AN EXAMINATION OF THE OPPORTUNITIES AND OBSTACLES OF PARENT ENGAGEMENT

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A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to find the opportunities, obstacles, and general experiences of school administrators, parents, and community regarding parent engagement. This study used a qualitative method of inquiry to examine engagement practices including district artifacts such as social media and focus groups. The data gathered from focus group interviews was analyzed through Epstein’s six-tiered typology framework. Findings of this research demonstrated important points considering relationships and open communication which may help school leaders better understand the functions of parent engagement in their communities and point to specific practices to maximize the engagement between their institutions and stakeholders.

*Keywords: parent engagement, qualitative*
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and two children who supported me throughout the process.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my committee chair Dr. Michael Scoles, who met with me in person on many Saturdays and evenings. Dr. Scoles challenged me in various ways with regard to research and scholarship. I could not imagine accomplishing this task without his support.

I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Rahman Dyer and Dr. John Cindric for their moral support and cheerfully positive spirit. Their encouragement made me keep going when I felt there was nothing left in me.
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Epstein’s Six Levels of Involvement
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

School-family partnerships and parenting research show us that parents who are involved with their children have children who are better adjusted to function in the world than the children of parents who are absent or uninvolved in the developmental processes of the child (Epstein 1991). Families that receive support from their schools on the school-family partnerships feel welcome and are better able to improve learning at home. The support creates motivated students. The beneficial outcomes of this involvement also extend to the performance and success of children in the school experience.

Epstein’s (nd.) parent engagement model focuses on six major areas, which include Parenting, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision-Making, Collaborating with the Community and Communicating. Most parents, educators and policy makers recognize parent engagement as an important factor, influence on children’s learning and general school adjustment (Ames, 1995; D'Angelo, 2012; Vance, 2015). These six major areas become critical within the district to find success with parent engagement. Much has been studied about parent engagement that school leaders support this approach with their teachers as the accepted models to use in their schools.

Students need support throughout their education, especially during the critical times of pre-k through 12th grade. During this period in student's lives, parent engagement becomes crucial. Even years after saying it the first time in 1996 during her book release, Hillary Rodham Clinton repeated in her 2008 Presidential Campaign, "I still believe it takes a village to raise a child." Parent engagement includes a combination of parent, student, administrator, community
and teacher interactions. The following relate to Epstein’s six steps to parent engagement framework.

When parenting occurs effectively, the community and educational system realize happy, healthy children who become capable learners and productive citizens of the community. School officials aware of the positive implications of parent engagement understand parents maintain life-long interactivities with their children compared to teachers who have limited time with students.

Taking this into consideration, communication becomes relevant to any relationship. Parent engagement according to Epstein (nd.) in her six steps parent engagement framework directly names communication as one of the characteristics needed to make engagement occur. Communication can take many forms such as phone calls, emails, newsletters, notes home or written digital media for instance school web pages, Twitter, Facebook and levy campaign literature. Since parents and school officials are busy using multiple ways to communicate, the variety of tools offer both school officials and parents different ways to correspond while minimizing barriers.

Epstein (nd.) also discusses acceptance of volunteers in the district facilitates parent engagement. There are three primary ways that most community members and volunteers can engage in the school on a regular basis. The first is helping teachers in the classroom as tutors or assistants. The second way is to assist with fundraising or promoting a community event. The last way can be as a member of the audience attending a school program such as a band show (Research Starters-Education, 2009). The accepted notion of involving parents at the school facilitates relationships between school staff and student’s parents. Since parents are in the school more, they see, hear and participate in more conversations related to their child’s
interactions with others, what is occurring in the district, which leads to more parent interaction and stronger parent engagement.

Parent interaction during the typical school day with school staff typically leads to stronger student-parent interaction at home with school assignments and student learning in general. Learning at home occurs when parents assist their children with assignments at home or by taking them on educational vacations or visits that increase their institutional knowledge. Learning also becomes stronger when teachers encourage parents to interact with the school curriculum on regular intervals. Teachers model research based practices during the day with their students and parents assisting in the classroom see these interactions which leads to stronger educational relationships with their own children at home. For example, parents watch how teachers approach student work, the kind of starter questions used and strategies to highly engage the students to do their work. This grows parent’s knowledge and confidence in assisting their students at home.

When the district invites parents and the community into the school for decision-making opportunities, or even school governance committees, or organizations, can make parents and community members feel part of the academic process. When students see their family involved in the school, especially in a leadership role they become stronger students (Flemmings, 2013). Schools that foster collaboration with the community build stronger parent engagement. Community collaboration works well with students because nonprofits, local businesses and even religious organizations will give schools resources supporting their students (Smith, 2006).

Administrators and teachers who understand the importance of parent engagement are more willing to set aside any hesitations or reservations they may have in order to focus on the benefits for their students. Epstein's research discusses the beneficial effects which occur from
elementary through high school and include higher achievement, better attendance, more course credits earned and more responsible preparation for class (2005). The districts trained and conforming to parent engagement techniques can document improvement in achievement, attendance and a higher passage of credits earned.

Teachers, students, parents and administers recognize the importance of parent engagement. Epstein states "In study after study, teachers, parents, administrators and even students from elementary through high school say that involvement benefits students, improves schools, assists teachers and strengthens families. There are basic beliefs and agreements about the importance of families and the benefits of parent involvement" (2001, p. 3). In a perfect world, everyone works together for the benefit of students, teachers and families. When collaboration rises, student engagement and grades rise which assist in narrowing the achievement gap.

However, the reality of parent engagement is not encouraging. The U.S. Gallup Panel reports twenty percent of public school parents fully engaged with their child's school (Hodges & Yu, 2015). That would suggest eighty percent of the remaining respondents felt less than fully engaged. This lack of full and clear sense of engagement with the educational structures and processes in place for the children in the community, whether as a parent or simply as a community member, creates a foundational weakness in the educational institution.

School districts are social institutions governed by the public. School districts rely on the financial support of their constituents for their functional success. Public school districts use a mixture of state funds, local sources such as property taxes (and in some cases income taxes) and federal funds (Overview of School Funding, 2017). State education appropriations represent the largest commitment of state appropriations. Last fiscal year (FY 2016), the state of Ohio spent
more on primary and secondary education than at any other time in state history (Overview of School Funding, 2017). More than 4,500 tax issues for schools appeared on Ohio ballots between 2003-2013 and legislators and education officials say there is no solution to the continual churn of local levies on the ballot (Interactive: How often do school levy issues pass? n.d.). While in the foreseeable future school districts will have continued and perhaps increased responsibility for funding their own operations. This funding will come from local tax payers who will either support or not support school funding requests based on their own perceptions of the school.

However, over the last two decades’ school choice has made it even more difficult on public schools by offering vouchers, open enrollment, home schooling, e-schools, parochial and charter schools for people to take their money elsewhere. It is forecast that President Trump will invest $20 billion in school choice (Malkus, 2017). It is important to engage with those that make families successful through finances. There are choices for families when the school (public or private) is not working for their children. Families can send their children to nearby schools through open enrollment arrangements. Another choice is to send their child to a Community or Charter school which can be a physical school building or an on-line e-school.

Schools must operate more like businesses today and like any successful business, schools must engage with their consumers and sell their messages to their stakeholders or public education will continue to lose along with the children. Some schools experience students coming in large numbers for open enrollment that adds to their budget. Schools have taken it upon themselves to advertise and get the word out that they are the best. Therefore, districts have decided parent engagement is important, not just for students but for all stakeholders. Schools have started to become their own advocates to make parent engagement a number one goal.
In addition to the challenges of school funding, there are other pitfalls that can come from disengaged school climates. One of those challenges is the nation’s graduation rate which is at 83.2 percent according to an Educational Week article by C. Gewertz (2017). That leaves a large number of our disengaged students not graduating. Not graduating from high school brings large consequences not only for the child but the whole community. This means lower earnings compared to a graduate, a lower probability of being hired and if not changed, leads to unemployment and possibly a life of crime. Whereas research shows when all stakeholders work together and the results are rewarding: students’ grades improve, attendance is better, graduation rates are higher and discipline improves (Epstein, 1995; Henderson et al. 2007).

Over the years many school districts have failed at engaging primary stakeholders with regard to parents. For example, according to D’ Angelo (2012) found parent engagement efforts employed showed “little clear evidence about what works best and for whom.” School district leaders instinctively know the importance of engaging key stakeholders in the community but they do not have robust understandings of how to do this, what works and what does not. The research lacks specifically knowing what creates, or starts the parent engagement. There is no “gold standard” on how to involve or engage the parents and teachers therefore the consequence if we do not explore this topic more to understand what facilitates parent engagement and what inhibits parent engagement, their promises of the educational system will fail to be fully realized for our students and our communities.

Epstein the Director of the Center on School, Family, Community Partnership and National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) maintains her connections at Johns Hopkins University as a research professor of education and sociology. While Epstein has become well

known for her research at the school district level on family and community involvement. She
has created the six types of parental involvement shown in figure 1.

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<td><strong>Type 1</strong></td>
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<td><strong>PARENTING:</strong> Assist families in understanding child and adolescent development, and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.</td>
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<td><strong>Type 2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>COMMUNICATING:</strong> Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.</td>
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<td><strong>Type 3</strong></td>
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<td><strong>VOLUNTEERING:</strong> Improve recruitment, training, work, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Type 4</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LEARNING AT HOME:</strong> Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework, other curriculum-related activities, and individual course and program decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type 5</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DECISION MAKING:</strong> Include families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type 6</strong></td>
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<td><strong>COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY:</strong> Coordinate resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.</td>
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*Figure 1. Epstein’s Six Levels of Involvement. Reprinted from School, Family and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools. (p. 34), by J. L. Epstein, 2011, Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Copyright 2011. Reprinted with permission.*

This research seeks to explore these issues to establish a better understanding of the dynamics parent engagement process as outlined by Epstein and her seminal work. The findings of this research can help school leaders better understand the functions of parent engagement in their communities and point to specific practices to maximize engagement between their institutions and stakeholders.
Rationale & Significance of the Study

The engagement of key stakeholders with schools and schools with parents for the success of children in the community remains significant for everyone involved. Therefore, the capacity of schools to create and maintain parent engagement is widely accepted as a solid educational practice (Rodriguez, 2014). While the general body of research clarifies the advantage to student’s learning when parents invest their time in the learning process, the engagement of parents with schools for the benefit of students has been made explicit and worth the time devoted to accomplishing the task (Ames, 1995).

However, indications from the Gallop Panel suggest that gains have yet to be made in fully engaging community stakeholders with their local schools. In addition, Epstein’s research also suggests there is more work to be done in using her six types of parent involvement framework. For example, Epstein (1987), identifies successful communication as a critical component of parent engagement with schools. However, most communications are negative because it encapsulates poor behavior, bad academics, fines, poor dress and other negative items. Therefore, school environments must change the shift from negative communications to positive and extend the theme of positive communications to all stakeholders.

A fundamental step in bridging the gap between schools and their disengaged stakeholders is to conduct an exploration and examination of the current parent engagement practices being employed by school districts. Above all, the significance of this will be to expose the opportunities, obstacles and general experiences of school administrators, parents and school community members in one exempted village, local and city school district in Northwestern Ohio regarding parent engagement. Potential outcomes of this study highlight practices which inhibit as well as those that cultivate engagement between stakeholders and schools.
The research by Robinson and Harris in their book Broken Compass: Parental Involvement with Children’s Education shows conflicting data when compared to past research on parent engagement by Epstein and the six types of parent engagement, which showed positive results with students. In contrast, Robinson and Harris (2014) argue differing results occur depending on specific types of parental engagement. For example, they raise the question of whether social class or race plays a difference. Therefore, a lot of time and resources have been used to implement parent engagement without specific evidence. Foster writes in the PDK/Gallup Poll that it is clear the need for parents to be engaged as partners with their school districts along with the public and community (2015). In addition, it may be beneficial to enlarge the scope of all six principles to include involved stakeholders. Epstein’s research, while focusing primarily on the key population of parents as stakeholders, provides a useful framework to gauge engagement practices with the larger school community.

**Purpose of Study**

The study proposed here will use the basic principles of Epstein’s framework to examine parent engagement strategies and practices of three Northwestern Ohio school districts. A qualitative method of inquiry is used to examine the nature of engagement practices exhibited by district artifacts such as social media comprising school web pages, Twitter and Facebook. In addition, key stakeholders will be interviewed and their perspectives documented for analysis.

The research purposed seeks to find obstacles and opportunities for school administrators, parents and school community members in three rural Northwestern Ohio school districts in respect to parent engagement. Specifically, this study seeks data from participants and artifacts to help define parent engagement as identified by Epstein’s (nd) Framework of Six Types of
Involvement. Additionally, this includes Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making and Collaborating with the Community.

The research will be accomplished through a qualitative methodology and will employ a case study model which is the most appropriate approach to answering the research questions in this study. In addition, this qualitative methodology will allow for a deeper exploration of the research questions for each of the cases being studied of chosen participants including parents, administrators and community members. Furthermore, there will be a variety of artifacts gathered from the interviews, focus groups and school such as websites, Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, newsletters and other social networking uses to show parent engagement. The data gathered from the interviews and focus groups will lead to a broader holistic understanding of how parent engagement works in three different districts such as one city school, local school and exempted village school.

Epstein states “These and other connections are interesting and research is needed to understand the combined effects of such activities (Epstein, 2009, pg 30). For example, as the six items are used together in different ways one can build school, parent or community engagement in different ways, depending on the goal or expected outcome.

By exploring parent engagement in local school, city school and exempted village school districts will help to inform what is working, or not working to develop parent engagement which will lead students to graduate, higher grades, less behavioral problems and overall development of their well-being. Through the gathering of personal experiences, the use of a rubric and overall opinions of the groups, the goal will be to gain understanding on how to provide further support to parent engagement, which will enhance students general well-being and success as adults.
Theoretical Framework

This research will use a six-tiered typology as a conceptual framework for understanding the levels at which schools can engage parents to participate in creating parental engagement offered by Epstein (nd). The typology consists of the following six types. Type 1, Parenting Skills, describes how adults have their style of parenting their child, and ultimately, how this affects children at school. Type 2, Communication, involves how often and how meaningful the parents perceive the communication. Type 3, Volunteering, is how often the parents are at the school helping in classrooms, chaperoning trips or events and volunteering for other school programs. Type 4, Learning at Home, is the space, time and structure that parents create for academic activities at home that relate to school curriculum or as enrichment. Learning at home can be conversations or social networking to build engagement between the teacher and parent to assist the student. Type 5, School Decision Making, means the extent to which parents get involved on committees consulted for school decision-making. Type 6, Collaboration with The Community, is how much the school reaches out to the resources of the community and invites the community to the school for the purpose of serving the students and families.

Type 1 focuses on Parenting including those activities associated with raising happy, healthy children that can become “expert learners” (Silberman, 1996). Silberman defines expert learners as one engaged with learning the materials. The students move their thinking forward by being motivated thinkers and listeners and not lazy or passive. These students take responsibility for their learning and see it as important and not something done to them (Silberman, 1996). Students practice self-regulated learning for processes that guide their learning. Students take
control of their learning and with the help of all stakeholders’ function outside the school within the community.

Type 2 focuses on Communicating, whether it is from school to home or home to school or in a broader way to stakeholders or from stakeholders. The importance of communication should not be underestimated. Communications need to be responsive to our stakeholders as well as to parents by being inviting, welcoming, timely and continuous which will ultimately engage (Two-Way Communication, n.d.). Communication can take many forms such as the school’s website, Facebook page, Twitter feed or may be face-to-face. There are different modalities of communication and not just one certain type may work for everyone.

Type 3 Volunteering according to Epstein (nd), happens in three ways in education. First, one can volunteer in the school or classroom by assisting teachers and administrators as tutors or assistants. Second, they may volunteer for the school as a fundraiser or promoting the school to all stakeholders. Third, they could be in the audience of a school event, or program such as a football game or band show.

