TEACHERS’ PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES AS BARRIERS TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Denise M. Brennan

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Committee:

Dr. Nancy Patterson, Advisor

Dr. Tracy Huziak-Clark

Dr. Angela Falter Thomas
ABSTRACT

Dr. Nancy Patterson, Advisor

Teachers are increasingly being required to collaborate with parents in the pursuit of the academic achievement of all students. Because teachers are being held accountable for, not only the academic success of their students, but also for collaborative measures in communicating about these, they must be aware of their professional obligations to this ‘partnership’ with parents. In this study, I examined and qualitatively analyzed the attitudes and practices of rural high school teachers in a particular high school to determine potential barriers that might inhibit or prevent the involvement of parents.

Data was collected in three forms: school documents to contextualize the research environment, and an online survey and interviews to capture participants’ expressed attitudes and practices. Seven assertions emerged from the data and were used to answer the most significant research question: How might these expressed practices and attitudes inhibit or prevent parental involvement?

The findings revealed four barriers including: teachers’ feelings of competence or self-confidence in involving parents, lack of teacher training for involving parents, lack of understanding of parents’ attitudes and abilities for being involved, and lack of administrative support. Though the results of this study cannot be generalized to any other setting based on the small size of the participant population, the results are worthy of consideration by other researchers who may wish to explore potential barriers to involving parents of high school-aged students in rural schools.

Keywords: parental involvement, collaboration, barriers, teachers’ attitudes, partnership
Lovingly dedicated to my three men who saw me through to the very end.

The following quote embodies the constructivist experience of writing this thesis:

“Nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.” – by Oscar Wilde
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For their guidance, wisdom, and support, I would like to acknowledge my thesis committee: Dr. Nancy Patterson, Dr. Tracey Huiak-Clark, and Dr. Angela Falter Thomas. I would especially like to acknowledge Dr. Patterson for her professional guidance, but respectful distance that allowed this research study to truly be my own.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

I once heard an educator at a parent orientation night use the image of a three-legged stool to describe the relationship between student, teacher, and parent, each representing one leg. She commented that if any one leg was broken, that academic success would be wrought with challenges. Imagine using a stool with only one or two functional legs.

After first hearing this metaphor, I pondered its meaning only long enough to fully appreciate its creative merits as a model for academic success and then it faded from my conscious thoughts. Gradually, as our nation’s educational climate fervently began incorporating reform measures mandated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the image of the three-legged stool started to resurface. The rapid advance toward high standards, accountability, parental choice and standardized testing created a morphing of that image of a three-legged stool into an image of a finely hewn, artfully-crafted, enduring piece of furniture. In consideration of the current research regarding the need for collaboration between home and school in order to promote academic success, the validity of the three-legged stool metaphor had to be further extended.

First, it was crucial to realize that the structural integrity of the stool was being scrutinized (NCLB, 2002). Critics (stakeholders) were suggesting that the stool needed to be constructed of higher quality wood (higher, common standards, accountability) for greater stability (academic achievement and international educational rankings). Pine or poplar (non-egalitarian educational measures) might have been easier to work with and more readily available, but black locust and oak (collaboration and engagement of all families) had to become standard (Epstein, 2005).

Second, the three legs needed to be broader in order to better distribute the weight (growth, learning, globalization, and choice) (NCLB, 2002). The student leg needed to be
broadened to include all students, proficient according to NCLB, minus gaps in achievement due to race, gender, ethnicity, disability, English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, national origin or color. Parents alone were not strong enough to constitute an entire leg. They needed the support of additional stakeholders, including the community and society. Like parents, teachers needed the added strength of not only administrators, such as principals and superintendants, but also from corporations and foundations whose monetary support provided density to the leg.

Having fortified the legs, it was important to remember the glue and fasteners required to keep the stool together. The strongest glues (cooperation and partnerships) distinguish our stool (national educational system) as being a fine piece of furniture and reinforce pride in the label—*Made in America*.

**Statement of the Problem**

While the image of the three-legged stool might make it easier to see the relationship between home-school-community, it is by far more difficult to construct a sound national educational system that will continue to serve the needs of our nation well into the future. The rapid advancement of high quality, common standards and accountability across our nation signifies a need to engage families and communities as partners (Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005). In addition, along with *No Child Left Behind’s* requirements for annual achievement, the law also includes important requirements for schools, districts, and states to organize programs of parental involvement and to communicate achievement results of students and school to both parents and the public (Epstein, 2005). In order to facilitate these worthy goals, schools must reflect upon their current practices and own attitudes about parental involvement so that they can identify and understand barriers that could impede their professional obligations and future
The purpose of this study was to educe and examine teachers’ practices and attitudes about parental involvement at a particular distant rural high school in the Midwest. I chose this location partially because of its familiarity and interest to me, but particularly because it served to fill a void in the research literature that tended to be heavily laden with research about the involvement of urban parents in the early education of their children, especially at the pre-school and elementary levels, as this is where the majority of academic remediation has occurred. There has been limited research conducted that includes both the high school level and rural academic environment.

Because federal mandates requiring parental involvement already exist, it is inevitable and highly feasible that schools will continue to be held accountable for their parental involvement measures (NCLB, 2002). Therefore, the definition of “Parental Involvement” from No Child Left Behind was utilized as a guide and reflective measure during this study. In addition, this study focused solely on identifying and revealing teachers’ practices and attitudes because it is my belief as an educator, that having a deep, introspective awareness of one’s own and peers’ attitudes and subsequent practices is primary to considering the attitudes of students, parents, and administrators. Additionally, this awareness empowers educators to consider parental involvement implementation strategies more thoughtfully and meaningfully.

To derive and analyze teachers’ attitudes and practices, I administered an on-line survey and conducted follow-up interviews with several of the survey respondents. In addition, I examined several school district artifacts, such as a customer satisfaction survey, that added contextual relevance to the study and helped to answer the following research questions.
1. What attitudes do teachers in this rural high school hold about parental involvement?

2. What practices do teachers in this rural high school perpetuate regarding parental involvement? And,

3. How might these observed practices and attitudes inhibit or prevent parental involvement?

**Significance of the Problem**

Teachers have an important obligation to understand their role in the “three-legged stool” model so that they can provide parents with the knowledge and tools to be involved. Failure to effectively involve parents will impede academic achievement and negatively impact the success of schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). This power, if utilized positively, can have a tremendous impact on the success of schools and all children. Research suggested that parental involvement in the learning environments of their children was critical. Unfortunately, most teacher preparation programs lacked courses on how to effectively involve parents and if teachers also had inadequate support or training from the principal or district on how to involve parents, then the deficiency was further compounded (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Hill & Taylor, 2004). This study will provide valuable insight into the identification of barriers that could prevent parental involvement. Identification of such barriers may help to establish what requisite skills and training are needed in order to facilitate effective collaboration with parents.

**Definition of Terms**

*Collaboration*- identification and integration of resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 2001)

*Attitude*- An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and
situations with which it is related (Allport, 1935). Allport (1935), a highly revered sociological researcher, included these important elements in his definition: attitudes are private, attitudes are formed and organized through experience, and attitudes are not passive, rather they have a direct influence on behavior. Though a dated definition of attitude, it was chosen for its origination and continued usage in sociological research and its relevance to this study.

Practices- Customary operations in education, from the educational system as a whole to the individual classroom or teacher (http://www.education.com/definition/educational-practices/)

Parental Involvement- the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities (NCLB, 2002)

Distant Rural- Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster (United, 2007)

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study that researchers wishing to utilize the information and results must consider. First, the results of this study were limited to a rural public high school in the Midwest and can only be generalized to one particular school, given the small sample size of the participants. Secondly, though the study included teachers from all content areas, as well as from ancillary content areas such as health and intervention special needs, the number of participants was limited to 10 of 29 teachers who were solicited for voluntary participation. A larger representative population would have allowed for more diverse and inclusive accounts of teachers’ attitudes and practices.

A third limitation of this study was that it did not consider all variables of teachers’ attitudes and practices. Because the on-line survey only included ten open-ended questions, it
was likely that all areas of teachers’ practices and attitudes were not explored. Therefore, the findings of this study are not inclusive of teachers’ attitudes and practices.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter presented a review of literature regarding the topic of parental involvement. The review provided information related to the sub-topics of: why parental involvement, difficulties in studying parental involvement, partnering strategies between schools and families, and barriers to effective collaboration. Organization of the literature into these categories facilitated greater clarity of comparison to the research findings of the current study and helped to identify gaps in the literature that would be well served by further research.

Why Parental Involvement?

The rapid advancement of high quality, common standards and accountability across our nation was a “call for action” (Machen et al., 2005). According to Machen et al. (2005), “collaboration between parents and schools had taken on increased importance as society recognized the need to help parents with the difficult responsibility of educating their children” (p. 13). This relationship was reciprocal in that strong schools produced strong communities and strong communities provided strong support for their schools. Furthermore, when parents and communities were involved in ways that connected to student learning, their involvement had a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement. As Henderson and Mapp (2002) distinguished, “To be effective, the form of involvement should be focused on improving achievement and be designed to engage families and students in developing specific knowledge” (p. 38).

In addition to collaborating with parents as a means of supporting communal enrichment and academic success, parental involvement was necessary because it had been mandated by national reform measures such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. In a No Child Left Behind Action Brief (National, 2004), produced as a joint effort between the Public Education
Network and the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, authors noted that parents were mentioned over 300 times in different parts of the act. Title I, Part A, Section 1118 of *No Child Left Behind* required that every school district and school receiving Title I funds had to have a written parent involvement policy in place. Furthermore, the policy must have been developed cooperatively with parents and distributed for approval to parents and the local community (National, 2004). Significant goals of *No Child Left Behind* were to establish equity in the nations’ educational systems so that all students could succeed and to close the achievement gap for marginalized learners by bridging the gap between home and school (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007; NCLB, 2002).

A major reason for mandating communication with parents was so that they would receive pertinent information about the scores and achievement results of both their own children and their children’s schools. This required communication would allow parents to compare the results of various neighboring schools, identify schools that were underperforming, and obtain information that parents needed to initiate choice, or change, in their children’s education. In considering the importance of such equity, parental involvement then too needed to include all families, not just the ones currently involved or those easiest to reach (Epstein, 2005).

