. My kids fight over who momma's going with. Used to having kids say I don't want my mom to come with me cause then we can't do this and that. But I have my kids saying they want me to go. I have their friends saying go with us. It shows in your kid's attitudes. My kids don't think that just because momma's here we can do whatever we want. I don't show that

> attitude because I will be the first one that jumps all over them and takes them right where they need to go to get in trouble.

Finally, parents suggested that teachers are more attentive to students when their parents are involved. Andrea answered a question about how teachers are impacted by parental involvement in this way: "I think if they know you are going to check on your kid and you are concerned, they work harder with you. They really do. Sometimes [if not] they push a kid to the side."

Involvement in the Community

Upon further discussion, several parents shared how they were involved in the community. Their involvement with their children stretched to the community center, churches, library, and even into their neighborhoods. Andrea discussed options available at the church and community center:

> The church next door, they have meetings. They invites us out. They have monthly meetings. They send us a letter home and they have like little classes for the kids. A sewing class and stuff like that encourage the parents to be more involved. The community center down the street from there, the daycare, they also encourage the parents to get involved. They also have classes for you to learn English because mostly we have a Hispanic neighborhood. So they work together to get the parents together to be more involved.

Another parent addressed how she was involved with her child outside of school. Mary said, "I have been able to take her to the library when we get off

work. When she was out of school for that day or something and we would be able to do things together."

Stacy highlighted a different aspect of community involvement. She suggested that involvement with the school had encouraged her Latino neighbors to be more comfortable socializing in her neighborhood. She said, "My neighbors, they will come out more when before they wouldn't come out. Now they will come out and sit on my porch. If I don't understand them they will ask their kids to interpret for us." Stacy said that she felt that this change was related to changes in the school.

Barriers to Parental Involvement

The parents identified four barriers to parental involvement. They suggested that language, transportation, and work all influenced how they became involved. Parents also suggested that the school's willingness to accommodate parents influenced their involvement decisions.

Both English and non-English speaking parents identified language as a barrier to parental involvement. Sara said, "The teachers need to be more aware of the language." Stacy concurred saying:

> In the past they couldn't get hardly any involvement out of them. I think that was because of the language barrier because there is a lot of Hispanics here. They were trying to find someone who speaks Spanish to get involved, but, they were either too scared or didn't want to get involved or didn't know much about it.

Several parents suggested that transportation to and from the school was a reason that they were not more involved. Rachel said, "sometimes she doesn't have a way of coming."

Parents tied the issues of work and whether or not the school accommodates parents together. Mary addressed the problem by saying:

> They probably have a lot of parents like me that when they do work like I said on Monday nights and on Monday mornings they have that little coffee shop and I can't come because I have to work. There are a lot of parents that can't come because they have to work. They would love to come just to see what is going on but they can't. They have a lot of things going. But they run across the problem of not being able to attend because they work.

Alicia said:

> In the past we have always been told that we can't have anything at night. The principal we had said that parents don't like to come out at night, 'There won't be anybody here.' The teachers wanted the meetings at 3:00 o'clock because they wouldn't have to drive back at night.

Parents' Knowledge of Changes in Parental Involvement

The parents identified four areas where they had seen an increase in parental involvement from the previous year. These areas included an increase in the Parent-Teacher Association (P.T.A.) memberships, an increase in the amount of money from fund-raisers, an increase in the

sharing of ideas, and an increase in the number of parents observed visiting the school.

Further discussion of recent changes in parental involvement highlighted three major themes. Parents first identified physical changes in the building. Second, parents discussed principal leadership in both positive and negative terms. Under leadership they also discussed the importance of accommodating parents. Relationship development was the final major theme that evolved from the parents' interviews.

Increase in Parental Involvement

Several parents mentioned that the number of people who belong to the P.T.A. has increased. Other parents suggested that there has been more participation in P.T.A. meetings than in the past. Alicia said, "This year we have more participation in the P.T.A. than we ever had. We received the award for the highest increase in P.T.A. participation this year. I think it was a 494% increase over last year." Both Andrea and Stacy concurred that there was over 100% participation, or more than one adult per child, in the P.T.A. this year. When describing the P.T.A. meetings, Natalie said, "Like I said, I think it has gotten better. Last year we would have P.T.A. meetings and there would be the teachers and me and Alicia and that was it. It has gotten a lot better."

Fund-raising is another area where the parents suggested that there has been more participation. Alicia described the increase in the following manner:

> Last year and the year before was okay. I mean we usually sell between $700-900 worth of books each year and last year was no different we sold about that amount. But this year we had family night for an hour and a half....we sold over $600 of books in that hour and totaled our [previous] book fair. Last year we sold $983 and they always want to try and go above it and we sold almost $1800 worth of books at the book fair for the spring this year.