Type 4 is Learning at Home and the importance of parents helping their children with homework, curriculum-related activities and decisions. An example could be field trips which include the student’s own community. These activities extend the school like experience beyond the walls of the school to the stakeholders by assisting with homework and other school assignments. Sometimes this can occur through summer learning packets, filled with ideas and activities that involve others in the student’s community. This can even be as far reaching as helping students set academic goals while planning for college or work after graduation.

Type 5 extends to Decision Making. This takes into consideration parent participation with school governance committees or organizations such as parent-teacher associations. Other
roles may include leadership, which includes disseminating information. This may include parents being involved with local PTA/PTO or other organizations such as curriculum committees, advisory or focus groups. Some of these groups may be lobbying for school reforms, improvements or even the passing of school levies. No matter the reason this decision making sharing can assist and support parents and students working with local stakeholders in the community.

Type 6 is Collaborating With The Community. This includes “identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family, practices and student learning development,” (Epstein, 2009, pg 14). For example, specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources and opportunities that will connect students with community stakeholders. These can create openness and transparency for using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, moreover, others to assist students and strengthen teaching practice.

Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis on 25 empirical studies and 31 of their findings indicated that parent engagement has a positive effect on student academic achievement and more students go to post-secondary school. This is beneficial to all stake holders in many ways including, the community and all stakeholders that it benefits.

**Research Questions**

A qualitative methodology was chosen for its perspective to answer the research questions posed in this study because it fit best with social interactions and is suitable in practice. Therefore, qualitative methodology allowed for exploring the research questions in a comprehensive way because qualitative is primarily exploratory. The following research questions provided the focus for this qualitative case study as the researcher attempted to
determine the factors that influence the level of parental engagement present at each of the schools:

1. How do three schools, one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio implement parent engagement procedures aligned with Epstein’s recommended framework of parent engagement?

2. What are the experiences of school administrators in one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?

3. What are the experiences of parents in one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?

4. What are the experiences of community members in one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?

**Definition of Terms**

The following definitions of terms clarify and support the contents of the understanding for this study.

*Term 1. Parent Involvement-* The NCLB [32](2002) definition of parent involvement prioritizes communications: “the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities.

- that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning;
- that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school;
- that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the
education of their child; and that other activities are carried out, such as those
described in section 1118 of the ESEA” (IDEA 2004). [Section 9101(32), ESEA.]

occurs when students, teachers and families strive to create open, reciprocal relationships.
In other words it happens when trust builds and participants feel safe in their interactions
with each other.

**Term 3.** Communication - The most accepted definition of communication is the
exchange of information, ideas and feelings to get a message across (McIntire &
Fessenden, 1994). The researcher Epstein (2002) says communication is the “Design of
effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school
programs and their children’s progress.

**Term 4.** Rural District Typology Code 1 – According to the Ohio Department of
Education (2015) a rural district is one that has high student poverty & small student
population which matches the city school district.

**Term 5.** Rural District Typology Code 2 - According to the Ohio Department of
Education (2015) a rural district with an average student poverty and very small student
population which matches the local school district.

**Term 6.** According to the Ohio Department of Education (2015) small town typology
code 3 - low student poverty and small student population which matches the exempted
village school district.

**Term 7.** Suburban District Typology Code 5 - According to the Ohio Department of
Education (2015) low student poverty and average student population size. This study did
not use a Suburban District.
Term 8. Urban District Code 7 - high student poverty and average student population size. This study did not use an Urban District.

Limitations

This study contained local, city and exempted village school districts however no urban or suburban districts were represented which could be considered a limitation. The focus groups included parents, community members and school administrators and did not include teachers which could be considered a weakness. Another limitation could be my knowledge of the districts which could bias some of the qualitative aspects of the study.

Subjectivity & Researcher Positionality

As a respected past Ohio State Support Team Regional Employee and now an employee of the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI), there is a natural commitment to fairness and personal bias not happening. Since a qualitative approach will be used, items will be carefully constructed using non-biased questions. Participants will be assured of their anonymity and protected through how the surveys are constructed and implemented.

Milner makes it clear that people interpret, live, function and represent things differently from each other (2007). When there are opposing positions, it is best to state them. Once recognized a person can begin to learn from the opposing position dealing with it as intended. Furthermore, the data captured through the narratives of the stories may be critical for research.

One strategy to be used is to target bias and move it from a vital force to a neutralized inert object (Thiederman, 2003). According to Thiederman, "Think the thought, shove it aside; think the thought, shove it aside; think the thought, shove it aside (2003 p 112). This is one strategy to make the bias into something that is no more than an irritating act of thought. Another suggestion from Thiederman is to curb negative language and talk positively and respectfully
(2003). Continuing to use verbal language will enlighten our mood and beliefs. Another strategy is recognizing and confronting our own bias may stop any foreseeable bias problems.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary objective of this research was to investigate the opportunities, obstacles and general experiences of school administrators, parents and school community members in three Northwestern Ohio local, city and exempted village school districts, regarding parent engagement. According to Epstein (1995), relationship building occurs when students, teachers and families strive to create open, reciprocal relationships. In addition, there needs to be sufficient focus on internal training to create the trust to build staff knowledge, to help participants feel safe in their interactions with each other (McKenna & Millen, 2013). For this reason, Epstein believes two-way communication was important. Epstein was clear how communication traveling from the school to the parent and then from the parent to the school was defined as two-way communication (et al. 2002) which was one of six signs of parent engagement.

More importantly, parent engagement is crucial to student success (Epstein, et al. 2002; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; MacIver, Epstein, Sheldon & Fonseca, 2015). "The essential core of family engagement is furthering the communication and relationship between teachers and parents" (Auerbach, 2009 p 19). Student success was higher when teachers, parents and students were collaborating using a team approach according to research (Bitsko, 2006). Children need nurturing especially in their younger years and as the child's world grows to include the educational community their past parental community feels the lack of belonging (Bitsko, 2006). Parents, students, principals and teachers understand and want healthy relationships (Vance 2015). However, according to Foster (2015) “There is a significant communication gap between the public, parents and schools” (p. 35).

There appears to be a lack of research specifically knowing what creates or starts parent
engagement. At this point it does not appear to be a guaranteed way to involve or engage parents and teachers. Therefore, the consequence if we do not explore this topic more to understand what facilitates parent engagement and what inhibits parent engagement, educator’s promises of the educational system will fail to be fully realized for our students and our communities. This literature review consisted of searching for scholarly peer-reviewed articles using databases such as ERIC, One Search and EBSCO. The terms used for searching were parent engagement, parent involvement, school engagement, family involvement, two-way communication, leadership, teachers, education, students, relationships, one-way communication and communication.

**Parent Engagement**

Several researchers have information on parent engagement. Parent engagement defined in this text as both parent voice and presence during which the educators are receptive to the parents allowing an environment of transparency with the multidirectional movement of communication (McKenna & Millen, 2013). Communication is mentioned within the context of parent engagement.

Parent engagement according to Epstein and Sanders (2006) has been part of future teacher and administrator training with teachers and administrators specifically trained on how to conduct school, family and community partnerships. Epstein and Sanders (2006) discuss how important a strong conceptual framework is needed in such situations. Epstein and Sanders (2006) reiterated how important strong leadership plays a role in developing parent engagement within the schools. Some researchers in this study used a sample size of 161 schools, colleges and departments of education (SCDE). This survey examined leaders’ perspectives and projections for the future and present courses offered. The researchers conducted a survey and ran different terms through the theory of overlapping spheres of influence which they used as
their conceptual framework for the study. In the past, school-based partnership programs have used the overlapping spheres of influence to explain how educator, families and communities may connect to support student learning and success in school. Researchers also used multiple regression analysis to identify characteristics to help explain which SCDEs offered more courses and content on partnerships. The research mentioned added to the previous studies by examining structural, organizational and attitudinal factors associated with differences in SCDEs’ coverage of partnership topics, preparedness of graduates to conduct family and community involvement activities and prospects for change.

McKenna and Millen (2013) believe there should have been mutual respect between the educators and parents which suggested there should have been parent voice and presence. There was also a certain amount of culturally responsive practices that connect the interactions of the educators and parents (McKenna & Millen, 2013). McKenna and Millen (2013) used the grounded theory models of parent voice, presence and engagement to view their K-12 research. McKenna and Millen (2013) explored the relationship between students transitioning to high school from middle school that struggled during the first year. The researchers focused on the outreach from the high school to the families of the students transitioning. McKenna and Millen (2013) examined the declining family engagement during the transition of the eighth graders to ninth grade. McKenna and Millen (2013) found a significant negative relationship between the proportion of student who struggle the first year of high school and the quality of high school outreach to parents. McKenna and Millen (2013) make it clear how there has to be more work to engage families during this transition period.

The data was collected in two ways. First by holding focus groups and then by surveys. Parents were chosen from an educational group and each family was rated as low-social-
economic. The focus groups were two hours in length and the letters that parents wrote were hypothetical. Data analysis was ongoing which is typical for qualitative research. Throughout the transcription, coding and processes remained high.

While using open coding model comparisons between participants remained constant. Axial coding was used as the data was sorted into thematic units. Grounded theory was observed throughout the study as themes and areas directly informed the creation of the model present during which researchers used two separate triangulation methods which included analyst triangulation and source triangulation to substantiate the data itself and the new model being created.

McKenna and Millen (2013) findings support family engagement. McKenna and Millen (2013) used the words of parents to describe or frame the understanding of parents’ actions and thinking in relations to parent engagement. One of the most important observations by McKenna and Millen (2013) was how many parents have significant motivation to support their child in several ways while displaying ongoing motivational and mutual respect. Parent engagement needs to be inclusive, culturally relevant and represents the parents and their children (McKenna and Millen 2013).

Leadership does make a difference in home-school relationships according to Ho, (2009). Ho, (2009) used Grounded Theory as he examined how educational leadership defined parental involvement and shapes the nature of the home-school collaboration. Ho, (2009) results showed three major types of principal leadership, bureaucratic, utilitarian and communitarian, which provide a powerful explanation of the extent of home-school collaboration. Ho, (2009) shows educational leadership is just as important or more important than putting it all on the parents for the relationship to occur.
Research conducted from December 2001 to December 2002 comprised of sixty-eight interviews with the principals of the three schools, eighteen teachers who were members of parent-teacher associations (PTAs) or home-school cooperation (HSC) teams, eighteen parents who were members of PTAs or active parent volunteers in the schools and twenty-nine non-involved parents whom were talked to at random either on the school premises or at school activities that parents attended (Ho, 2009). There were also participant observations of nine different activities organized by the PTAs or HSC teams of the three selected schools. The researchers used grounded theory approach to explore the different facets and manifestations of parental involvement to understand the underlying values and the implicit meanings various stakeholders ascribe (Ho, 2009). Primary coding analysis was used for the data. These codes were subsequently conceptualized and abstracted during the second phase of analysis to reveal pertinent themes and constructs (Ho, 2009).

Results show three major types of principal leadership, or habitus of parental involvement: bureaucratic, utilitarian and communitarian, which provide a convincing explanation for the extent and nature of home-school collaboration than parents’ capital in this context (Ho, 2009). The present article adds to the existing literature by application of Bourdieu’s concepts of field, habitus and capital to understand the relationship between principals’ leadership and different types of home-school relationships (Ho, 2009).

**One-Way Communication**

Lee and VanDyke (2015) used Twitter and Facebook feeds from federal science agencies to communicate science. Their data reached from March 2 to March 15, 2014, as Lee and VanDyke (2015) observed 11 organizations consisting of 252 Facebook posts and 679 Tweets. Lee and VanDyke (2015) also noted how well the agencies created dialogic space based on other
Researchers suggestions, for example, were community rules posted and did they identify social media managers? When it came to science communication Lee and VanDyke (2015), found through their evidence collection that engagement and two-way communication rarely happen while one-way communication occurs the most often.

Another study by Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser (2012) found one-way communication could benefit in particular circumstances such as leading by words. Data was collected using assignments such as Let $I=\{1,\ldots,4\}$ stand for a group of four participants who interact for $t=1,\ldots, T$ periods in partner design (Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser, 2012). At the beginning, each individual is endowed with 25 ECU (Experimental Currency Units) while the formulas keep getting into more depth as they continue the researchers used the Wilcoxon rank sum test to access whether the distribution of the resulting sequences is identical to the distribution of the average group contributions in $C$ (Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser, 2012).

Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser (2012) used a between-subjects design to study five treatments that build on this basic game (Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser, 2012). Participants interact for ten periods using a baseline, continuous communication and pre-play communication, which address the questions given earlier and the researchers ran three sessions per treatment (Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser, 2012). Each session had twenty-four participants with a group size of equal to four during which there were eighteen independent observations per treatment (Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser, 2012). The ending results shown by Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser (2012) through the effects of one-way communication on contribution levels and second, the communication's content and its relation to participation decisions. Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser (2012) used mean and median and one-sided Wilcoxon rank sum tests with the group.
Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser (2012) set up a game like scenario to experiment with the power of leading with words and a voluntary contribution scenario using one-way communication to set out to prove that responses will occur without the exchange of promises. Koukoumelis, Levati and Weisser (2012) found that leading by words using one-way communication increases contributions significantly.

Nee and Fusco (2015) found most tweets (using the social network Twitter) were one-way communication because the correspondence fell back into traditional reporting practices. The data collection by Nee and Fusco (2015) consisted of a qualitative review of all tweets and the implementation of a simple coding scheme based on patterns which emerged. Nee and Fusco (2015) used the literature review which assisted in identifying traditional practices of journalism and two-way communication during a crisis. Nee and Fusco (2015) next applied the coding scheme to all 1261 crisis-related tweets for a sample during which coding schemes were set up and researchers compared their results using an intercoder reliability.

Nee and Fusco (2015) used a coding scheme to code the data by traditional, one-way forms of communication, conversational interactivity, promotional/other, this study shows significant differences in the way Twitter was used, based on the journalists’ gender and their native media platform while using the 2 x 2 Chi-square analysis, Inter-coder reliability and Krippendorf’s alpha.

This study found that most tweets were the same as traditional reporting practices of one-way communication and that newspaper journalists sent more interactive tweets then broadcast journalists (Nee and Fusco, 2015). Nee and Fusco (2015) were clear that this information might be useful for those still trying to figure out appropriate models of social media use, such as scholars and journalists. Even in healthcare communication falls back to one-way
communication. Hether (2014) finds through social media posts of a large company how social media posts usually showed one-way communications and little two-way communication. Hether (2014) in this study used a case study examining social media communication with stakeholders accomplished using one of the biggest not-for-profit health care organizations in the U.S by setting up their study through content analysis and interviews. Hether (2014) did a case study with content analysis and in-depth interviews for the data collection methods during the summer of 2012. Two independent coders analyzed all of the posts using inter-coder reliability coefficients, the content analysis codes, two-way asymmetrical, two-way symmetrical, four dialogic principles, a dialogic loop and dichotomous variables and participants were recruited through a snowball sampling strategy (Hether 2014). The findings show how a large company used social media posts which reflected one-way and two-way communication models along with the principles of dialogic communication.

**Two-Way Communication**

Blaschke and Veh (2015) locate companies implementing strategies for two-way communication and what they found was surface conversations. Blaschke and Veh (2015) are clear there needs to be a discussion, negotiation and discourse characteristics to be two-way symmetric communication.

The data collection mostly focused on using Twitter, a social networking tool which uses 140 characters which the authors stated made it easy to collect data (Blaschke and Veh, 2015). Blaschke and Veh (2015) during May and July 2014 put together 88,233 tweets from conversations covering 28 user accounts of companies in the DAX. The analysis consisted of using the numbers as absolute while the frequency (tweets per day) and the time to reply (in minutes) are given as mean and standard deviation. Blaschke and Veh (2015) provide levels of
turn claiming and turn receiving which indicates one, two-way and symmetric communication. They use the Shapiro-Wilk test of normality and the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient to figure out the levels of turn claiming and turn receiving.

Pakter and Chen (2012) found that increasing parental involvement using text messaging did not show measurable results on the academic performance of students. Pakter and Chen (2012) found text messaging alone did not change student performance however it is another easy, time efficient way to contact parents.