Regardless of age, race, socio-economic status or educational level, researchers, Yun and Kusum (2008), asserted that parents, naturally, are the “central agents” of education for their children. These researchers reported that parents played a key role in the education of their children and, therefore, impacted the engagement levels, academic performance, and future social competence of their children. Because parents had such a critical role and such power over their children, the fact that they had a right to be involved in the education of their children was not challenged. Thus, it is not surprising that a wealth of studies reported that parental
involvement had been shown to positively affect student achievement and reduce behavioral problems (Fan & Chen, 1999; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Keith & Keith, 1993; Kyriakides, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Simon, 2000; & Van Voorhis, 2001).

**Difficulties in Studying Parental Involvement**

Two primary difficulties of studying parental involvement were indicated in the research, the first being the difficulty in defining it, and the second being the extreme variability in the demographics that embody it. First was the difficulty in establishing a definition or vision of the meaning of parental involvement. For example, several well-known researchers supplied the following definitions: “the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within a given domain. These domains include: behavior, cognitive-intellectual, and personal” (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994, p. 538); “home-based to school-based activities that are either child focused or institution focused” (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, p. 6); school-family-community involvement, broken down into six types: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1987, 2005); and, finally, “consisting of the following activities: volunteering at school, communicating with teachers and other school personnel, assisting in academic activities at home, and attending school events, meeting of parent-teacher associations and parent-teacher conferences” (Hill & Taylor, 2004, p. 161). In addition to these definitions, the *No Child Left Behind* definition defined parental involvement as, “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities.” Though these definitions shared some elements, it seemed rather commonplace for researchers to have constructed their own definition of parental involvement, combined aspects of more than
one definition to create a new definition, or to have used another researcher’s definition as the theoretical framework for their own personal research.

Secondly, as I studied the parental involvement literature to address bolstering a district’s academic achievement, identifying barriers to involvement, or suggesting implementation strategies of involvement at a distant rural high school, I found that the literature spanned the full academic age spectrum, was concentrated in urban demographic areas, and even varied widely in participant perspective. The majority of the current research had been conducted at the Pre-K through early elementary levels where parental involvement was considered to be indicative of early academic success, in particular as regards, language skills and social competence (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Parental involvement through children’s middle to high school years was thought to decline and the types of involvement changed (Sanders, Epstein & Connors-Tadros, 1999). In a study conducted by the Search Institute, as described by Sanders et al. (1999), researchers found that four practices of parental involvement—discussions about homework, discussions about schools and school work, helping with homework, and attending school meetings and events—declined significantly between grades six and twelve. In addition, they found that the organizational structure of middle and high schools, with large numbers of students assigned to teachers for short periods of time, inhibited effective and productive parent-school communication and engagement. Hill and Taylor (2004) suggested that perhaps involvement did not decline that much, rather, the research may have indicated declining involvement because the measurements did not take into consideration a change in the nature of the involvement.

In agreement with this possibility, Simon (2001) further concluded that such research “must have taken a narrow view of involvement that did not consider the wide range of
partnership activities that were conducted at home, at school, and in the community” (p. 9). Her conclusion was based on her own research analyses of reports from the parents of 11,000 high school students from over 1,000 high school principals who participated in the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88). These parents and principals were surveyed on a range of topics including characteristics and practices of school, family, and community connections. The results were conceptualized and then presented using Epstein’s (1987) framework of six types of family and community involvement--parenting, community, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community—in order to illustrate, specifically, how high schools connect with families and community.

Parent-teacher conferences and school-to-home or home-to-school communications were found to not be as effective at the high school level. Volunteering at school tended to occur at school functions rather than inside classroom because, “parents questioned their usefulness in the classroom, teachers may not have wanted to be monitored by parents and students may not want their parents at school keeping tabs on them” (Simon, 2001, p. 10). Also, parenting workshops about drug and alcohol abuse prevention, college planning, and homework assistance and involvement in parent teacher organizations (PTO) were found to be meaningful ways to connect with parents. Regardless of the perception that parental involvement many taper at the high school level, Epstein (2001) argued that participation among all families can be encouraged by developing comprehensive partnership programs that build meaningful connections between families and schools.

To summarize, in addition to the difficulty of establishing a common definition of parental involvement, research on the topic of parental involvement spanned several socio-economic levels, developmental age levels, and parental educational levels. It spanned cultural,
race and ethnic groups, varied perspectives (of teachers, parents, administrators, policy makers and students), varied settings (urban, suburban, rural, Catholic, private, and combinations of these) and even considered involvement based on gender (fathers versus mothers). Add the difficulty of establishing a common definition of parental involvement to the copious list of these other components and the result was literally, hundreds and hundreds of studies that obscured the field’s focus. This lack of consensus in defining the field in itself becomes a barrier that must be reconciled before collaboration can be engaged. As Flessa (2008) posited, “given the expanse of the literature, there is no uniform agreement on what counts as parental engagement, what its purpose is, or who is best positioned to assess whether or not parents are engaged” (n.p.).

**Partnering Strategies between Schools and Families**

In a study conducted by Taliaferro, DeCuir-Gunby and Allen-Eckard (2009), researchers applied the ecological systems theory to the understanding of the rearing of a child by suggesting that multiple systems of support were necessary during child development. They furthered this analogy by implying that these multiple systems were nested and offered reciprocal relationships. Therefore, to ensure the academic success of children, multiple systems, including parents and schools, had to work, tangentially. In particular consideration of the school as a system, they suggested that it was often teachers who “make or break” a program’s effectiveness and that the “teachers’ perspectives were essential to the implementation of school-based programs” (p. 278). In following their logic, and in considering the research questions of this study that focus on teachers’ practices and attitudes, school-to-family strategies were broken down into categories for discussion by who initiated them- administrators or teachers.

**Administration as initiator.** On the administrative level, Feuerstein (2000) noted that it was imperative that school practices and policies build trust between teachers and families.
Because most parents, regardless of socio-economic status, love their children and wanted them to succeed, schools needed to be well versed in the cultural diversity of their populous (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Understanding and respecting diversity allowed schools to structure and schedule events and activities that accommodated parents’ needs. In addition, schools facilitated these needs, especially those of poorer families, by providing transportation, childcare, and even food at such events (National, 2004). In one example, presented by Epstein (2005), several departments of the Seattle Public School System worked together to develop presentations, school handbooks, school websites and other important publications for parents in 10 different languages in order to support diverse families. These and other efforts to make parents feel welcome at the school (such as simple, welcoming signage and friendly smiles from staff) helped to create a welcoming environment. When schools organized high-quality programs to inform and engage all families, many more parents felt welcome at school and valued by educators and became involved because of school and classroom partnership practices (Epstein, 2001, 2005; Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Van Voorhis, 2003). This translated into trust that was important for engaging parents as well as teachers.

Many teachers cited the support of their principal as a key aspect of success for parental involvement strategies (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). As administrators, providing teachers with the tools and training they needed to feel efficacious was important. Teachers’ limiting time constraints coupled with lack of parent involvement management skills can quickly erode engagement strategies if not addressed. Research by Hill and Taylor (2004) noted that “most teacher training programs do not include courses on how to effectively involve parents” (p. 163). For these reasons, teachers required clear directives from building level support and from central administration regarding parent involvement best practices (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).
Teachers as initiators. Teachers played a vital role in both the home-based and school-based involvement of parents. For home-based involvement, teachers selected, planned, and developed materials for home learning. In addition, they worked with parents to explain, monitor and evaluate the activities (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). A strategy to provide parents with ample support in their home involvement roles was to offer programs or workshops that, if presented by teachers, built strong bonds between home and school. Another strategy to involve parents at home included the use of interactive homework.

In a study conducted by Epstein, Simon, and Salinas (1997), 683 Baltimore middle-grade students’ test scores and grades in writing and language arts improved when families participated in Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork -TIPS learning activities at home. The TIPS process allowed teachers to design homework that required the involvement of someone at home. In this manner, parents or guardians became involved by, monitoring, interacting, and supporting their child in learning. Results of the study showed that not only did writing scores and grades increase, but, parental participation levels improved, as did students’ completion of homework and teachers’ attitudes (Epstein et al., 1997).

Inside the school or classroom, teachers asked parents to be involved in meaningful ways that used their talents so they felt valued (Kyriakides, 2005). When teachers contacted parents, personally, to ask for their participation in organizations (such as Parent Teacher Organizations) or within the classroom, volunteerism typically increased (Feuerstein, 2000). In addition, when parents volunteered in the school, it sent a message to their children that school was important and that they care about their children’s success (Machen et al., 2005). This sense of caring and establishment of educational worth translated into feelings of self confidence and agreement
between school and home. When students perceived that their parents and their school were ‘on the same page’, behavioral issues were reduced (Martin & Martin, 2007).

**Barriers to Parental Involvement**

Though investigating school-family partnering strategies was a key step toward answering the research questions of this study, it was also necessary to consider whether these strategies could be successfully implemented. In order to do so, potential inhibitors had to be explored. The purpose of this section was not to create an inclusive list of barriers that existed and might, therefore, prevent parents from engaging in their children’s academics. Rather, the purpose was to consider the major derivations of such barriers so that awareness was generated and a foundation for remediation created. Three subtopics were used to organize this section: teacher and administrator’s beliefs/efficacy, parents’ beliefs/efficacy and compounding issues.

**Teachers’ and administrators’ beliefs/efficacy.** Barnyak and McNelly (2009) reviewed practices and beliefs of administrators and teachers regarding parental involvement following the first year of an implementation plan to involve parents. Results of the study showed that, although teachers and administrators had strong beliefs about the importance of parental involvement in strengthening students’ achievement, their practices in their schools and classrooms were contrary. An example of this contrary relationship between belief and behavior would be an educator who had strong beliefs about the value of classroom newsletters, web pages, interactive homework and e-mails, but did not utilize any of these in his or her classroom. Barnyak and McNelly (2009) suggested that this discrepancy might have been the result of self-efficacy issues, which stem from one’s own beliefs in his or her competence to complete a task rather than actual ability. The self-efficacy issue then translated into a barrier of involving parents since the feeling of incompetence prevailed over the perception of ability.
Hill and Taylor (2004) investigated parental involvement across cultural, socio-economic and developmental levels to identify variation in the patterns and amounts of involvement. In their research they noted that teachers who differed culturally from their students were less likely to know the students and parents, and believed that those parents who volunteered at school valued education more than those parents who did not. This belief was further associated with ratings of students’ academic skills and achievement.

