EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS’ VIEWS ON WORKING WITH PARENTS:
POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ENCOUNTERS IN MAINTAINING THE
HOME/SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP IN HIGH/LOW INCOME SCHOOLS

A dissertation submitted to the
Kent State University College
of Education, Health and Human Services
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Philosophy

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December 2012
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EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS’ VIEWS ON WORKING WITH PARENTS: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ENCOUNTERS IN MAINTAINING THE HOME/SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP IN HIGH/LOW INCOME SCHOOLS (356 pp.)

The purpose of this study was to research the experiences of early childhood (K-3) teachers in working with parents and families of high and low income. In particular, this study gathered information on the positive and negative encounters teachers have experienced in maintaining the home/school relationship and their reaction to these experiences. It gathered more information about the experiences that early childhood teachers have when problems arise within the home/school relationship. Particularly, this study looked at how teachers react to conflict situations and in what ways their teaching practices are altered by the encounters.

By using a mixed method approach of surveys and interviews, data was gathered to explore how teachers from high and low income schools work with parents in problem situations. Surveys were developed and gathered to compile initial data on teachers which establish patterns within the home/school relationship, as well as helped in the selection of interview participants. In depth interviews provided for additional information on teachers’ actual experiences in working with parents within the schools. Finally, a comparison between teachers who work with high and low socioeconomic students and families shed light on similarities and differences within the home/school relationship. The results of this study have direct implications for educators on the
importance of critically reflecting upon their practices in dealing with parents and families.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank several people whose guidance and support were invaluable in the completion of this dissertation. First, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Martha Lash, my advisor, for her constant encouragement during the difficult times of this research project. I am grateful to her for working with me through each and every phase of this project, carefully reading the early drafts of this dissertation, regularly conferencing with me to discuss my progress on this project, offering insightful feedback, and challenging my thinking, which helped me navigate my way to the completion of this piece.

I am also deeply indebted to Dr. Janice Kroeger and Dr. Averil McClelland for providing effective feedback and having insightful conversations with me about my work, which inspired me to think critically. A special thanks to Dr. Kathleen Walker for taking the time to read my research. I could not have completed this journey without the support from my committee.

No amount of thanks can express my gratitude to the participants of this study. I am extremely thankful for their willingness to participate and their openness in sharing their personal experiences with me. Without their involvement, this study would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank all of my colleagues and administrators. Thank you for taking the time to help me tweak my survey instrument and for sharing your stories with me. Your words and experiences were validation that this research topic is important.
Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Paul, my son, Nathan, my parents, Dave and Linda, and all of my friends and family that supported me through this process. Their special love and unconditional support gave me strength to complete this marathon learning experience. Thanks for believing in me, encouraging me to pursue my goals and sharing both the good times and the bad. Words can never express how much I appreciate all that you have done for me. It is to all of you that I dedicate this dissertation.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I began my teaching career 10 years ago in a southern United States public school that in many ways could be compared to the Cleveland Public Schools today, in that the school was mainly comprised of minority students and was of a lower socio-economic status. Many of the second grade students in my class and their families struggled on a daily basis to make ends meet. When I started teaching I held high expectations for the amount of parent participation in each student’s learning process. One of my first realizations that my expectations were off came on parent night. I was prepared for a full crowd of 23 sets of parents, but instead was shocked when only five parents came. Conferences had a similar outcome when only half of the group attended. Not only was there little participation in school events, but the majority of students failed to return homework that was supposed to be supervised by a parent. Discipline issues were occurring frequently in the classroom with little response by parents. I made attempt after attempt to contact parents about academic and behavior issues with little success. I began to assume that the parents and families did not care as much about education.

Finally, one day after school I was able to set up a meeting with one of my student’s parent at her work place; I will refer to this student as Shawn. Shawn’s mother worked at a gas station. As I approached Shawn’s mom, I thought about how the year was more than half way over and this was the first time that I would be meeting her in person. I also thought that it was unfortunate that I was about to confront her with information that her son was failing the second grade. As I introduced myself, Shawn’s
mother apologized for never coming into the school. She confided in me that she was unsuccessful as a student and that schools brought back terrible memories for her. I did my best to make her feel at ease with talking to me and in between customers we discussed Shawn’s progress at school and his behavior. She was able to provide me with background information about Shawn that helped me understand why he behaved the way he did. I was able to provide her with some suggestions for helping Shawn academically. When we were finished Shawn’s mother thanked me for making the effort to come and see her.

This parent experience was what it took for me to change how I approached all parents of my students. I began to initiate contact with my students’ families. I visited almost all of their homes and learned that many families spoke English as a second language. Many were embarrassed at the idea of coming into school for fear that they would not understand the language. For these families, parents were unable to help their son/daughter with homework because they could not read the English directions themselves. Through these interactions I came to the revelation that I needed to approach homework in a different manner. I began to have the directions translated into Spanish so the families were able to become more successful at helping their children with homework as well as enrichment and practice. I also tried to improve my own Spanish vocabulary!