Pakter and Chen (2012) used a mixed methods approach to collect data from a group of students. Participants were chosen from an urban high school in California consisting of mostly a low social, economic population (Pakter and Chen, 2012). Pakter and Chen (2012) wanted to find out if texting would work with their parents to change academic performance. They collected data on student attendance and overall grade in the course of study. Parents that participated received text messaging regarding their student’s assignments, tests and quizzes from the teacher. The participants all came from four different physics classes taught by the same instructor.

The analysis was performed by manually collecting the instructor’s grade book and attendance records and recording them into spreadsheets and attendance software to be analyzed and a Paired Difference T-Test of the pre-test, post-test measurements for both the texting group and the non-texting group was performed using a data analysis package (Pakter and Chen, 2012).

Pakter and Chen (2012) did not find the answer they had articulated. Pakter and Chen (2012) were hoping to prove that the use of text messaging using cell phones to communicate with teachers to parents would yield measurable results on the academic performance of students and instead they showed text messaging by itself does not change student performance.
While their findings show that teachers have to reflect specific pedagogies along with two-way communication, Dowden, Pittaway, Yost and McCarthy (2013) showed how feedback is a continuing of two-way communication that encourages progress for students. Dowden, et al. (2013) are clear there needs to be a strong relationship with the student which is within the teaching and learning context.

Dowden, et al. (2013) collected the data with a questionnaire containing closed questions using a Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The recipients of the research were on-campus and distance cohort made up of four-year Bachelor of Education students (Dowden, et al., 2013). There was also a focus group and pilot survey with probing questions administered (Dowden, et al., 2013). The analysis was accomplished through a mixed-methods framework using both qualitative and quantitative data even though the numbers responding to the survey were relatively small responses close to 10% (Dowden, et al., 2013). Dowden, et al. (2013) were clear that the response rates were not expected to be a problem because the project sought to gain qualitative insight into students’ perceptions, as opposed to generating generalizable quantitative data. One of the themes found was examined through feedforward, consulting markers and teacher-student relationships (Dowden, et al., 2013).

Dowden, et al. (2013) found that students’ emotions clearly reflected their perceptions of feedback from their teachers. Teachers need to be able to assure their feedback reflects specific pedagogies along with two-way communication and a healthy relationship with the student which is within the teaching and learning context (Dowden, et al., 2013).

**Relationship Building**

Relationship building according to Li and Labig (2001) was not optional when negotiating in China. Li and Labig (2001) found it was best to build the relationship before
discussing issues, however, people in the United States are task oriented and tend to skip the relationship building which leads to broken relationships or no relationship.

Li and Labig (2001) conducted their data collection through interviews with business people in China finding 21 of the 27 managers had successful negotiations and the successful managers said it was due to the time they invested in building a relationship with the folks first. The Chinese appreciate and react positively to managers that develop a relationship first and then start to negotiate (Li and Labig, 2001). The relationship-oriented negotiators considered relationship outcomes at the planning stage of negotiation (Li and Labig, 2001).

Symeou, Roussounidou and Michaelides (2012) conducted research on in-service training focused on teacher-parent communication and its impact on teachers in a training program which took place in Cyprus. Symeou, et al. (2012) used questionnaires completed by teachers before they were trained and tried the communication skills taught during their course. Their data showed changes in the teacher’s perceptions about how they communicated with parents. According to Symeou, et al. (2012) the teachers gained significant competence in organizing and implementing communication sessions with parents. Supporting their idea that teachers can be trained to communicate with parents. Symeou, et al. (2012) also believe this study offers invigorating teacher approaches and skills to assist in talking with parents.

The data collection by Symeou, et al. (2012) was outstanding and had to be achieved carefully since the researchers were evaluating the impact of the training course that was created on the teachers’ effectiveness in organizing and implementing meeting with parents. Symeou, et al. (2012) needed to assess the relationship between perceived communication and the actual skills used while collecting data through a pre/post questionnaire.
The analysis was accomplished through a Likert-type ordinal scale (Symeou, et al., 2012). Symeou, et al. (2012) used a factor analytic technique to extract empirical dimensions from the 48 communication skills and a paired samples t-tests were used to make sure the data was reliable and compared properly. Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients were used while Symeou, et al. (2012) used interpretable and reliable subscales and the varimax rotation method.

The data showed after the study that there were changes in the teacher’s perceptions about how they communicated with parents and educators gained significant competence in organizing, implementing communication sessions with parents (Symeou, et al., 2012). Symeou, et al. (2012) believe this shows evidence that teachers can be trained to communicate with parents and this study offers invigorating teacher approaches and skills to assist in talking with parents.

Social Networks

Hether (2014) exhibited research on how a large company could use social media such as Twitter to post one-way and two-way communications. This large company used social media to post information in a one-way fashion and a few times responded to some posts, however over all the research clearly showed that most of the communication was one-way (Hether, 2014). Hether (2014) showed how the company held a conservative approach to using the social network and stayed almost entirely with one-way communication. Hether (2014) found that the large company was highly concerned about message control which leads to how one-way communication was less challenging and safer to use than two-way communication.

The authors Nee and Fusco (2015) were clear that this information might be useful for those still trying to figure out appropriate models of social media use, such as scholars and journalists. This case study was to show interactivity of newspaper and broadcast journalists.
“Interactivity as the process was defined as a two-way communication between sender and receiver, with each party having the chance to trade roles” (Nee & Fusco, 2015, p. 100). What Nee and Fusco (2015) found was newspaper journalists were using two-way communication more than broadcast journalists who used mostly one-way communication.

The researchers Blaschke and Veh (2015) were studying one and two-way communication strategies using social media such as Twitter posts. The research perspective taken is “communicative constitution of organization (CCO) to provide a theoretical account of the use of social media in stakeholder conversations (Blaschke & Veh, 2015 p. 401). This study addresses issues by “Reconceptualizing Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) framework for public relations management from the perspective of a communicative constitution of an organization" (Blaschke & Veh, 2015 p. 402).

Lee and VanDyke (2015) find Relationship building was tied into the one and two-way communication using Twitter in the sciences. Even agencies using social media only use it in a one-way direction, which was to push information out (Lee and VanDyke, 2015). It appears again and again whether it was education, journalists or even science one-way communication was found in use.

**Homework**

Homework is a common word used in the United States. McMahon (2010) used a qualitative case study which took place in a low-income, urban middle school and relied on interviews, participant observations and analysis of artifacts collected at meetings and school events. McMahon's (2010) study was analyzed through the lens of sociocultural theory. McMahon (2010) discusses homework in the context of social justice and how it can hurt children from different backgrounds.
Parents believe the involvement with their child's home and projects can assist them in their awareness of curriculum standards (McMahon 2010). As parents assist their children with homework every evening, they will have become more engaged with the assignments and with the curriculum standards. Good teachers will stress the learning goals and stress the connected learning standard hoping the parents will learn more. Another important factor is how parents can realize their child's strengths and weaknesses (McMahon 2010).

Internet technology is still a new tool and now used by schools has become important to parent engagement (Graham-Clay, 2005). Over the years there have been more school websites added to express school information to families and the public. Graham-Clay (2005) found students work with school staff to create and maintain school websites. Teachers can update their individual websites with homework assignments, test schedules and resource links (Graham-Clay, 2005).

**Nutrition**

Nutrition while thought of as important for all students has significant effects on academic performance of our students and their overall success in and outside of the learning setting. Breakfast is considered the first meal of the day and possibly the most important according to researchers. Fiocco and Probst (2016) found in their literature review how breakfast is to student's mental and physical well-being. They specifically focused on elementary and secondary student's cognitive and academic performance. Fiocco and Probst (2016) used database searches of Scopus and Science Direct using the search terms of breakfast, breakfast composition, quality, cognitive, academic performance, children, adolescent and limited their publications to the years of 2005 - 2015. Fiocco and Probst (2016) found fifteen articles
reflecting how breakfast has a significant effect on cognitive, academic performance, increased memory and attention span with children and adolescents.

Researchers recognize nutrition and breakfast is important for students to maximize their memory, and academic success. However, schools are not always knowledgeable on how to implement a solid nutritional program for their learners. School districts are lacking when it comes to implementing multichannel nutritional interventions and forming relationships with partners such as the media and community members. Levine, Olander, Lefebvre, Cusick, Biesiadecki, McGoldrick, (2002) found how school teachers, administrators and food service personnel have learned from organizational issues involved in an overall system of intervention. Levine,et.al. 2002 found the importance of local coordinators supporting teachers to bridge the gap between cafeteria, staff and outside partners to form external partners. Through sustained relationships with parents, local businesses, educational institutions and health organizations they found a solid system could be put into place with regard to assisting students with improved nutrition which would reflect gains in academics.

Another area of concern for school officials are students skipping breakfast or not taking the time to eat a nutritional breakfast. The students and families may have the money and the food is available but students do not take the time to eat breakfast. Jolles, (2012) reported how breakfast skipping in adolescents ages 11-18 happens a lot and the negative impacts are lower end of the term grades, attention span affected performance.

Mental Health

Similarly, social networking contributes to a student's mental health while impacting their academics and overall schoolwork. Whether social networking is negative or positive on mental health is still being debated by researchers (Sampasa-Kanyinga, & Lewis 2015). Social networks
defined as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace and Instagram to name a few impacts student's mental health. The researcher's study incorporated surveys to 753 students in grades 7-12 in Canada using multinomial logistic regression to examine the response between mental health variables and time using online social networks. One reason for concern now is because mobile devices have made the internet even more accessible to students. Sampasa-Kanyinga, & Lewis (2015) data results reflected students with mental health issues using online social networking more often and for longer periods of time than students with no mental health issues. These issues become important for administrators when they are organizing and working with families.

Another mental health concern is internet addiction which affects students academics impacting the family and school. Renjun et al. (2017) through a study of 888 junior high school students discovered internet addiction led to several psychological and behavior problems which included bad thoughts, negative behaviors, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobia and paranoia. The researchers believed more training on mental health and how to recognize internet addiction was needed. This work is important to school districts and another important factor while considering family engagement.

Students need the internet and should have access to it for the benefit of their education. Baker, Perez and Algorta, (2016) through a systematic review of empirical studies examined qualitative studies which focused on relationships between online social networking and depression in students. They used PsycINFO, Web of Science, CINAHL, MEDLINE, and EMBASE . Baker, Perez and Algorta found not all internet interactions end up with depressed students. There are important variables needing consideration such as time, quality and type of social networking. Along with these variables, considerations must be individual differences which includes sex and personality (Baker, Perez and Algorta, 2016). Districts have students
using the internet every day whether it is doing research or playing games in the library. Some students even carry mobile phones and interact on them throughout the day. Administrators know the importance of caring for the student's mental health as it relates to the internet and social networks while understanding how important it is to have the family involvement through discussion. Family engagement is key to make sure the proper amount of internet access and availability of social networking is proper for their child.

**Every Student Succeeds Act**

Under ESSA parents will have a greater range of impact through the guarantee of two-way communication between school and parents (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). The limit may be the lack of enforcing how two-way communication will happen from schools to parents. Also, the lack of parent training in the strategies of two-way communication. Possibly implementation of the statewide family engagement centers will have the responsibility to train parents/guardians in two-way communication (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

The problem investigated is communication and parent engagement/relationships. An important policy is the every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) a Federal (National) policy which formed in the U.S. Department of Education in Washington D.C. ESSA specifically says: S. 1177-70 (5)(D) “ensuring regular two-way, meaningful communication between family members and school staff and to the extent practicable, in a language that family members can understand” (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015 p. 70). Assuming two-way communication is an important component for the successful implementation of ESSA goals to equal opportunity for all learners. ESSA has conceptualized this by making communication concrete this time compared to No Child Left Behind. It specifies two-way communication instead of just
communication. ESSA is hoping this will fix the past problem and lead to stronger school-parent partnerships.

**School Websites and Leadership**

School websites are a place for the general public as well as parents and stakeholders to visit for information. However, school websites are becoming just as known for facilitating teaching, learning and communication to improve the outcomes of education (Taddeo, 2016). While school websites can be a source for general one-way information, they can also be a tool for teaching, learning and two-way communication to improve parent engagement between the school and stakeholders. School websites are providing education settings with the opportunity to transform and enhance the schooling experience when it pertains to parent engagement. School websites are providing education settings with the opportunity to transform and enhance the schooling experience.

It appears stakeholders, teachers, parents and leaders have a high expectation for their district website to promote their school district and its processes and events. While some school websites primarily serve a marketing purpose by showcasing the school, others see it as a public relations and marketing tool, providing a forum for communication and information sharing (Taddeo, 2016). In some districts, the leadership uses the school website as a transparent way to streamline school administrative processes. For example, logging student absences, lunch or online payment fees to name a few. In some cases, the schools are considering the website to be a conduit for communicating with stakeholders and enhancing the education experience. By doing this, the hope is to increase parent engagement.

Establishing a clear website purpose aligned with the needs of the school community will increase parent engagement. Doing this assists with parent engagement because it includes the
stakeholders to achieve the goals (Taddeo, 2016). Because it involves many people, groups, partners, community and stakeholders it has to be part of the district's strategic plan and considered an important priority. (Taddeo, 2016). In the end Taddeo, 2016 believes more investigations are needed to explore how websites in the future can make teaching and learning meet the total range of needs with their stakeholders. It becomes more important as districts begin integrating technology to move learning and educational agendas. All of this work needs to lead to more parent engagement.

**School Marketing**

School districts are changing, along with the markets and the expectations of the stakeholders. Parent engagement along with relationships have become more important because there is more choice now than in the past. (Anast-May, L., et.al, 2011). Now there are community schools, e-schools, private schools and religious schools to choose which sometimes offer more than the public school. While there are many choices, stakeholders have far more expectations from the school. This suggests that school districts have to move toward stronger engagement with its parents.

Principals are starting to recognize the importance of marketing and branding to the success of their school. Anast-May, et.al, discuss the importance of the connections between the school and community while attempting to provide stakeholders with the services they demand (2011). Principals know the survival of their schools might be dependent on their marketing or branding to keep students and even to lure students to their schools. Therefore, as principals increase their marketing ability their hope would be to increase engagement with their parents.

The study by Anast-May, L., et.al, suggests we understand the basic survival of the schools might be dependent on the capacity of the principal to keep the majority of the
stakeholders involved (2011). Their purpose is to consider the preparedness of the principal to be the branding, marketer for the school. Basically, is the principal well enough prepared to be a marketer for his school? There is more research needed in the area of what constitutes effective school branding. Might it be student ethics, life skills, academics, communication, the arts or others?

While marketing their school, some principals see parent engagement as a means to focus student's parents on state tests and raising their proficiency scores. For example, Bickmore's (2010) study started showing how principals concerns were less about involving parents with their kid's school and more about convincing parents to accept and to support school goals and student achievement. Principals spent their time trying to change the parental mindsets to conform to the school and how they do business. Principals view the parents and stakeholders as constituents instead of customers (Bickmore, 2010). The concern over tests became the principal's focus with parents, students and teachers which shifted this study from parents’ engagement to the emphases of the principal's promoting their own goals for better test results.

**School Choice**

Most would agree school choice has become more common every year with charter schools and e-schools arising in different parts of the country. People tend to believe with all these choices of schools that school or parent engagement would be higher. One might be lead to believe if you choose the school your children attend then there would be a higher chance of engagement with the school. It is not true according to Kim and Hwang (2014). They have found the opportunity for school choice itself is not strongly relevant to parental participation in school (Kim, & Hwang, 2014). Even though parents may choose an individual charter school that they have researched and found as a fit for their children does not mean they will have any more
interactions with the school than if they had not had school choice. When parents are dissatisfied with the amount of parent engagement at their school and feel it would be wise to switch to a charter school or an e-school they may want to rethink the whole plan because this past study shows that school choice does not mean parent engagement.

Again one would believe the more school choice, the more parents and schools would want to engage, especially when people believe it might be a significant step in improving educational outcomes for all students. The policy makers believe by providing parents with more school options for their children; the parents will ultimately be more involved in the day to day activities of educating their children. Again people believe that increasing parental engagement is a component to improving educational outcomes for U.S. Schools. The majority of policy makers suggest we can raise parental engagement by giving them school options for their children. McGinn's, (2014) research considers whether school choices truly translates into more parental involvement. McGinn (2014) finds that school choice does not translate into more parental involvement. The authors conclude that school choice does not always have a positive impact on parental engagement and engagement, in turn, does not always translate into better or more equitable opportunities. In some cases, increased choice may present additional challenges to parents as they struggle to find accurate information, weigh a variety of problematic options and consider the impact of their personal decisions on their children and the overall well-being of the district.

