BARRIERS TO FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS: EXPLORING THE
VOICE OF THE URBAN, HIGH POVERTY FAMILY

Thesis
Submitted to
The School of Education and Health Sciences of the
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of
Educational Specialist in School Psychology

By
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Dayton, Ohio
August, 2016
BARRIERS TO FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS: EXPLORING THE VOICE OF THE URBAN, HIGH POVERTY FAMILY

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ABSTRACT

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Students typically reach higher levels of success academically when their parents are involved in the educational process. The purpose of this study was to explore the barriers that prevent the participation of impoverished, inner-city families in their children’s education. Using semi-structured interviews, eight parents from an urban school district in the Midwestern United States were interviewed. Results demonstrated that economic factors, times constraints, communication, and institutional environments were barriers for the families. Other themes emerged, including: a) families expressing in unison that they wanted their children to complete their school careers with the necessary skills to be productive citizens, b) families expected schools and educators to partner with them in providing their children the academic skills required to reach their full potential, and c) families were inclined to utilize technology, such as e-mail, to be involved in their children’s schools. Implications for educators are discussed.
This is dedicated to all those who have the joy to have the title of “Parent.”
This is also dedicated to the memory of “Betty” whose input was invaluable to this study.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my committee members for their contribution to this project. I also would like to acknowledge those families who gave of their time to be interviewed for this special thesis project. I also want to acknowledge all those who supported me to complete this thesis project.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The current world of education focuses on schools achieving high percentage of graduation rates and producing proficient students who are competent in all academic areas. In order to better meet these standards, federal initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) act were enacted to compel states to create new guidelines. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) altered the language from parent involvement stated in the No Child Behind legislation to parent and family engagement (ESSA, 2015). The Every Student Succeeds Act specifies a clear plan for schools to engage families, which includes an annual evaluation of a school’s current parent and family engagement strategies (ESSA, 2015).

Local school boards must meet these standards despite the social-economic status of the district, or other barriers, such as, limited resources. Caring educators nationwide seek avenues to increase students’ success. Methods used to assist children in meeting national and state standards include implementing after-school programs, utilizing technology with instruction, purchasing research-based curricula, and providing professional development. In addition to these supplemental programs, research shows that a strong indicator for students’ success within the educational environment is family
involvement (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Decker & Decker, 2003; Ingram, Wolfe, Lieberman, 2007; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). It is widely accepted that students reach a high level of success in school when their family is involved in the educational process. As Johnson, Pugach and Hawkins (2004) state “students are children first, then they walk into our hallways and become students” (p.1).

Further, literature suggests that children display fewer disruptive behaviors and are more emotionally healthy when families are engaged in their education (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Domina, 2005; Wilkinson, 2006). The traditional mindset of educators is that a missing family equated to a disinterested family, but current research suggests that families’ lack of involvement in schools does not necessarily equal a lack of concern (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). On the contrary, recent studies now indicate a myriad of reasons for limited parental involvement in school, such as: economic and time restraints; lack of transportation; stereotyping; an unwelcoming school environment and narrow concepts of the role and function of parents (Christenson, Godber & Anderson, 2005; Friend & Cook, 2010; Johnson, Pugach & Hawkins, 2004). The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore the obstacles that prevent participation of high poverty, inner-city families in their children’s education. The current study sought to gain a deeper understanding of personal and institutional barriers previously identified in research studies, such as: economic and time constraints, lack of transportation, and lack of communication with families.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review consists of four sections. The first section analyzes what the literature suggests constitutes family involvement and how the term is defined for the purposes of this study. The next section explores the significance of family involvement on children’s school success. Protective factors revealed in research demonstrate the importance of educators promoting and encouraging family involvement. The third section reviews the evolving family structure and how it impacts students, parents, and the school environment. Finally, a discussion of barriers to family involvement in school is included; personal, environmental, and educational obstacles are examined. Specifically, this section presents evidence suggesting there is limited research literature representing the voice of the high poverty family living in an urban environment.

Family Involvement in Schools

Does family involvement mean that parents are volunteering at school on a consistent basis? If so, does this level of involvement significantly impact students’ attitudes, behaviors, and academics? Moreover, does a single mother who makes copies weekly for teachers meet the definition of family involvement? The term parental involvement does not have a universally accepted definition in the literature, making it
difficult to accurately and consistently measure. Cox (2005) and Dominia (2005), note that parental involvement, is simply a buzz word used as a formality without valuable empirical support. Dominia (2005) admits that his research findings may demonstrate little to no correlation between parental involvement and children’s academic success because of the parameters used to measure family involvement in schools. Measures of family or parental involvement is often limited to attending open house, attending parent-teacher conferences and signing weekly behavior reports (Allen, 2008). In fact, current researchers argue the traditional roles of attending PTA meetings and participating in fundraisers is not only superficial in nature, but does not accurately reflect the way families, especially in urban, high poverty settings would like to be or can be involved in school (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Mahler & Zehm, 2000).

Mayo, Canela, Matusov, and Smith (2008) strongly reject the notion that parental or family involvement should be defined as involved or uninvolved. They further question the basis, which is often biased, that school administrators use to define active and engaging parents. For example, parents who respond promptly to a call or pick up a child from school would be considered an active parent. Allen (2008) insists it is a myth that families must appear in the school building to be considered active and that parents who complete educational activities at home with their children can and should fall into the category of being involved. Elias, Patrikakou and Weissberg (2007) found that parents of disadvantaged youth who participated in directed family activities in the home and at school fostered social, emotional and academic progress in their children. This finding may lead researchers to believe that in middle school the visibility and
engagement of parents decreases significantly, indicating that the traditional roles for parents are no longer suitable (Elias et al., 2007). In addition, Mayo et al. (2008) deduce that families, especially in low-income areas, are in a double bind with educators. This is because school personnel often have a set of unspoken expectations that parents come to the school as the school prescribes. Simply stated, “By controlling the term ‘involvement’, school authority frames the ways in which parents and families must participate in their child’s education and manipulates the parents by inducing guilt when parents fail to fit imposed images of parental involvement” (Mayo et al., 2008, p.104).

Family involvement is characterized in various ways in the literature. Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders and Simon (1997) conducted foundational research in which they found family involvement begins first in the home when parents provide for basic needs and affirm education as a priority. Epstein et al. (1997) established guidelines with their foundational research that family involvement is recognized when parents respond to communication from the school, volunteer on school grounds, engage in learning with their child at home, adopt roles in the educational decision-making process and connect with community resources.

Abdul-Adil and Farmer (2006) define family or parental involvement in much broader terms, specifically as “any attitude, behavior, style or activity that occurs within or outside the school setting to support children’s academic and/or behavioral success in school” (p.2). Miller, Arthur-Stanley and Lines (2012) believe that parent involvement should be referred to as family-school partnering and includes building strong relationships, creating welcoming environments, increasing two-way communication and
promoting educational partnership. In addition, Rath et al. (2008) describe engaged families as those with parents who are aware of their child’s behavior and academics at home, at school and in the community. They found pre-adolescent inner city youth, whose parents monitored their after-school activities and who were aware of academic expectations, had increased academic achievement and healthier peer relationships (Rath et al., 2008).