Storer (1995) found that, while educators claimed to value positive involvement with parents, they also believed that parents did not understand or appreciate their work, that parents valued educational aspects of school behind less important aspects such as extra-curricular activities, and that educators felt that parent involvement in volunteerism and home education was appropriate, but parents being involved in decision-making applications, was not. Much along the same vain as a self-fulfilling prophecy, this research suggested that educators’ and administrators’ attitudes and beliefs might have permeated the school culture as they were projected into their collaboration efforts or parental involvement implementations and thus, their feelings of incompetence may have been actualized. To prevent such a hindrance from occurring, Barnyak and McNelly (2009) suggested that teacher education related to parent involvement and thorough examination of teachers’ attitudes, skills, and abilities be conducted by state leaders or parent involvement coordinators.

In examining beliefs of administrators, one might question why an administrator, laden with knowledge and results of studies that show the positive impact and implications for schools on academic achievement and behavior, might choose to understate or simply ignore such progressive measures. One line of argument by Flessa (2008) would suggest “principals are not attending to parents now because new accountability pressures focus their daily work on what
gets tested-and there’s no test for parental involvement” (p. 20). Supposing this to be true, this mentality suggested that parental involvement was an either/or-type option and further implied that principals were attending to parental involvement before accountability measures created such high pressure.

**Parents’ beliefs/efficacy.** Much research was dedicated to why parents become involved in their children’s education. It was critical to comprehend some of these finer points so that understanding of parents’ attitudes might open the channels to collaboration. Understanding parents’ attitudes was also helpful for schools as they chose implementation strategies for achieving academic success.

A study conducted by Griffith and Galassi (2010), in a rural middle school in the South, explored parents’ perceptions of barriers to academic success via an action research approach that used a focus group consisting of twenty-nine parents. The focus group was divided in half based on the academic success levels of their children. The following six major themes emerged from both groups of parents: parent and family barriers, teacher and instructional barriers, parent-teacher interaction barriers, student barriers, school or educational system barriers and perceived available resources for school success. Two additional themes from the parents of at-risk (failing one or more classes and have behavioral referrals or suspensions) students emerged: teacher-student interaction barriers and perceptions of what is needed to address barriers to school success.

Based on the emergence of these themes, recommendations included: “increased communication between schools and families (especially between teachers and parents), teachers paying closer attention to the individual needs of students, and greater availability of school and community resources that enhance learning for all students” (Griffith & Galassi, 2010, p. 96). In
addition, parents recognized the shared responsibility in helping their students become academically successful, though beyond being more involved and proactive they were unsure of how or where to get assistance. These findings aligned with the self-efficacy construct proposed by the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) model regarding parental role construction.

Hoover-Dempsey’s and Sandler’s (1997) research of role construction theory suggested that “groups to which parents belong will hold expectations about appropriate parental role behaviors, including behaviors related to involvement in children’s educational processes, and will communicate their role expectations to parents” (p.10). Because the groups to which parents belong can be numerous (families, child’s school, workplace, neighborhood), expectations from varied groups may conflict. That was why demographic characteristics such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and cultural background could be systematically associated with parental school involvement (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Overall, parents with higher educational levels and from higher socioeconomic levels had positive perceptions of their ability to be involved in their children’s academics, while parents with backgrounds in lower socioeconomic levels, typically having lower educational levels, were faced with more barriers to involvement. These barriers could have from their own negative experiences with schooling while growing up, or feelings of inadequacy in addressing teachers or schools and may have included: Lack of resources, nonflexible work schedules, transportation problems, childcare needs, and stress due to living conditions (Hill and Taylor, 2004). In this regard, it was rather ironic and unfortunate that parents of students who would most benefit from parental involvement might have experienced the most barriers to becoming involved.

Shumow and Lomax (2001) examined parents’ feelings about their ability to guide their teenagers. In their study, a national sample of 929 families, with children aged 10-17, examined
the impact of parents’ feeling of efficacy on student achievement. Their findings revealed that family background, as well as income and neighborhood, affected feelings of efficacy that in turn affected how parents were involved in their children’s education and, consequently, affected the children’s achievement and feelings of well-being (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). This finding aligned with an observation made by Sanders et al. (1999) that suggested, “when high schools develop partnership practices that encourage families to volunteer or become active participants in school decision making, families respond” (p. 14). Even low-income and minority families will be encouraged by well developed, comprehensive programs that build meaningful connections between families and schools.

Compounding issues. A study by Plevyak (2005), conducted in Southwestern Ohio, included 50 returned surveys of 112 parents that examined the beliefs of parents. Approximately 50% of the respondents considered “knowing what was going on in the school” (p. 27) to be an advantage to participating. Parents felt that a major benefit to being involved was that their children would see them being involved in school functions, thus supporting the cooperative role of a home-school partnership. This collaboration and communication were important components of many involvement programs.

In analyzing sources of inequality in school outcomes, Flessa (2008) observed a lack of data regarding the kinds of assessments or evaluative measures that policymakers have collected on schools’ work with parents. He suggested that this was because the means to evaluate parental involvement were typically assessed informally and did not include any methods of measuring commitment, but only superficially assessed compliance. Additionally, the relationship between parent satisfaction and what schools did to engage parents was ambiguous. Policymakers have concluded that parental involvement was an important aspiration for schools;
this in turn placed greater expectations on schools and principals, with no clear means of measuring success (Flessa, 2008).

**Summary**

A summary of the literature regarding the needs for schools to involve parents as addressed in several sub-categories was provided in this chapter. These were: why parental involvement, difficulties in studying parental involvement, partnering strategies between schools and families, and barriers to effective collaboration. In the review of literature, I considered research about the beliefs of teachers, parents, and administrators, and considered parental involvement at all age levels, with the bulk of that literature focused on early and elementary education in urban settings. Difficulties in studying parental involvement were explored, as were the possible barriers to parental involvement that added to these difficulties. And, while barriers and difficulties were identified, so too were teacher-led and administrator-led strategies that could be employed to curb or prevent such barriers. Because this nation’s educational system must be a vehicle of success for all students, further research is necessary, particularly as it relates to non-urban settings and middle or high school-aged children. As politicized by current educational reform and as a goal of education in a democracy, the rights and equality of all citizens must be considered. In reconciling the information from this review of literature, the current study aimed to provide further research that would not only broaden the scope of the literature by filling in the gaps, but also by providing a solid understanding of how teachers can be instrumental toward building communication bridges between families and schools, by starting with the identification of their own attitudes and practices of parental involvement. Quite simply, improving parental involvement can better schools and push them toward higher standards (Machen et al., 2005).
CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

As a researcher and educator, I believe that having a deep, introspective awareness of one’s own and peers’ attitudes and subsequent practices is critical to establishing successful partnering relationships with families. As mentioned in the review of literature, it is often the teacher who can ‘make or break’ a program’s effectiveness (Taliaferro et al., 2009). It was this belief that fueled my desire to conduct research on teachers’ attitudes and practices and it was also this belief that forced me to be conscious of my own potential subjectivity in my research so that I could knowingly consider the manifestations of my feelings (Peshkin, 1988). As Peshkin (1988) commented on researchers’ subjectivity, “When their subjectivity remains unconscious, they insinuate rather than knowingly clarify their personal stakes” (p. 17). As Barnyak and McNelly (2009) also pointed out, even though teachers may have strong feelings about the importance of involving parents to improve the educational success of their students, their classroom practices may be contradictory. In this chapter, I first provided a contextualization of the research environment and then described the methods utilized to study the attitudes, practices, and barriers regarding parental involvement of high school teachers in a distant rural Midwest high school.

In organizing the data, I used the following framework of barriers that emerged from the review of literature to guide my analysis. As the literature regarding the self-efficacy of teachers suggested, what teachers say they believed and what their classroom practices demonstrated were often in contradiction (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Several studies attempted to reveal teachers’ attitudes by exploring teachers’ strategies of involving parents (Epstein et al., 1997; Feuerstein, 2000; & Kyriakides, 2005). But, as researchers Barnyak and McNelly (2009) reasoned, teachers’ expressed attitudes may not have matched their practices because they
consciously or unconsciously lacked confidence in their capabilities to involve parents (p. 40). Their research and that of Hill and Taylor (2004) further suggested that teachers’ lack of confidence may be attributable to their lack of training on how to successfully involve parents and/or their lack of support from the administration on involving parents.

Another barrier connected to teachers’ feelings of competence for involving parents was having a shallow understanding of parents’ attitudes and ability to be involved with schools (Shumow and Lomax, 2001). At the upper grade levels, researchers suggested that perhaps there was too narrow of an understanding of what constituted involvement since involvement might change as students become older (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Simon, 2001). In not fully understanding parents’ reasons for being involved, or not being involved, teachers created their own perceptions about parents’ involvement (Storer, 1995). The framework of barriers that guided my research follows.

In particular, I analyzed participants’ expressed practices and attitudes to determine the existence of barriers that might inhibit collaboration efforts of teachers with parents. In addition, I used the definition of parental involvement from No Child Left Behind (2002) as a reflecting point during data collection in order to consider its significance. The following is a discussion of how I used the instrumentation and methodology for conducting the study, along with the procedures for data collection and analysis, to investigate the following research questions:

1. What attitudes do teachers in this rural high school hold about parental involvement?
2. What practices do teachers in this rural high school perpetuate regarding parental involvement? And,
3. How might these observed practices and attitudes, inhibit or prevent parental involvement?
The Study

During this investigation, a qualitative, action-oriented approach was employed to explore teacher attitudes and practices as a means of determining potential barriers to involving parents in academic partnerships with schools. The approach was action-oriented, because, the resulting data could feasibly be used by the field site participants to guide future parental involvement efforts. I used empirical generalizations and formal theory during the beginning stages of analysis to form initial questions for research (Glesne, 1999). According to Thomas and Brubaker (2008), this study is considered a case study versus an ethnography “because it is intended to reveal the individual attributes of a particular person or institution, while ethnographies are intended to identify beliefs and customs shared by members of a social system” (p. 114). In selecting a case to study, Lichman (2006) asserted that the key to establishing the case was in identifying the characteristic, trait or behavior being studied so that proper design, analysis and interpretation can be utilized. I considered this case study to be typical because it was not being generalized to any other population and was representative of other similarly sized distant rural high schools. To answer my research questions I collected documents that helped establish the background of my research site, developed and administered an on-line survey, and conducted interviews with teachers. I then analyzed results and reported the findings.