One parent said that parents were more comfortable sharing their ideas than they have been in the past. Stacy indicated this by saying:

> I think [there is] more parental involvement. I think more interest, more suggestions, more advice on how to do things and input on that. I think that helps out a lot. Because if you don't get input you will never know exactly what they [parents] want. It helps when the parents tell you what they want.

A majority of the parents said that more parents were visible in the building. Natalie, Sara, Rachel and Andrea all said that they had seen more parents helping this year. Alicia described an event this way, "Yeah that's right the honors choir sang that night. That was another thing that principals in the past had always said parents won't come and bring their kids back, but the place was packed. There was standing room only."

Andrea agreed. She said, "This year since we have a new principal, whenever they have the meeting to give out the student of the month and stuff like that I have noticed more parents coming."

Physical Changes

A majority of the parents identified physical changes in and around the building in which parents had assisted. It is important to note that the Latino parents mentioned the physical changes and helping with the physical changes more than any other type of change. All of the parents that discussed the physical changes seemed to take personal pride in the school. Six of the parents discussed the improvements on the outside of the building. Alicia described the project:

> That was School Scapes, that is where...they came in and cleaned up outside of the school. Cleaned it up in November and then came back...and planted all the plants that are outside. We have never had anything like that it has always been grass and weeds....I mean the first time these people showed up and they took over. They knew exactly what to do and they did it. Went in there and cleaned it up. It was totally different after it was over.

She went on to add:

> The marquee is new. We just got that installed at the end of February. Yes I kind of think that our success with the book fair had to do with the marquee, because it was out there on the marquee.
>
> Several parents also mentioned physical changes inside the building

such as air conditioning, lighting and paint. Stacy said, "...I told you she had some light or something or I don't know what but it is brighter. I think it is the colors, too." She continued to say, "...We are doing a lot of activities with them to upgrade [the school], to make it look better, to clean up the facilities and stuff."

Principal Leadership

Principal leadership turned out to be an important theme for the English speaking parents. The interviews led to three sub-themes under principal leadership. They were negative leadership, positive leadership, and the accommodation of parents.

Negative principal leadership. Half of the parents described problems that had developed with the previous principal. They discussed issues of availability, shared decision making, and climate. About availability, Cindy said:

> So far this year I have no complaints on our principal. Last year I did. I have been able to talk to her when I needed to on anything and last year you had to make an appointment a week ahead of time to talk to him.

Cindy went on to discuss the lack of shared decision making. She said, "Last year, we had a principal that wouldn't let us sell pickles or do for the kids like we have been able to this year." Alicia agreed with her by saying:

> Last year I was P.T.A. [officer]. [It was] very hard to get stuff done. Last year it was done but you had to kind of beg and plead your case. I had to get the vice president in there because he was male to smooth things over

and get everything going. He didn't want it held and got called in to the state level a few times.

In addition, parents linked negative principal leadership to the school climate. Stacy described the atmosphere, "Before they never turned on the lights in the hallway. Like you just shut the door in jail. Scared to walk up the stairs." Cindy concurred with this description, "Last year if you walked in here you would have felt who is going to turn the heat on cause it was cold around here last year." Alicia agreed with them by saying:

> Last year was, it had to do with the principal we had last year. He was kind of, tensions ran high. It was thick in the school, was bad enough for kids to not want to come to school and transfers out....Everybody stayed kind of clear of the school. My kids come in on their own unless there was something I had to do or had to see in here.

Positive principal leadership.

Several of the parents identified a change in principal leadership as a key factor in the change in parental involvement. The sub-themes that emerged under positive principal leadership were availability, shared decision making, and climate. Andrea discussed the availability issue. She said, "She is really nice and every time I have to go talk to her I ask her any question. She is very accessible."

Alicia identified how the principal shares decision making with parents. She said:

> This year...you go in the office and tell them this is what the P.T.A. is

> going to do this year. If there is any problems with it ...we will work it out. There hasn't been any problems. Usually anything that P.T.A. is going to do it's done and there's no begging, pleading, getting a second party in here. I haven't had any calls from the state level this year saying, 'You are doing this and you are not supposed to.'

Natalie agreed by saying, "The P.T.A., everything we want to do, everything she said okay. She never says 'No you can't do that.'"

Cindy described the school climate and how it was affected by positive principal leadership. She said:

> All the parents were allowed to come in and see what was going on and everything. The book fair the parents really got into the book fair. Last year we didn't. The P.T.A. wasn't up last year like it is this year. We more or less have to have a good principal in there for the parents to get involved....If you have a good principal you have got a good school. We have got a good school this year.