McWayne et al. (2004) conducted a study with 307 low-income, minority kindergarten students and discovered a positive effect on academics and social adjustment when parents provided supportive learning opportunities within the home, made direct contact with the school, and overcame barriers to involvement, such as a conflicting work schedules. Research by Arnold et al. (2008), Ingram et al. (2007), and McWayne et al. (2004) followed the guidelines established by Epstein et al. (1997) to measure and define family and parental involvement. Therefore, the majority of research reviewed suggests that parent involvement is a broad term. It begins in the home with parents who are aware of their child’s current level of academic, emotional and behavioral functioning, and evolves when parents partner with educators in a combination of traditional and non-traditional roles inside and outside the classroom setting. In the current study, parental involvement is referred to as family involvement and is defined as the birth parents or legal guardian’s engagement and participation in their child’s academic success.
The Significance of Family Involvement

Does family involvement significantly impact a student’s success in school, and if so, how? Domina (2005) found that family involvement decreased negative behaviors, but showed no significant impact on students’ academic progress. Nevertheless, several authors concur that involving families is not only a good idea, but it is a mandate from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) legislation (Christian, 2004; Cox, 2005; Decker & Decker, 2003; Ingram et al. 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The previous federal initiative of NCLB required that families be frequently informed of students’ progress (NCLB, 2001). This federal mandate may stem from research that emerged in the 1990s, which emphasized that families and schools share the responsibility of educating children and therefore, should work as a united force (Cox, 2005). The current federal initiative ESSA not only addresses family involvement but mandates school personal review family engagement policies and procedures (ESSA, 2015). Christian (2004) also reiterates that family involvement just makes sense because school personnel and parents both desire to see students succeed. However, Miller, Arthur-Stanley and Lines (2012) report that despite the research and support for home-school collaboration from organizations such as the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the National Parent Teacher Association, there remains a prevalent gap between “what happens at school and what happens at home” (p.12).

There is substantial literature documenting that students’ success or lack of success is directly linked to family involvement in schools (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Allen, 2008; Cox, 2005; Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997; Ingram et al.,
2007; McWayne, et al., 2004). For example, Rath, Gielen, Haynie, Solomon, Cheng and Simmons-Morton (2008) found that high parental involvement for low-income, elementary age, African-American students resulted in the development of healthier friendships, pro-social behavior and an increased interest in academics. In addition, several studies suggest that family involvement increases students’ readiness for school (Arnold, Zelijo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008; McWayne, et al., 2004), literacy skills (Paratore, 2001), and appropriate social interactions with peers (McWayne, et al. 2004; Rath et al., 2008). Furthermore, family involvement helps to decrease misbehavior (Wilkinson, 2006) and positively impacts students’ self-image (Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004). Teachers who actively seek to involve parents observe increased student test scores as well (Kohn, 1996).

Indeed, substantial research supports that from preschool to graduation, families who are engaged in their children’s education typically have children who succeed academically, socially and emotionally (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Allen, 2008; Arnold et al., 2008; Cox, 2005; Epstein et al., 1997; Ingram et al., 2007, McWayne et al., 2004). Therefore, family involvement is a key resource to be embraced and encouraged by educators.

**Current Family Structure**

Eliciting family involvement in schools begins with an educator’s understanding the structure, function, and needs of students’ home environments (Johnson et al., 2004). Therefore, when discussing family or parental involvement, the definition of “parent” or “family” must be considered. “Parent” or “family” no longer denotes the traditional
family structure consisting of a child’s married biological mother and father. Instead, consideration should be given to individual(s) serving in a “parental” role. This may include single parents, grandparents, stepparents, family members such as aunts, uncles or older siblings, foster parents, adoptive parents, and in some cases peers’ parents (Christenson, Goodber, & Anderson, 2003; Decker & Decker, 2003; Johnson et al., 2004). Johnson et al. (2004) adopts the word family instead of parent, and states that family is a system of individuals connected by mutual commitment, by blood, by marriage, or by legal means. Cox (2005) argues that parent is too limiting of a word and prefers the term home-school collaboration in her research, as it is a broader, more inclusive term. It should be noted that parent or parental in the present study is not limited to the traditional nuclear family but includes single parents, stepparents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, foster parents and any other persons responsible for the physical, emotional, and social welfare of a child.

**Unique structure of families in urban settings.** Urban school districts serve students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. Some students come from families that live in luxury apartments. Some students come from families that live in homes with white picket fences. Some students come from families that are restricted to living in depressed areas due to circumstances. These circumstances include single parent led homes, incarceration of parents and the loss of income due to death or loss of employment (Goldfarb, 2010). These circumstances combined with daily life stressors leave these urban families more likely to face psychological, medical and emotional problems (McKinney, Flenner, Frazier & Abrahams, 2006). According to McKinney et
al. (2006), families in who find themselves in the circumstances listed above face many challenges such as high poverty, exposure to violence at an early age and a lack of family stability. Families in certain urban environments have a lower socioeconomic status as a result of limited education, underemployment, unemployment, crime, victimization, substance abuse, and depressed living conditions characterized by abandoned buildings, minimal green spaces, busy streets and unsanitary living conditions (Goldfarb, 2010; McKinney et al., 2006). These conditions can leave families feeling hopeless, frustrated and powerless (McKinney, et al., 2006). Families in these urban environments often deal with socio-emotional effects of violence which is harmful and often leads to depression, frustration, aggression and lack of empathy for others (Goldfarb, 2010, McKinney et al., 2006). Finally, Goldfarb (2010) and Goldstein (2010) state that urban families have to combat the perception of being uneducated, being bad, lacking morals, and committing crimes. Despite the unique and challenging circumstances some urban families face, being involved in their child’s education is not beyond reach. As educators, these misconceptions should not be promoted and the voice of urban families should be elicited, encouraged and emphasized.

**Barriers to Family Involvement in Education**

Research indicates that parents not only care about their child’s education but want to be part of their child’s school life (Epstein et al., 1997). Current literature states that family involvement in school is nominal in predominantly impoverished communities (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Elias et al., 2007; Williams & Baber, 2007). Symeou (2008), using interviews of teachers, students and parents, compared teacher-
parent interactions of rural and urban parents. The researcher found that urban parents rarely initiated contact with teachers, questioned the intention of the teachers, and often interacted with teachers in critical ways. Therefore, urban parents did not view the teacher-parent relationship as an equal partnership (Symeou, 2008).

Abdul-Adil and Farmer (2006) note that researchers mistakenly attribute the lack of minority family involvement to apathy. However, there are several hypotheses from researchers as to why families, especially those in the minority and who are often high poverty, are not active in their child’s schooling. According to Kohl, Lengua and McMahon (2000) the educational history of parents, marital status, and mental health issues, such as depression, and culture are risk factors that affect family involvement. Likewise, economic and time constraints along with inadequate transportation, previous negative school experiences, and safety concerns are all hurdles parents face when it comes to participating in their child’s education (Kohl et al., 2000; Miller & Kraft, 2008). Davis-Kean and Eccles (2005) agree that the biggest predictors of family involvement in schools are socioeconomic status and mental health.