My assumptions and beliefs about the families I worked with changed that first year teaching. Over the course of the following nine years I found myself working at first a Catholic school for four years and then returning to public schools where I
continue to teach now. In both schools I was faced with parents and families that were from middle to high income backgrounds and a different realm of issues.

Contrary to my initial teaching experience, where I dealt with struggling families, parents at both the Catholic and public school were very present within the school setting. At parent night with the exception of one or two families every single chair was taken with someone representing each student. Conferences were packed with back to back meetings lasting two days straight until late into the evening. Homework was turned in on time day after day. Parents were volunteering to come into the classroom to help work with students or clerical items I needed help completing.

However, in addition to supporting their child by attending school meetings, volunteering, and helping with homework many parents began to contact me about other issues that would arise throughout the school week. For example, in a school week timeframe I typically responded to 5 to 10 emails (sometimes more), three to five handwritten notes, and two to three parent phone calls. At times parents would also request to come in and speak to me in person before or after school. A large chunk of my planning time would be spent responding to parents. My role as a teacher had changed from my first year of teaching as the initiator to the responder of parent contact.

I soon discovered that many of the emails, notes, and phone calls were from the same parents. One parent alone contacted me a total of 10 times in one week! That week the parent had many concerns about her second grade daughter’s friend situation at school. Her daughter, whom I will refer to as Jill, was having problems getting along with her best friend. Apparently, Jill’s best friend wanted to play with other girls at
recess and was excluding Jill from the group. Jill’s mother wanted to be kept up to date on a daily basis about her daughter’s situation. By the end of the week I had spent over two whole planning periods keeping Jill’s mother apprised of the friendship, which eventually worked itself out on its own.

Jill’s mother is one example of parents that within my school become labeled as “high maintenance parents” or an HMP. An HMP is a parent who requires a lot of teacher time and attention to deal with frequent concerns regarding significant and insignificant issues that occur throughout the school year. When a teacher learns formally that he/she is going to have a child with a parent that is a HMP he/she knows that means a lot of teacher time will be spent dealing with the family on both the significant and seemingly insignificant issues. Placement meetings at my current school shifted from including the label HMP occasionally on placement cards to including a space on placement cards to identify parents or families that have significant needs. The administration is able to monitor the amount of high maintenance parents so that one teacher will not have too many HMPs in the same class.

Every teacher faces different challenges in working with parents and families. Through my own varied, professional experiences I became interested in the relationship between the home and school. The above examples were taken from my professional experience and show how conflict situations and interactions with parents can have both a positive and negative affect on teaching. For me, one interaction from what I initially perceived to be a negative situation with Shawn’s mom in my first year of teaching, profoundly affected my attitudes and practices in working with parents in a proactive and
outreaching manner. The second example with Jill’s mother shows the exorbitant amount of work week time for only one of my 23 second grader’s social friendship over a two week period. However, these examples only capture my own teaching experiences. This study explores other teachers’ experiences in conflict situations while working with parents; two different types of schools, both high and low income environments, are represented and compared.

The relationship between the home and school has changed over the course of history to embrace an opportunity to work together to strengthen the education of a child. Many expectations are set for the teacher to initiate and maintain a healthy, fruitful partnership with the families of the children they teach. Textbooks and articles have been written in attempts to provide the necessary information that educators might need to establish these relationships (Gestwicki, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Jacobson, 2003; Sanders, 2008). Colleges and universities are offering courses on working with families for preservice teachers in an effort to educate before launching their own teaching careers. The trend in education is moving toward embracing this relationship.

While many advantages of parent involvement have been researched, studied, and analyzed that show benefits of working with the school (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Gestwicki, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994), research also indicates that problems continue to emerge (Lareau, 2000; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). This research study has gathered information about teachers’ relationships with parents and shows how those relationships
are affected by positive and negative conflicts and encounters; additionally, differences based on the school socioeconomic background are examined.

**Statement of the Problem**

Over the course of history parent and teacher relationships have been documented and early information shows that parents participated in their child’s education through involvement with the Parent Teacher Organization (Brooks, 1946) and were encouraged to help their child in the home setting (Pettengill, 1939). As time went on research expanded to acknowledge another milestone in the parent/teacher relationship: the conference. With the conference the home/school partnership was taken to another level as parents were asked to come into the school to discuss their child’s progress (Cawelti, 1966; Starbeck, 1950). By the mid seventies parents were beginning to provide assistance to schools by helping within the classroom (Scriven, 1975) and teachers were relying more on parents extending learning in the home environment (Becker & Epstein, 1982).