Alicia described the change in climate this way:

> This year I think everybody was kind of leary after our experience last year so we want to step lightly and see what happens this year. I think the ones who are here and have seen what is going on and the ones, even if they haven't been physically involved with anything, can see what is going on outside, see the positive changes in the kids and the attitudes and the parents' attitudes and you're welcome in the school.

Stacy said, "She is a great principal and she has brightened the whole

school up. When you walk in there now it is like light, actual light in there now. I love it." Natalie summarized the change from negative principal leadership to positive principal leadership by saying, "This year the principal we have now acts like she cares. The other one didn't."

Accommodation of parents.

Several of the parents discussed how the principals have or have not accommodated them. Accommodation arose as a sub-theme in three different areas. These included time of meetings, the use of interpreters, and the incorporation of new ideas and events. In their discussion of P.T.A. meetings, parents addressed the time of meetings and the use of interpreters. Alicia said:

> This year we started having them [P.T.A. meetings], because at 3:00 o'clock we would have maybe 1 or 2 other parents and the rest was teachers. This year we had the first one like at 5:30 and I think we had 7 or 8 people, probably more than that, and the majority of them were parents.

When asked about the average meeting, she went on to say, "I would say about 15 to 20 people...so 6:30 or 7:00 seems to be the good time. That is what the parents at the first meeting agreed on that and said that would be a better time." Natalie spoke on the use of interpreters. She said, "Last P.T.A. of course there is a bunch of Mexican people who go here and they can't understand English, so last meeting there was like four or five and they came and had an interpreter..." Mary spoke of the translation of

communication between home and school. She said, "They send out newsletters. They do one side in English and one side in Spanish. I think it is fantastic. I have never been in a school that did that either."

Parents felt that their ideas were being incorporated in the school. This translated into more activities and events to support students. Andrea said:

> This year they have like fun day a lot of new activities they didn't have before. This principal is really good. They have more activities and a fun day and I don't remember. They have Cinco de Mayo, they went on more trips this year. That's what I have noticed. There have been more parents there.

Mary also mentioned Cinco de Mayo as a new pleasant activity.

Relationships

The final major category that resulted from parents' knowledge of changes in parental involvement was the importance of relationships. Four sub-themes emerged from the discussion of relationships. These were: a need for social gatherings, a sense of caring, responsiveness to families, and a sense of cooperation.

Mary suggested the importance of social gatherings in developing relationships. She said, "Just get them together for a festive mood. Don't bring them all together for the bad, bring them all together for the good news, the good stuff. It makes a positive attitude."

Natalie, Mary and Stacy all discussed the importance of a caring attitude. Natalie said, "I love it. I like it because the teachers are real

friendly. They care about what you say. Not just my child's teacher but the other teachers, too. They are just real friendly people." When asked to describe a good school, Mary said:

> [One] That really cares about their child. They seem to care for each individual child. I have brought [my child] up here Kindergarten, first, second at the first of the year and all the teachers hugging her. 'You are going to be so happy here. You are so lucky to have this girl.' They really build her self-esteem.

Stacy summed it up nicely. She said:

> To me they're more caring. They're more fun now, they are more laid back. Like I said it is just more light there it is just not so dark and gloomy like they are scared to move around. They just bounce off now.

Several parents also stressed the importance of being responsive to families in order to develop relationships. Stacy gave an example. She said:

> We were having a little problem with [our daughter] doing her homework...and my husband sat down at the computer....He typed a letter of his opinion of her opinion of what we need to do to get her grades up. She [the teacher] replied. She even had the whole class carry a little journal just because of [our daughter] to have me sign to see if I have received her homework or if she has returned her homework. I like that she communicates with me if there is a problem. She will send

> me a note home or she will call me and leave a message. She will call my husband. I love it.

Andrea supported this by saying:

> Teachers are willing to help. They have been working with me. If my kids do something, they notify me right away because they know if a problem comes up, I want to correct it as soon as possible. So, I really love the people here.

Finally, several of the parents described the school as a family that works together. Cindy and Alicia both spoke of this sense of cooperation. Cindy said, "In my opinion a good school is where everybody works together. Around here we all seem to work together this year instead of pulling apart." Alicia described it this way:

> [A good school is] where everyone works together. Kind of like a family is what I see this up here. This is my extended family...It's when you offer it like you're a family and you're not. You can voice your opinion, not everybody likes everybody but you wouldn't know it.