**Graduation Rates**

Most would agree that high school dropouts do not do well on a wide variety of long-term outcomes. It is well known on average a dropout earns less money and is more likely to be jailed, poor health and less likely to be happily married. During this time the dropout rates
remained unchanged at approximately thirty percent during the past three decades (Messacar, & Oreopoulos, 2013). This lifetime of challenges face these students all their life when it could be different with today's economy. Instead, they drop out earning about $12.75 per hour or less with most jobs found only in the food services, construction and landscaping industries (Messacar, & Oreopoulos, 2013). Socially dropouts face a nightmare too with thirty-three percent of females giving birth as teenagers, thirteen percent of male and female dropouts are separated or divorced (Messacar, & Oreopoulos, 2013). It is commonly understood that dropouts are from households where parents are less active in their child's education. Therefore, when students decide to dropout, there is not the needed or extra support by their parents or by their teachers. Messacar & Oreopoulos (2013) through their study recommend compulsory schooling which they say is successful in keeping students in school. They also point to economic evidence in their study suggesting it is a worthy goal and pays for itself over time. Messacar & Oreopoulos (2013) further say programs that target disengagement among at-risk students at an early age will increase graduation rates ensuring a more driven economy. The research discussed sounds great. However, they do not mention the importance of parent engagement. These researchers put everything on the family.

Parent engagement, parental involvement, parent participation, community engagement, school-parent partnerships or other key terms are not the focus as much as moving our students toward graduation and post-secondary transition. The results show that parent's educational expectations do significantly make a difference with students for all backgrounds (Ross, 2016). This study also finds parent participation in school functions to be a significant positive predictor of both high school completion and postsecondary enrollment (Ross, 2016). Hence parental involvement during the middle and high school years benefit students academically, behaviorally
and increases their self-efficacy (Ross, 2016). The bad news is the steady decline of parental involvement once students start their middle and high school years. The research continues to find how schools do not know how to effectively collaborate with parents to support their children academically. Thus, it is important to understand parent engagement and how the district can engage the stakeholders.

Another challenge to measuring parental involvement is that there is no consistent definition of what it entails. According to Epstein using the six types of activities that are essential to a comprehensive program of a family, school and community partnership: (1) Parenting, (2) Communicating, (3) Volunteering, (4) Learning at home, (5) Decision-making and (6) Collaborating with the Community. Epstein would say something like, students are best served when schools help families establish supportive home environments for learning, provide two-way systems of communication about school programs and student progress, Obviously, these practices, when implemented, are meant to more deeply engage parents in the school community than simply providing information through newsletters and progress reports.

Most researchers accept how essential it is for students to acquire high school achievement and proceed on to college or career as an overarching goal in the United States education system. The individual and societal advantages of higher education, involving higher incomes and employment rates, greater job satisfaction and social mobility, healthier lifestyles and more active citizens are well documented (Ross, 2016). Furthermore, students need to stay in school through their middle and high school years and leave with a graduation diploma. The study by Ross, (2016) replicates and extends previous research by examining the impact of various dimensions of parental involvement on high school completion and post-secondary attendance. Ross, (2016) believes this fills an important gap in the emerging literature on
parental involvement and has implications for expanding policies for family and parent engagement. Ross, (2016) presents the need for parental involvement once children reach high school. The study mentions how difficult it is to prescribe sufficient levels of parental engagement. The study suggests in the conclusion that parents engage in more developmentally appropriate practices, such as expressing high expectations for their children’s future.

**Theoretical Consideration**

The theory being considered at this time is Epstein’s Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence which is used with the Conceptual Framework. Epstein has used this theory in many of her studies on parent engagement. “It asserts that students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school and community work together to support students' learning and development. In studies of school-based partnership programs, the model of overlapping spheres of influence has been used to explain how educators, families and communities may connect to support student learning and success in school” (Epstein & Sanders, 2006 p. 84).

**Summary**

In order to appropriately highlight and find the positive outcomes of parent engagement, the present literature review took into consideration parent engagement, parent involvement and relationship building. The research presented in this literature review was not only from education but also the corporate and national realm. Parent engagement affects parent-school relationships causing profound barriers to learning for students. Since schools today have a large, diverse population of students it is imperative to use effective parent engagement, more now than in the past, for the need of parent-school relationships. One common theme throughout the review is how difficult it is to have parent engagement. This study will expose the opportunities, obstacles and general experiences of school administrators, parents and school community
members in a local, exempted village and city in Northwestern Ohio school districts regarding parent engagement. Potential outcomes of this study highlight practices which inhibit and those that cultivate engagement between parents, stakeholders and schools.
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The primary objective of this research was to investigate experiences of administrators, parents, and school community members in one local, one exempted village and one city Northwestern Ohio school district regarding parent engagement. For the purpose of this study, the responses of the participants and artifacts collected helped define parent engagement identified by Epstein, J. L. (nd), Framework of Six Types of Involvement. This included the areas of:

1. Parenting
2. Communicating
3. Volunteering
4. Learning at Home
5. Decision Making
6. Collaborating with Community

Children's lives, experiences, support and love have been interwoven with those of their families, school and community according to a Policy Statement from the U.S. Department of Health, Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education on May 5, 2016. Parent engagement has become more crucial to the success of students (McKenna, M., Millen, J. 2013). Students of all ages need support and that support can come from their families, schools and communities.

A qualitative methodology was most appropriate to answer the research questions posed in this study because it worked best with social interactions. Therefore, qualitative methodology allowed for a deeper dive into exploring the research questions while allowing for flexibility in approaching the problem.
1. How do three schools, one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio implement parent engagement procedures aligned with Epstein’s recommended framework of parent engagement?

2. What are the experiences of school administrators in one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?

3. What are the experiences of parents in one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?

4. What are the experiences of community members in one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?

Data was collected and analyzed using qualitative research procedures and common themes pertaining to the research questions were identified, examined, and presented. The results of this research may hold several practical implications for school leaders and may offer ways to perpetuate parent engagement opportunities, experiences, and obstacles in the future. Knowing certain opportunities, experiences, and possible obstacles now can help guide schools, parents, and the community in their vision to obtain a higher satisfaction of parent engagement. Therefore, teacher outreach to parents is positively related to parent engagement and student achievement according to Henderson, A. & Mapp, K. (2002).

The interview questions were based on the literature on parent engagement and the work of Epstein (1995). The primary components of her framework are Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community. To see the specific questions, see Appendix A. Epstein's work influenced the questions in Appendix A. Epstein's, (1995) framework of the basic components of school, family, and community partnerships for children's learning were used to generate the questions. In the past, parent
engagement has been defined rather loosely and in different ways. The challenge was to find out how participants in this study define parent engagement. Therefore, question one invited participants to define parent engagement which should lead to establishing some patterns in the responses for our collection of qualitative data. The second question builds on the first. This question takes the participants further by asking their general experiences in their district with parent engagement. Then the third question asked the participants to reflect on how parent engagement holds opportunity for the district. Lastly, the fourth question asks what obstacles exist now to prevent districts from maximizing parent engagement.

This chapter presents the procedures that were used to collect and analyze data in relation to the exploration of the research questions presented in this study. The research design was presented and rationale given to the appropriateness of the selected design. Participants were presented and relevant characteristics discussed. Instrumentation and data sources were presented as well as how these instruments were used in the collection of data. The study’s research questions were presented followed by the procedures that were used to analyze the collected data for interpretation in relation to the research questions. Finally, basic assumptions of the study were discussed.

**Research Questions**

1. How do three schools, one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio implement parent engagement procedures aligned with Epstein’s recommended framework of parent engagement?

2. What are the experiences of school administrators in one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?
3. What are the experiences of parents in one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?

4. What are the experiences of community members in one local, one exempted village and one city school in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?

**Research Design & Qualitative Approach**

Researchers such as Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, believe the "differences between quantitative and qualitative researchers are often discussed in terms of differing paradigms, or world views" (2015, p. 425). The lens of one researcher may be different from the lens of another researcher. Qualitative data has been seen as categorical measurement expressed employing a natural language description and not by numbers. Qualitative methodology was selected for this study because it provides authentic insights, opinions and thoughts into the research questions.

Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun state "A case study comprises just one individual, classroom, school, or program (2015 p. 432). For this research, each school district appeared to be a case study or considered various cases, meaning more than one case involved. This research took place in three separate locations using three districts, an exempted village school, city school and a local school all in Northwestern, Ohio.

Case studies endeavor to study meaning, investigate processes and gain insight and an in-depth understanding of an individual, group or situation, (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle 2010). In case studies, detailed information is gathered from multiple sources. As humans are complex creatures, in-depth descriptions necessitate that researchers conducting case studies use interviews, observations, documents and artifacts as their primary tools (Lodico et al., 2010). These data collection activities occur in the participants naturalistic setting and are appropriate
for the current research project. In particular, data collection tools for the current study include interviews, focus groups and artifacts.

This study adhered to the case study model in that it seeks to uncover a better appreciation how three school districts employ, or fail to employ the most basic elements of Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement. Multiple sources were used to illustrate ways these school districts used Epstein’s philosophy. Data elicited from these sources were compared to each other to gain a broader holistic understanding of how parent engagement philosophy was working in practical scenarios.

Based on the case study model of qualitative research a small, purposive sample of parents was chosen from the local, exempted village, and city district. There were detailed descriptions of conversations conducted with participants through interview questions. The same occurred with each administrator from each district. The data generated from the interviews and focus groups were analyzed using commonly accepted qualitative analysis procedures. Multiple read-throughs were conducted on the interview transcripts during which thematic codes were developed and refined based upon similar meaning units found in the narrative feedback.

Using purposive sampling the researcher sought to both simplify the recruitment process and to access a group of parents and community members who were already engaged in parent education programs. The sampling was built from each choice of the superintendent.

Thematic coding was used in which the data are interpreted inductively or without bringing in any preselected theoretical categories. The kind of data that was collected was best analyzed using the inductive thematic approach. The first read through of the data was to get a common sense or feel for feedback. During subsequent readings, similar thoughts and expressions were identified and grouped together into similar meaning units which then evolved
into codes representative of those meaning units. Finally, similar codes were refined where possible and presented for discussion. This method worked well because participants were asked to share perceptions, experiences and obstacles. To obtain rich data it was necessary to ask the participants open-ended questions, to assure their responses were authentic, original and unrestricted.

**Participants & Sampling Technique**

Ohio has a variety of school communities - rural, suburban, urban, public, private, charter and online. Each of these types of school communities has some level of parent engagement and would have something to offer the larger dialogue on this topic. A large urban district could have been chosen and compared to a small private school, or a charter school could have been compared to an online school. There were several scenarios considered; however, for the purpose of narrowing the scope of this study, convenience sampling was employed to identify District A, B and C. Furthermore, this study has one exempted village, one city school and one local school district all located in Northwestern Ohio. The table below shows the Average Daily Membership (ADM), Poverty as percentage of ADM, Percentage of Population Administrative or Professional Occupations, Median Income, Percentage of Population with College Degree or More, Percentage Agricultural Property, Population Density, Non-Residential & Non-Agricultural Per Pupil and Percentage Minority Students for districts A, B and C School Districts.
Table 1 School District Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Average Daily Membership (ADM)</th>
<th>District Percent Of Disadvantaged Students FY16</th>
<th>District Purchased Services As % Of Operating Expenditures FY16</th>
<th>Median Income FY16</th>
<th>District Classroom Teacher Averages Salary FY16</th>
<th>District Total Revenue Per Pupil FY16</th>
<th>District Percent Of Students With Disability FY16</th>
<th>District Percent Of Teachers With 10+ Years Experience FY16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exempt</td>
<td>1,058</td>
<td>.1991</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>37.964</td>
<td>51,298</td>
<td>9,374</td>
<td>.0807</td>
<td>.7391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>.412</td>
<td>.2695</td>
<td>31.263</td>
<td>43,160</td>
<td>16,007</td>
<td>.1281</td>
<td>.5135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>1,907</td>
<td>.5728</td>
<td>.1587</td>
<td>27.634</td>
<td>51,435</td>
<td>12,739</td>
<td>.1512</td>
<td>.5435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following participants were selected for this research by using a method considered common to qualitative research known as purposive sampling (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2015). Purposive sampling according to Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun happens when the researcher has chosen participants familiar or holding an understanding of the subject matter (2015). Each participant in this case possessed the necessary information. Therefore, the following people were selected to participate, three school administrators, three parents, and three community members.

The Superintendents of Districts A, B and C were contacted and a face-to-face meeting was set up at different times and the importance of the study explained in detail. Once the approval and letters of cooperation were received from the superintendents, the principals were contacted by email. The email offered the explanation and importance of the study. A few days after the email, each principal was contacted by phone to arrange mutually convenient dates and times for interviews. A convenience sampling was used for the selection of community
members. For example, the principal or superintendent called upon community partners to participate in the study.

This study consisted of a total of nine participants who completed the open-ended interview questions. All interviews for administrators, parents and community members lasted approximately sixty minutes each and were conducted in a familiar place of the participants’ choice such as the school. The interview process gave administrators, parents and community members a chance to express their opportunities, obstacles and general experiences concerning parent engagement at their school.

The authentic voices of the participants were heard through their unfiltered dialogue regarding opportunities, obstacles and general experiences. All participants who contributed in the study were informed they were voluntary participants and all information was kept confidential. There was no risk to participants and approval of the research methodology and interview protocols used were obtained through the Institutional Review Board of the University of Findlay prior to beginning the study. Also, the researcher completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) training, which certifies the researchers understanding of the rights of participants and ethical obligations of the researcher.

**Ethical Considerations**

Participants, districts have remained anonymous to keep them from harm and protect their participation. Participation should not cause physical or psychological harm. Standards were applied in order to help protect the privacy. Participants signed informed consent. Ethical considerations were considered and were mitigated through internal reflection and double checking.
Instrumentation & Data Sources

Qualitative research according to Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2015) gives us a holistic impression of what happens around us. When "a researcher might wish to know more than just to what extent or how well something is done" (Fraenkel, Wallen, Hyun, 2015 p. 423). Evaluating the quality of parent engagement is essential if findings are to be utilized in practice and incorporated into the educational and community environments.

The research constructs under investigation have been organized into independent, or impact, variables and dependent, or outcome variables for the purpose of conceptualizing the interaction of the factors under study which impacts the various factors that lead to, or fail to lead to, parent engagement outcomes.

A case study model of inquiry calls for multiple sources to be employed in gathering rich data on the cases being studied. For this study a number of artifacts and other resources of data have been examined. These data sources included school websites, newsletters, levy campaign literature, Facebook, Twitter and other social media presences in addition to interview and focus groups with primary stakeholders in each district.

Data was collected from interviews with representative stakeholders in each of the districts included in the study. A set of interview questions were developed to guide the discussion of concepts related to the research questions. The basis for these questions coincided with the theoretical framework and the research questions.

Epstein’s framework of six types of involvement were used as the basis for developing the questions for the interviews and the criteria for the artifacts. This framework contains Parenting, Communication, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making and Collaborating with Community.
To support validity of instrumentation strategies were specifically adopted by respected qualitative researchers to enhance the credibility of this research. For example, Morse, Barrett and Mayan (2002) believe accounting for personal biases which may have influenced findings. Another example is demonstrating clarity regarding thought processes during data analysis and subsequent interpretations (Fraenkel, Wallen, Hyun, 2015). Not leaving out record keeping, demonstrating a clear decision trail and ensuring interpretations of data are consistent and transparent (Fraenkel, Wallen, Hyun, 2015). Finally, it is crucial that qualitative researchers integrate strategies to increase the credibility of a study during research design and implementation. Although there is no universally accepted terminology and criteria used to evaluate qualitative research, several brief strategies were used to enhance the credibility of study findings.