Research began to encompass the positive effects that healthy home/school relationships produced. Parent involvement was linked to a child’s positive attitude towards school (Spaggiari, 1998). A student’s performance academically was connected to the home/school relationship (Ashton, 2008; Gestwicki, 2007). An increase in student attendance (Haynes et al., 1989) and improvement of a student’s sense of self-worth (Murphy, 2003) were all shown to be benefits of parent involvement. A look at that literature shows a shift in parent behavior and in teacher behavior towards parents. While many positive benefits were being discovered some negative aspects of working with
families began to surface. Some teachers were struggling with the amount of time that was necessary to maintain a healthy relationship with parents (Gestwicki, 2007; Swick, 2003). In addition, parents were also feeling the time constraint with the amount of expectations that were being placed on them at home (Gestwicki, 2007). Parents were being asked to be open about their child’s home life and share information that would help a teacher, which for some families felt like an invasion of privacy (Lightfoot, 1981).

Teachers were finding that some parents were showing too much involvement and were overstepping professional boundaries in an effort to give their child extra advantages (Brantlinger; 2003; Lareau 2000).

Regardless of the advantages and disadvantages of family involvement the relationship between the home and school has changed over time. The high expectation for teachers to maintain a healthy partnership has become assumed in most schools and in state and federal guidelines. Government mandates such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) includes goals that require the home and schools to work together in order to help children acquire basic educational skills and pass standardized tests. Schools and teachers are expected to take control in facilitating and establishing this joint communication. While there are many advantages to family involvement, problems and conflicts can occur between the home and school, which potentially can jeopardize a healthy relationship. Through this study, the positive and negative effects of conflict situations are explored within schools with different socioeconomic backgrounds.
The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to research the experiences of early childhood (K-3) teachers in working with parents and families of high and low income. In particular, this study gathered information on the positive and negative encounters teachers have experienced in maintaining the home/school relationship and their reaction to these experiences. In addition, it gathered more information about the experiences that early childhood teachers have when problems arise within the home/school relationship. Particularly this study looked at how teachers react to conflict situations and in what ways their teaching practices are altered by the encounters. By using a mixed method approach of surveys and interviews, data was gathered to explore how teachers from high and low income schools work with parents in problem situations. Surveys were developed and gathered to compile initial data on teachers, which establish patterns within the home/school relationship, as well as helped in the selection of interview participants. In depth interview provided for additional information on teachers’ actual experiences in working with parents within the schools. Finally, a comparison between teachers who work with high and low socioeconomic students and families shed light on similarities and differences within the home/school relationship. The results of this study have direct implications for educators on the importance of critically reflecting upon their practices in dealing with parents and families.

Research Questions

This study concentrates on one main issue: How do early childhood teachers view working with parents; what are their positive and negative encounters in maintaining the
home/school relationship; what are their reactions to these encounters? More specifically, the following research questions will be used to investigate that issue.

- How do early childhood teachers at high/low income schools communicate with parents?
- What are the attitudes of teachers towards working with parents in high/low income schools?
- What happens when conflicts occur in the early childhood parent/teacher relationship?
- How do early childhood teachers at high/low income schools respond to conflict situations with parents?
- What types of positive outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?
- What types of negative outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?
- How do teachers at high/low income schools perceive the families and the student after a conflict has occurred?
- How do teachers at high/low income schools feel they are perceived by parents after a conflict has occurred?
- In what ways has the parent/teacher relationship been altered after a conflict or disagreement has taken place?
- How do parent/teacher relationships differ depending on the socioeconomic status of the school?
Significance of This Study

This study provides an insightful look into the teachers’ perspective of working with families in two different school settings. By examining this point of view information was gathered that will contribute to our current knowledge base on parent/teacher relationships. A deeper look into the teacher perspective sheds light on how teachers perceive working with families and their attitudes towards helping to establish this partnership.

Research has shown that there are many positive effects of parent involvement (Ashton, 2008; Gestwicki, 2007; Murphy, 2003). These results encourage and promote a healthy home/school partnership, but are teachers utilizing parents in order to maximize these benefits? In addition to gathering information about teachers’ present practices in working with parents, this research helped to gain a better understanding when problems or conflicts occur between the home and school. Literature has shown that problems sometimes exist within the parent/teacher relationship (Ingersoll, 1996; Sanders, 2008; Swick, 2003). This study contributes to an area of research that is lacking by focusing on conflict that takes place within the home/school partnership. By examining the problems that occur from a teacher’s perspective a better understanding of the beliefs and interactions surrounding conflict can be understood. This in turn might potentially offer suggestions and ideas for future situations in dealing with similar conflict scenarios. In addition the manners in which teachers respond to conflict and the outcome of the problem are better understood. This research sheds light on the somewhat historical, yet
contemporary and continuously emerging issue of high level parent involvement and how teachers are incorporating this into their professional life.

While the majority of research on parent/teacher conflict focuses on the negative outcomes (Duncan, 2007; Ingersoll, 1996), this study looks at both the pros and the cons of parent/teacher conflict. Conflict is often seen in a negative way; however, it is possible that a teacher’s practice may change due to a realization or revelation brought about by a problem situation. A parent’s perspective on a school situation, when brought to the attention of a teacher, might cause the teacher to reflect upon the occurrence. The reflection process that takes place has the potential to change how a teacher perceives future situations and may cause an alteration in the teachers’ practices. Very little research exists that emphasizes the positive outcomes that may take place within the school setting due to parent/teacher conflict. This study examines both the positive and negative outcomes of parent/teacher issues.