All of the participants were pleased with the school at the time of the interviews. The parents disclosed that they had had both positive and negative experiences with the school in the past. They also suggested that there had been many recent changes for the better. The interviews highlighted some differences between the perceptions of the Latino and non-Latino parents. The data revealed both external and internal changes created by the administrator that parents identified as contributing factors

to the increase in parental involvement. The external changes were physical improvements to the building while the internal were more subtle changes included under principal leadership such as: parent accommodation, and relationship development.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter compares the perceptions and experiences of parents in one urban school with the research base on parental involvement. Similarities and differences between the parents' perceptions and those of principals and teachers, who are often cited in the literature, are highlighted. The chapter also identifies the school efforts the parents felt made a significant difference in their involvement practices. Finally, because impoverished minority families are often perceived from a deficit model perspective, the researcher wanted to provide a positive illustration of the possibilities for meaningful home-school partnerships in an urban school setting.

The school described in this study was selected for several reasons. The researcher first heard about the school because of a story in the local media. A confrontational situation between the parents, teachers, and administrator was reported during the 1998-1999 school year. The following year a new administrator was hired. The researcher learned more about the school because she worked in that building during the 1999-2000 school year, providing in-service training in early childhood education and participating as a university representative on an entry-year teacher committee. Having worked with the newly appointed principal on prior occasions, it was clear to the researcher that parent and school relationships would quickly be made a priority. Proof of this change

was apparent in the immediate increase in the number of Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A.) memberships during the principal's first year.

The second reason for selecting the school was that aside from the changes in the P.T.A. numbers, it was difficult to believe from the school climate that the environment had been viewed as hostile the previous year. Parents, students, staff and administration appeared to be working together as a community. The researcher was interested to see if the parents' perceptions would be similar to those of an outside observer.

Of further interest to the researcher was the fact that these changes had occurred in an urban school with an impoverished minority-majority population. Much of the literature has focused on how difficult it is to change parental involvement in schools with large populations of at-risk students. Therefore, the researcher wanted to focus on an urban school where positive changes in parental involvement had occurred.

The purpose of a phenomenological study is to describe a phenomenon from the perspective of an individual's or group's experience with it. In this case, the phenomenon was an increase in parental involvement as explained by the parents. The shift in parental involvement was obvious on paper, and because the researcher had spent time working in the building and with the administrator, she was aware of the efforts to increase parental involvement. The researcher was interested in how parents would interpret those efforts and if they would recognize any changes. Therefore, the research questions were how have parents in low-income and high minority schools perceived their experiences with their

children's school when parental involvement had increased dramatically?, and how have parents in low-income and high minority schools perceived changes in parental involvement over a period of years and how did they explain any changes?

In answer to both questions, the parents' perceptions corroborated and supported much of what has been found in the research (Chavkin, 1989). Parents felt that children benefited from their parents' involvement in their education. In addition, their perceptions suggested that the definition of parental involvement needed to be expanded. Finally, the participants identified barriers to involvement. In answer to the second question, their perceptions also supported the literature. Their responses revealed a difference between the Latino and non-Latino perceptions of parental involvement. The Latino parents were much more aware of the physical changes in the building, while the non-Latino parents identified changes of a more social nature such as principal leadership, availability, and relationships.

Parents' Perceptions of Their Involvement

In answer to the first research question, all of the parents interviewed clearly articulated the importance of their involvement in their child's education. Their perceptions corresponded closely to what has been found in research by Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, and Dornbusch (1993) and others.

The parents' construction of the parental role, as identified by Hoover-Dempsy and Sandler (1997), includes their ideas about development and child-rearing, beliefs about education and the outcomes that are the result of these

beliefs. In the interviews, parents said that their involvement demonstrated to students that they cared about them, that their involvement improved student attitudes, and that teachers of students whose parents were involved gave those students more attention than their peers. Parents' sense of self-efficacy, as defined by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) is their belief that they can exert a positive influence on their children's educational outcomes. This sense of control or self-efficacy is the second factor related to parents' decisions to become involved in school related activities. Contrary to research by Payne (1998), these parents did have a strong sense of self-efficacy. Even when faced with negative circumstances, these parents desired to have some influence in their child's school. Parents described their frustration during previous years of having been prevented from participating in the decision-making process; in turn they expressed their satisfaction at being included in that same process during the present year. Another construct identified by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler was parents' perceptions of the extent to which the school or their child want them to be involved. One of the participants described a situation in which one of her older children told her that she needed to attend an event of a younger sibling because of how it made the older child feel when her mother didn't come to one of her events. This information helped the parent understand how important it was for her to respond to her children's invitations.

Pena (2000), Davies (1993), and others have suggested that the definition of parental involvement needs to be expanded to include such activities as driving children to extracurricular events or discussing school with their children. Parents

in the study approached their participation from a broader perspective as well. They described the importance of their community ties, their use of community resources, and the things that they do at home like knowing the neighborhood children when questioned about their involvement.