Participant interview questions were peer reviewed by two people in education, one from business and one from higher education. Reviewers checked the participant interview questions for alignment to the research questions, clarity and understanding. After several edits including realignments and wording clarification, the survey questions were considered validated for the purposes of this study.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The superintendents of one local, one exempted village and one city school district were contacted at separate times and the importance of the study explained in detail. Once the approval and letters of cooperation were received from the superintendents, the administrators were contacted by phone. The phone call offered the explanation of the importance of the study. A few days after the email each superintendent was contacted by phone to arrange a date and time for the interview. Face-to-Face focus groups occurred at their respective buildings using the
interview questions. Each focus group took approximately sixty minutes. Sometimes it was necessary to ask clarifying questions to extract deeper responses to clarify the meaning of the respondent’s answers.

Parents, community members and administrators were chosen through purposive sampling. One parent, community member and administrator was chosen for their knowledge of the district and willingness to be part of a focus group for each district. The focus group time was approximately sixty minutes or less and the tools used to capture the information included a live stenographer and audio recordings.

**Data Analysis**

This research study used interviews, artifacts and triangulation. Appropriate methods have been used to analyze and compare individual items collected. Data was reviewed by listening to all of the digital audio recordings to reflect on the meaning, impression, depth and tone of the information for a general sense of the knowledge provided. Next, all interviews were transcribed, data was organized into chunks to summarize and identify the substance of the information provided by the participants, using terms that were stated by the participants and linking them to the general code of the question, as well as any subsequent questions and comments as it related to the types of parent engagement matching Epstein’s framework. Specifically, Thematic Analysis was used in which the data are interpreted without bringing in any pre-selected theoretical categories. The kind of data collected was best analyzed using the inductive thematic approach. First, the collected data was read through to get a common sense for feedback. Then during subsequent readings, similar thoughts and expressions were identified and grouped together into similar meaning units. These eventually evolved into codes representative of those meaning units. Finally, similar codes were refined where possible and
presented for discussion. This method worked well because participants were asked to share perceptions, experiences and obstacles.

In addition to oral testimonies collected from key stakeholder groups in each district through oral interview and discussion, specific artifacts including newsletters, websites and social media such as tweets and Facebook postings were also collected from the districts. A rubric and checklist derived from Epstein’s Framework was developed and used to examine each artifact collected for the purpose of eliciting additional data for the study. This rubric and checklist were used to identify and analyze areas of application and non-application of Epstein’s parent engagement principles.

This research makes use of triangulation because triangulation gives the opportunity to approach the research objectives from different viewpoints (Cohen and Manion, 2002), therefore obtaining a fine distinction of the connections between the variables. For this study, triangulation was appropriate and useful because it showed evidence of each districts practical application of Epstein’s theory from multiple sources.

Assumptions

There are several assumptions taken into account during this study. First, participants will be open and honest during the interviews which means they will tell the truth and say what they are thinking without hesitation. Second, there are no hidden agendas and participants would feel free to speak candidly. Participants will respond from their point of view with no political, union, or otherwise for groups with an agenda. Additionally, the assumption was made that the time allotted for participant interviews would be sufficient to adequately uncover depth and breadth of thought and ultimately reach data saturation. Finally, the assumption was made that the questions developed for the instrumentation would sufficiently uncover the themes intrinsic in the study.
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

This chapter presents findings, emerging from the qualitative data gathered during focus groups and artifact analysis which links to the purpose of this study. Presented are the sites, participants and analyses. Next the five major themes that emerged from participants through the focus groups and artifact analysis are presented and discussed in the context of the data analysis process. These delineate the findings that surfaced from the data regarding this study’s topic of family engagement in three school districts made up of one exempted village, local and city. This study used the basic principles of Epstein’s Framework of Six Types of Involvement to examine parent engagement strategies and practices within the three school districts. This included Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making and Collaborating with the Community. Above all, the purpose of this will be to uncover the opportunities, obstacles and general experiences of school administrators, parents and school community members in an exempted village, local and city Northwestern Ohio school districts regarding parent engagement. Potential outcomes of this study highlight practices which inhibit and those that cultivate engagement between stakeholders and schools.

The research accomplished through a qualitative methodology and employed a case study model which was the most appropriate approach for answering the research questions in this study. In addition, this qualitative methodology has allowed for a deeper exploration of the research questions for each of the cases being studied of chosen participants including parents, administrators, and community members. Furthermore, there has been a variety of artifacts gathered from the interviews, focus groups, and school such as websites, Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, newsletters, and other social networking uses to show parent engagement. The data gathered from the interviews and focus groups will lead to a broader holistic understanding
of how parent engagement works in three different districts such as one city school, local school and exempted village school. These findings are presented in written text and tables. They are presented along with discussion which reflects the information gathered from the focus group interviews. Using the five themes that emerged from the data, Chapter V will then specifically address the four research questions of this study. These questions will serve to suggest the relation of the findings to the theoretical framework, limitations of the study, and implications for practice, policy and further research.

Three Northwestern Ohio school districts picked for this study comprising one exempted village, local, and city school. The selection of the three districts was important for this study because the needs of different types of districts can vary according to school type and this differentiation yields a potentially richer dataset from which to elicit information to inform the research questions of the study. For example, a city school has the largest assortment of city and rural students. The exempted village school comprises students from the village and rural area. Whereas the local school comprises almost all rural students.

While evaluating the quality of parent engagement it is important to choose knowledgeable groups of people for the focus groups for the findings to be used in practice and infused into the educational and community environments. This study chose three school administrators, parents, and community members using a method common to qualitative research known as purposive sampling (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2015). Purposive sampling is the choosing of a sample based in their knowledge of the subject. It was believed each person chosen had the appropriate understanding of the information being sought. For example, administrators were chosen because the literature discusses the importance of leadership. Specifically, Ho (2009) mentions how the positive or negative effects an administrator can have on a parental
engagement. Since administrators have a large impact on parent engagement, it seemed reasonable to have them as part of the study. Community members were chosen because they can offer a variety of resources and opportunities to improve schools, strengthen families, and increase student success. According to Epstein this strengthens school programs, family practices, student learning and development (2009).

After receiving approval from the University of Findlay’s Instructional Review Board (IRB), the researcher contacted each school superintendent by phone with a follow-up letter by email and all necessary information. The school superintendent then contacted one administrator, parent and community member with a date and time to meet as a focus group. A court stenographer was used to document each meeting along with a backup digital recording device and large big sheets to catch participant thoughts. Upon meeting with each focus group, it was explained to them the details of the focus group and they signed off on the appropriate paperwork. The participants were advised of confidentiality and how no names of people or schools would be used. For example, participants would be known as administrator, parent and community member. The schools involved would be known as local, exempted village and city.

After receiving all three transcripts from the stenographer the researcher read through the material one time using primarily inductive theory. One day later the researcher read through the material again and this time manually highlighted and made notes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldanña, 2013). New variables continued to emerge from the text. After the fifth read through MAXQDA2018 was downloaded as the qualitative software to use. The meaning units were refined, and common themes started to emerge. There were eighteen codes in the beginning and they were condensed into nine codes and then ending with five final themes.
The focus groups were guided by interview questions which were aligned to Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement (Appendix A).

**Research Question 1**

How do three schools in Northwestern Ohio implement parent engagement procedures aligned with Epstein’s recommended framework of parent engagement?

**Parenting**

Inspection of the data reveals there were similarities between the responses of administrators. The city district administrator appeared to focus on mental and physical needs of students which included their eating habits. For example, making sure parents know how to feed their children healthy foods. Another area is mental health, social media and where and how to get assistance. The administrator commented "Healthy options and communicating that back to parents". All three district administrators mentioned the importance of relationships. One administrator said, "The staff does what is needed to build relationships”. The community members across districts expressed how teachers will reach out to them for their needs. Such as asking a community member into the school to teach consumer math or how to save money and put the money into a savings account. Whereas a parent believed it was nice how community members became involved with the schools to assist students in different ways, such as job shadowing.

When analyzing the data, the five major themes emerged directly from the data which was compelled by participants rather than by researcher ideas. The researcher pulled from three focus groups and a total of nine people. There was also website, artifact, analysis completed after the interviews. While using MAXQDA2018 to organize the data and to understand each theme, it was necessary to look across the participants and data sources because they were tightly
aligned through the use of Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement. After completing first-order/initial codes then second-order codes consisted of data chunked into themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldanña 2013). The final analysis for each table consisted of a comparison phase to ensure that everything to this point could be found, captured and tied to Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement accurately.

Table 1

*Connections between Epstein’s First Type of Involvement Parenting and Themes Pulled From the Data in the Focus Groups by Title of Person*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Community Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Communication</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents into School</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Goal Academics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access/Barriers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Epstein’s First Type of Involvement Parenting which is defined as “assisting families in understanding child adolescent development, and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families (Epstein, 2011). Above is a table with the five themes which help to answer Research Question One. After coding the data, finding the themes and counting up the frequencies it appeared open communication was found most often. The theme open communication consisted of dialogue, feedback and changes.

The next item with a high frequency was parents in the school. There was discussion from all involved how important it is to get parents or grandparents into the school and involved. There are many examples throughout the data collection expressing and reflecting the importance of family in the school building. One administrator said “Try to get parents into the building for fun things.” This district used a movie night to achieve the goal. They will plan
more with the expectation of more parents and family members showing up in the future. Their immediate goal is to get the parents to feel comfortable in the building. One administrator said “We hope to establish a better relationship with some of the parents we do not see a lot. And hopefully get them comfortable coming into the school. Then we start working on the academic things”.

Social networking artifacts gathered from the three districts which matched up to Epstein’s framework under parenting consisted of websites. Each district had items on their website which could assist families. The items were either downloadable or could be read from the website. Basically the websites had a link at the top or bottom of their websites with a parent label. The links usually consisted of new and returning student registration forms, health forms, computer use policy, work permits, free and reduced lunch applications. Other links include ProgressBook, online café payments, free/reduced lunch application, medication forms and text alerts.

The exempted school district had strong parental characteristics with information that paralleled Epstein’s framework under parenting. The city school newsletters could not be located and the local school district was attempting to strategically start targeting parents in their newsletter. No indication of Facebook or Twitter used in this category of parental.

*Communicating*

The data reflected overall that administrators agreed communication is important, with one administrator saying, “communication is big”. In fact, the exempted village, local and city school district administrators mentioned how they used newsletters as a tool for communication. The use of tools became indisputably clear quickly with each administrator. Specific tools mentioned by the administrators were emails, newsletters, phone calls, and the website.
In contrast the community members and parents appreciated a mixture of tools such as Facebook, Class Dojo, Google Classroom, Remind, and Twitter, which are not static. No matter which district or person there was agreement that technology is a way to enhance communication to parents. For example, they discussed how Class Dojo and Remind was personal communication where Facebook, Google Classroom and Twitter were more informative. For example, Twitter appears to be used the most by the athletic departments to post minute by minute scores during a sporting event. Class Dojo is used by the teacher to send messages and pictures out to parents and parents can respond back to the teacher. A controversial area was the all call system which is a voice message from a district representative that goes to everyone’s phone at the same time announcing important messages. The city school administrator likes the all call system however warns if the all call system is used too often people disconnect from it which hurts the overall intention. Therefore, it appears technology can enhance communication from the schools to parents and parents to the schools through a variety of tools.

Overall the parents came to consensus on the importance of the communication folder as an excellent communication tool. This folder according to the parents held all the information happening in the classroom such as homework, behavior, issues and future tests. The parent commented “I think that folder has been great throughout.” It appeared important to all involved how important the reading and signing off on the folder was to both teachers and parents every day.

On the other hand, community members agreed on two specific types of communication. The community members appreciated the newsletter for direct information and facts about the schools and district, however they appeared to want personal contact. For example, appreciating the open door policy of their administrators, where they can walk in and have a discussion.
directly with the administrator or a discussion at a school or community event. One member said
“I am not against a school administrator and or teacher walking right up and saying, hey,
(omitted name) did a really great job with this. Or, I was ready to strangle him”. It appears for
communication variety and choices are the new normal, whether paper and pencil or
technological they all have a place in parent engagement.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicating</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Community Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Open Communication</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents into School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target Goal Academics</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access/Barriers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Epstein’s Second Type of Involvement Communicating is defined as “Communicate with
families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and
home-to-school communications (Epstein, 2011). This table was surprising when one looks at it
the first time, because one would believe this would be or should be high in each area. However,
the frequency in the different areas were low. They discuss tools however according to the data
there is a disconnect between Epstein’s model and what is really occurring.

All three districts used district websites for communicating as one of Epstein’s type of
involvement. Clearly, each district used their district website to communicate out to their
constituents on a regular basis however the communication was one-way from the school and out
to the district members. The websites did not have the ability for messages to be from the district
members back to the district unless it was through an email or phone call.
Twitter messages found districts posting sports scores and sending out alerts such as school delays or late busses. One of the districts did not use Twitter. The Twitter feeds revealed only a few two-way communications. Most were posts from the districts which resembled web posts or Facebook entries.

Facebook posts were used by all three districts however it unclear in most cases whether the Facebook account was held by the district, PTO, or some other organization. The communication were posts made up of PTO meeting dates and times, football information and items which appeared to be immediate.

Two of the districts newsletters fit Epstein’s communicating framework. Each district had equal areas of voice in their newsletters. For example, each had the superintendent usually discussing the district as a whole and complimenting staff while reassuring that the district is in good financial shape. The rest of the newsletters had student and staff voice throughout.

Volunteering

The administrators differed in their ideas of volunteering and how it happened in their schools. Clearly, through their discussion it became evident that volunteer numbers are higher in the lower grades and fall as the students get into higher grades. Consequently, the administrators strive to involve parents in the local PTO, band boosters, athletic boosters, and room mothers/fathers. Through discussion it became clear from the city school administrator that the high school has a lot of parent engagement in the extra-curricular areas such as band and sports teams. This administrator said he “Would love to see a way and need to probably look into more ways of getting involvement through curricular ways.” He believed having more involvement in the classroom with the actual curriculum and state standards would be ideal compared to just extra-curricular items.
While the discussion occurred between the different districts, there was a profound difference between the three districts that emerged. According to the parent’s perspective from the exempted village school there was an overabundance of parent volunteers to the point of having to turn many away. The parent gave examples of turning parents down from helping at Santa’s Workshop, helping in the classroom and fieldtrips. Nevertheless, the high school has high number of volunteers for athletics, prom and reverse raffles. The local district’s community member made it clear how parents work and it is hard to take off work to volunteer, so grandparents should be invited to the schools to volunteer. To that end, the data reflects overall the importance of being invited and feeling welcomed into the school to volunteer. The parent noted that she was more likely to come in if she felt a connection with a teacher. The member of the community added being invited is critical.

Table 3

*Connections between Epstein’s Third Type of Involvement Volunteering and Themes Pulled From the Data in the Focus Groups by Title of Person*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteering</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
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<th>Community Member</th>
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<td>Open Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents into School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target Goal Academics</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access/Barriers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Epstein’s third Type of Involvement Volunteering is defined as “Improve recruitment, training, work and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at school or in other locations to support students and school programs (Epstein, 2011). The first notable point was how two themes stand out which are relationships and parents in the school.
Volunteering had the largest footprint on Facebook with two districts. For example, they used Facebook to post items for sale such as items being sold through the PTO or other groups. People could respond through Facebook. The advertising of volunteers through Facebook and the volunteers could sign up online. The use of Facebook reflected true two-way communication.

Learning at Home

This area of the discussion no matter which district or whether parent, community member or administrator moved directly to homework and seemed to focus toward new math. All were concerned with the supports needed to help their children with the new math. They discussed how links or explanations from websites would support helping their children at home. One administrator from the exempted village school added teacher parent conference nights support parents and children in addition to the district reaching out to students needing academic assistance.

For the local district administrator homework was a hot topic this past year. A lot of dialogue and discussion occurred with how much is enough homework. The administrator found it was through all this that the importance of relationships became apparent. Further, was the importance of tools such as ProgressBook, which parents could monitor at their leisure. On the other hand within the local district the parent was clear how many times teachers do not post assignment and grades within a reasonable amount of time which leads to parents not being able to assist or guide their children with the needed support in the evenings. For example, the parent said, “Some teachers wait until one week before grade cards come out and by then it is too late for parents to assist their children.”