Parents and families play a vital role in the education of a child. Over the past decade research on family involvement has increased as the realization has come about that it is crucial to understand the intricate relationship that forms between the home and school. This research addresses the need to gather current information about the home/school relationship in order to contribute to literature and promote a healthy team that ultimately works toward the same goal; educating the child.

Explanation of Terms Used in the Literature Review and in This Study

The benefits of parent involvement for the children, families, and teachers make examining the conflicts that occur within their relationships worthwhile. In this study the
term parent and family involvement is used interchangeably. In this regard the individuals that actively participate in a child’s learning are included. This might include grandparents, siblings, and extended family. Parent involvement is seen as family participation in children’s lives whether in or out of school. Another component that impacts parent involvement is the teachers’ attitudes and willingness to involve and work with families, which influence the quality of family–teacher relationships and involvement. In this respect, parent/family involvement depends on both parents’ and teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards working and communicating with one another.

The definition of parent involvement varies for each individual. Teachers’ experiences and beliefs shape how parent involvement is viewed and defined. My own experiences have led me to develop my own beliefs and definition for parent involvement. Looking at literature and my own personal experiences it is evident that a wide range of parent involvement and definitions exist, (Bratlinger, 2003; Lareau, 2003). Adequate involvement consists of parents providing the basic necessities, such as food, clothing, and shelter for their child (Gestwicki, 2007). In addition, parents assist their child in completing daily homework assignments and attend important school functions like parent/teacher conferences. Over involvement entails parents taking a more assertive and sometimes aggressive approach to supporting their child (Bratlinger, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parents frequently are involved within the school environment and take an excessively active role in helping to advance their child, at times initiating unnecessary contact with the teacher. Under involved parents seem absent from the school environment (Drummond & Stipek, 2004). These parents are conspicuously
missing from school functions and provide little help with school work. These definitions are based on personal experiences and literature and will vary by the individual.

**Terms and Definitions**

- **Conflict**—a disagreement that occurs between two or more individuals
- **Cultural Capital**—skills individuals inherit or have access to that can then be translated into different forms of value as they move through various institutions (Bourdieu, 1977a; 1977b)
- **High Income School**—less than 10% of the student population is provided free and reduced lunch
- **Home Advantage**—benefits that children receive due to parent participation and activation of cultural capital (Lareau, 2000)
- **Low Income School**—more than 40% of the student population is provided free and reduced lunch
- **Negative Encounter**—an experience between a parent and teacher that was perceived by the teacher as not going well and resulted in a negative manner for the child and/or future relationships with the parent
- **Parent involvement** - family participation in children’s lives whether in or out of school and the parents’ awareness of their responsibilities in their children’s education (Gestwicki, 2007)
• **Positive Encounter**—an experience between a parent and teacher that was perceived by the teacher as going well and resulted in a positive manner for the child and/or future relationships with the parent

• **Reliability**—validates study by showing the results are constant and dependable (Merriam, 2002)

• **Validity**—the capability of the research to pull meaningful and accurate conclusions from the information gathered for the study (Creswell, 2007)

**Summary**

Every school year is different. Teachers embark upon the complex task of teaching new students and working with different parents and families each year. For some teachers working with parents comes relatively easy, for others maintaining a healthy relationship can be a struggle that is difficult to achieve. Regardless all teachers are required to be the liaison between the home and school. This study contributes to the literature on the teachers’ perspective of parent involvement. In particular, it exposes teacher reaction and understandings of conflicts that occur between the home and school. Additionally it looks at teachers’ experiences within two different environments; high and low income schools. Despite the environment, this study shows that it is essential for educators to critically reflect upon their teaching practices in regards to working with parents so that they can reap possible benefits and adapt their teaching styles to meet the needs of their students.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Over the course of history parents have made a steady increase in the amount of participation within schools (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Brooks, 1946; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Greenwood et al., 1972; Pettengill, 1939; Savage & Jones, 1972; Scriven, 1975; Starbeck, 1950). Research has shown that there are many positive outcomes from this joint participation (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ingram et al., 2007). However, research also shows that negative factors do emerge within the relationship between the home and school (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Duncan, 2004; Horvat & Lareau, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Longaretti & Wilson, 2006; Sanders, 2008; Swick, 2003). This research explored the perspective of the teacher to better understand the intricacies of the home/school relationship. In order to accomplish this literature was gathered that shows (a) a historical look at parent involvement, (b) definitions of what parent involvement is, (c) advantages of family involvement, (d) struggles within the home/school relationship, and (e) factors that contribute to the effects of parent involvement.