Furthermore, many schools were still functioning from the same premise that they acted on 15 years ago. These schools were utilizing the typologies developed by Epstein (1988) that outlined the five different areas of parental involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, helping with homework, and representing other parents. These categories may not have been appropriate for the populations in urban schools where many families lacked the basic resources to help their children with their education. It may be necessary to build a network of support for these families before they are able to fulfill the roles outlined by those typologies.

The parents shared a deeper understanding of school-related issues as they described the barriers that prevented people from becoming involved. The participants identified transportation, and work as problems which corroborated the work of Yon, Nesbit, and Algozzine (1998) who found that low-income parents experienced isolation due to lack of time, transportation, employment restrictions. Language and the school's willingness to accommodate parents were also described as issues that have inhibited participation. The English proficient parents suggested that in the past non-English proficient parents had participated at lower rates than during the present. They attributed the lack of participation to the absence of interpreters at meetings, and to a lack of written notification in

Spanish. Anyon (1995) noted, "commentators have long pointed to the fact that differences between social backgrounds and language can impair interaction and trust" (p. 75). Parents also suggested that a lack of transportation limited some parents' ability to become involved. Finally, parents mentioned work as inhibiting their involvement opportunities.

After illustrating their experiences with their child's school, the parents went on to describe activities in which they had seen an increase in participation. The following section specified those areas and attempted to explain the changes that they had observed in parental involvement during the previous several years and their perceived causes.

Parents' Perceptions of Changes in Parental Involvement

The following sections of the paper describe the areas in which parents had observed an increase in participation, the ways in which the participants perceived changes in parental involvement over the last several years, and how they explained those changes. This section also illustrates parents' perceptions of physical changes in the building that involved parents.

In addition, principal leadership is covered in this section. Under the heading of positive principal leadership, parents further described the effort on the part of the school to accommodate them and the changes in the relationships between home and school, and how those changes affected their involvement.

The parents identified four areas in which they had observed an increase in parental involvement. Participants said that P.T.A. memberships had increased. There was an increase in the amount of money raised in fundraisers. There was an

increase in the sharing of ideas. Finally, they had observed an increase in the number of parents visiting the building. These perceptions support previous research which has found that schools can improve rates of participation in parent teacher organizations, volunteering and communication between the home and school (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996).

Interestingly, the description of the physical changes in the building, is where a noticeable difference between the participants was observed. The non-English proficient participants focussed on these as the major changes in parental involvement. They described improvement efforts such as new paint and lighting inside the building and beautification efforts such as clean-up, weeding, and planting flowers outside the building.

The Latino parents took great pride in sharing that they had taken part in those efforts. Many of these parents also mentioned a marquee that had recently been acquired as an improvement. While the non-English speaking parents focussed on physical changes, the English-speaking parents mentioned those changes briefly. However, they spoke at length about climate changes within the building.

Principal Leadership

The events and behaviors that the non-Latino parents described were tied specifically to the building administrator. As previously described in the literature, parents' decisions to become involved can be influenced both negatively and positively by the behavior of the school (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Epstein, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; McGillicuddy-

DeLisi & Sigel, 1995). Further, research has suggested that parents make involvement decisions based on whether or not they like the principal (Payne, 1998; and Pena, 2000). The interview data indicated that the parents liked the new administrator. The participants described the negative events and behaviors in terms of the previous principal and the positive events and behaviors with the current principal.

Negative principal leadership.

In their discussion of their negative experiences with principal leadership, they discussed issues of availability, shared decision-making, and climate. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) described how conflict might occur when there are differences between different groups' expectations. Parents concurred, expressing their frustration over their inability to make decisions. They felt that the previous administrator consistently refused to implement their ideas. Further, the participants felt that they had to coerce by threatening to bring in a higher power (state P.T.A. officials) to even maintain what little control they did have. The relationship between the principal and the parents became antagonistic to the point of changing the school climate. Parents said that it was uncomfortable entering the building and that the students and teachers were affected by the negative atmosphere. Consequentially, the administrator and several teachers left the building at the end of the school year and a new administrator was appointed for the following year.

Positive principal leadership.

The parents said that in the beginning they were hesitant to trust the new administrator. However, half of the parents interviewed attributed the positive changes in parental involvement to her leadership style. The school reform literature suggested several of the key factors necessary for successful school change. Parents confirmed the importance of an effective leader. Successful leaders recognize the importance of understanding the past and present conditions of the environment in order to effectively change the future. The participants discussed issues of availability, shared decision-making, and improved climate as contributing factors to the positive changes.