Background. To contextualize the research environment, I reviewed school documents, including the district and school websites, the school report card from the state department of education website, notes from an informal interview with the principal, and the district’s own customer satisfaction survey. The district’s mission, extracted from its website, provided cohesion between the description of the setting and the embodiment of this study. The district’s
mission, paraphrased to protect the identity of the research participants, denoted the traditional, rural community as having progressive leadership and being dedicated to developing educators prepared for the challenges of a diverse curriculum. The mission statement further emphasized that these goals would be accomplished through effective teaching and positive community support.

Eagleville High School educates approximately 640 students in grades 9-12, averaging approximately 160 students per grade (Ohio, 2009-2010). Many of the children attending this school are from second and third generation families. The populous of the high school’s full-time teachers is approximately 30 with 40% of those being male. The current principal, Mr. Montanya (pseudonym) has been serving as this school for almost 15 years. The campus, also housing the middle school, is located at the crossroad of two county roads that traverse the area.

The nearest towns serviced by this school district range in population from approximately 900 to 1400 residents and were originally established around 1900. These residences, primarily single-family, dot the crosshatched streets named after early presidents and tree varieties. Streetlights, not common to the area, are primarily located along the main roads through these towns, which are also state highways. The community surrounding these towns’ boundaries consists of single-family homes on small acreage tracts and “family” farms on plots of 20 acres or more. Grain and animal farming remain vibrant in the area and are part of the economic base. The nearest urban center, providing employment opportunities, cultural variants and supporting amenities, is approximately 20 miles to the northwest. The racial composition of the surrounding county is primarily 95% Caucasian, which is reflected similarly in the school population.

**Participants.** After conducting a thorough review of the literature regarding parental involvement, I observed that the majority of the literature addressed elementary students and
urban settings. As a researcher who grew up in and currently has children in a suburban setting, I chose to conduct research in a rural, high school setting in an effort to ‘round-out’ my exposure to parental involvement in a variety of settings. I chose this location partially because of its familiarity, but primarily because it represented a typical rural high school and served to fill a void in the research literature that was heavily laden with research on early education in urban settings.

Because this study was a case study conducted with the participants of one particular rural high school in the Midwest, survey and interview participants represented a typical case sampling because they “illustrated or highlighted what was typical, or normal” (Patton, 1990) for this location. The sample was a convenience sample of the entire staff at the school, and though it was not intentionally orchestrated, maximum variation sampling (Glesne, 1999) evolved naturally from participants’ voluntary participation as represented by the extreme range in variance of the teachers’ experience levels and content area specializations.

Of the 29 high school teachers in the sample, 10 completed the survey, with 3 of these participants agreeing to be interviewed. These 10 participants were both male and female, with experience levels ranging from 4 to 36 years, and included all core content areas, as well as ancillary teaching areas. The distinct experience levels and extreme variation in content areas of the three teachers who were interviewed provided maximum variation sampling, or cases that cut across a range of variation (Glesne, 1999) and added to the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), given their diverse perspectives. In addition, all three teachers had spent their entire teaching careers at this same distant rural high school, which truly deepened the contextualization of this particular school, in this particular case study. Participant demographics are included in Table 1.
Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from an on-line survey and in-person interviews which appear in Appendix A. These sources provided first-hand accounts of teachers’ attitudes and practices that allowed for direct applicability to the research questions of this study. The goal of utilizing multiple data-collection methods was to increase the trustworthiness of the data and validity of each source (Glesne, 1999). Multiple methods were also utilized as a means to fulfill the researcher’s obligation of presenting sufficient details so that others can judge the quality of the resulting research (Patton, 1999). The resulting data fulfilled a two-fold purpose of adding to the current literature about parental involvement in rural high schools, which was sparse, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content area</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Gender</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>36 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>31 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention Specialist</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Two survey respondents did not provide demographic information.
providing action-oriented results that the subject high school can utilize for future compliance, modification, implementation, or validation requirements.

Instrumentation. Instrumentation consisted of the afore-mentioned on-line survey and brief, in-person interview with teacher participants. In development of the survey and interview questions, I considered the results of the many studies included in my review of literature and gave special consideration to the voluminous amount of Likert-style surveys conducted by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) and Epstein (2001) used to explore their own research on teachers’ beliefs and practices about parental involvement and the academic success of children. In particular, I focused on constructing questions that would potentially reveal teachers’ attitudes on important topics such as their methods of involving parents, strategies they considered to be most/least effective, perceived barriers to involving parents, impact of federal mandates regarding parental involvement, administrative support for involving parents, and their own feelings of competence and preparedness for involving parents.

The on-line survey itself was created using a professional survey creation website, with the link to the survey sent via e-mail to the potential participants. An on-line survey was chosen because it provided an affective means of accessing multiple perspectives. The confidentiality of the survey allowed for candid, uninhibited, qualitative responses.

The goal of the interview questions (Seidman, 2006) was to have participants reconstruct his or her experiences with parental involvement in an effort to build upon and explore participants’ responses. The questions were carefully developed so that objectivity was prioritized, allowing for opportunities for negative case analyses to be mined from the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This deeper exploration allowed for more meaningful connections to the research literature. The survey questions and interview questions are located in Appendix A.
Procedures. Prior to the initiation of data collection, I sought consent (Appendix B) to conduct research from the field site principal and from the Human Subjects Review Board at Bowling Green State University. After receiving validated permissions, I established procedures with the principal to inform teachers of the request to participate in an on-line survey and follow-up interview. As an incentive to participate in the research study, the principal agreed to provide “comp” time to those who chose to participate. Comp time was personal time that teachers could accumulate by attending professional development. The high school principal expressed his willingness to offer comp time as a means of supporting this important research involving the teachers and as a way to increase participation from less willing participants. Then, I chose a staff meeting date and sent a copy of the invitation I planned to send to the participants to the principal, via e-mail, beforehand.

At the staff meeting, I presented the opportunity to participate in the research both orally and as a written script, approved by the Human Subjects Research Board. The script chronicled the nature of the study and presented the timeframe for involvement in the on-line survey and subsequent interviews. I designed the survey questions as open-ended (Wolcott, 1995), objective questions. In framing the survey questions, I gave careful attention to a question that Wolcott (1995) posed, “How can the context remain theirs, rather than your own?” (p. 104). I administered the surveys over a two-week period to allow ample time for participation. After the first week, I sent an e-mail reminder to all potential participants. At the close of the survey date, participation was weak so I extended the deadline for three days to include an additional weekend. The survey ended with 10 of 29 teachers having participated.

After I conducted the on-line survey, those who opted to volunteer for follow-up interviews were contacted via e-mail, which I had requested of them at the end of their surveys.
Within three weeks after completion of the on-line survey, I scheduled and completed follow-up interviews. The interviews took approximately 15-20 minutes each, all occurred during the school day, and were held privately in the same comfortable meeting room within the school’s media center. I informed the participants that everything being said during the interview would be recorded using computer software, and then transcribed later by the researcher. I also informed them that pseudonyms would be used during reporting of survey and interview results and that their candid, honest responses were not only appreciated, but would provide valuable insight into teachers’ perspectives.

I conducted interviews as a means to extend the depth of understanding of teachers’ attitudes and to add rich, contextual information to the study, or, as Wolcott (1995) purported, to “introduce efficiency into the fieldwork” (p. 105), making sure that the analyses were driven by informed responses instead of the researcher’s own literature review observations. I sought uniformity of procedure so that outside variables did not impact the interviewing process. In this study, the three interviews represented maximum variance sampling and provided exemplary accounts of their distinct perspectives. After completion of the interviews, I coded the survey data, searching the entire set of field notes for expressed truths (Erikson, 1986). I then transcribed the interviews and coded them using the coding results from the survey.

**Data analysis.** The survey data included a broader range of perspectives and included more questions than did the interviews. Because of this, I felt that the assertions generated from the survey data would provide a larger canvas on which to paint a picture of the more elaborate interview assertions and so coded them first. Analyzing the data from broad to narrow provided a sequential and tiered manner for drawing parallels to the literature review framework and in answering the research questions of this study.
I organized the survey data in two ways, by participant and by survey item number. Gathering the data in two ways allowed me to analyze the data in context related to the individual participant and then again in context by each response. Being able to analyze the data within the context of the individual allowed me to develop a sense of mood, or tone, surrounding the respondent (Wolcott, 1995). This might not have been possible if responses had simply been analyzed in “clumps” of separated information and would have detracted from the authenticity of the information, which was critical for providing meaningful coding.

During coding, I used the framework from the review of literature provided at the beginning of this chapter and categorized emergent patterns and themes into assertions, while exploring potentially disconfirming or negative cases. As Erikson (1986) asserts, “one basic task of the data analysis is to generate assertions…by searching the entire data corpus” (p. 146). In all, I identified seven assertions during the codification of surveys that I felt were directly relevant to the practices, attitudes, and barriers of teachers regarding parental involvement. I then used these seven assertions as a sub-framework for the coding of the interviews.

I coded interview transcripts using the seven assertions from the survey analysis as a basis for comparison. After reconciling the assertions from both sources, I again scoured the entire “data corpus”, looking for confirming or disconfirming evidence to establish evidentiary warrants (facts or truths expressed by the participants) for these assertions (Erikson, 1986). Then I categorized survey assertions and warrants and discussed these categorizations based on which research questions they answered. I contextualized the interviews as narrative vignettes in order to provide “concrete particulars” and convincing evidence of the “analytical constructs” of this study (Erikson, 1986). As Erikson (1986) suggested, “narrative vignettes provided the reader with a clear picture of the interpretive point the author intended by telling the vignette” (p. 150).
The assertions and evidentiary warrants served to answer the research questions of this study I have organized and discussed these in Chapter 4.

Summary

I conducted this case study in a distant rural high school in the Midwest. I chose this location because it represented a typical rural high school and served to fill a void in the literature that was heavily laden with research on early education in urban settings. Though the site was typical of other rural high schools, data was not generalizable to any other school given the small number of research participants. Given the nature of the study, I operated under an interpretivist paradigm (Glesne, 1999) and employed a qualitative approach to research.