Historical Look at Family Involvement in Education

Over the course of history the structure of family life has changed greatly as well as the amount of participation families are taking on in education (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Brooks, 1946; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Greenwood et al.,
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1972; Pettengill, 1939; Savage & Jones, 1972; Scriven, 1975; Starbeck, 1950). Today children come from diverse settings that include single parent households, families with two moms or two dads, children who are being raised by extended family such as grandmothers or grandfathers, households where both parents work full time, and many other various scenarios. Along with this change in family structure another transformation has evolved that entails the role that parents play within education. Today many parents show more involvement within their child’s education than what had occurred in the past (Baker, 1999; Carlisle et al., 2005; Comer & Hanes, 1991; Epstein, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Greenwood et al., 1972; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Herman & Swick, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey, 1987; Sanders, 2008; Swick, 2003; Starbeck, 1950; Woodrow et al., 2007). However, with the increase in involvement comes the effect this participation might have which can be positive or lead to problems (Brooks, 1946; Cypher & Burbage, 1958; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Epstein, 1986; Kaplan, 1950; LeFevre, 1967; Reavis, 1941).

1930s and 1940s

Throughout these decades literature has shown that schools have been attempting to establish meaning behind parent involvement. In the late 1930s schools wanted parents to view and recognize teachers as professionals and reinforce what was being taught at home (Pettengill, 1939). One problem that surfaced within the 1940s and still remains a struggle today is that parents were found to be uncomfortable when schools tried to implement different techniques that were unlike the strategies used for their own
education (Reavis, 1941). Parents’ personal experience was linked to the amount of support they gave to the school system (Kaplan, 1950; Reavis, 1941; Yourman, 1936).

In order to help parents understand ideas that were dissimilar to their own the Parent-Teachers’ Association (PTA) was established (Brooks, 1946). When the PTA first began the organization consisted of meetings with parents and teachers. During the gatherings both groups discussed ideas. The teacher had the opportunity to review over the educational program and to explain in depth what was occurring within the classroom. After six years of conducting meetings with the PTA, teachers found that teaching had become more effective because of the understanding and interest in education by the parents (Brooks, 1946).

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s communication through the PTA was established as a means to bridge the gap between the home and school. Expectations for parents to extend material learned at school to the home were set. Parents were strongly encouraged to have an open mind to some of the new techniques that were being used by teachers that might not have been a part of their own personal experience. Positive results from joint communication were beginning to surface such as the willingness to assist in solving problems within the schools, acknowledging that education continues outside of the school, and time spent truly getting to know the school and the atmosphere in which the children would be learning (Brooks, 1946; Kaplan, 1950; Reavis, 1941; Yourman, 1936).
1950s and 1960s

Documentation from the literature reviewed focused on parents in education during the 1950s and 1960s grew beyond the Parent Teacher Association to include parent teacher conferences (Cawelti, 1966; LeFevre, 1967; Starbeck, 1950). Parent teacher conferences became a one-on-one interaction that occurred in order for the teacher to communicate a child’s progress in school (Starbeck, 1950). By the 1960s conferences had developed into a two-way communication that allowed both the parent and the teacher to focus on the development and growth of the student. Parents had viewed the teacher as the one with the control to pass or fail their child (LeFevre, 1967). This role was changing as teachers attempted to put parents’ fears at ease and enlisted their help at conferences by creating conference guides (Cawelti, 1966). The conference guide provided questions for parents to answer prior to attending conferences. This became a step in building a connection and opening lines of communication between parents and teachers (Cawelti, 1966).

Parents were being encouraged to give voice to their concerns about their child and their child’s education. Opening the lines of communication between the school and home provided teachers with additional information about individual students. This information can have a positive effect by providing an insight as to how best to educate the child (LeFevre, 1967). However, along with these positive insights problems also arose. Tensions resulted in the efforts of home and school to protect their interests and the personal inadequacies of parents and teachers (Kaplan, 1950). Again parents’ own personal experience caused a strain on relationships as they struggled with understanding
the updated curriculum and different styles of teaching. Parents also felt violated as teachers made inquiries into home conditions (Kropp, 1956). Teachers found that parents were not fulfilling their parental responsibilities and lacked qualifications needed in order to participate in school programs (Kaplan, 1950). Many of these problems continue to permeate the home/school relationship today.

While both positive and negative experiences were occurring between parents and teachers the need for excellence in schools remained and parents were becoming a pivotal point in obtaining this goal (Swallow, 1957). Cyphert and Burbage (1958) wrote, “a school can go no further than it can take its parents” (p 172). One large obstacle that stood in the way of incorporating parents into the education system was one’s own experience. Parents faced difficulty in understanding the changes within the schools and with little communication going on between the two, parents efforts fell to the wayside (Cypher & Burbage, 1958). However, even with communication as a problem, school systems were beginning to realize the importance of parent involvement within the schools.