Too often families lack the resources, knowledge, and support required to contribute to school participation (Christenson, Godber & Anderson, 2005). Families must consider daycare options, alter work schedules, and identify resources (e.g. money for gas/transportation) when requested to take an active role in their child’s education (Christenson et al., 2005; Friend & Cook, 2010; Johnson et al., 2004). In addition, families who feel limited in knowledge or may not have a full understanding of the school process may, in turn, lack confidence and feel that they cannot make sound
decisions for their child in the school setting (Friend & Cook, 2010). Families who believe they have nothing to offer often feel powerless and are less likely to be involved (Decker & Decker, 2003).

Educational institutions can knowingly or unknowingly create barriers for families. Esler, Godber and Christenson (2008) and Mahler and Zehm (2000) agree that schools’ limited funding, stereotyping, lack of training on building parent-teacher relationships, and narrow concepts regarding the role and function of parents all contribute to the lack of family involvement in schools. Not addressing stereotypes and misconceptions, combined with ignoring cultural differences, creates insensitivity within the school environment (Decker & Decker, 2003; Williams & Baber, 2007). Sometimes teachers discourage family engagement by not clearly communicating with families, only communicating in negative circumstances, or limiting the times and ways families can be involved in the classroom (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Miller & Kraft, 2008). For example, teachers may limit communication to only one form such as e-mail; only communicate when a child is in trouble; and never extend an invitation to the classroom outside the traditional teacher-parent conference. Mayo et al. (2008) found that teachers did not expect low-income families to engage in the classroom. O’Connor (2001) found that gaps in communication and misunderstandings between the school and families were the most evident and common barriers.

Additionally, schools may inhibit family’s participation with ambiguous policy, educational jargon, an unwelcoming environment, and blurred views on roles and responsibilities (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Miller & Kraft, 2008). This may be
especially true for minority families from other countries who may have limited English skills. For example, due to limited English skills minority families may not be aware of attendance procedures such as writing a note after an absence or academic policies such as signing homework. Sheehey (2006) identifies educational facilities, policies and procedures as westernized, creating a system that is difficult to navigate and that is often incompatible with minority families’ values and viewpoints. Sheehey (2006) discovered in her qualitative study that minority families found that decision making should not be limited to the formal, brief IEP meeting. In other words, educators should encourage family participation beyond attending PTA meetings, volunteering as an office aid or assisting with lunch duty. Other researchers attribute minimal parental engagement to a conventional educational ideology that is not conducive or inviting to low-income urban parents (Elias et al., 2007; Mahler & Zehm, 2000).

Minority and high poverty families face external and internal obstacles that affect school involvement (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). Research suggests families in poverty, parents who are depressed, and families lead by single mothers, often have lower family involvement in schools (Kohl, Lengua & McMahon, 2000). In fact, Kohl, Lengua and McMahon (2000) concluded that despite the educational level of the parent, minority families often felt uncomfortable getting involved in schools if they had a negative school experience growing up. In addition, school personnel consciously or subconsciously tend to view minority, high poverty families as less educated and therefore treat them as inferior, assume that education is not a priority, and solicit their input less (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Cox, 2005; Williams & Baber, 2007). Abdul-Adil and Farmer (2006)
suggests that bridges between families and educators could be built by offering administrators and teachers professional development regarding the daily struggles in urban environments.

**Limited Research from the Family Perspective**

Johnson et al. (2004) propose that we cannot service parents and families until we know the needs of the home. Once the needs of families are understood, schools can work to increase family participation. Educators must identify and overcome barriers to families’ participation in their child’s education. Research clearly supports that schools and families who rally together will see the progression and development of students (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Decker & Decker, 2003; Ingram, Wolfe, Lieberman, 2007; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). Despite research demonstrating the involvement or the lack of involvement of families, the fact remains that there is limited research examining the role of families who are in poverty, who belong to the non-majority, and who live in the inner-city (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Mahler & Zehm, 2000; Williams & Baber, 2007). There is an even a smaller pool of research that examines family involvement specifically from the family’s perspective.

Although limited, there is some research that has explored the voices of families. For example, Sheehey (2006) interviewed parents of special education students in Hawaii to gain their perspective on the special education process. Likewise, Symeou (2006) explored teacher-parent collaboration in rural and urban areas. Interviewing parents provided an avenue to obtain rich in-depth answers regarding parent-teacher relationships. By using semi-structured interviews of families, Giovacco-Johnson (2009)
found that if early childhood educators understand parents’ goals, values, and experiences and provide parents with supports, family involvement will increase. Likewise, Williams and Barber (2007) used group and individual interviews with parents to evaluate the efficiency of schools in meeting the needs of their African-American children. The few aforementioned studies all examined the family’s perspective using qualitative methods.

The purpose of the current study was to qualitatively identify and understand the barriers of involvement for high poverty parents in an urban setting, such as economic problems, time constraints, and the lack of communication with school personnel. Additional factors, such as race, years of schooling, and parent’s educational experiences when they were students, were examined.
CHAPTER III
METHOD

Research Question

The purpose of this study was to provide additional insight and understanding into the barriers to families’ involvement in the school setting. The primary research question was: “What factors do high poverty, urban families identify as barriers to school involvement?”

It was theorized that participants in this study would identify the themes that emerged from previous research (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Christenson, Godber & Anderson, 2005; Decker & Decker, 2003; Johnson et. al., 2004), which included a lack of resources, time constraints, and institutional barriers, such as the lack of communication from school personnel.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to identify and explore barriers for urban, high poverty families. This methodology was selected because it allows families to articulate their perceptions in an open dialogue format.
This study most closely followed a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The goal of this study was to explore from the family’s perspective what prevents them from being involving in the school setting.

Qualitative interviews were conducted by the researcher to identify perceived obstacles that inhibit parents’ interaction with school personnel.

**Understanding the Parent Perspective Using Qualitative Methods**

Richard and Morse (2007) note that qualitative research is beneficial when trying to explore a phenomenon from the participant’s perspective. Creswell (2003) states a qualitative approach describes information from a constructivist perspective. In other words, a qualitative research design allows the researcher to explore how an individual experiences various entities.

Holliday (2007) suggests that qualitative research is fluid in strategy, design and method. The current study followed a grounded theory paradigm, which seeks to establish a theory concerning a phenomenon by analyzing data from the perspective of participants (Richards & Morse, 2007). Core constructs can be a foundation for researchers following grounded research, in fact, Charmaz (2003) states that “essentially, grounded theory provides a set of inductive steps that successively lead the researcher from studying concrete realities to rendering a conceptual understanding of them” (pg. 311). For example, the core constructs in this study were discovered from literature, which suggests that barriers to family involvement in schools include economic and time constraints. Therefore, when using grounded theory methodology, the focus of the researcher is to expand upon and fill in the gaps identified in literature. Further, Richards
and Morse (2007) note that grounded theorists seek to answer the question, “What’s going on here?” (p.60). The present study sought to identify the voices of families and expand on previous research.