The city school community member and parent were in strong agreement that children need to be independent and learn with less parent intervention. The parent said, “We have to
foster our child to independence”. The community member in complete agreement said, “We still monitor it however it is on them.” This community member went on to add, “There are evenings that it is a big huge stick. Do it or I am going to kill you. Your mom is going to kill me. Please do your homework.” Which is probably a reflection of how difficult some evening can be for families and homework.

Table 4

*Connections between Epstein’s Fourth Type of Involvement Learning at Home and Themes Pulled From the Data in the Focus Groups by Title of Person*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning at Home</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Community Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents into School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target Goal Academics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access/Barriers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Epstein’s forth Type of Involvement Learning at Home is defined as Involving families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework, other curriculum related activities, and individual course and program decisions (Epstein, 2011). An important observation in the data pattern on this Involvement Type shows the bulk of the responses here are from the administrators.

Not one of the social networks showed signs of Epstein’s learning at home component. The websites, Facebook, and Twitter feeds did not show any signs of meeting this area. Google searches were also implemented without any signs of data in this area.

**Decision Making**

The data collected through the exempted village school administrator’s discussion reflected how committees would be created and parents contacted as needed when concerns
surface. For example, if a student is having a consistent problem, they will call the parent for a meeting and have an open discussion on ideas for how to handle their child. The administrator believes it works to know more about a child, so interactions can be tailored to meet the student’s needs. The community member added how transparent the superintendent has always been in the community and how easy it is to talk with him about anything of concern. The administrator reminded everyone how small the area is and how “Everyone knows everyone here.” The community’s population has not changed over the years thus reflecting knowledge of each other through past experiences and growing up together in the same school. The superintendent practically knows everyone and they trust his communications. In essence the community knows he is transparent, sharing and communicating everything happening in the district and how it affects the teachers and students.

In comparison the local School’s discussion took a different form. The local school has seen many superintendents, administrators and board members over the years along with some change in the community which has been caused by the loss of jobs and poverty. In this respect money is tight and people are cautious and ask a lot of questions. The local school district decided a few years ago a strategic plan could assist in pulling people together again. Members of the community and parents have participated over the last few years on committees to assist the district in a short and long term plan for the district. Committees were made up of extracurricular, building, ground, and academic groups. Both community members, and parents were invited to voice their opinions good or bad and what is affecting the school as a whole. It became clear how the school district and community constantly met to identify goals and areas to improve. Through this work it is believed by the administrator, parent and community member that the district is open to parent decision making. The local school believes all the
administrative staff are open to parents coming in and making suggestions. The administration, parents and community members believe their voices are heard. An example of parent input was how the district went from standards-based report cards back to the well-known and highly accepted grades for grade cards. The administrator said “Parents were unhappy with homework, so we listened and adjusted”.

Another example brought up by the community member mentioned grandparent’s day which was about one-hour long. Through dialog and discussion, the local school adjusted grandparent’s day from one hour to the whole day which allowed for time to rotate between all grandchildren. The parent added how great the whole event ended up with grandparents in the school all day. Morale was shown to be raised for everyone involved. For example, the parent said “But their grandparent's feedback was awesome. I mean, they absolutely loved coming in. They loved meeting the teachers. They loved seeing the classmates. They loved talking about what school was like when I was in school and now what school's like when you are in school and connecting that way”.

Hence the discussion from the city school administrator was how a community member group has formed to have dialog on random drug testing in the future. This group attended a school board meeting to express their opinion. In turn the city school is meeting with community members and parents for input on policy that the school board can react too. The district is going to collect everyone’s input and then make their decision. Ultimately, it will be the school district's decision. The district is allowing voices to be heard before the board makes its final decision on the matter.

Table 5

*Connections between Epstein’s Fifth Type of Involvement Decision Making and Themes Pulled From the Data in the Focus Groups by Title of Person*
Epstein’s fifth Type of Involvement Decision Making is defined as “Include families as participants in school decisions governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations” (Epstein, 2011). The open communication theme has the highest frequency in this table for this type of involvement. According to the administrator the counselor does most of this area. The school counselor will connect children and families to the proper agencies for different needs. This would also include transitioning to colleges or universities. Again, the administrator reminds we are a small community with close ties to the college which is close.

When observing the social networks only one district had items connected to Epstein’s decision making. Facebook became a strong tool for the district with an improvement plan in process. This social tool reached out to people for their input and the recruitment for decision makers. Along with Facebook was the district newsletters which asked for people to be part of the decision-making teams for the district. No information could be found on-line for the other two districts in this area. The school counselor posted items for a meeting to discuss transition from High School to College/University which is after the parent student conferences.

**Collaborating With The Community**

The data showed through the focus group that the school counselor connects the children and families with the proper agencies for assistance or help. Which also reflected transitions to
colleges or universities. They believe it is easy because they are such a small community with a college within blocks.

Equally important, the local school concentrated on those community members and parents that do and do not participate. Basically, there was discussion regarding how the same few people do most of the volunteering. The parent says, “there are those families that have children in everything and then there are those families that do not participate at all”. This parent was unsure what the school does to reach out to these families and children that are not involved outside of academics or the normal school day?

To that end, the discussion went to how important trust, and building relationships over the years can make a difference in parent engagement. The culture of the district can make an impact.

The administrator said,

Some parents as kids did not have a good experience here and they carry the memories into older age and pass them on to their kids. Nevertheless, parents love their kids and kids love their parents no matter the circumstances and the local district believes once a student graduates from high school there is no one looking out for you anymore.

Table 6

*Connections between Epstein’s Sixth Type of Involvement Collaborating with Community and Themes Pulled From the Data in the Focus Groups by Title of Person*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborating with Community</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
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<th>Community Member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collaborating with Community defined by Epstein is “coordinate resources and services for students and families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community” (Epstein, 2011). While looking across the five themes and the three districts, administrator, parent and community member the highest frequency was with relationships. This supports the notion that relationships are important to partnerships. Another observation from the data is the frequency of the theme target goal academics. This suggests how people are on the same page about the importance of academics, to the collaboration of the community. There were some mentions of access to items such as mental health agencies and to proper health care.

On the other hand there was significant discussion from the administrators, community members, and parents on services delivered to the school and in the school. One of the parents said, “They brought in business leaders to talk about different jobs.”

An administrator said:

Part of our strategic plan that the community came up with, that try to get more community involvement in the building and parent involvement. For some parents’ school was not necessarily a great place for them. So trying to make them comfortable with the process again of wanting to be in the school and sharing.

For example, there was even the mention of a business’s giving financial support, teaching classes, and assisting with book fairs and field days.

One community member said:
Most recently a teacher reached out and asked about some funding for hygiene care. And it was to help encourage those kids that were 5th and 6th grades their bodies are starting to change. Maybe they were not learning it at home. So the teacher was filling a gap there I think, in trying to maybe encourage the kids to brush teeth, comb hair, use deodorant, those kind of things. Of course we helped—we was not expensive. But we helped with that.

Bringing community members into the school is important to members of the focus group. The data reflects this notion throughout and little data reflecting educators or students assisting outside the schools for engagement.

Facebook is used by all three districts for Epstein’s collaborating with the community. Information flows out in a timely manner to the community using Facebook.

One district said the following on their Facebook:

The relationships within the Community, which include students, teachers, staff, parents and patrons, are a vital influence on the success of our children’s futures. Therefore, our purpose is to foster a sense of support, pride, and enthusiasm. Through fund raising and family activities, we will promote positive school/community relationships that enhance our children’s educational environment.

Then others can comment back to the post. This sharing of information back and forth reflects two-way communication.

One of the districts post information on Facebook such as purchasing shirts, athletic events, school goals, building projects, and job postings. There is a community link where folks
can post whatever they like which transforms into two-way communication. Another example would be the posting of upcoming community events for the public.

Another tool is the newsletter which is supported by the districts in this area. The newsletter reaches out to the community is several ways such as community service learning and upcoming community events for the public. The district newsletter is also used to thank businesses for giving their time and talents to the school. Newsletters also are used to thank local businesses in the school district for their contributions.

**Research Question 2**

What are the experiences of school administrators in three schools in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?

One administrator’s first words were “I think we are kind of blessed that we have parent involvement.” This administrator as well as others believe communities that have high regard for academics naturally have higher parent involvement. Two of the three administrators wrestle with how at times parent involvement is so high it becomes an obstacle because it does not give the students enough autonomy and the ability to make their own decisions.

One administrator commented:

Sometimes the parent engagement part can be an obstacle too because they get too involved. Sometimes it is good for students to make mistakes on their own so they can learn from mistakes. So sometimes, you know, on the flip side of that it can be a downfall too. It is much more of a positive than a negative obviously, but we will see that a number of times too, where I guess parents will be so involved that they do not let their kids make the decisions to try to learn from their mistakes and everything.
The administrators believe students need to be able to make mistakes along with their own decisions.

Two administrators agree transparency, openness and welcoming environment is important to parent engagement. One administrator commented that it has “Worked because all our levies pass around 70/30”. This specific administrator feels strongly that the community needs to understand where the school’s money is spent, and it is not spent frivolously. They believe transparency leads to parent engagement.

Administrators are happy with businesses in and out of the district during the day. They encourage them to visit classes and present to students. Two of the districts have a Chamber of Commerce and clubs such as the Lions and American Legion to name a few that go above and beyond.

While one administrator struggles with parent engagement, movie nights have been a way to reach out to parents who are not typically involved. The administrator found that different booster organizations were happy to contribute money for popcorn and water. The whole community took in the fun event which pulled in a lot of families, specifically families that do not usually attend school functions. This administrator continues to work hard, collaborate, and reach out to the parents not engaged regularly with the school. Another administrator understands the importance of collaborative meetings with the public to begin the dialogue. In fact the administrator knows there has to be open communication with people to find out and acknowledge what people care about. One administrator said, “I do not feel like they have been tapped like they could be to get more parent involvement”. This administrator had two pages of notes.
Two of the administrators know high school courses are not easy for parents to connect or support their children or come to the school and tutor students. For example, an administrator during the focus group commented “Parents just are not willing to say, ‘I will come in and help you with your calculus. Just does not happen’”. On the other hand one administrator verbalized how an invitation for parents to come in and hang out without stress of thinking they had to tutor. To an extent the administrators wrestle with how to implement the technology in the correct ways for communicating the correct things. Two of the administrators believe ProgressBook can be an asset however it can be time consuming in the high school because there are so many classes to track. One administrator commented “So trying to come up with a more streamlined way to communicate and maybe the most important things that a parent needs to know. And we try to do that, but I still feel like we are lacking”. Two of the administrators mentioned the all call system with the addition of caution. For example one administrator said, “As much as parents love the all call phone service, they also can hate it just as quick if it calls them too much. We have to make sure we are communicating the correct things”. All three administrators have noticed both Facebook and Twitter usage is increasing around the district. Each administrator has confidence that improvement can always occur through communication and using more tools such as Facebook and Twitter.

**Research Questions 3**

What are the experiences of parents in three schools in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement? Most notable according to each parent is the communication folder also known as the homework folder. The parents all come to the same conclusion that it works well because it has to be viewed every day and signed or there are consequences. Parents appreciate the interactions of the folder on a daily basis. For example, they appreciate knowing what is
occurring in the classroom, homework, reading assignments, spelling practice timelines and their child’s behavior for the day. They also appreciated knowing all the activities that are happening in the classroom every day.

Parents were both positive and negative about ProgressBook. The data showed they appreciated ProgressBook for what it should do and, in many circumstances, did accomplish such as homework, and grades. ProgressBook gave them the ability to peek inside the classroom and to view their child’s assignments and grades. The problem they stressed was the fact that many teachers fail to keep it updated and in many cases was not updated in time for parent intervention with their child. One parent even said, “Some teachers wait until one week before grade cards come out and by then it is too late for parents to assist their children.” Clearly the parents were happy with ProgressBook the tool however they had concerns on the human factor of keeping up with it on the teacher’s side.

Equally important, one parent had concerns of how the message gets into the community to the unengaged parents about ProgressBook. For example a parent said the following, “I was at a community event and I had an upper elementary parent say my child is struggling with this. And I said, oh, well you can see the grades on ProgressBook. And they said what”? The data clearly reflected how busy parents are with life. Parents are raising children with or without a spouse, working excessive hours or not working and have no money for gas. The list of reasons for not being able to attend school events such as an open house to learn about ProgressBook. For example, the parent gave the example of a family having a car break down and was unable to reach the open house. The parent in the focus group said “So then that makes me question what can we do better to make sure that these parents who have all these other circumstances to help
them to be more informed. I mean, I think she should have known about that at that point. And the fact that she did not, something happened. There was a gap there”.

The parents were in agreement it starts and ends with relationships. One parent voiced, “I think the more understanding and compassion that goes between administrators, teachers, coaches, parents as a group, I think the better off we will be”. In spite of the obstacles the parents believe some parents just do not want to be involved, however each believes strongly no one should give up and everyone should keep the personal invites.

Parents expressed their views of tools to engage parents as mostly positive. They were clear how the Remind App is used to remind parents of events, bus arrivals from games, and items for the classroom. One example given was how students needed a show box and it went out over Remind so parents could send it to school with their child. Another tool mentioned by the parents was the school website which contains specific school events, homework assistance such as math and links to important information and newsletters. Additionally, parents expressed how Facebook was up-to-date and informative. They appreciated how Facebook was more interactive than a website which does not appear to change. Two more tools parents mentioned was email and Class Dojo. The appreciated both because they had the ability to send photos of their children. One parent said, “It is always good to see your child in the classroom”.

In contrast, parents discussed face-to-face communications at places such as extracurricular events.

One parent said:

I think a lot of conversation happens at school events. So at football games. At sporting events, at music concerts, things like that, where parents come together and they have time to socialize around a school event. So I think there is a lot of
questions that come up, you know, who do I talk to about this. Or I am worried about my child about that. You know, things like that that come up that is more on a personal level. So I try to serve sort of a connector between the school and the home that way.

Parents during their discussion made it clear how easy it was to talk about everything happening at school during events such as choir shows, football games, and other items attended outside of school. One parent voiced the concern of the parents which do not attend any of these and how the school should keep trying to make personal connections. One parent appreciated their district’s grandparent day while another parent appreciated movie nights at their district. Parents appear to agree it is about building relationships and the feeling of being needed and accepted.

Another area the parents appreciated was presence in the school. They went on to discuss how children appreciate having one-on-one contact with people who care, because some children do not have parents helping them at home with their school work. When parents volunteer at the school they can work with the children on their skills and homework all in one setting. All the parents agree that children need to come first and that all parents love their children and their children love them.

One administrator said:

Every parent loves their child. Every parent does. There is no one single parent, regardless of whether they struggle or the kid is hungry, they still love their kid. It is just they do not know the opportunities that this is the best chance that they will ever have in life of resources and people looking out for them. This is it, because once you graduate high school there is no one looking out for you in anymore. And getting them to understand how to take advantage of that. We are here to
help. We are not here to do this or that. And developing that trusting relationship with them, you know.

It appeared there were alternative ideas generated by parents too.

A parent said:

I know for my kids they loved having their grandparents there. But their grandparent's feedback was awesome. I mean, they absolutely loved coming in. They loved meeting the teachers. They loved seeing the classmates. They loved talking about what school was like when I was in school and now what school's like when you are in school and connecting that way. So it was great for the kids and grandma's and grandpa's, but I think that opens up the door for getting new people in here and seeing where we are at and what we need and what we benefit from.

Another idea was to consider parents and grandparents that could not volunteer time might want to pick up supplies or donate money which could support students in the classroom. One parent said, “here is a thousand pencils”. No matter what the parents at the focus groups believe there is a lot of work and options for parents in the schools. One parent went as far to say, “But I think we have had a huge improvement on getting information out from in the past. So that is nice”.

Whether you physically attend the school and donate your time or donate money and supplies, it is all appreciated by the staff.

Research Question 4

What are the experiences of community members in three schools in Northwestern Ohio with family engagement?
All the community members appreciate an open-door policy, a personal invitation, and the welcoming environment recognized by people immediately when you approach an administrator or teacher at the school.