**1970s and 1980s**

During the 1970s and 1980s empirical information (Greenwood et al., 1972; Savage & Jones, 1972; Scriven, 1975) supported the benefits of incorporating parents into education, which led to the development of federal experimental programs. Programs such as *Head Start, Follow Through*, and *Parent-Child Centers* began to emerge (Greenwood et al., 1972; Savage & Jones, 1972). The purpose of the programs were to educate parents on how to be involved with their child’s education (Greenwood
et al., 1972), address low self-esteem and attitudes parents had towards dealing with schools (Savage & Jones, 1972), and deal with the educational concerns that parents shared (Savage & Jones, 1972).

In addition to the United States government taking action towards getting parents involved in the curriculum teachers began to take a more aggressive approach to getting parents involved. Parents were actively taking on roles of volunteering in classrooms and becoming a part of the instructional team. Teachers were asking if parents had any special skills that would be applicable to the curriculum. Parents were also providing assistance for some teachers in the areas of completing tasks, taking attendance, and helping children get dressed for outside activities (Scriven, 1975). Teachers were placing more emphasis on homework and extension activities that parents could monitor and reinforce at home (Becker & Epstein, 1982).

Links had been established connecting achievement to parent involvement (Becker & Epstein 1982; Coleman et al., 1966; Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Brissie, 1987). Schools began to ask and expect more from parents and teachers to work together in educating children. Survey research was used to gather information and analyze factors that contributed to parent involvement or lack of parent involvement. Parents were more apt to be involved in a child’s education throughout the earlier years of education (Becker & Epstein, 1982). The attitude and self-efficacy of a teacher affected the amount of parent involvement and communication between the home and school (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Hoover-Dempsey, 1987). Research showed that
new teachers, a lack of confidence, and teachers who received little help or feedback from home put forth little effort to incorporate parents (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Hoover-Dempsey, 1987).

In addition to analyzing factors that impacted the use of parents within schools studies looked at drawbacks and problems that occurred (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Epstein, 1986). Some teachers had a negative attitude towards utilizing parents because of lack of support at home. Parents were not following through with helping their child complete requested extension activities, which led to negative attitudes for teachers (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Both teachers and parents expressed concerns about the amount of time that was needed to conjure up activities and to complete the different tasks given (Epstein & Becker, 1982).

Overall, during the 1970s and 1980s some parents expressed a strong desire to be included in the education process and felt that they were not being utilized by the schools (Epstein, 1986). Parents were being encouraged to actively participate and teachers were being analyzed to understand in what ways parents were being asked to be involved (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Empirical studies showed different factors for involvement (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Hoover-Dempsey, 1987) and problems that were occurring because of this additional need in education (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Schools had embraced the partnership of working with parents in order to reap the benefits of the partnership.
1990s and 2000s

Research continued to show positive results with the development of parent involvement (Ashton et al., 2008; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Gestwicki, 2007; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ingram et al., 2007; Murphy, 2003; Patterson, 2009). Studies showed parent involvement improved academic achievement (Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Swick, 2004), student sense of well being (Epstein, 2008; Murphy, 2003), better attendance (Epstein, 2008; Ingram et al., 2007), positive attitudes from students and parents towards academics and behavior (Epstein, 2008; Gestwicki, 2007; Ingram et al., 2007), an increase in the amount of time parents and children spend together at home (Cochran & Dean, 1991; Schoor, 1997), and parent satisfaction (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Swick, 2004). With so many constructive contributions of parent involvement literature, research studies turned to examine how teachers and schools were reaching out to the home.

By the 1990s parents were actively involved and taking on larger roles within the schools. Some parents were working with schools, sometimes on a daily basis to establish academic and social goals (Comer & Hanes, 1991). While some parents were pursuing relationships within the schools other parents held different beliefs about their role in a child’s education (Lareau, 2000). It then became the teachers’ job to help empower parents to actively participate in their child’s education (Cochran & Dean, 1991; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Morrow & Malin, 2004).

In order to create this partnership a teacher needed to be aware of different factors that might affect the home/school relationship and learn how to work with those
problems (Carlisle et al., 2005; Knopf & Swick, 2008; Watkins, 1997). A few of the factors that impacted the home/school relationship were the amount of effort being made at home to extend learning (Baker, 1999; Lareau, 2000), the degree to which school communicated with the home (Knopf & Swick, 2008; Watkins, 1997), and how parents perceived communications between the home and school (Drummond, 2004; Watkins, 1997). Teachers and schools were left to handle these issues. It became their responsibility to work at improving relationships between the home and school.

With the teacher becoming more immersed at providing communication to the home (Carlisle et al., 2005; Knopf & Swick, 2008; Watkins, 1997) and encouraging parents to be active participants in their child’s learning (Cochran & Dean, 1991; Gestwicki, 2007; Ingram et al., 2007) the need to understand culture and home life for students arose. Books were written to teach educators how to communicate and create open classrooms for the many diverse backgrounds (Casper & Schultz, 1999; Gestwicki, 2007; Phillips, 1988). These books provide insights to understanding different ways of living and accommodating for the diverse student population.