Reliability and validity looks different in qualitative research compared to quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1995) propose using the terms credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity) to address reliability and validity issues in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1995) state that credibility is achieved by establishing trust with participants. Rapport with participants in the current study was established using consultative and counseling skills acquired by the researcher, such as explaining confidentiality and rights, showing empathy, using reflective listening skills, checking for comfort level, and appropriately providing closure for each interview. Although the triangulation of data did not include using three different sources such as observations, interview and focus groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1995), the researcher collected data from schools located on diametrical areas of the same city. Therefore, the data do not represent just one section of the city but includes families that represent various areas of the city and the local public school system. Lastly, the researcher continually checked with various members of the sample to confirm the accuracy of data collected, which is referred to as member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Shelton, 1995). Transferability, as explained by Lincoln and Guba (1995) is established by using appropriate thick description for data analysis. A thick description uses sufficient, rich details regarding the phenomenon being studied (Richards & Morse, 2007). In the current study, the
researcher provided sufficient detail about data collection and analysis so that readers can
determine if the results of this study are applicable for their given situation. Establishing
the dependability of the data works hand in hand with methods used to establish
credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Shelton, 2004). The researcher reported the processes,
such as selection of participants, data collection, and data analysis, within the study in
detail. The final component is establishing confirmability or objectivity (Lincoln & Guba,
1995; Shelton, 2004). Confirmability seeks to confirm that theories discovered are
reports that it is nearly impossible to ensure complete objectivity, but providing an audit
trail or a running record does eliminate subjectivity. By recording and transcribing each
interview, coding the data using a systematic grounded approach, securely storing this
data, and using non-bias peer evaluation, the researcher left a clear trail of data that can
be examined to ensure that bias was avoided as much as possible (Shenton, 2004).

Qualitative research allows for an open dialogue with families regarding the
factors that affect their involvement in schools. Unlike quantitative methods, which are
more narrow and defined in focus, qualitative methodology encourages “thick
descriptions” from participants which are rich, detailed and descriptive narratives
(Creswell, 1998; Richard & Morse, 2007). Furthermore, there are only a small number of
studies that have used qualitative methodology to explore the family’s perceptions of
barriers to their involvement in schools. This study sought to add to this literature.

Participants and Setting
In qualitative research designs, data gathered further develops, contributes to and expounds upon the understanding of a phenomenon, and therefore sampling is deliberate (Krathwohl, 1998; Richard & Morse, 2007). Purposive sampling is used in qualitative research to identify cases that will develop, understand, clarify and describe the phenomenon studied (Krathwohl, 1998). Therefore, the participants in this study were a purposive sampling of families. Richards and Morse (2007) state that the number of participants in a qualitative research design is small compared to a quantitative research design. In the current study (n = 8) participants, representing different compositions of families (foster parents, single parents, guardians, etc.), participated. Participants met the income guidelines for free and reduced lunch, and lived with an urban school district in the Midwestern United States. Initially, the study was designed to involve families with limited contact with the school. Limited contact was defined as less than three contacts with the school within a nine-week grading period or less than twelve contacts with the school in an academic year. Interview questions addressing contact with the school was not gathered from the participants at the beginning of the interview. Once identified that a participant did not meet the limited contact criteria, interviews did not abruptly end. The participants not meeting the limited contact criteria did live in an urban school district and offered information and perspective regarding expectations of the school, communication with the school, financial and time constraints, views of the school environment and past school experiences. It was determined data gathered from participants who did not meet the limited contact criteria contributed to the study and should be included.
Research suggests that with qualitative studies, it is not the number of participants that is crucial, but the breadth of strong and rich data obtained (Creswell, 2003; Richards & Morse, 2007). Instead, the research should focus on the participants’ experiences, their ability to report on their experiences and if they meet the qualifications of theoretical sampling (Richards & Morse, 2007). Thus, this present study selected a small sample of high poverty, urban families who informed the researcher of barriers regarding school involvement. As predicted, theoretical saturation, which is when no new categories or concepts emerge, was evident after four to six interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Theoretical saturation was verified by review of the data by a non-biased evaluator; a graduate student with experience in qualitative research.

**Study participants.** All of the participants identified as African-American. The participants selected their own pseudonym names. A brief introduction of each participant involved follows:

*Jasmine* is a single working mother in her early thirties. She has three children attending a local urban school district in elementary, middle and high school. She is considering sending her youngest child to a community school.

*Mike* attends school full time and has several foster children attending elementary, middle and high school. The foster children in his care all attended the local public school district.

*Betty*, a single grandmother with a limited income, is a custodial parent whose two children attend the local public elementary school.
John is a blue collar single working father. He has two children attending the upper grades in the local public school system.

Cynthia is a single working mother. She has two children and her youngest child attends one of the local public high schools.

Becky is a single working mother, whose two children attend the local public middle school.

Beatrice is a single working mother. She has two children. Her elementary and middle school aged children have attended both community schools and the local public schools.

Lisa is a single working mother. She has two children. Her oldest child graduated from a private school. Her youngest child attends one of the local public high schools.

Procedures

Before data collection began, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, and an informed consent (see Appendix B) was explained in detail and signed by all participants. The participants were identified only by a self-selected pseudonym name. Each participant was interviewed to obtain in-depth information. The interviews averaged 30-45 minutes in length and took place in the homes of participants using a semi-structured instrument (see Appendix A).

The data analysis included coding procedures based upon grounded theory methods. The data were stored in a secured locked area at all times.

Recruitment. Participants’ names and contact information were provided by members of the community who work directly with families of school aged children. A
letter (see Appendix C) accompanied by flyers (see Appendix D) was provided to community members and key members in local school districts stating the purpose and usefulness of the study to recruit participants.

Data collection. Data for this study were acquired via in-person individual interviews. The participants were offered a $10 gift card to a local merchant and $5 gift card to a local restaurant. The researcher arranged meetings at convenient times for participants in their homes. The lengths of the interviews ranged from 30-60 minutes. The interviews were recorded using a tape recording device, and the researcher took notes on the interview instrument. The researcher obtained permission to record the sessions at the beginning of the interview. The interviews were transcribed in order to conduct the data analysis. The data were collected between January 2013 and December 2015.

Instrument

Personal interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview questionnaire (see Appendix A) created by the researcher for this study. Richard and Morse (2007) state that the semi-structured interview is used when the researcher has acquired knowledge from the literature about the topic and therefore can develop open-ended questions in a considerably logical order. The goal in designing a semi-structured interview in the present study was to provide the researcher with a picture of the unseen factors, expand understanding, gain insight, and discover barriers from the participants’ perspectives.
The interview instrument had three sections. The first section was composed primarily of open-ended questions that sought to explore the frequency and quality of interaction participants had with the school. This section also included questions that sought to identify what, if anything, prevents families from participating fully in the educational process. The second section of the interview instrument consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore the participants’ own experience in school when they were students. The participants described their experiences using pleasant or unpleasant as a qualifier. This section also included a question addressing how involved participants’ families were involved in their education. The final section gathered demographic information regarding the participants, including gender, race, employment, family structure, and if the family qualifies for the National School Lunch Program (federally funded meal program that provides low-cost or free lunches for low-income families).