I used the framework that was extracted from the review of literature to develop the online survey questions and gave special consideration to the research conducted by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) and Epstein (2001) that explored teachers’ beliefs and practices about parental involvement and the academic success of children. Based on these same criteria, I qualitatively developed the interview questions, organized the information gathered and then analyzed it to identify commonalities, or exceptionalities. I attained credibility and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) through the use of multiple data sources and consideration of disconfirming evidence. I established dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by providing a thorough description of the procedures involved to conduct the study and by providing representation of actual participant responses. Finally, because I provided thick, rich description and contextualization of the research setting and participants, transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was assured.
CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

The purpose of this research study was to examine and qualitatively analyze the attitudes and practices of distant rural high school teachers to help answer the research questions:

1. What attitudes do teachers in this rural high school hold about parental involvement?
2. What practices do teachers in this rural high school perpetuate regarding parental involvement? And,
3. What barriers exist, based on these practices and attitudes, which could inhibit or prevent parental involvement?

In this chapter, I reported the findings of this study in three phases. First, I discussed the results of the survey analysis relative to how they serve to answer the first two research questions of this study. Then, I presented vignettes from the interviews to further elaborate on key finding. Finally, I explored assertions and warrants from both the survey and interview results concurrently to determine barriers that might exist and prevent teachers at this rural high school from involving parents.

I categorized the seven assertions that resulted from the codification of the surveys and interviews by which research question they answered. The four assertions that answered the first research question, “What attitudes do teachers in this rural high school hold about parental involvement?” were:

- Teachers believe that how parents feel about the value of education directly impacts their children’s academic success.
- Teachers feel that parents’ lack of caring, lack of follow through, and lack of time are the greatest obstacles to involving parents.
High school teachers were generally satisfied with the level of collaboration given the older ages of their students, particularly 18 year olds.

Teachers at this high school believed that their administration supports the involvement of parents and supports them in their efforts to involve parents.

The three assertions that answered the second research question, “What practices do teachers in this rural high school perpetuate regarding parental involvement?” were:

- At the high school level, federal mandates have not affected teachers’ practices involving parents except for expediency and documentation requirements where IEPs are concerned.
- Teachers equated involvement strategies with communication strategies and were reluctant to talk about strategies that they have found to be unsuccessful or have met with limited success.
- Teachers have little or no formalized training on how to involve parents.

Finally, because barriers can be manifested in both teachers’ attitudes and practices about involving parents, I used all seven of the assertions to answer the third research question, “How might these observed practices and attitudes, inhibit or prevent parental involvement?”

Survey Results

I divided the survey results into two categories based on which of the first two research questions they answer. Then, I established barriers based on the analysis of all seven assertions. The order of discussion points was chosen randomly. The results were not prioritized in any way.

**Attitudes teachers hold.** The survey results analysis strongly suggested that teachers believed *how parents feel about the value of education, directly impacts their children’s*
academic success. These parental feelings were based on teachers’ perceptions of parents’ attitudes, not parents’ reported feelings. Teachers expressed these attitudes both positively and negatively by comments such as, “Depending on how the parents perceive or value education plays a role in how involved they are at any age of the student,” and “If parents don’t care, neither will the students.” One teacher mentioned the need for parents to “model to their children that education is important,” while another commented, “Usually, the high achieving students who already have the attitude to succeed, already get it from home.” Another lengthy but worthwhile example demonstrated the frustration felt by teachers of the parental attitudes that have a negative impact on student achievement. As this teacher explained,

I had a father, at a parent/teacher conference, who complained that I asked for a conference because his son was passing with a D. In front of his son, he said that his son would never be an A or B student. He’s happy with a C or D. Needless to say, that student turns in C/D work when he could easily be an A/B student. Dad is clearly showing his son that school is not that important.

At the end of this response, the teacher then commented, “It should be noted that the student is not involved in school activities and neither is Dad.” The attitudes of teachers regarding this assertion can be summed up in the response of one participant who said, “Children pick up the attitudes of their parents many times. If you can have the parents buy into the importance of their children’s learning, most of the time the children will be cooperative and work hard in your class.”

Another assertion expressed by teachers’ attitudes also related to parents, specifically in identifying the challenges teachers have had in involving parents. The survey question asked teachers about the challenges they had experienced in involving parents. Table 2 in Appendix C
noted all of the responses to this question, but the three most significant themes that emerged as evidenced by their multiple responses, were expressed in the assertion, *teachers believe that parents’ lack of caring, lack of follow through, and lack of time are the greatest obstacles to involving parents.* From these responses, it seemed that teachers were focused most on contemplating why parents were not more involved, instead of contemplating what their own involvement in the equation might have been. Even though the question was written so that teachers could provide testimonial of their own practices, no introspective responses emerged rather, all of the responses were pointed at the parent as the initiator. These responses suggested an attitude of disconnect as being part of the problem that may be the result of teachers’ conscious or unconscious feelings about their competence.

The final two assertions expressed by teachers’ attitudes pertained to levels of teacher satisfaction. The first assertion correlated parental involvement to the age of the child. This assertion suggested that *high school teachers are generally satisfied with the level of collaboration given the older ages of their students, particularly 18 year olds.* As one teacher stated, “At the high school level, outside contacting the parent for an annual meeting, a majority of the parents’ involvement is limited and when you try to discuss many things with them, you get ‘lip service’ as a reply.” Another teacher commented, “Because I have seniors, many of my students are already 18. I am finding that parents of 18 year olds want less to do with their child’s education.” While this sentiment was used mostly to represent the attitude of parents, this same attitude was echoed by one teacher who similarly expressed, “Parental involvement needs to continue throughout the student’s academic career, however, the parents need to know when its time to let their child take responsibility and grow up.” The fact that 8 of 10 teachers replied that they were satisfied with their current level of involvement suggested an attitude of
acceptance that parents were supposed to be less involved in their children’s academics as students become developmentally capable of being responsible for themselves. Not only did this assertion help to answer the research questions of this study, but it also signified a potential need to establish how much and what kind of parental involvement was necessary amongst parents of high school-aged children.

The second assertion relating to teachers’ level of satisfaction and the final assertion related to teacher attitudes overwhelmingly suggested that teachers at this high school believed that their administration supports the involvement of parents and supports them in their efforts to involve parents. During the survey, I asked teachers to “Please describe the support from the school administration (principal and/or superintendent) for involving parents in student academic learning and other school activities.” One hundred percent of the respondents answered with positively connoted words such as, “great, very, constant, supportive, constantly urging, conduit, encouraging and 100% behind us”. I included the strategies that teachers noted as being evidence of strong administrative support in Table 3 of Appendix D. One participant’s response, “Our principal is 100 % behind the staff and is a great conduit for parent-teacher-student relationships,” clearly summarized the attitudes expressed by all respondents.

Practices teachers perpetuate. First, when I asked how federal mandates have affected how teachers involve or collaborate with parents, the overwhelming response was that they have no affect, except where IEPs are concerned. As one educator indicated, “I continue to do thing the way I feel they should be done. I have not changed my methods because of federal mandates.” Others simply responded, “It hasn’t,” or, “It’s part of our job.” These responses also indicated that teachers’ involvement with parents was driven by their responsiveness to the
responsibilities of their profession, rather than an external requirement or mandate to involve parents, such as *No Child Left Behind*.

A second assertion derived from the survey results, related to teachers’ practices of “how they encouraged the involvement of their students’ parents regarding academic matters”, but also related to their willingness to discuss both positive and negative strategies that they have used in communications with parents. When I asked, “In what ways do you currently encourage the participation of your students’ parents in communication with you,” teachers primarily reverted to discussing modes of communication as noted in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letters</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Progress book</th>
<th>School website</th>
<th>Class website</th>
<th>Phone calls</th>
<th>Open house or orientation</th>
<th>Conferences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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In organizing the modes of communicating with parents, Table 4 indicated the use of e-mails as the most widely used instrument for communication, while school or class websites were used least frequently. I would also like to note that “Progress book” referred to an on-line grade recording system that allows parents to monitor their child’s academic assignments and grades.

In addition to the modes of communication, I requested teachers to, “Please describe a particular involvement strategy that works well in your classroom or describe a particular strategy that did not meet your expectations. Explain why you think this strategy worked or did not work as intended.” From their responses, it was apparent that *teachers equated involvement strategies with communication strategies and were reluctant to talk about strategies that they have found to be unsuccessful or have met with limited success*. Interestingly, teachers only
talked about strategies they found to be unsuccessful or met with limited success. First, only 7 of the 10 respondents offered a response at all. Of these seven, only one specifically addressed a strategy as not being very effective by stating, “The Open House fails to bring the parents of the students who are having academic or social problems”. Two others mentioned specific instances that met with resistance by commenting, “I am also finding that many students try to forge their parents’ signatures,” and “I like sending letters home, but I will admit that sometimes these letters do not get home to parents.” A couple even offered advice, like, “If you are able to call the parent’s cell phone, that works better than the home phone. A lot of times when I call home, I get the answering machine and most times I don’t get a response back,” or, “Usually, if you e-mail a parent, they usually respond back within a day.”

A final assertion related to teachers’ practices was that teachers have little or no formalized training on how to involve parents. Six of the ten respondents said that they had no training, while three referenced having occasional in-services at school as their only source of training. One teacher actually had an entire course on parental involvement and still said, “The class was great, but at the time I was taking so many classes and trying so many new things, that I need to be refreshed.” This response alone suggested that even if teachers have some training in how to communicate with and involve parents, that they may need re-familiarization or re-training of strategies in order to feel confident in using them regularly and effectively.

**Interview Results**

The three interviews in this study illuminated and clarified attitudes and practices embodied by the teaching populous of Eagleville High School. Because their years of experience spanned over 30 years and were representative of 3 very different licensure areas, these samplings provided maximum variance in the study. Their distinct perspectives gave a
three-dimensional quality to the data that served to give shape to the analysis while providing cohesion within the research.

**Interviewee #1-Marilyn.** The first interviewee, Marilyn, arrived at the Media Center punctually and energetically and announced her arrival with ready-to-serve enthusiasm. Her stylish appointments and youthful demeanor suggested a contradiction to her many decades spent as a teacher. Her entire countenance added to the air of confidence and poise she exuded and seemed to be representative of the pride-filled 25+ years she had spent as a teacher, entirely at Eagleville High School.