As research has shown (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Epstein, 1987; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Minuchin, 1985), the construction of the parental role is not linear, but reciprocal. Parents have certain ideas about child rearing that they present to the group and the group has similar or different perspectives that they share with the parent. Both group and individual ideas grow and develop as a result of these interactions. The participants felt that the new administrator took the time to listen to them. Taking time to meet with the parents and being responsive to their interests was a common concern. The parents felt that the person in charge should be and was easily accessible to them.

An effective leader who focuses on developing relationships in order to create an environment of collaborative decision making is a key component to school reform. Research had shown (Chavkin & Williams, 1987; Chavkin & Williams, 1993) and these interviews supported the idea that parents have an

interest in and believe they are capable of making school-related decisions. Henderson and Berla (1994) found that when schools collaborate with parents, the parents develop self-efficacy and are more likely to act in ways that will help their children with school. In the past, they felt that their interests and requests were ignored. The participants felt that they were listened to in their new situation. They expressed appreciation that they could initiate and implement new activities. This partnership led to a new feeling throughout the building.

Another critical component to school change was a systematic plan for transforming the school culture. The research on low-income families had shown that the key to helping them was to create a foundation of support through the development of relationships (Hashima & Amato, 1994; Payne, 1998). In addition, Shouse (1997) found that variables such as climate and a sense of community could influence parental involvement. The parents described the many changes, both internal and external, that were components of the administrator's plan to expand resources for the students, families and staff in the building. The principal provided further details and insight into her vision for the school (See Table 1 for Complete Details).

Ethridge and Hall (1992) advised that successful parent involvement programs often require continuous training for parents and teachers. In a separate report, *Raising Our Future* (1995), the Harvard Family Research Project stated that "the heart of family support programs is the web of relationships connecting staff with families, parents with children, and parents with other parents. Recurrent themes in program implementation are continuous outreach,

overcoming negative images of the schools, building trusting relationships, and empowering parents" (p. 11). As outlined in Table 1, efforts at ongoing training to create and maintain connections have been an integral component of the school's change efforts. The school has worked diligently to build resources and increase its support of children and their families.

Table 1
Principal's Plan for School Improvement

Year	Action	Purpose
1999-2000	New Curriculum	Core Knowledge Selected Implemented to Increase Students' Mental Resources
	Redirected Title 1 Funds	To Support Core Knowledge Curriculum, To Provide Resources for Classrooms, To Increase Students' Mental Resources
	Requested and Received a Full-Time Counselor	To Increase Emotional Resources for the School Families, To Increase Mental Resources for the School and Families, To Increase Support Systems for School and Families
	Arts Grant	Enrich the Curriculum Through the Arts to increase Students' Mental and Emotional Resources
	Wrote Grant for Playground Equip-ment ($56,000)	To Increase the School's Financial Resources, To Increase Students Physical Resources
	Initiated Monthly Newsletters in Spanish and English	To Increase Support Systems for School and Families
	Increase P.T.A. Memberships	Increase Support of the Parent Teacher Association Increase Support Systems for Parents and Teachers Increase Relationships and Role Models for Parents and Teachers
	Adjust Hours for P.T.A. Meetings,	To Accommodate Working Parents, Increase Support Systems, and
	Fundraising, and Extra-curricular Events	Increase Relationships/Role Models for Parents and Teachers
	Team with the Community Center to Host Literacy Events	Increase Community Involvement, Increase Families' Mental Resources, Increase Support Systems, and to Increase Relationships and Role Models for Families and School

	Improve Physical Conditions of the Building, Paint, Add Lighting, Add Marquee, and Implement School Scapes	Increase Pride and Ownership of the School, Improve School Climate, Increase Communication, Increase Emotional Resources for Families and School
	In-Service for Teachers in Core Knowledge, Early Childhood Education, and Parental Involvement	Increase Mental Resources for Teachers and Students, Increase Emotional Resources for Students, Increase Support Systems for Families and Staff, and Increase Relationships and Role Models for Parents and Teachers
	Implement the Use of an Interpreter for Meetings and to Translate Written Communication	Improve Communication between School and Home, Increase Mental Resources for Families, Support Systems, and Increase Relationships/Role Increase Models for Families and School
	Coffees with Principal	Improve Communication between School and Home, Increase Support Systems for Families and Staff, and Increase Relationships/Role Models for Families and Staff
2000-2001	Redirected Title 1 Funds	To Support Enhanced Instruction-Making Vocal Music and Visual Art Available for All Students K-5th, To Increase Mental Resources for the School and Families,
	Wrote Reading Excellence Grant ($112,300)	To Provide Training and Resources for Reading Instruction K-3rd, To Improve Mental Resources for School and Families, To Increase Support Systems for School and Families
	Wrote Grant for Pre-K Classroom (5,000)	To Increase Mental Resources for Students and School, To Increase Physical Resources for Students and Families
	Hired a Parent Coordinator for the Parent's Resource Room	Improve Communication between Home and School, Increase Support Systems for Families and Staff, and Increase Relationships/Role Models for Families and Staff
	Add English as a Second Language Classes for Parents	Improve Communication between Home and School, Increase Mental Resources for Families, Increase Support Systems for Families and School, and Increase Relationships/ Role Models for Families and