However, a large problem remained with the majority of current teachers and lack of training. Currently more and more education programs are incorporating courses that teach prospective educators how to work with parents. However, many current teachers have received little or no training. With the government mandating more regulations (No Child Left Behind, 2002) for parent involvement teachers are forced to make changes within their methods of involvement with parents.
Even though incorporating parents into the education system has been mandated it does not erase teachers and parents concerns about being involved within the classroom. A few of these concerns involve the amount of time it takes to prepare for parent involvement, the possibility of disagreement between the parent and teacher, and the scrutiny teachers are afraid they might receive. Parents on the other hand suffer from uncertainty of how to contribute to the classroom, lack of time, their own beliefs, and possible language barriers (Aparicio & Dorris, 2006; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Drummond & Stipek, 2004). In order to overcome these obstacles teachers have to understand that time is needed to establish trust with the parents (Gestwicki, 2007).

The 1990s to present show that the term parent involvement had grown to encompass more than conferences and homework. Parent involvement has become a partnership between the home and school. Parents are being asked to take on more collaborative roles and to be involved in decisions about education. Both qualitative and quantitative research has been conducted to provide information for teachers on how to incorporate parents and to better communicate with the home. Teachers have been found to lack training in how to deal with many of the demands that involving parents requires. Research conducted provides data that urges universities to train and teach pre-service teachers how to utilize parents (Baum & Swick, 2007; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). The dynamics of family life are again changing which requires teachers to embrace an openness in order to maintain communication with all types of parents. Major steps are being made in uniting the school and home, but many problems still existed.
What is Parent Involvement?

In order to understand the relationship between the home and school it is necessary to define what is meant by parent involvement. This review of literature shows that there are many different definitions and interpretations for the term. Teachers and parents view parent involvement in different ways. In order to understand the experiences of parents and teachers in relation to each other it is necessary to be aware of each individual’s idea of what parent involvement is. Looking at literature reaffirms the idea that parent involvement is constantly being re-conceptualized. No set definition exists and with time the meaning continues to remain in a constant state of change. The idea behind parent involvement differs depending on one’s perspective.

According to Epstein (1986), *parent involvement* refers to parent participation in children’s learning activities at home and at school. This extends to providing a home environment that supports their learning, engaging in positive communications with the school, giving assistance and support in and out of school, receiving needed guidance and tools that support their children’s learning, and gaining empowerment to become decision-makers in the school community. In this study parent involvement is treated as family participation in children’s lives whether in or out of school and the parents’ awareness of their responsibilities in their children’s education.

Annette Lareau (2003) discovered in her study of middle, working, and poor class families that a difference in beliefs resided in what a parents’ role in education entailed. For the middle class, parents took a proactive role with feelings of entitlement and a sense of being equals with teachers. These parents actively took charge of their child’s
education and would interject if they did not feel that the needs of their child were being met. The working and poor class held different beliefs. Parents found their role to be the provider, giving their child basic necessities to survive such as food, clothing, and shelter. For these parents little time was spent being actively involved within the school walls, for this was the teachers’ domain.

Delpit (1995) examines the African American beliefs on parent involvement. Similar results were found to Lareau (1999) with African Americans entrusting education to the authoritative figure—the teacher. These parents believe that it is the teachers’ job to maintain control of the classroom, establish trust with the students, set standards and educate children to excel in education. This in turn leads to a separation between school and home and what seems to many to suggest that African Americans are silenced when it comes to education.

In addition to the differing perspectives of parents, teachers too hold different beliefs about the role of the parent in education (Brantlinger, 2003; Graue & Brown, 2003; Lawson, 2003). Teachers who worked with students from a poorer socioeconomic status were found to have differing beliefs than teachers who worked with middle class students (Brantlinger, 2003). Teachers who worked with the poor found that through their experiences stereotypes of poor parents were exploited and dismissed. Instead what formed within the teachers who worked with the poor was an understanding of what parents were capable of accomplishing. They also became more aware of daily life occurrences that brought about an understanding for the families. On the opposite end of the spectrum teachers of the middle class held strong opinions about poor class parents
and their involvement while experiencing strong participation from parents on a regular basis within the classroom walls. Discrepancies were found in regards to parent involvement along with strong opinions about the opposite strata (Brantlinger, 2003).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) provided a model that suggests why some parents are more actively involved within their child’s education. The model examines a parents’ efficacy for helping their children, knowledge of educational material, opportunities to participate, and amount of time available. These factors were found to contribute to the amount of involvement. Parents who displayed these attributes were found to influence their child’s education through means of modeling, reinforcement, and additional instruction.

According to Gestwicki (2007) the terms family involvement and parent involvement are used interchangeably, and in Home, School, and Community Relations she called parent or family involvement “an all-purpose term used to describe all manner of parent-program interaction: policy making, parent education, fund-raising, volunteering time, and even the simple exchange of information of various sorts with staff” (p. 127). Rockwell, Andre, and Hawley (1995) defined parent involvement as the process of engaging parents or families in activities whether at home or in an educational setting. For the purpose of this study parent involvement is seen as family participation in a child’s education.