The perspective that Marilyn offered was, of course, longevity, but she added great significance to the sense of community that abounds in this small, rural community, both as a teacher and a parent of a student who attended Eagleville School. As she proclaimed, “It’s a small community; many people are related. Everyone knows someone, and that’s always been nice.” Because the subject she teaches is also not one of the core content area subjects, she offered insight to parental involvement as it related to more personal student matters. Marilyn explained, “I mean, we talk about everything from A to Z and I open myself up for criticism...but I never had that.” She claimed that in her 25+ years of teaching at Eagleville, she had never had a problem with parents and she attributed her longevity as one of her successful strategies in working with parents. She explained,

> Just having been here for as many years as I’ve been here, they get to know who you are. The longer you’re here, the more familiar your name is in the community and you establish that reputation and I think that’s part of why maybe I haven’t had a lot of issues.

Though personal parental involvement strategies were part of the on-line survey, I intentionally wanted to re-visit the subject to see whether more, in-depth experiences might be shared. In
describing other strategies that she had found to be successful, Marilyn commented on the use of letters, calling parents and putting together flyers, all of which she claimed had been “somewhat successful”. She noted that “There’s always communication that won’t go home; That’s a given,” and then alluded to her own experience as a parent of an Eagleville student, saying “As Hannah got older, we didn’t go through her book bag…”. Though it was quite clear that she began speaking as an educator, I was unclear whether the thoughts she was expressing were those of an educator or a parent when she said,

As kids get to high school, we definitely notice that kids aren’t as informing and mom and dad can get online and look at Progress Book and a parent might think, “Why would I go to open house? I’m not really hearing anything about my child’s behavior. I’m on Progress Book and their grades are fine, so I’m not going to open house”.

Regardless of whether this attitude was a reflection of a teacher or parent, it added validity to the assertion that teachers are generally satisfied with the level of collaboration because they felt that parents of high-school aged students, particularly 18 year olds, did not want to be that involved since they believed that their older children should be learning to take more responsibility for themselves. Marilyn’s responses also echoed the observation made during the survey analyses, that, teachers equate involvement strategies with communication strategies and were reluctant to talk about their own involvement strategies as she focused more on modes of communication than strategies.

In addition to elaborating on their own strategies, I also offered an opportunity for interviewees to discuss what they have heard other teachers say about how or whether they involved parents. Because I felt that teachers might have difficulty in reflecting on their own unsuccessful or lacking strategies, I wanted them to have an outlet to discuss these without
having to divulge whether they were truly their own or someone else’s. To this question, Marilyn commented that she felt some teachers did not involve parents because “There’s some insecurity there.” She described how they (teachers) might have had issues in the past and think that parents are ganging up on them and may be self-conscious about that. She said, “Teachers are human, they don’t want to be attacked…you want them (parents) to come in and be positive…not criticize the way I’m teaching…or my class…or blame me…”. This conversation provided context for the assertion that concluded that teachers are reluctant to talk about involvement strategies that have been unsuccessful or met with limited success and further supported the attitude that teachers may not feel competent in their ability to involve parents or may not have proper training on how to involve parents so that they can feel confident in their ability to involve them.

As I began each interview, I asked interviewees to first reflect back on their survey responses and to then, again remind me of what their thoughts were about “how important parental involvement is to the academic success of students,” citing personal experiences with elaboration. Marilyn began her response by stating, “Eagleville has always had tremendous parental involvement,” reflecting her satisfactory attitude about the administration’s positive commitment to involving parents. She described the importance as a “partnership” and explained, “What I’m doing here also needs to be done at home, and vice versa…when parents don’t have an active role, they (kids) do suffer sometimes.” From her years of experience, Marilyn observed that “deep inside, I think they (kids) want their parents to be involved”, and when parents “don’t have an active role, kids don’t do as well.” These sentiments added credence to the assertion relating to the challenges of involving parents and also served to
strengthen the idea that Marilyn’s veteran teacher status gave her the perspective to more fully understand her role as a partner in students’ academic success.

**Interviewee #2-Karen.** Karen entered the interview setting with a very casual and laid-back disposition. She looked very comfortable and made me feel as if I had known her for years. Her demeanor was suggestive of a person with a flexible, low maintenance attitude, which seemed rather fitting for her role as an intervention specialist, or, “master of none and knower of all,” as she described herself, when asked about her content area specialty. Even though her experience consisted of less than 5 years, I relished the depth that her perspective added to the study of teachers’ attitudes about parental involvement because she was more directly and more frequently involved with parents because of her students’ IEP needs. In addition, unlike core content area teachers, Karen had about 30 students that she was regularly involved with, not 130.

Of the approximately 30 students that Karen had, she explained that “Probably 50-60% of them are involved and others, you get a lot of lip service from their parents and then nothing happens at home,” but, from her standpoint, there is a lot of interaction with parents. “Especially this year,” she said, “I’ve noticed there’s been a lot more interaction with the parents, maybe it’s just the group of parents we have, but from my very first year until this year, a lot more.” This assessment of greater interaction from previous years could be, as Karen said, because of the group of parents they have, or could be related to increased governmental mandates regarding IEP students, or a reflection of Karen’s professional maturity as she has gained experience in working with parents, or could be any combination of these. However, her comment about getting “lip service” with no follow-through runs parallel with the assertion that teachers believed that *parents’ lack of caring, lack of follow through, and lack of time* are the greatest
obstacles to involving parents. The attitude reflected suggested a need for better understanding of parents’ attitudes and constraints of being involved.

When I asked her to describe her own successful or not so successful strategies of parental involvement, Karen commented, “This year, it has definitely been making a phone call home.” She also noted the use of e-mail and letters, but stressed that the economy has made it so that not all her students’ parents have e-mail right now and that with letters, “We can’t rely on the majority of the kids getting them home to their parents,” though she expressed particular desire to send letters home in the end-of-year grade card as an introduction to her students for the following school year. She also kept a communication log for each student and recorded contacts made with parents. She said that this was mostly due to the need of many of her students who took medicine and as a protocol measure related to documentation mandates. This indicated that the different modes of effective communication teachers mentioned as being successful, may also have been indicative of the special needs of their teaching content area and suggested a need for further research about strategies specific to teaching content.

Later in the interview, I asked her to describe other teachers’ positive or negative experiences with involving parents. Karen explained, “Most of what I hear is usually in the teachers’ lounge and it’s mainly about having an issue with a parent.” She explained that examples of these frustrating issues were shared by the staff and offered, “If we could get them (parents) involved, then we wouldn’t have this type of issue going on.” At this point in the interview, Karen offered agreement with the assertion that administration supported the involvement of parents and supported them in their efforts to involve parents by stating, “Just like from our administrator…telling us, if you have a problem, contact the parent, if it doesn’t work from there, then we’ll take care of it from our level.”
Whereas, Marilyn reflected a positive attitude of experience and assurance that was boldly asserted in the portrayal of her teaching as a “partnership” with parents, Karen’s limited teaching experience was expressed in the single word she used to describe her feelings about parental involvement and collaborating with parents. That word was: “hesitation”. Her first reaction feelings were of hesitation, followed by thoughts of gratitude for parents who were willing to be involved and of feelings like, “Aw, let’s do it, and, it’s fine.” She felt this way particularly as she considered the new class of freshman, or “newbies”, as she called them, that would become her students for the next year, and the whole new set of parents she would have to start over with. When talking about the parents, she said,

Ya know, if they (parents) didn’t have a good experience in school, they’re probably gonna, they’re not gonna, it will reflect on their parenting, if you will, and how they’ll handle their kids at school. If they don’t like school, they’re probably gonna think everything negative and pessimistic about school and be like, ‘my kid is not gonna do that.’ I try to remember that often. Where are they coming from, kind of thing, cuz I loved school.

Not only did these sentiments help to strengthen the assertion that *how parents feel about the value education directly impacts their children’s academic success*, but the initial feelings of hesitation that Karen felt toward involving parents could be indicative of a *lack of confidence or experience with training related to how to effectively involve parents*, another assertion identified during survey analysis. The polarity of the attitudes and experience levels expressed by Marilyn and Karen, not only enhanced the richness and depth of this study, but also served to bracket, or set the boundaries for the warrants offered by Stacey, the third and final interviewee.
Interviewee #3-Stacey. Stacey was the only interviewee who taught one of the core content area subjects and I thought I might have to go without this much needed perspective when Stacey cancelled our appointment due to illness. Even on the day of our re-scheduled interview, Stacey was running late and I was just about to call down to her classroom when she entered the Media Center. She was quite composed for someone who was a bit tardy, and matter-of-factly apologized for sniffling, since she was still feeling under the weather. As she sat down across from me, she brushed back her hair and set to task providing responses in a concise and straightforward manner. Her brief and assertive responses, less hesitant than someone with limited experience, yet not as firmly rooted as someone with veteran status, were truly representative of her 10-year experience level, comfortably between that of Karen and Marilyn. As she began to answer the first question that I asked, it seemed clear that Stacey was a reflective teacher.

In describing her own experiences with involving parents in the academics of their children, Stacey quickly asserted,

I’ve noticed in the classroom that students tend to show in the classroom whatever feelings are going on at home with their parents, those attitudes are being brought to the classroom. So, if parents don’t care about education, the students certainly are not going to care about education, so, and I know that a lot of parents if they’ve had bad or negative educational experiences, they’re less likely to be involved or want to be involved, and I think that the best way to curb attitudes and to help them be successful is for their parents to have a positive experience with the teachers so that they’re encouraging their students and the teacher doesn’t become the bad guy.
This response was not only similar to the attitude expressed by other teachers at Eagleville (via the survey results) about *how parents feel about the value of education*, but it also demonstrated Stacey’s professionalism in using the assertion as part of a strategy to involve parents. Where some teachers might have used this assertion to excuse poor parental involvement, Stacey used this assertion as a basis for involving parents. This clearly expressed assertion proved to be foreshadowing to Stacey’s other responses and a testament to her personal philosophies regarding parental involvement.

When asked to discuss her own successful or not-so-successful strategies of involvement, Stacey, again, shared a very clear and concise synopsis of what she has found to work and, not work, though her responses, like those of all survey respondents, related to modes of communication, more than anything else.