The goal for this study was to explore the barriers to parental involvement, specifically with parents in an urban school district with a limited income. Thus, questions on the instrument focused on the experiences, opinions and perspective of the interviewees with regard to communication with the school, expectations of the school and past school experiences. Further, questions were designed to offer insights into whether parents are limited from participating in their child’s education due to time and financial constraints as well as unwelcoming school environments. The questions were focused on understanding the experiences participants had interacting with the school system in the past and in the present.
The interview instrument was piloted with three families with a limited income who have elementary-age students. The pilot participants were graduate students or single working families who have children in the urban educational settings. The formatting, length and wording of the instrument were revised based on the pilot study results. Additionally, based on the feedback from the pilot study some questions and some sections were relocated. There were questions that were broken down into parts and altered with different vocabulary or placement of words. The question using a scale was presented in visual more simplified and user-friendly form.

Analysis of Data

Upon completion of the study, data was analyzed using ground theory guidelines. The thick description provided by each participant was verified by summarizing questions with the participant and verifying responses through clarifying questions. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and coded. Tiers of coding were used to analyzing the data. Data was coded to identify themes and patterns participants identified.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a grounded theory qualitative analysis. Discourse analysis seeks to understand the meaning of participants’ responses by considering the context of the participants’ “thematic structure, discursive practice and the sociocultural practices” (Mertens, 2010, p.427). Using deductive analysis, the themes, patterns and categories that emerged will augment theory development. In this present study, by reading the transcribed interviews line by line, words and phrases were identified that were associated with barriers to school involvement.

The themes and patterns that emerged from the data collected were then organized using coding methods. Coding is an evolving process that includes sorting, classifying, categorizing and defining data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The data were analyzed using a two tiered coding categorization. Identified as ‘coding data by finding themes’, the purpose of the first tier of coding is to identify barriers in the participants’ responses, which align with factors currently established in the research (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Therefore, the data from the interviewees’ responses were coded using emerging patterns and themes identified from the data. It was theorized that the commonly found barriers reported in the research would emerge in the data of this study. Those common barriers
included economic factors, time constraints, such as families work schedules and institutional barriers such an unwelcoming environments and lack of communication.

The second tier of coding used is known as ‘open coding’ (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). One of the purposes of open coding is to pinpoint potentially new themes from data collection (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). It was predicted that potential themes such as participants previous school experiences, and level of education would be discovered as barriers to family involvement using this data analysis process

**Identified Barriers**

The purpose of this study was to use qualitative methods to gain a perspective on the barriers to high poverty families’ involvement in the schools. After closely reading, re-reading, and coding the interview transcripts, several salient themes emerged across the eight interviews. Participants were invited to review and comment on the themes, and all affirmed that they resonated with their experiences. Results of this study confirmed that parental involvement is impacted by several factors, including: (a) economic factors, (b) time constraints (b) communication, and (c) institutional environments.

**Economic factors.** Families’ economic condition plays a role in family engagement. Christenson, Godber, and Anderson (2005) note that lack of resources, knowledge and support contribute to families’ school participation. Jasmine is a single working mother in her early thirties. She has three children attending a local urban school in elementary, middle and high school. Below is an excerpt from her interview, which verified that economic constraints limit family involvement.

In order to increase my involvement as a single parent, I would need someone to release some financial pressure and burdens in order to increase my involvement.
I mean I would love to increase my involvement. I did make a major change to increase my involvement by changing my work hours to first shift. (Jasmine, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

The unique structure of families in an urban community results in unique circumstances. These circumstances include single parent led homes, and the loss of income due to decreased health, incarceration of parents and death (Goldfarb, 2010). Betty, a single grandparent of two students, described budget constraints. Betty is the sole breadwinner and her income is limited due to her health conditions. She has a child who suddenly passed away and a son who is incarcerated. She shared her current circumstances, which impact her involvement in the school.

During that time near the end of the year (when he attended the alternative school) I had a stroke. I was working (God is good) and I had a stroke. It was so sudden. I had to go in the hospital and I was there eight days. Then when I got out the hospital and at the time they didn’t have busing (to the alternative school). So, I thought ‘I am going to have him go back up here (to his home school) cause I can’t drive.’ So he started going back over here. He started out really good. Then they had another teacher who they had a problem with, I mean all the students. I didn’t make it to the school to address the problem but they (administration) pulled her. Then he got better but I could tell he was upset with his parent who is incarcerated and dealing with the death of my other child. He has gotten better but I know he is still dealing with a lot. (Betty, personal communication, December 23, 2013).

**Time constraints.** Working families possess limited availability. Hurdles identified in research for families include economic and time constraints to participation in their child’s educational needs (Kohl et al., 2000; Miller & Kraft, 2008). Six of the eight participating families worked during the day. The families reported attending major events such as parent-teacher conferences and athletic events. Two of the families
conveyed that their working schedule directly affects their ability to be involved during school hours.

(I would be more involved) you know, just to be honest, the hours that I work and I am involved with them but I really don’t have a whole lot of time. I work first shift. But with my hours, I worked 7:30-4:00. Those are the school hours. I’m thankful parent conferences are offered after school and that the school meets with me concerning my special needs child after school hours. (John, personal communication, December 17, 2013).

(To be more involved) It would have to be my situation. As a parent, I have other priorities that I have to attend to outside of school. I mean I would love to increase my involvement. But I did make a major change to increase my involvement. I was on a pretty tight work schedule working 10 am till 11 pm 5 days a week. So I switched my whole entire work schedule so I could increase my participation and so I could be home with my kids when they get home from school. (Jasmine, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

Communication. The method(s) by which schools transmit information play a vital role in family engagement. Researchers have suggested that communication between families and school personnel can either be a palpable barrier or a powerful tool (Auerbach, 2009; O’Connor, 2001). The families in this study shared the schools their children attended communicated primarily using mass phone calls and e-mails. Four of the families preferred communication via e-mail and four of families preferred to be contacted by phone. One participant stated e-mail works best:

The phone didn’t really work for some reason it would cut off the part of the message so I didn’t get the entire message so um I would prefer by e-mail. (Becky, personal communication, August 8, 2013).

Seven of the eight participants stated that timely communication from the school impacted their involvement. Families expressed that it was helpful to receive newsletters, mass e-mails, and phone calls from the schools. Two of the families suggested with
upcoming events it would beneficial for schools to send reminders in the form of phone
calls and e-mails. Most of the participants stated that sending home information with their
children was not the most effective way to relay information.

A theme which emerged from the interviews was the use of technology as a tool
of communication. Beatrice is a middle-aged working mother. She has three children
attending elementary, middle and high school. Her quotes revealed that communicating
electronically could be a key element to bridging the communication gap between school
personnel and families.

Make stuff more digital. We are in a digital age. I should be able to go on-line
and see what’s going on in my kids’ classes. (Beatrice, personal communication, December 19, 2013).