One parent commented:

Definitely feel like there is a definite, very good open-door policy with our superintendent. With any questions he seems great with not holding back and -- really great communication lines.

Then when you leave, you feel like you have been heard and recognized as a contributing individual. When an environment is open and welcoming, all the community members appeared to agree there will be volunteers willing to lend a hand. One community member said, “I love that,” referring to someone inviting them into the school for a presentation to students.

Overall the data reflected little to no discussion of the community members with communication tools. They did mention the all call system and how it would be nice if grandparents and other family members would be able to sign up for it. The all call system known by several different names such as automated dialing, automated calling service, automated phone calls, phone or call blast services, automated call trees, and phone calling systems mostly do the same job. A person records a message on the phone and it automatically is forwarded to everyone that has signed up and they receive a phone call or text with the message.

Furthermore members focus was not on communication tools but on specific ways they could engage with students in the school environment or outside the environment. They mentioned in the classroom examples like how they come into the classroom and teach on a specific topic to outside examples of job shadowing experiences whether it is middle school age students or high school students. Community members also agreed it would be nice to engage
parents in a business-like manner. For example, what tools do students need coming out of school to be successful in the workforce.

A community member said:

I can offer an opinion. But we can also maybe try to engage parents in a manner what do we need as a business community for your kids. What tools do they need coming out of school to come into the work force. Whether that is at a factory or a financial institution, or as an educator, or whatever they choose to do. We have some input there. We know what we need. And that is a great way to engage the kids and their parents.

Basically the community members seemed to agree on a partnership between business, school and parents was needed however no details on how that could happen.

In addition, community members agreed district, and building newsletters were important to keep communication flowing which helps with parent engagement. An example given was how one administrator offers information on everything going on in the district broken down by building and by project. The administrator covers the projects and the testing being done by the district.

One community member said,

But I think our school is fabulous as far as letting the community know what is been going on with their newsletters. Everyone in the whole area gets this. And it is letting you know what is going on in all three buildings. So each principal has their blurb in it. So it really does let you know everything that is going on in all the buildings. All the projects that are going on through the year.
This was not the case in all three districts according to the data. The data showed the city district mentioning newsletters once compared to the local at three and the exempted village with thirteen mentions of the newsletters.

An administrator commented:

I do not know how many people read my newsletter. I do not think that many. There is a date, but I do not think they really read everything. Some do, some do not. The ones that go home, they do not, like you said, they just do not -- they kind of breeze through it or for some reason they do not look at it.

What works in one district may not work in another district.

Another administrator said:

Communication is a big key. So I mean, we have a number of different communication pieces, whether it is district newsletters, school newsletters, or just letters from home. We have different meetings that we offer in the evening to inform parents of whether it is CC plus options, or whatever that may be. Those are some basic things that we will do to try to, you know, with that communication piece.

The data suggests variety and options for everyone works best.

Table 7

*Total Connections between Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement and Themes Pulled From the Data in the Focus Groups by Title of Person*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Community Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Communication</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents into School</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This table shows the total data by the themes and the nine people in the focus group. The first point here is how high the frequencies are under the administrators. Neither the parents or the community members talked much about this area. It might be worth checking to see if this is missing across a lot of parent engagement activities. There appear to be plans like movie nights or other great items however if there are unforeseen barriers not allowing people to attend then maybe more consideration should go into this area.

Table 8

*Total Connections between Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement and Themes Pulled from the Data in the Focus Groups by City, Exempted village or Local District*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Exempted Village</th>
<th>Local</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Communication</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents into School</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Goal Academics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access/Barriers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After examining the themes above and examining them by city, exempted village and local school district it is clear that the frequencies such as Relationships, Open Communication, Parents into the School and Target Goal Academics are excessively higher from the local school district. The causing factor could be the fact that the local district has been deeply involved in the school improvement process for the last few years. The Superintendent and the School Board has had numerous planning meetings and the community have shaped a strategic plan. The theme relationship and parents into the school showed strong in the data. Both of these themes are areas within the districts strategic plan. The other frequencies may be high because of the key words
used in their improvement process and their strategic goal plans. This local school has been seeing academics incline which may explain why their themes are extremely higher than the other the city or exempted village schools.

The exempted village school had relatively low frequencies across the board just like the city school. This could be a result of not having a specific strategic plan. This district is doing well for other reasons. There are districts in Northwestern Ohio that are small, everyone knows each other, and things are going well. It would appear no major changes have happened in the district for decades and most people are happy with the communication, leadership, and relationships. When the numbers are looked at closely, the two themes with the highest frequencies are relationships and communication. It would appear when browsing the data this district has strong relationships and communication. Proof would be in the district not having a levy fail in at least the past few decades. People understand the expenses needed through clear communication from administrators and the bond of relationships which supports the trust through tough times.

While examining the totals for the city school, it is evident that the numbers are lower for the themes in each area across the board unlike the local school. For example, the numbers from each column are substantially close such as relationships and more parents in the school. The city school does not have a strategic plan or at least never mentioned it so maybe their terminology is not as aligned as the local school. Maybe their terms or language is not as sharp or focused. Possibly the city school is starting to move in the direction of improving and that is why communication is its third highest theme.

Summary
This chapter offered the results and findings of a qualitative study into experiences of administrators, parents, and school community members in one local, one exempted village and one local Northwestern Ohio school district regarding parent engagement. For the purpose of this study, the responses of the participants and artifacts collected helped define parent engagement identified by Epstein, J. L. (nd), Framework of Six Types of Involvement which include Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, Collaborating with Community.

The focus groups were analyzed. The specifics of the focus groups were presented, including many quotes from the participants as evidence of the emergent themes. Five main themes emerged from the focus groups. The five themes consisted of Relationships, Open Communication, Parents into School, Target Goal Academics, and Access/Barriers. The instrument for the collection of social networking tools offered support to the conversation of how social networking tools are used for parent engagement in the three districts. All major conclusions and recommendations based on the findings will be considered and explained in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Review of the Study

School-family engagement is imperative to the success of our children in school and in real life situations according to Epstein (1991) when compared to children with minimal or no school-family partnerships. The partnerships between the school and parents support a warm welcoming atmosphere which contributes to the parents and children feeling safe and secure leading to an environment where students are more inclined to learn and interact. Parents are more likely to interact with administrators and teachers when there is a warm welcoming environment. While supporting strong school-family partnerships students react through higher engagement, self-esteem and the student's success in the school setting and at home.

School-parent partnerships do not exist in every district or school in the United States. The reality is parents are only engaged twenty percent in their child's school according to the U.S. Gallup Panel (Hodges & Yu, 2015). This lack of school-parent partnership reflects a weakness in the structural foundation of our educational school system for the success of our students. Unsuccessful students over an extended amount of time leads to unsuccessful adults. Unsuccessful adults could mean two outcomes which are unemployment and prison terms.

D’ Angelo (2012) clarifies there is no gold standard in how to create and sustain school partnerships. Administrators and parents know how important school-parent partnerships are to the success of students however they are unaware how to make it happen. There needs to be more research on how to begin and enhance school-parent engagement to fill the gap between school and home. When parents know how to help their students with homework and support, the school through a school-partnership the actions are shown through the student's improvements at school.
Teachers, students, parents and administrators perceive the value of parent engagement. Epstein says "In study after study, teachers, parents, administrators and even students from elementary through high school say that involvement benefits students, improves schools, assists teachers and strengthens families. There are key assumptions and agreements about the value of families and the benefits of parent involvement" (2001, p. 3). In an ideal system, everybody works collectively for the advancement of students, teachers and families. While participation grows, student engagement and grades rise which assists in narrowing the achievement gap.

This research explores the issues to provide a stronger sense of the challenges with the parent engagement process as defined by Epstein and her influential work. The conclusions of this investigation can serve school leaders better to understand the functions of parent engagement in their communities and point to distinct practices to expand engagement between their schools and partners.

Chapter V presents an in-depth analysis and discussion of opportunities, obstacles and general experiences of school administrators, parents and school community members in Northwestern Ohio relating to school-parent involvement. The districts encompass an exempted village, local and city school district regarding parent engagement. This research utilized a qualitative methodology and employed a case study model which fit the appropriate approach for answering the research questions of this study. The bulk of the qualitative data came from interviews with three face-to-face focus groups of parents, administrators, and community members. Five themes were identified from the gathered data: Relationships, Open Communication, Parents into the School, Target Goal Academics, and Access/Barriers. The lens used Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement including Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making and Collaborating with Community framework. The
remaining data was collected through the examination of a variety of artifacts including school literature (i.e. newsletters) and social media such as Twitter feeds and Facebook accounts. Finally, implications and opportunities for future research will be presented and discussed.

**Discussion**

The discussion in Chapter V frames Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement for the conducted research on parent engagement. The first Type of Epstein’s Involvement Framework is Parenting. Following the discussion with Parenting the discussion moves to Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making and Collaborating with Community.

**Parenting**

Parenting is the first of Epstein’s Types of Involvement and is defined as assisting families in understanding child adolescent development, and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level (Epstein, 2011). Family support programs assist in training parents, which includes parent education, family support programs to assist health, nutrition, child rearing, and even literacy. School counselors, or pupil service personal will set aside time to visit the students in their home setting with their parents or family members while delivering first hand supports for the whole family.

While analyzing the data using Epstein’s First Type of Involvement of Parenting, three major themes surfaced. Communication, Building Relationships, and Getting Parents into the Buildings was a continuous theme arising through the discussion of the participants of the focus groups. Symeou, et al. (2012) discusses how important communication is in the teaching profession and how skills can be taught and teachers trained in the needed skills assisting teachers to talk with parents. Being able to talk with parents in a friendly meaningful way makes for meaningful and powerful communication. The data collected from this study reflected the
importance of communication between participants of the focus groups from all three school districts. Participants had a believe that good communication leads to building relationships.

Relationship building can happen in different ways. However, according to Li and Labig (2001) relationships should be built before discussing issues. Li and Labig (2001) found people in the United States are task oriented and jump over or dismiss creating relationships. The researcher’s study conducted with the three districts showed a mixture of building relationships while assisting students and their parents. For example, relationship development can come in the form of inviting parents or community members to the school to discuss useful, critical, life skills such as consumer math. Consumer math is the everyday math needed in real life where students can learn about checking and savings accounts. Students need to know how important saving money is for their future and how to balance a checkbook. When students realize the link between school and work or school and the real world they become more engaged with school (Cooper, 2013 p. 63). This district showed how mixing a task supported the development of relationships.

The research with the three districts showed strong support for healthy students, specifically nutritious aspects. The district would include family members by engaging them in discussion about nutrition and sending information home with students for families to use as a resource. The districts also tried to support healthy eating through educational brochures, and different educational options through outreach. Fiocco and Probst’s (2016) study included physical needs through student nutrition provided by eating a nutritious breakfast leading to academic success. For example, past research supported both physical needs and mental health by eating well not only at school but at home. Levine, et al., (2002) proved a strong nutritional program with parents and the community can assist and support mental health and nutrition of
students to support academics and student well-being. Boschloo (2012) showed how some students skip breakfast and the negative effects the lack of nutrition can have on academics. This study also showed districts offering free breakfasts to students to assist their nutrition.

Another concern was social networking and the effect this has on students, and their mental health. Schools are concerned about their students and their academic achievement because they want them to be successful in life. Because our society lives in the digital age and students have access to social networking at home and on their mobile devices, this is a concern. Sampasa-Kanyinga, & Lewis (2015) data reflects students with mental health issues are more likely to use social networking more often and for longer periods of time. Administrators have to deal with this at school and protect the students, helping them to find the proper help through the correct organizations. The research found districts deal with these issues mostly the same however through different channels. In most situations school counselors inter-vein however with all staff involvement families can benefit the most. Through the training of all school staff, preventative training can occur to support families and students.

In addition, internet addiction can be a problem leading to mental illness or problems in the school setting which can affect students and how they work with others and achieve academic success. According to Renjun et al. (2017) internet addiction can cause psychological and behavior problems. Problems include bad thoughts, negative behaviors, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobia and paranoia which are all brought to school as baggage (Renjun et al. 2017). Furthermore, administrators know the internet may cause other problems such as depression or changes of moods or attitudes of their students. It is important for staff to be trained so they can recognize and respond. Baker, Perez & Algorta, (2016) found how online social networking can cause depression in students. This occurs through variables such as
time, quality and type of social networking. The data reflected administrators taking an active role by sending information home to parents in different ways. Sometimes it was through the mail, and home with students, or postings on their websites.

The communication to parents through educational information leads to healthy options for parents to have conversations with their children and outside help above and beyond what parents can do. Dowden, et al. (2013) suggests teachers using specific feedback reflecting pedagogies coupled with two-way communication and healthy relationships with students and parents are most persuasive. Epstein (2002) believes communication from the parent to the school or from the school to the parent as two-way communication and is one of the six types of involvement. The research accomplished with the three districts showed how administrators, teachers, and counselors reach out to families with mental health information. In some circumstances, community people/companies would attend the schools and present on a variety of subjects. Interviewed people during the study acknowledged different communication supported them the most.

In addition, the data showed the importance of bringing parents and grandparents into the school buildings. This should not be focused on getting something from the parents or grandparents such as teaching or doing aid like tasks. The parents and grandparents should be invited in for fun or to observe with no expectation of receiving something in exchange. This invitation to parents and grandparents reflected the blending of Relationship Building, Communication and getting Parents into the Building. Bickmore (2010) showed how principals held their own school goals above what parents wanted or needed for their students. In Bickmore (2010) the administrators tried to change the parent's mindsets to conform to the school while ignoring the parent and student needs compared to the data the researcher found which held the
parents and students as customers and not as constituents. The three districts found parents reacted positive and were more willing to work with them when held in higher esteem.

**Communicating**

Communicating is the second of Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement and defined as the effective communication from home-to-school and school-to-home (Epstein, 2011). Our data expressed home-to-school as opportunities for families to express concerns, insights and expectation from their school. The research data expressed how the data from one district was clear and sharp from the district practicing school improvement. For example, the clarity came from how the focus group had a common vocabulary and expressed it well. Since this district had several of its own focus groups, they were comfortable expressing themselves and not hiding any facts or stories. Symeou, et al. (2012) showed data how people's perceptions can change through communication training. The research study showed through the consensus of the parents how important the communication folder than their favorite communication tool. According to the parents this folder held all the information they needed including homework, behavior, issues and future tests. The folder also highlighted the present and future activities in the classroom. They appreciated how both the teacher and the parent had to sign off on the assignments and reading of the folder every day. In comparison, community members appreciated two specific types of communication. They enjoyed the newsletter for specific information and facts about the school district. While they appreciated the direct information through the newsletter they appreciated the face-to-face contact and the open-door policy by the administrators. The implications from this data translates to transparency through details and face-to-face contact along with variety and choice.
In contrast, the community members and parents appreciated the variety of tools such as Facebook, Class Dojo, Google Classroom, Remind, and Twitter, which are not static. This study reflected the need for choice and how technology can enhance communication to parents believing it enhances parent engagement. Nee and Fusco found in their study how most tweets were the same as traditional reporting practices. The research data confirmed this notion by also showing how school personnel use data the same way. For example, the athletic director and others use Twitter to push out information and do not reply or carry on a two-way communication. People want a variety of choice whether it is a one-way communication, two-way communication, pen and paper or technology all have a place in parent engagement.

In addition, school-to-home is important. Some think of notes sent home from the teacher to the parent or phone calls from the teacher to the parent. The research data showed the administrators agreed with important communication methods. Administrators used emails, newsletters phone calls and the school website. McKenna & Millen, (2013) mentions important multidirectional movement of communication which perpetuates an environment of transparency and includes both parent voice and presence with student engagement. The data reflects administrators saying they have an open-door policy and appreciate the public coming up to them person-to-person talking to them. They appreciate the face-to-face contact with the public.

Furthermore, Type Two Communicating includes information on school policies, programs, memos, phone calls newsletters, report cards, student work folders and even conferences (Epstein, 2011). Communication simplified is the ability for administrators, teachers and parents to talk to each other about what is important for the child’s success.