I think the best way to communicate is with email, because in a phone conversation, a lot of parents feel like I’m being accusatory or there’s so much emotion involved…they like being removed. With an email, I know that the parents are getting the email and I know that they don’t have to talk to me per se, and we can resolve the issue without having to necessarily talk to each other…they will tell me what they think more in an email than they would on the phone. Usually on the phone it’s “OK”, but the problem doesn’t get resolved…I tried sending letters home and I’ve found that it doesn’t work because the kids don’t give the parents the letter or the kids intercept the letters in the mailbox.

Stacey’s response was clear and concise as well as thorough in defending the logic behind her preferences, while allowing further credence to the possibility that there might be criteria involved in choosing which strategies work better in particular teaching environments or situations. Her in-depth response using words like, “accusatory” and “emotion” alluded to
feelings about confidence and competence that were expressed in the survey when teachers were asked to, “Please describe a particular involvement strategy that works well in your classroom or describe a particular strategy that did not meet your expectations. Explain why you think this strategy worked or did not work as intended.”

Because Stacey’s responses seemed so decisive and more attuned to creating positive collaboration with parents, I was somewhat taken aback when I asked her what feeling came to mind when thinking about involving parents and she said, “frustration (pause), or a lack of,” and then giggled. But, I think I understood her response better after I asked the next question. I asked her, “If you could make one major change in how you engage with parents of your students, what would it be and why?” To this she responded,

I think I would try to include them more than I do, uh, I have the attitude of, I have seniors, and so I don’t always include them right away because most of them, their kids are 18 and they’re going to college and so if there’s some kind of issue in my classroom, the parents are usually the last resort. I need to do a better job of, I mean, it’s their last chance to be parents and be involved in their kids’ school. I think I need to contact them sooner than what I do.

This self-professed attitude was dichotomous in that, on the one hand, Stacey wanted to treat her students as adults and help them to be responsible for their own communication between she and their parents, but on the other hand, realizing that it was their last opportunity as parents to be involved with their children as students, she wanted to allow them to be involved in the academic decisions about their children. Indeed, this push-and-pull sensation might certainly have conjured up the word “frustration” when asked to describe her feelings. In addition to offering this explanation, Stacey’s comments regarding the adult age of her students also alluded
to the assertion from the survey results that *high school teachers were generally satisfied with the level of collaboration, given the older age of the students, particularly 18 year olds*, though her comments did not necessarily agree with the assertion. It was important to remember here, as well, that there was some discrepancy as to whether teachers felt that parents believe this assertion, or whether teachers themselves also may believe in this assertion. Participant’s responses during this survey suggested both, though not enough information was available to be conclusive.

**Barriers to Parental Involvement**

The third research question of this study, “What barriers may exist, based on these practices and attitudes, which could inhibit or prevent parental involvement?” was answered by reconciling the seven assertions that were established during the data analysis with the framework of barriers that emerged during the review of literature. Because the barriers from this study resulted from teachers’ expressed attitudes and practices, it was most feasible to explore these barriers after all the data had been mined. During this study, I established the emergence of four barriers to parental involvement at Eagleville High School. These barriers were: teachers’ feeling of competence or self-confidence (Shumow and Lomax, 2001) in involving parents, lack of teacher training for involving parents (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009), lack of understanding of parents’ attitudes and abilities for being involved (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Simon, 2001, & Storer, 1995), and lack of support from the administration (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Hill & Taylor, 2004) for involving parents. Interestingly, the fourth barrier was distinguished by the fact that, though established as a barrier from the review of literature, the expressed perceptions of teachers at Eagleville High did not indicate it to be a barrier.
The first barrier, *teachers’ feeling of competence or self-confidence* (Shumow and Lomax, 2001) *in involving parents*, was affirmed by the following recap of interview commentary from Stacey and Karen, respectively. “I think the best way to communicate is with email, because in a phone conversation, a lot of parents feel like I’m being accusatory…” and, “hesitation” as it was used to express Karen’s first, one word response when asked what single words expressed her feelings about parental involvement. This barrier was also asserted by the reluctance of survey respondents, only 7 of 10 who replied at all, when asked to describe a particular involvement strategy that worked well or did not meet with expectations, in their classroom. Those who did respond only talked about strategies they found to be unsuccessful or that had met with limited success.

The second barrier, lack of teacher training for involving parents (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009), was asserted only through survey responses when participants answered the question of how much training they have had for involving parents. Six of the ten respondents said that they had no training, while three referenced having occasional in-services at school as their only source of training. In addition, one respondent, who had had an entire class on parental involvement said, “The class was great, but at the time I was taking so many classes and trying so many new things, that I need to be refreshed.”

The third barrier, lack of understanding of parents’ attitudes and abilities for being involved (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Simon, 2001, & Storer, 1995), was also affirmed strictly from survey responses. When asked, “What challenges have you experienced in involving parents?” the following two responses typified their answers: “If parents don’t care, neither will the students,” and, “Children pick up the attitudes of their parents many times.”
Finally, the fourth barrier, indicated as a barrier during the review of literature, but not perceived as a barrier by teachers at Eagleville was: *Lack of support from the administration* (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009; Hill & Taylor, 2004). One hundred percent of the survey respondents answered with positively connoted words such as, “great, very, constant, supportive, constantly urging, conduit, encouraging and 100% behind us”. Further warrant came from the interview with Karen, when she offered, “just like from our administrator…telling us, if you have a problem, contact the parent, if it doesn’t work from there, then we’ll take care of it from our level.”

Summary

I began this chapter by presenting seven assertions that were developed during the data analysis. I then presented these seven assertions, with evidentiary warrants, in the manner in which they served to answer the research questions of this study. To present these, I used elaborate vignettes, offering distinct and diverse perspectives, to add transferability to the study and give it a three-dimensional quality that established cohesion within the research. I finished by exploring potentially disconfirming themes and indicators for further research. These connections to the review of literature and other emergent observation will be discussed in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

I conducted this study so teachers’ attitudes and practices of involving parents could be explored as a means to determine whether barriers exist that might inhibit or prevent collaboration effort with parents. During the review of literature, I identified a void in the research related to parental involvement in rural education at the upper grade levels. Therefore, I intended for this research to fulfill the two-fold purpose of adding useful information to the literature, while also providing meaningful information for Eagleville High School to use in their future parental involvement and collaboration efforts.

The findings of this study revealed four potential barriers to parental involvement at this rural high school that connected to the framework from the review of literature. These were: teachers’ feeling of competence or self-confidence in involving parents, lack of teacher training for involving parents, lack of understanding of parents’ needs and constraints for being involved, and lack of support from the administration. What did these findings suggest about the strength of the teacher leg of the three-legged stool presented in the analogy at the beginning of this study?

Discussion

In returning to the image of the three-legged stool, it was apparent that the teacher leg was not as fortified as it would need to be to become an enduring piece of furniture, meeting the future needs of educational success for all students. To understand how the teacher leg could be strengthened, I returned to the review of literature to draw parallels to the four barriers that I identified in this study. I will discuss these parallels randomly, as no hierarchal significance was placed on the barriers.
From my research, I determined that teachers’ lack of understanding of parents’ attitudes and abilities for being involved was a barrier to successfully involving them. When survey participants responded that the greatest challenges to involving parents were the parents’ “lack of caring”, “lack of follow through” and “lack of time”, it was evident that a barrier existed. Several research studies from the review of literature supported this with their findings of what influenced parents’ decisions to be involved in their children’s academics (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; & Shumow & Lomax, 2001). Demographics, such as socio-economic level, education level, and income level (Hill & Taylor, 2004), as well as family background and neighborhood lived in (Shumow & Lomax, 2001), were found to affect parents’ feelings of efficacy. These feelings, often created from role construction theory (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) in which parental role behaviors were communicated by the groups to which parents belonged, in turn affected how parents were involved in their children’s education and, consequently, affected the children’s achievement and feelings of well-being (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

In line with teachers’ perceptions of parents’ attitudes and abilities as a barrier to parental involvement were teachers’ own feelings of self-efficacy to involve parents in the academic achievement of students. Just as Karen reported “hesitation” as a word that came to her mind when thinking about parental involvement, three of the ten survey participants did not respond at all when asked to relay their successful parental involvement strategies. In parallel literature from other researchers, even when teachers responded positively about the importance of parental involvement in strengthening students’ achievement, their practices in their schools and classrooms were contrary (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Storer (1995) found that, while educators claimed to value positive involvement with parents, they also believed that parents did
not understand or appreciate their work and that parents valued educational aspects of school behind less important aspects such as extra-curricular activities. These parallels helped to explain why survey respondents in this study may have been reluctant to talk about their own involvement strategies, which may also have been attributable to the next barrier, which was: a lack of teacher training for involving parents.

While adequate teacher training might certainly have helped teachers feel more confident and efficacious, in this study, six of the ten respondents said they had no training regarding parental involvement, while three referenced having occasional in-service training about involving parents. Even though one respondent reported having an entire class on parental involvement, her response, “The class was great, but at the time I was taking so many classes and trying so many new things, that I need to be refreshed,” signified a strong need for training. Taylor and Hill’s (2004) research summed up this deficiency by noting that many teacher preparation programs did not include any courses on involving parents.

Finally, in consideration of the final possible barrier of this study, researchers Barnyak and McNelly (2009) offered, that many teachers cited the support of their principal as a key aspect of success for parental involvement strategies. In this study, I observed that all of the respondents answered with positively connoted words when asked to describe the support from their administration. Responses included, “great, very, constant, supportive, constantly urging, conduit, encouraging and 100% behind us”. One respondent even replied, “Our principal is 100% behind the staff and is a great conduit for parent-teacher-student relationships.” Interestingly, it was clear from the attitudes expressed by the teachers that they perceived there to be adequate administrative support for involving parents. However, it was not quite clear whether there actually was adequate support and what forms that support may have included, or whether it was
possible that there may actually only have been the perception of adequate support, rather than the support itself.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers will become increasingly obligated by their own professional standards, federal mandates and accountability measures, to involve all parents, not just the ones currently involved or those easiest to reach (Epstein, 2005). To fully understand these obligations, teachers need greater awareness of their own attitudes and peers’ attitudes toward collaboration with parents. In addition, as researchers Yun and Kusum (2008) asserted, parents, naturally, are the “central agents” of education for their children. Teachers need to understand that they are educational partners with parents, and, therefore, must also become more aware of parents’ expressed feelings and beliefs about being involved in their children’s education so that meaningful and appropriate strategies can be implemented.