Institutional environment. The final primary theme concerned the families’
perspective of the school environment. The majority of the families noted the physical
structure of the school. Students of the families who attended schools that were built in
the last five years had more favorable responses about the physical structure of the
school. One family clearly stated the expectations for the physical structure of his
students’ school:

(My child’s high school) is very laid back, well protected, always secure and for
the most part I feel welcomed. (John, personal communication, December 17, 2013).

Another family, whose children attend three different schools, commented on the
physical structure of each school. Her oldest children attended local public schools and
she did not mention any elements that were unattractive in the building. Her youngest son
attends a charter school and her statement expresses her sentiments about the physical environment:

(My son’s school is) It is kinda dark. The painting on the walls is all dark. It is like gloomy. I mean every time I walk in there it gives me like the chills because it is so dark. I don’t know maybe because it is because it is a church and there is all that dark paint in there. I don’t know what it is. It is not like birds are chirping and the angels are singing. It is nothing like that! (Jasmine, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

Research suggests schools may inhibit families’ participation with ambiguous policy, educational jargon, an unwelcoming environment, and blurred views on roles and responsibilities (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Miller & Kraft, 2008). Almost half of families commented on the atmosphere of the building. The emphasis was on the behavior of the students, the interactions between staff and students, and the attitude of school personnel with families. The quote below demonstrates a common theme:

The school itself I really impressed with the school. I like the, ah you know, the interaction with most teachers. And the students are basically nice and respectful. Umm I mean every now and then you run into one or two children you know doin what children do running around you know and whatever. I feel this way about her (the teacher of her student) that she kind of singles him out. And you know I feel like she doesn’t want to deal with him at times. I go and meet the teachers every year. I tell them to call me. Don’t wait. Call me. (Betty, personal communication, December 23, 2013).

Families voiced that educators’ policies and attitudes of school personnel influence families’ motivation to be involved at school. The policies and procedures in some schools tend to be too constricting for some families. At least three families mirrored the following comment:

Schools can increase involvement by creating open door policies. Let parents know they are welcome to come in and check on the students and talk to the teachers. (Beatrice, personal communication, December 19, 2013).
In short, families would appreciate more invitations without tight guidelines. Educators may benefit from extending more opportunities for families.

**Additional Findings**

Exploring the voice of the urban family using a qualitative study lead to the discovery of additional themes. The themes that emerged provide groundwork for a place of comradery for the families and school personnel.

**Fulfilling potential.** The families all had specific goals for their children’s education. There was unison among the families that they wanted their children to reach their highest potential. Families with children who struggled in school did not express lower expectations. In fact, families with special needs or at-risk children desired them to end their school careers with the necessary skills to be productive citizens. As shared by John, a single father,

I believe my child needs spelling skills. I understand they don’t teach spelling and reading like they did in school. They are focused on testing than everyday living skills. My child needs though the basic (academic) skills to be okay. (John, personal communication, December 17, 2013).

**Responsibility of the school.** Families in this study clearly articulated the role schools play. Families expected schools and educators to partner with them in providing educational, social and academic skills in order for their children to reach their full academic potential. Families were not varied in their expression on the school’s responsibility. Quite simply, the overarching message conveyed by the families was the desire for educators to use sound educational practices to ensure learning and growth is occurring daily. This quote represents the sentiments of the families interviewed:
What I expect from the schools in that my kids will be educated and know the fundamentals and the basics like reading, math, social studies and history. I guess I expect a little bit of athletic opportunities when they get older. I see those as the schools primary responsibilities. Education is the most important thing in your lifetime. (Jasmine, personal communication, December 13, 2013).

The vehicles families appreciated the schools using included college prep programs, resources that enrich the curriculum, counseling services, and highly qualified, involved caring teachers. As this comment reflects:

I feel my son is continuing to gain knowledge and preparing for the future in his current high school classes. I have promising hopes for him. The school has patient teachers with the heart to teach. (Cynthia, personal communication, December 21, 2015)

Families expressed how educators could employ a more current hands-on curriculum, provide more resources for students with behavior challenges, be more consistent with addressing issues, offer more academic support for struggling students, and offer more resources for families who have at-risk or special need students.

**Contradictory Findings**

Qualitative research allowed the researcher to explore the dynamics behind barriers families identified. Researchers suggest family involvement is impacted by risk factors such as the educational history of parents (Kohl, Lengua & McMahon, 2000). Would families identify their own negative experiences in school as a barrier to their involvement with their child’s school? However, participants in this study did not identify that their negative school experiences impacted their current perceptions regarding education.

**Impact of families’ school experience.** Families were asked about their experiences in elementary, middle and high school. Each family then described the
overall experience as unpleasant or pleasant. While all of the families interviewed shared at least one negative experience from elementary, middle or high school, overall they rated their own school experiences in the “pleasant” category.

Lisa, a single mother stated that in elementary and high school she believed teachers did not drive her to reach her full potential. She grew up in a single working mother home and therefore her mother was not involved in her education. Despite these circumstances when asked how she would rate her overall experience in school she stated:

(I would describe my overall school experience as) Pleasant. I enjoyed school. I didn’t have any problems with any teachers. I didn’t have problems with any of the kids. (Lisa, personal communication, January 28, 2014).

The following themes were extracted from the families overall pleasant ratings:

(My overall school experience was) Pleasant-especially in high school; this was due to having friends, good teachers and being involved in activities. (Becky, personal communication, August 6, 2013).

(My overall school experience was) Pleasant; this is primarily due to teachers who took me under their wing and from support from the church. (Mike, personal communication, August 19, 2013).

(My overall school experience was) Pleasant. I had good teachers and an excellent principal in elementary school. I experienced racism and did not have a lot of opportunities in high school. My mother was involved and I come in era when the whole community was involved in everyone’s education. You didn’t just disappoint your mother, you disappointed the whole community. (John, personal communication, December 17, 2013).

(My overall school experience was) Pleasant. In high school I was exposed to wonderful opportunities that students today have not experienced. We went to WSU for an autopsy (Science Program), UD Summer Camp, participated in all types of gym activities, music programs and field trips. (Cynthia, personal communication, December 21, 2015).
An expected emerging theme the families would voice is that they had no model of family involvement. Families were asked to rate their parents’ involvement in their education. It was predicted that most families would divulge that their parents were not involved. However, over 85% of the families rated their parents as involved to some degree in their education. This finding contradicted this prediction.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Review of Purpose and Major Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the obstacles to family involvement in schools from the perspective of urban parents. Research notes that families care and desire to be involved in their children’s education (Epstein et al., 1997). Participants verified that economic factors, time constraints, communication, and institutional barriers affect family involvement in schools. Results of this study demonstrate that families believe schools play a major role in preparing their children to be productive citizens and that they expect schools to view them as partners. Surprisingly, analysis of the data demonstrated that the educational history of families did not have an impact on involvement, as expected.

Researchers agree that high poverty urban families are restricted by economic factors (McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, & Abrahams, 2006). Single parent families carry the burden of providing solely for their families. Lack of resources and families’ economic condition plays a role in family engagement in schools. There are many factors that families cannot control, such as the hours required to work or time of shift required
to work. School personnel should be aware of families’ work schedules and availability. Schools should connect families with programs to help relieve financial burdens.