Common knowledge tells us fundamentally people enjoy communication and expect having choices. One area of improvement would be for districts to adopt several communication
avenues/methods for parents. The data reflected the agreement on how important and successful
the daily communication folder works for their elementary children. Not only does it work for
one-way communication, but it also works for two-way communication. Both the teacher and the
parent appreciate the importance of someone signing off every evening on the communication
folder.

While schools need to find a variety of ways to listen to parents, they need to consider
whether it is a one-way or two-way communication. For example, the districts are
communicating better with the parents by pushing out clear information and keeping them
informed, however the school does not have processes to receive a communication from parents
or community members. The research data agrees with Hether's (2014) findings which showed
social media posts with one-way communications and little two-way communication. Blaschke
and Veh (2015) found when implementing strategies for two-way communication social media
still reflects surface conversations. Again this confirms our data which showed how
administrators liked emails, newsletters and the website which reflect one-way communication
or pushing a message out.

Hence, homework became the main focus in this discussion. Each focus group discussed
homework. Most were okay with homework. However, the discussion occurred over the amount
given to students and whether they truly had the time to do it. The local district finds it hard for
their children to find time for homework because they are in several extracurricular events in the
evenings. Since the district is small in student numbers many students find themselves in several
extracurricular activities leaving them little time for homework. They all agreed on the
importance of education and backed the staff on homework.
In contrast the city district concerns and conversation was how to monitor their children’s homework. For example, they want their children to become independent and be responsible for completing and submitting their homework without parent intervention. One way to monitor the homework is through a website known as ProgressBook. ProgressBook allows parents to log into the website and view the assignments given to children with due dates and progress. However, not all parents agree the system is effective. The data pointed out that not all teachers update it. For example, there were times when the grades and assignments were entered days before the nine weeks would end. This left no time for parents to intervene with their children.

Volunteering

Volunteering is the third of Epstein’s Types of Involvement, which includes encouraging parents to assist and support in various ways (Epstein, 2011). Epstein encourages volunteer programs to assist teachers and everyone involved in the district (Epstein, 2011). One example would be a family center within the district for meetings and resources for families (Epstein, 2011).

The research data revealed three main points concerning volunteering. First the number of volunteers were different depending on grade level. The elementary had the most volunteers with less in the middle school and even less in the high school. Epstein (1990) notes how the number of engaged parents fluctuates downward as students move to the middle school and then onto the high school. The research data showed how parent engagement went down from elementary through high school. It was interesting how data showed administrators in the exempted village school district had no problem with volunteers in the middle or high school. They found the parent engagement and what the parents were volunteering for transformed from the elementary school to middle and then on to high school. For example, parents may have
volunteered to read books to students in the elementary however at the high school parents were volunteering to help with sport programs, dances or prom. An implication found in the data was how successful administrators were to engage parents in a different way therefore keeping parent engagement high in all three avenues of elementary, middle and high school.

Second, relationships were important to get people to volunteer. The data collected showed how important relationships with educators in the school were with the volunteers. Both community members and parents want invited and welcomed into the buildings. Prior research by Li and Labig (2001) confirm important relationships and their data suggests Americans jump to the task without building the relationships first. This research implies the same from the focus groups comments. The parents and the volunteers want the warm relationship building and with it they will volunteer and accomplish the task. The data points to relationships having an important presence with having volunteers. Parents want a connection to someone in the school before they offer to volunteer. The relationship can occur through a phone call invite to the school or classroom by the teacher or an administrator. The relationship could also occur through a perceived friendship with the superintendent or the administrator creating a connection for school/volunteering.

Third, all participants judged volunteering by how many parents come into the building. The administrators spoke of how they focused on getting parents and community members into the building. The parents and community members spoke about all the responsibility they have inside the school buildings. According to research, parent involvement requires more than physical presence within the school (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004a). During the three focus groups all the members interviewed said parent visibility is important within the schools. The data
showed how many of the community members believed it was their duty to show up and even teach classes when necessary.

**Learning at Home**

Learning at Home is the fourth of Epstein’s Types of Involvement and can be expressed as providing ideas and information to families in numerous ways such as decision making, planning, and homework (Epstein, 2011). This would also include setting student goals, planning for college as well as summer learning activities. In addition, it may include homework policies, the discussion of schoolwork at home, the improvement of skills, and calendars with activities for students at home (Epstein, 2011). Equally important would be an organized way to get healthy living and mental health information to families.

Homework has been a long-standing tradition in the United States. However, since culture is changing, so is the attitude for homework. Homework is now problematic for more students, parents and teachers. Hence homework became the focus in this discussion. Each focus group discussed homework. Most were okay with homework. McMahon (2010) discusses homework through a social justice lens and how it can hurt children from different backgrounds. Diversity did not arise in the study because the three districts were not diverse except for students from economically disadvantaged families. The discussion was on how much homework should be assigned and not on whether homework is good or bad. Therefore, the discussion occurred over the amount given to students and whether they had the time to do it. The local district finds it hard for their children to find time for homework because they are in several extracurricular events in the evenings. Since the district is small in student numbers, many students find themselves in several extracurricular activities leaving them little time for homework. They all agreed on homework assignments for their children backing the staff.
In contrast, the city district concerns and conversation was how to monitor their children’s homework. For example, they want their children to become independent and complete and submit their homework without parent intervention. McMahon (2010) says it is imperative how teachers interact with parents with students in the middle and high school years. Students want more independence and parents have to know how to balance student independence with knowing how to help and monitor their homework. The research data discovered one way to monitor the homework is through a website known as ProgressBook. ProgressBook allows parents to log into the website and view the assignments given to children with due dates and progress. However, not all parents agree the system is effective. The data pointed out that not all teachers update it. For example, teachers did not enter grades and assignments until a week or days before the nine weeks ended. This left no time for parents to intervene with their children.

**Decision Making**

Decision Making is the fifth of Epstein’s Types of Involvement which shows parent importance. This involvement type states parents should be included in the school’s decisions, which can occur through developing parent leaders (Epstein, 2011). In fact, some of these items have existed for years such as Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) or other parent organizations. In addition, schools need to think about parents being part of advisory councils, curriculum committees, and district leadership teams. Bitsko (2006) reminds us that student success is higher when teachers, parents and students are collaborating using a team approach. Networks built by parents for parents are active in school decision making. This may even include parent advocacy or lobbying groups for improvements. The research data reflected this too through one
school district which was showing success through the team approaches created through long-term planning with its strategic planning process.

While looking through the data, one commonality arose, which was communication. Even though all three districts had a different view on how decision making could happen with parent partnerships, they all agreed it came down to two-way communication. The “why” appeared to stay the same. They applied opened communication for the benefit of the students. However, the “how” was different. One district accomplished decision making through open communication by the administrators and teachers. Another district accomplished decision making through their strategic planning process. "The essential core of family engagement is furthering the communication and relationship between teachers and parents" (Auerbach, 2009 p 19). Lastly, one district did it through parent and community groups getting together to move action to and through the board of education on something important to them. Each believed open communication became the key to success.

Second, the research data showed how important it is for districts to set goals and follow through with them. One such district started a grandparent’s day to get feedback on the district. This day first started as grandparents attending about an hour in the district with their grandchildren and then relaying feedback. However through informative feedback, the school found out it should last all day long. One hour with one grandchild was fine however, the grandparents wanted time with each grandchild to experience the whole picture of a day. The emergence of a grandparent’s day supported open communication and improved their two-way communication. Through this communication from grandparents, and school staff administrators experienced input for decision making.
While schools are working on increasing parent engagement with decision making, they may want to establish a clear website aligned with the needs of the community. The district can involve parents and community members on making decisions with stakeholder goals (Taddeo, 2016). The research data reflected how parents and community members were involved in their five-year strategic plan. Taddeo (2016) found when numerous people, groups, and partners are involved it moves the important priorities. These groups through discussion will find connections between the school, parents and the community which leads to services stakeholders want (Anast-May, 2011). The take-a-way from this is how this collaboration can lead to marketing and branding of the district to lure students and family securing the future of the district.

When it came to parent decision making, this study found the same answers as many other studies. For example, Henderson et al. (2007) found how local parent groups rarely decide with the school district leaders. Decision making by parents in collaboration with school leadership in the local, exempted village and city school district was surface only or on an as needed basis. The research data implied parents were engaged by the school leadership well when there was an extreme need for something. For example, the district engaged in strategic planning only engaged the parents and community members only as needed. The research data also revealed the lack of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles. Decision making did not occur on a daily basis. This would demonstrate how much more work needs to occur for engaging parents on decision making every day and in depth.

**Collaborating with the Community**

Collaborating with the Community is the sixth of Epstein’s Types of Involvement which consequently reflects the need to take advantage of community resources and services to strengthen the school district in many ways (Epstein, 2011). A few ways include family
practices, student learning, and community activities linking to learning skills. Also included are service to the community by students, information for students and families on health and social support and services that assist families. The Ohio Department of Education promotes Project Aware which stresses the awareness of behavioral health issues among youth.

The research data from this study reflects three main points in the area of Epstein’s Type Six, Collaborating with the Community. The first point shown through the focus group data reflects how districts believe the community should come to them and be present in their buildings. There is little to no discussion of how the districts should extend themselves into the community. For example, schools are willing to accept businesses into the buildings to teach, assist or even donate money as well as time. On the other hand, the focus group spoke little about the district taking part doing things outside of the schools. The focus group did mention job shadowing of students with different businesses.

The second point which emerged through the research data is the importance of relationships. Li and Labig (2001) research would agree because they believe relationship building is not optional, it must occur first. Each member of the focus group mentioned how important relationships are with collaborating with the community. They felt it would be hard to collaborate with the community without having a meaningful connection. Li and Labig (2001) believe relationship building is a requirement for discussing issues.

The community members believed the open communication by the leadership of the districts influenced their participation in the schools. Research from Epstein and Sanders (2006) confirm how important strong leadership and how it encourages parent engagement in the schools. They appreciated the administrators having an open-door policy, informative newsletters and personal invitations to take part. The personal invitations such as an email, phone
calls or mentioning in person their invite to the school for participation with the students. Auerbach (2009 p 19) states "The essential core of family engagement is furthering the communication and relationship between teachers and parents".

This research shows an important development of relationships with community members and building communication that takes into consideration everyone communicates differently including the new realm of social networking. Research by Taddeo (2016) suggests how school websites can facilitate teaching, learning and communication leading to improved student outcomes. The research exposed why websites are important to parents and how they would like to have them go further and deeper. For example, parents would love to have examples and step by step directions for assisting their children with homework, specifically algebra. Lee and VanDyke (2015) found how relationship building can occur through the use of Twitter for two-way communication. An implication is matching the correct communication tool for reaching out to stakeholders. This is extremely important for parent engagement.

On the other hand, community members and parents need to be proactive in building relationships with school districts and communicating potential partnerships. The responsibilities need to be shared and not just the responsibility of the school or the community. The culture should be that of an inviting, caring and communicating inclusive environment. Anast-May, et al., (2011) states how relationships and parent engagement are more important now than ever because there is more school choice than in the past. Parents now have additional choices such as charter schools, virtual schools and private school.

**Recommendations**

This study could be enhanced by adding teachers to the conversation. The addition of the teacher’s voice would strengthen the conversation by comparing the expectations of parents to
teachers when discussing parent engagement overall. In contrast, hearing the comparison between the administrator’s beliefs and the teachers compared to the community member extracted different themes or expectations. For example, there is the lack of alignment between the administrator’s view of what is occurring and what is actually occurring with parent engagement.

The new technology available today can assist in many ways for parent engagement. However, adult behavior could experience difficulty in staying current regarding technological use. Adult behavior infers that there is a refusal to change or make time to keep up with the use of technology or taking the time to enter data. When the technology such as ProgressBook is deemed highly usable for parents by parents then teachers have to be willing to keep the information up to date and be willing to have conversations with parents when it happens. There will be many tools in the future that will build the bridge for parent engagement, but we cannot let poor adult behaviors stop the flow of good communication.

Another improvement should be in the area of homework. Districts must study and determine the proper amount and the significance of assigning homework to students. The believes there needs to be agreement within the district the amount of homework given by grade level and whether it makes a difference in student learning. The data suggested that math homework causes stress with parents because students do it in a different fashion than parents did at the same age. The recommendations were filming how to do the math and saving it to YouTube for parents to watch. By doing this it would provide parents with the confidence to assist their children.

Improvement could be made to the decision making process by having parent representation on district leadership team. By having parents as part of the original discussions
and building relationships within the school district up front would be beneficial. In addition, parents could be involved in the initial goal setting procedures too. The parents could see the whole picture and not just pieces and parts.

Another recommendation would be to set up technology tools in such a way to improve open communication. For example, have board meetings streaming so people who cannot get out of their houses can watch and listen from their homes. The district could share the minutes through a Google Document. Finally, the district could use additional tools for social networking such as Twitter, Facebook, Remind, and many others, which are free.

**Future Research Opportunities**

Further research should occur in the area of social networking and how the school can assist parents. For example, Kuss and Griffiths (2017) research discusses how students are becoming addicted to digital social networking. Students cannot run from it or get away from it so they must have the support to deal with it directly. Whether it is at home or at school the educational field has just started to feel the implications of mental health problems related to this phenomenon. There needs to be further research on two-way communication and how the new technology can enhance specifically two-way communication.

Further research should be conducted seeking the relevance of parents in the building to determine if actual volunteering is occurring or not. For example, the data showed a connection between parents in the buildings to volunteering. This finding notes the need to heighten the desire to growing the volunteer population that have never walked into the school building.

A question could also be developed to seek more information on relationships. If relationships are important to volunteering then what happens if relationships never occur. Would there be a lack of volunteers if there are no relationships? The data collected for this
research supports the importance of relationships. Another area for further research would be what constitutes a relationship and how can it occur?

**Conclusion**

Clearly Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement framed this case study, which included Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making and Collaborating with Community. The data in this study contributes to past research on parent engagement and extends it by using local, exempted village and city school districts. The data demonstrated how there can be differences between three types of districts with parent engagement.

The data demonstrated important points considering relationships and open communication. While these were important, a third unexpected area arose. The data revealed how technology can be used to effectively support and extend family engagement effectively beyond how it does now.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

General Lead-In Question
I am studying the concept of Parent Engagement with schools. How do you define parent engagement within the school context?

RQ1: How do three schools in Northwestern Ohio implement parent engagement procedures aligned with Epstein’s recommended framework of parent engagement?

Type 1: Parenting
1. How do you (does your school)… Work with families with their children’s development
2. How do you (does your school)… Work with parents on how to assist their children at home
3. How do you (does your school)… Work with families to understand their needs

Type 2: Communicating
1. How do you (does your school)… Communicate with families about school programs
2. How do you (does your school)… Communicate with families about student progress
3. How do you (does your school)… Demonstrate two-way communication

Type 3: Volunteering
1. How do you (does your school)… Improve recruitment, training, work and schedules to involve families as volunteers
2. How do you (does your school)… Improve recruitment of parents to volunteer at school programs

Type 4: Learning at Home
1. How do you (does your school)… Involve families with their children in learning activities at home
2. How do you (does your school)… Involve families with their children assisting with homework
3. How do you (does your school)… Involve families with their children assisting with individual course and program decisions

Type 5: Decision Making
1. How do you (does your school)… Include families as participants in school decisions
2. How do you (does your school)… Include families as participants in school governance
3. How do you (does your school)… Include families as participants in school advocacy

Type 6: Collaborating with Community
1. How do you (does your school)… Coordinate resources for students and families through agencies and businesses
2. How do you (does your school)… Coordinate services to the community by the school
RQ2: What are the experiences of school administrators in three rural schools in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?
   1. What is working for you?
   2. What obstacles are there to your being more successful with parent engagement?
   3. What opportunities exist to improve parent engagement?

RQ3: What are the experiences of parents in three rural schools in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?
   1. What is working for you?
   2. What obstacles are there to your being more successful with parent engagement?
   3. What opportunities exist to improve parent engagement?

RQ4: What are the experiences of community members in three rural schools in Northwestern Ohio with parent engagement?
   1. What is working for you?
   2. What obstacles are there to your being more successful with parent engagement?
   3. What opportunities exist to improve parent engagement?