This leads to two further implications for teachers, which can only be rectified through teacher training and professional development. First, teachers need to be aware of the definition of involvement that is utilized by their school or district and to then fully understand what constitutes involvement. If no standard definition exists, the framework provided by Joyce L. Epstein (1987) from the review of literature, is recommended.

Finally, teachers need to become well versed on best practice principles and implementation strategies for involving parents. One strategy might be for teachers to inventory parents’ interests and experiences so that extended learning opportunities can be arranged. These inquiries can also help to establish partnering relations between teachers and parents, thus offering opportunities for two-way, meaningful communication as required by NCLB (2002). This two-way, meaningful communication can also be achieved when teachers take the initiative
to personally invite parents to be involved or share their expertise in the classroom, or when teachers host and lead workshops for parents (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

Another proven strategy teachers can use to successfully involve parents is interactive homework, such as the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) activities. These activities require the involvement of parents or guardians in meaningful homework assignments. Results of such interactive assignments showed improved academic scores, improved homework completion and improved teacher attitudes (Epstein et al., 1997).

**Implications for Administrators**

While teachers in this high school felt adequately supported by the administration, administrators need to be fully aware of teachers’ attitudes, parents’ attitudes, and their own attitudes about involving parents. In addition, it may ultimately benefit students if administrators have a solid understanding of teachers’ skill levels for involving parents. Furthermore, administrators need to understand that, in order to increase the academic success of all students, strong communication with parents and the community is not the same as involving parents. It is advisable that administrators seek to establish an inclusive definition of involvement or to utilize a well-established framework such as the one provided by Joyce L. Epstein (1987), which includes six types of family and community involvement.

Having and using an inclusive definition of involvement will allow schools and families to function under the same umbrella and to establish partnerships. Schools should seek opportunities to involve parents in decision-making and problem solving aspects of the school. Parents can be included on interview committees, policy-making groups, or school councils. Parent-teacher organizations should be utilized as a way to better educate parents about school funding, governmental mandates, and academic opportunities, but also as a means to build an
informed, trusting relationship between teachers and parents. If parents feel valued, they will be more involved.

For any school desiring to bolster collaboration with parents, a needs analysis should be completed in order to assess the instructional needs of teachers for communicating with and involving parents. Based on the results of the needs analysis, administrative support, in the form of time and professional development should ensue. A valuable resource for schools and administrators is the National Network of Partnership Schools founded by John Hopkins University in 1996. This network provides training, handbooks, newsletters and on-going assistance to members. Information can be found at: http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/index.htm.

Research showed that when schools organized high-quality programs to inform and engage all families, many more parents felt welcome at school and valued by educators and became involved because of school and classroom partnership practices (Epstein, 2001, 2005; Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Van Voorhis, 2003).

**Implications for Future Research**

My recommendations for future research are two-tiered. First, I will make recommendations relating specifically to the subject site of Eagleville High School. Then I will conclude by making recommendations for researchers who wish to further the research on involving parents in collaborative efforts to increase the academic success of schools.

**Eagleville High School.** This study did not include all teachers and was not inclusive of all teachers’ practices and attitudes. Therefore, further in-depth studies with greater numbers of participants, focusing on varied levels of involvement, would reveal significantly more meaningful data. This meaningful data would benefit collaboration efforts particular to this site.
For future research of barriers to parental involvement at this school, it is also recommended that the results of the district-wide customer satisfaction survey be analyzed for emergent themes related to the results of this study. In addition, it is recommended that parents’ expressed attitudes about involvement in their children’s academics be explored. Finally, it is recommended that research on the types of parental involvement, at this school be fully explored so that a functioning definition can be employed and appropriate strategies can be implemented.

**Further studies.** For researchers who wish to further the research on involving parents in collaborative efforts to increase the academic success of schools, I would suggest two major areas of further research. First, further research to distinguish the types of involvement at the various age levels would help to establish common categories for comparison and might further establish which are tied to academic success. These categories of involvement might further be broken down by content area as the current study suggested that the type of involvement might vary depending on teaching content area. Second, research to study the outliers, or those who resist involving parents, should be conducted in order to better understand how to overcome these barriers. While this research does not have to be limited to rural areas, the current data about parental involvement at the middle and high school levels, particularly in rural areas, remains limited and would benefit from further study.

**Conclusion**

Teachers can ‘make or break’ a program’s effectiveness (Taliaferro et al., 2009). Their attitudes and practices play a significant role in closing the achievement gap for all children, which is a primary aim of our national educational system as well as a professional obligation. As our nation fervently pursues increased academic excellence by heightening accountability,
developing common core standards and invoking parental choice, schools and teachers are called to collaborate with parents and communities by building educational partnerships with families.

In this study of a particular high school in the Midwest, I identified potential barriers to involving parents, based on the expressed attitudes and practices of teachers. These were: teachers’ feeling of competence or self-confidence in involving parents, lack of teacher training for involving parents, lack of understanding of parents’ needs and constraints for being involved, and lack of support from the administration. As much research and my own findings as a researcher and as an educator have revealed, teachers, with the support of administrators, can meet their professional obligations to involve parents. This can be accomplished by increasing awareness of attitudes and practices of involvement, identifying potential barriers, and implementing successful involvement strategies, such as those identified in the review of literature and in the implications sections of this chapter.

To meet the demands of such a worthwhile endeavor, administrators and teachers must fully understand their own and peers’ attitudes and practices so that potential inhibitors can be determined and partnerships can prevail. It is not enough to simply communicate with parents. Teachers need to involve parents.
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http://www.ncpie.org/nclbaction/parent_involvement.html


http://ilrc.ode.state.oh.us/


APPENDIX A

Instrumentation
Survey Monkey On-line Parental Involvement Survey Questions

Definition of Parental Involvement from No Child Left Behind: “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities”

1. How important is parental involvement to students’ academic success? Please explain your response fully and give an example if possible.

2. In what ways do you currently encourage the participation of your students’ parents in communication with you?

3. Please describe a particular involvement strategy that works well in your classroom or describe a particular strategy that did not meet your expectations. Explain why you think this strategy worked or did not work as intended.

4. What training have you had about “parental involvement? How useful was it?

5. What challenges have you experienced in involving parents?

6. Please describe the support from the school administration (principal and/or superintendent) for involving parents in student academic learning and other school activities.

7. Are you satisfied with the level of collaboration between your high school and the families of your high school populous? Why, or why not?

8. How have federal mandates affected how you involve or collaborate with parents?

9. What is the most important thought, idea, or feeling that you would like to share about parental involvement?

Note: Please clear your browser cache and page history upon completion of the survey. Thank you!
Follow-up Interview Questions/Prompts

1. During the on-line survey, you were asked to indicate how important parental involvement is to the academic success of students. Please remind me of your answer and elaborate with examples from your personal experience.

2. I’d like to hear more about strategies you find successful or not-so-successful in communicating with your students’ parents. Why do you think these are successful or are not successful?

3. Without naming names, have you ever heard educators talk about or explain why they do involve parents? And, why they DO NOT involve parents?

4. What single words to express your feeling come to mind when you think about or share your thoughts about parental involvement or collaborating with parents? List as few or as many as you like.

5. If you were to make one major change in how you engage with parents of your students, what would it be, and why?
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent
February 10, 2011

TO: Denise Brennan
    EDTL

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
      HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H11T145GE7

TITLE: Attitudes of Teachers Toward Parental Involvement

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of February 9, 2011, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on January 27, 2012. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, send a request for modifications to the HSRB via this office. Those changes must be approved by the HSRB prior to their implementation.

You have been approved to enroll 20 participants. If you want to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/Modifications:
Please add text equivalent to the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp to the “footer” area of the electronic informed consent (see attached for specific text).

Stamped consent forms are coming to you via campus mail.

c: Dr. Nancy Patterson

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7
A Study of Teachers' Attitudes about Parental Involvement

Written Informed Consent

I have been informed that I am being asked to voluntarily participate in this follow-up interview after having completed a voluntary on-line survey as part of thesis research being conducted by Denise Brennan. I have willingly agreed to participate and have been informed that I will be awarded additional comp time upon completion of the interview. Again, I have been informed that choosing not to participate will not negatively impact my relationship with [high school name] and that I can elect to discontinue the interview at any time by signaling my intent to the researcher. I have been informed that the interview should take no more than 1/2 hour in time and that the interview will be recorded so that accurate data can be ensured. As with the survey, interview data will be encoded and only numbers and/or pseudonyms will be used in the study results, with every effort to maintain the strictest confidentiality made by the researcher. Ultimately, all data will be stored on a secure, password-protected server in the technology laboratory of the College of Education at BGSU.

I have been informed that if I have further questions about the study, I can contact the principle researcher, Denise Brennan, at dm.brenn@bgsu.edu or (419) 575-4007 her project advisor, Dr. Nancy Patterson, at (419) 372-9379 or at np@bgsu.edu. Any questions about participant rights can be addressed by contacting BGSU-HSRB office at (419) 372-7716 or hrsb@bgsu.edu.

I have been informed of my participation rights and give my consent to be interviewed.

__________________________________________  __________
(participant signature and printed name)  (date)
APPENDIX C

Table 2
Table 2

*Teacher Reported Challenges to Involving Parents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Teacher comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent follow-through</td>
<td>“Some parents do not follow through, which is frustrating”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Getting the parents to respond, especially those who are failing or have a D”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Getting the parents to communicate back”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child discipline</td>
<td>“Some parents are afraid to discipline their child”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental attendance</td>
<td>“Some do not show up at parent-teacher conferences or IEP meetings”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I had 10 parents come for Open House and 6 for conferences”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not caring</td>
<td>“Parents, who with their apathy encourage poor performance”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Parents not caring, or saying they do, but doing nothing at home to help their child”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Parents just plain don’t care”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displaced anger</td>
<td>“Parents angry about the economy and blame the schools and teachers for their economic hardships”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>“Parents can come in during school hours due to work schedules”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Parents do not have enough time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>“Parent feels child is more academically gifted than he is”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

Table 3
Table 3  

*Administrative Strategies for Involving Parents as Noted by Teachers*

- Weekly newsletter e-mails from both the principal and the superintendent
- Open houses
- Teacher generated lists of parents to invite to conferences—invitation sent out by the principal
- Periodic classes for parents (i.e., Internet safety)
- Parents’ night out
- Parent/Teacher conferences
- Dialogue night for parents, teachers, students and other community members