		School
	Add Tai Kwon Do Classes for Families	Increase Physical Resources for Families, Increase Relationships/Role Models for Families
2001-2002	Awarded a 20,000 Dollar Grant for the Parent's Resource Room	Increase Financial Support for the Families and the School, Increase Mental Resources for Families and the School, Increase Support Systems for the Families and the School

Feuerstein (2000) found that "schools can and do influence the level of parent participation in their children's education" (p. 37). In his research, he found correlations between the number of contacts made by the school and the amount of times parents spent volunteering and participating in PTO activities. This is of further interest to schools when combined with data from Henderson and Berla (1994) that suggested that parents were more likely to act in ways that would help their children educationally when schools collaborated with them. The students end up benefiting from the partnership between the home and school.

This study illuminated one inner-city school's efforts to develop positive school changes through increased partnerships between the home, school, and community. Although previous research by Payne (1998) and others had outlined the many deficits for poor minority families that place them in high risk categories, the current study showed the possibility of positive outcomes when partnerships are developed under strong leadership. The following section offered suggestions for schools, colleges and universities, and researchers in the field of education.

Recommendations

Elementary Schools

The data from the interviews and from previous research (Payne, 1998), indicate the importance of building resources and support for low-income families of color so that they in turn can assist their children through the educational process. In order to accomplish that goal, schools need to increase their understanding and knowledge of diverse family cultures. In addition, they should provide ongoing training and support based on current research to improve their efforts at parent involvement (Chavkin, 1993; Epstein, 1996; Floyd, 1998; and Hulsebosch & Logan, 1998). Furthermore, continuous and sustained parental involvement needs to be encouraged throughout the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation phases (Come & Fredericks, 1995; and Hulsebosch & Logan, 1998). Schools need to increase connections between the systems of home and school, develop rapport, and improve two-way communication through multiple means such as telephone calls, parent meetings, social gatherings, a hired parent liaison, or coordinator, etc (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Levine, 1999; Payne, 1998). Schools need to develop their sensitivity to the specific needs of low-income and minority families and develop programs that will encourage their participation (Pena, 2000). Finally, schools need to make a place for parents within the school. Teachers and faculty need to go out into the community to conduct workshops and make home visits (Epstein, 1996; Payne, 1998).

Maintenance is a critical component of any school change effort. Schools must engage stakeholders in ongoing communication about and evaluation of programs in order to ensure continuous momentum. As indicated by Table 1, English as a second-language classes were added the second year because initial data from the study indicated discrepancies in participation due to language barriers. Schools should focus attention on input from students, teachers, parents, and community efforts to uphold each school's vision.

It is imperative that schools extend their definitions of parental involvement and work to create meaningful relationships with families, sharing responsibility for the development, implementation and evaluation of school practices (Pena, 2000). Hulsebosch and Logan (1998) suggested that schools need to break out of practices based on the deficit approach and instigate practices based on an asset model. The asset model assumes that minority students and families have unique attributes that can enhance the educational process. The following suggestions will help schools begin building a foundation of support for students and families in which all members can participate in a more collaborative and meaningful environment.

Schools need to consider making changes in parental involvement practices in light of the information provided by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model. An effort needs to be made to create a warm, safe climate where parents feel welcome and are encouraged to participate. The data from the interviews demonstrates that parents will participate if they have a positive construction of the parental role, a sense of self-efficacy, and an open invitation

from the school. In addition, the parents highlighted the importance of the emotional weight put on invitations by their child. Further, multiple types of practices need to be put into place that will accommodate the different knowledge, experiences and life style demands of individual parents.

Colleges of Education

The interviews with parents highlighted the importance of positive leadership. Their decisions to become involved were tied to how they felt about the principal and how the principal made them feel. Parent and community partnership courses, therefore, should be required of not only teachers but administrators as well. In addition, ongoing training needs to be offered to administrators who are already working in the schools.

Future Research

Contradictory to the research on generational poverty (Payne, 1998) and to the research on self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), these low-income parents did not have a strong belief in fate or low self-efficacy. They believed that they could effectively change their children's futures by participating in their education. Future research should focus on why and how these parents had developed their positive beliefs about parental involvement.