Families as stated by research are also constrained by time (Kohl et al., 2000; Miller & Kraft, 2008). Families are faced with the constant decision of balancing attendance and attention to school meetings and attendance and attention to their place of employment and family obligations. Attending sporting events and after-school performances serve clear purposes. Most participants fully grasp the purposes of parent teacher conferences. However, families grappling with time management may not always choose to attend meetings that school personnel have deemed essential.

Participants overwhelmingly stated that they were open to more immediate methods of communication such as e-mail and phone calls. Some participants recommended that schools send reminders, which could assist families struggling with time management. Increasing communication in various forms and in various ways is a practical method to increase engagement for all families.

Family involvement is also influenced by the school’s physical structure and atmosphere. Literature points to unwelcoming environments, ambiguous policy, and educational jargon as possible factors that inhibit family involvement (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Miller & Kraft, 2008). Participants commented that they want a school where their children are safe, where parents feel welcome, where there are specific guidelines that do not restrict family participation and where school personnel possess positive, supportive and respectful attitudes about their children. Schools can meet this
expectation by providing professional development for staff and by providing opportunities for staff and families to interact.

Abdul-Adil and Farmer (2006) stated urban families’ absence in schools as prescribed by school personnel does not mean families are not invested in their students’ educational success. Families clearly reported high expectations for their children. Each participant expressed the desire for their children to reach their highest potential. Families also have definite roles defined for educators and how education plays a major role in the success of their children. School personnel should always assume that families are invested in their children’s education. The mindset which schools should never adopt is that families do not care or are not invested. This study shows quite the opposite. Families are indeed an untapped resource and willing partners for educators.

Families did not report that their previous experiences in school presented as a barrier. Kohl, Lengua and McMahon (2000) suggest the educational history of parents are risk factor that affect family involvement. Participants who did not have a model of parent involvement did not identify that as a barrier in this study. Families were asked about the years of education completed. In this study, three participants had earned a high school diploma or G.E.D. and the remaining participants had completed at least a year in college. Although no definite findings can be drawn from these results, the data suggests that family involvement cannot be tied to the sum total of education a parent has received.

While exploring families’ barriers to involvement, schools are cautioned not to assume that there is a single reason parents are not involved. Therefore, following The
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) guidelines for evaluating parental involvement (ESSA, 2015) can provide schools with a roadmap to address identified family barriers. Evaluations of school programs may include conducting surveys, focus groups, or gathering information from schools with high family involvement.

**Implications for Educators**

How can educators overcome the barriers to family involvement identified in this study? Educators can address economic factors by offering families schools supplies, academic supplements or gift cards when they attend meetings. Since urban families are constrained by time, schools would benefit from clearly communicating the purpose of meetings and the role the family will play, as well as offer families flexibility with scheduling meetings. Communication can become a powerful tool when educators utilize phone calls, and technology, such as e-mail. These practical methods of communication can increase engagement for all families. Creating a first impression for families which include a secure and safe building and welcoming attitudes of school personnel can go a long way with knocking down barriers. School budgets would benefit from designating funds for professional development for administrators, staff, and teachers addressing the uniqueness of the urban family. Schools can offer opportunities for staff and students to interact through hosting themed family nights. This type of activity allows school personnel and parents to build relationships in a casual nonthreatening atmosphere. Finally, educators are encouraged not to tolerate myths that the urban family is not interested in forming viable partnerships with the school.
Limitations

The intent of this qualitative study was to explore the voice of the urban family as relates to barriers to school involvement. There are possible limitations to consider when interpreting the findings.

The study’s primary focus was on specific barriers impacted by societal conditions, the school’s atmosphere and collaboration between school personnel and the family. Other factors may contribute to family barriers. Hornby and Lafeala (2011) report that factors such as the age, academic aptitude and behavior challenges of the child influence family involvement. Not fully exploring these child factors in the line of interview questioning was a limitation to this study.

The study initially was designed to target families with limited contact with the school. All participants in the study did not meet this criterion. Screening families or positioning questions addressing limited contact at the beginning of the interview may have increased the number of families participating in the study who meet the criteria of limited contact with the school.

In addition, the qualitative method of this study does not lend to broad generalizations of findings. Although the findings contribute to the understanding of barriers to school involvement that urban, indigent families face, the results are specific to these particular participants. For example, because all the participants were African-
American, the conclusions do not include the viewpoint of other minority groups who are served by schools in an urban area.

Although the study has limitations, the information obtained from interviews with families confirmed that time constraints, communication, school personnel attitudes and unwelcoming school environments all contributed to restricting family involvement in their children’s education.

**Implications for Future Research**

The findings discussed in this study were consistent with previous research. However, the findings lend to research questions that should be considered for future research. Every family interviewed in this study gave specific suggestions regarding methods schools could use to increase their involvement. Elis et al. (2007) suggest that families should be encouraged and invited to be involved in critiquing and creating educational policies and procedures. Thus, exploring effective methods to obtain the perspective of families would benefit school personnel. For example, is using on-line tools to survey families an effective way to seek the family voice? Obtaining the perspective of the family can assist schools in creating relevant programs that solicit family involvement in the educational process.

Educational programs with high rates of family involvement in high poverty urban areas should be analyzed. Domina’s (2005) research findings suggests that effective programming and useful activities for families are key in improving students’ academic performance. Programs already experiencing success with involving families can yield rich practical ideas that educators can implement.
Partnership, like a dance between couples, requires in-sync steps. Exploring how families view the role schools should fulfill in a student’s life is a viable research question. Educators would benefit from knowledge of the family expectations. This information would provide school personnel a foundation and basis to guide policy, professional development and family engagement programs.

Conclusion

Overall this study confirmed research findings that economic factors, times constraints, communication, and institutional environments were barriers for the families. Data from this research suggest that urban impoverished families not only care about their children’s education but desire to be intricately involved as partners with schools in the educational process. Because family involvement boosts student achievement, educators should prioritize identifying methods to increase family involvement. Keys for educators include eliminating institutional barriers, providing safe environments, using technology to communicate student progress, providing professional development for school personnel, providing opportunities for staff and families to build a positive connection, connecting families with resources, offering various times and dates for meetings and being flexible.

Educators, including school psychologists, can promote family involvement in schools by keeping families informed using various and timely methods of communication, creating welcoming environments, developing policies/procedures in collaboration with parents, inviting families to become partners in their child’s education,
and conducting regular evaluations of schools’ family involvement policies and procedures.
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APPENDIX A

INSTRUMENT

Interview for Investigating Barriers for Families to School Involvement

Pseudonym Name: ____________ Date: __________

Expectations
1) Could you describe the primary responsibility of schools in your child(ren)’s education?

2) Because of the education your child has received, what are your hopes and goals for the future?

3) How is the school helping your child meet those hopes and goals?

4) How can the school better help you meet the educational goals you have for your child (ren)?