In her research of generational poverty, Payne (1998), quotes Comer as having said "No significant learning takes place without significant realationships." Meaningful relationships are also necessary to families, administrators, and teachers if they are to learn new ways of working together. Future research should focus on how this and other patterns in generational

poverty influence the schools and families abilities to work together to support student's learning.

Conclusion

This study examined an increase in parental involvement from the perspective of the parents. Parents were clearly able to identify changes in parental involvement and their perceptions of the causes for the increase in parental involvement. The data from the interviews corroborated and supported much of what has been found in previous research. The findings from this study further dispelled the notion that low-income parents of color are not interested or are not capable of becoming partners with schools. On the contrary, when treated with dignity and respect, these parents were enthusiastic about their involvement. In answer to the first research question, how do parents in low-income and high-minority schools perceive their experiences with their childrens' school?, the parents' responses were dependent upon how they were treated by the school. In answer to the second question, how have parents in low-income and high minority schools perceived changes in parental involvement? and how do they explain those changes?, the parents' perceptions and explanations corresponded closely with what Pena (2000) said, "Their personal feelings toward the school's principal heavily influenced their involvement: (p. 50).

There were reasons to hope that the changes in the building would bring some success in increasing parental involvement. There was a strong effort to: increase funding through grants; improve the curriculum by selecting one with high expectations and a focus on improving educational outcomes for low-income

and minority students; maintain a clear direction; acknowledge and celebrate cultural diversity; accommodate parents; and focus on building support for students, families, and staff through developing relationships. More than a rise in the number of Parent Teacher Association memberships was uncovered in the data. The rising prevalence of parental involvement in many areas has been attributed to the positive leadership of the principal.

In its' review of 73 programs, the *Harvard Family Research Project* (1995) identified nine lessons that emerged in programs working to support families. They were: involve multiple stakeholders in the planning process, base program design on community resources and concerns, build trusting relationships with children and families, involve parents in a variety of roles, strive to build and maintain community partnerships, hire and support caring, well-trained staff, involve public school teachers with programs, evaluate to strengthen the program and build support, and raise funds broadly, continuously, and creatively. The interviews with the parents and conversations with the principal have demonstrated that this school has learned those lessons and used the information to transform their school into a community.

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Appendix A

Parent Questionnaire

Please answer each question below. Pick the one which best describes your situation.

1. What is your age? ____Years
2. Are you female ____ or male ____?
3. How many children in your family? ____
4. Marital Status:

a. ____single parent (not married, separated, divorced, widowed, etc.)

b. ___other, please explain_____

c. ____married with spouse living at home

5. What is the highest amount of education you have completed? (Please check only one.)

a. ____elementary school

b. ____some high school

c. ____finished high school

d. ____some college

e. ____finished college

f. ____graduate degree

6. Which is your ethnicity? (Please check only one.)

a. ____Anglo/Caucasian

b. ____Black

c. ____ Mexican American or Hispanic

d. ____ Asian or Pacific Islander

e. ____ Native American

7. Are you a P.T.A./P.T.O. member? ____Yes ____No

8. Have you ever been a P.T.A./P.T.O. officer? ____Yes ____No

9. Have you ever served on a school committee? ____Yes ____No

If so, please describe_____

10. Have you ever served on the school board? ____Yes ____No

11. How much time do you work outside the home?

a. ____full time

b. ____part time

c. ____not at all

12. How much time does your spouse work outside the home?

a. ____full time

b. ____part time

c. ____not at all

13. Are you a school teacher? ____Yes ____No

14. Are you a school principal? ____Yes ____No

THANKS

Appendix B

Interview Schedule

Key Questions

1. Describe your child's school.
2. Describe your involvement with your child's school.

Possible Follow-Up Questions

1. Describe any changes in parental involvement that might have taken place in the last 3-5 years.
    2. Describe what you know about the P.T.O. in your school.
3. Describe any changes in the P.T.O. or parent involvement that you have observed during the time that you have been involved with your child's school.
4. Describe any other activities that the school utilizes to encourage parents to be involved.
5. Describe the communication practices that your child's school employs.
6. How do you feel that parent involvement affects students in the school? Teachers? Administrator?
7. What do you see as the school strengths in the area of parent involvement?
8. Describe any weaknesses that you see in the area of parent involvement.
9. How are parents involved in decision making in the school?
10. Are there resources outside of the school that influence parent involvement in the school? Please explain.
11. What is your school doing to become a better place this year?
12. What would the parents' role be in those improvements?

13. What has their role been in the past?

14. How would you complete the following statements:

    -I believe students learn best when...

    -The best teaching occurs when...

    -A good school is one that...