Interaction with the School
5) Excluding calling to report an absence, how times have you called the school this year? ______

6) How many times have you visit your student’s school this year? __________

6 a) Could you describe the reason for your visit (s)? (parent teacher conference, behavior, etc)

7) How would you describe the atmosphere in your child(ren)’s school building?
8) How does the school communicate with you primarily about your child(ren)? (phone, newsletter)

9) What are more effective ways your child’s school could communicate with you?

10) Tell me what would need to happen in order to increase your involvement in your child’s education?

**Your Personal Experience with School**

11) What is the highest grade you completed in school? _______________

12) Using a number between 1 and 10, rate how involved were your parents in your education. 1 representing Not At All; 5 Representing Somewhat; and 10 Representing is Very)____________

13) How would you describe your school experience as a student in elementary school? (For example, did you receive any special service?)

14) How would you describe your school experience in middle school?

15) How would you describe your school experience in high school?

16) Would you describe your school experience as pleasant or unpleasant? Why? (NOTE: If response to #16 is unpleasant, ask question #17)

17) What made your school experience unpleasant? (peers, teacher, etc.)

18) What would you have changed about your school experience?

**Demographics**

Name: _______________________________ Address: _______________________________

52
Employed: Y  N   Place:______________   Part-Time or Full-Time

Relationship to child(ren): (Family Structure)

Biological Mother    Biological Father    Grandparent    Other:_____________________

Race:_____________________

School-aged children first names and grade:

1)__________________________________ 2)__________________________________

3)__________________________________ 4)__________________________________

5)__________________________________ 6)__________________________________

Does your child(ren) participate in the National School Lunch Program (receive free or reduce lunch)?  Yes or No
APPENDIX B

FAMILY CONSENT FORM

PARENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

RESEARCH STUDY:
Family Involvement in Schools: Exploring the Voice of the Urban Parent

Dear Participant,
You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Kemba N. Hubbard, who is a master’s student from the University of Dayton. This study will investigate what helps or hinders family involvement in school. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

• WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?
This research investigates what obstacles you, as a parent, encounter which may limit your participation with your child(ren)’s school. This research is important because schools need a better understanding of barriers that parents face when interacting with the school system.

• WHAT WILL BE DONE IN THIS STUDY?
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will talk one-on-one with the researcher, Ms. Hubbard, for about 30 minutes to 45 minutes. She will ask you questions about any difficulties you face when contacting or visiting your child(ren)’s school. You will be asked to give your honest opinions. Your responses will remain anonymous and no information will be given in the report that would allow anyone to personally identify you or your responses. The interview will take place at your convenience preferably in person, in your home, or at a local community center. The researcher will be tape recording the interviews so she can go back and listen to them at a later time.

• WHAT IF I EXPERIENCE ANY DISCOMFORTS AND WHAT ARE THE RISK?
Your participation is completely voluntary. It is not expected that you will experience any physical discomfort however, if you need to take a break for any reason, please feel free to do so. If you agree to participate, you are free to stop participating at any time during the process for physical, emotional or, without penalty. You are also free to choose not to answer any question(s) which with you are uncomfortable, without penalty.
• IN CASE OF RESEARCH RELATED ADVERSE EFFECTS
If you are experiencing any kind of discomfort as a result of your participation in this study, or if you have questions about the research, contact Kemba N. Hubbard, primary investigator, at 937-903-0769. Dr. Susan Davies, University of Dayton Professor at 937-229-3644.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?
Even though there are no direct benefits to you, the information discovered in this study will assist educators in creating ways to include and promote parent involvement in the schools.

• DO I GET A PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATING?
You will receive a $10 gift certificate to use at a local merchant for participating in this study. In addition, a $5 gift card will be given to you for a child in your home.

• HOW WILL THE INFORMATION FROM THE STUDY BE STORED?
Only a pseudo or fictitious name will be recorded. Your personal information (i.e., your name, address, and other identifying information) will not be recorded. The primary researcher, Kemba N. Hubbard, University of Dayton Advisor, Dr. Susan Davies, and a fellow graduate student will be the only persons who will have access to the data. Recordings and notes will be kept in a locked box at all times which will be located at the residence of the primary research or in a secured area at the University of Dayton campus. Recordings, notes and instruments will be in the sole custody of the primary researcher when transported to either secured areas listed above. Your data will be included with data from other research participants and only summary results will be made public. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

• WHAT IF I WISH TO WITHDRAW OR NOT PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY?
Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, that will not affect your relationship with your child(ren)’s school or the University of Dayton or other services to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice or penalty. The investigator may also terminate her participation in this research if she feels this to be in her best interest.

• WHO SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?
If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact Kemba N. Hubbard, primary investigator and graduate student at 937-229-3755 or at hubbardk1@udayton.edu or Dr. Susan Davies, Thesis Chair and Associate Professor with the University of Dayton at 937-229-3644 or at sdavies1@udayton.edu.
• RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Dayton Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, Mary Connolly, PhD, (937) 229-3493, mconnolly1@udayton.edu, Office of Research, 300 College Park Dr., Dayton, OH 45469-0102.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT
I have read the information provided above. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form. **In signing this form, that I certify I am eighteen years of age.**
Name of Participant (please print) ________________________________
Address ________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant __________________________________________ Date__________
APPENDIX C

REQUEST TO COMMUNITY LEADERS FOR PARTICIPANTS

To: Subject’s Name, Director of Community Center
From: Kemba N. Hubbard, University of Dayton, School Psychology Graduate Student
Subject: Seeking Research Project Participants

Title of Research Study: Barriers to Family Involvement in School: Exploring the Voice of the Urban Family

I am a school psychology student from the University of Dayton conducting a research project investigating what helps or hinders family involvement in school. The purpose of this study is to identify and understand what obstacles guardians/parents encounter which limit their participation in their child(ren)’s school. The research results seek to contribute to current literature regarding the barriers to family involvement in school. This current research project is beneficial because schools need a better understanding of barriers that parents face.

I am most interested in individuals such as kinship guardians, grandparents, foster parents, and single parents. Guardians/Parents agreeing to participate in this study will talk one-on-one with the researcher (me) for about 30 to 45 minutes. The interviews cover questions about any difficulties parents/families face when contacting or visiting their child(ren)’s school. Participants will be asked to give honest opinions which will remain anonymous. The interviews can take place at family/parent convenience in participants home or at your facility.

Guardians/Parents who agree to participate receive a $10 gift certificate to use at a locate merchant for participating in this study. In addition, a $5 gift card to a local fast food restaurant will be given for a child in the home.

Contact Information: Please feel free to contact me at hubbardkl@udayton.edu or at 937-903-0769 with names of guardians/parents who are interested in participating in this research project. If guardians/parents prefer they can contact me directly.

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APPENDIX D

HOME SCHOOL COLLABORATION FLYER

Would like to share what you think would increase family involvement in schools?

You can be a part of a research project conducted by a University of Dayton, Graduate Student seeking to understanding and identify the barriers families/parents face which limit participation in schools. You will receive a $10 gift certificate to a local store and a $5 gift card to a local restaurant for your time. It only requires 30 to 45 minutes of your time at your convenience.

Contact Information Below

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