A key concept in parent involvement is the parent’s realization that they themselves are a child’s first teacher and that family must remain involved in their children’s education after they enter school. Parent involvement is determined by the
parents’ level of understanding of teachers’ responsibilities and the crucial role that parents play in children’s lives. Another component influencing the degree of parent involvement is the teachers’ attitudes and willingness to involve and work with families, which influence the quality of family–teacher relationships and involvement. In this respect, family involvement depends on both parents’ and teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards working and communicating with one another.

**Advantages for Parent Involvement**

Within the home/school relationship research has been gathered to show benefits as well as problems that exist between parents and teachers because of involvement or lack of involvement (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Brantlinger; 2003; Coleman et al., 1966; Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Becker, 1982; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Haynes et al., 1989; Kaplan, 1950; Lareau & Horvat 1999; Lightfoot, 1981; Murphy, 2003; Schoor, 1997). By understanding the literature that exists we can better analyze the perceptions and experiences that parents and teachers face in their working relationship today. This complex relationship offers insight into the growth and learning experiences of children.

Looking at the relationship between the family and the school, benefits can arise on different levels that involve the child, the parent, and the teacher. A child that witnesses positive interaction between home and school shows a more optimistic attitude toward school (Ashton, 2008; Cochran, 1987; Epstein et al., 1997; Ingram et al., 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Spaggiari, 1998). In addition to a positive outlook towards learning, parent involvement was found to promote better student performance academically (Ashton,
Parent involvement impacted student attendance (Epstein, 2008; Ingram et al., 2007), which is linked to student achievement. A students’ sense of self-worth has also been connected to the involvement of families within education (Coleman, 1987; Comer, 1986; Epstein, 2008; Murphy, 2003). These benefits contribute to the general well being of the student in relation to education.

Parents also gain from the establishment of a positive relationship between home and school. By working with teachers, parents are sharing their responsibilities and receiving support in raising their child (Gestwicki, 2007). Teachers can provide resources and suggestions for helping parents and families in the area of education (Lally et al., 2001). This guidance provides parents with support that leads to a better sense of self-esteem and empowerment in taking an active role in their child’s learning (Cochran & Dean, 1991; Morrow & Malin, 2004; Schoor, 1997). An increase in parent esteem leads to more involvement and participation within a child’s educational experience.

In addition to the many advantages that parent involvement has on the child and parent, a teacher also experiences benefits from the home/school relationship. Through discussions and interactions with parents, teachers may hear positive remarks and feedback about a child’s learning experience. This feedback leads to an increase in confidence and efficacy in a teacher’s ability to teach (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Preece & Cowden, 1997). Parents also offer insight and
knowledge that enables teachers to be more effective with instruction (Gestwicki, 2007). In an interview with Reggio Emilia (Spaggiari, 1998), Emilia stated:

The contribution of ideas, expectations, and abilities offered by families to the schools help the teachers to perceive the link with families as something that enriches rather than interferes...even with the best-prepared teachers and in the richest situations, there are areas that can only be realized through sharing and interactive choices. (p 111)

Parents are a child’s first teacher and the information that they can provide can lead to an enriched learning experience. Teachers might also find other sources of information that can be useful in educating children. Parents might be skilled or educated in areas that could be useful in teaching (Gestwicki, 2007). For example, if a parent is employed as a dentist then a teacher might utilize this parent’s knowledge as an active participant within the classroom. In this case, parents might serve as resource materials and reinforce the education for children. Many benefits exist when a positive relationship has been established between the parent and teacher. These benefits embrace not only the child but the parent and teacher as well.

Literature has established the necessity for sustaining positive relationships between the home and school. While many home/school relationships reap the benefits of working together others have found that issues or conflicts lead to a strain in the partnership of the parent and teacher. The following section will explore literature that evokes an awareness of problems that occur within the home/school relationship.
**Struggles Within the Home/School Relationship**

While there is an extensive amount of literature that shows the possibilities that parent involvement has within education, research also shows that problems exist between the home/school relationship (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Duncan, 2004; Horvat & Lareau, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Longaretti & Wilson, 2006; Sanders, 2008; Swick, 2003). Teachers share different philosophies that affect the amount of parent involvement generated throughout the school year (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Epstein, 1986; Graue, 2005). While some teachers employ strong communication and relationships between themselves and the families, others have opposing beliefs (Greenwood et al., 1972; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Sanders, 2008). Research shows that teachers with fewer years experience and a lower sense of efficacy have a tendency to keep parents at bay (Baum & Swick, 2007; Becker & Epstein, 1982; Dembo & Gibson, 1985). These teachers typically exhibit a lack of confidence in their own abilities, which inevitably creates a sense of unease in dealing with communicating to parents and families.

Issues may arise in parent/teacher relationships because some parents feel that teachers are invading their home space, while teachers might feel that parents are intruding upon their school space (Duncan, 2007; Kaplan, 1950; Lightfoot, 1981). In establishing a working relationship between the home and school a fine line can be easily crossed in invading the others domain. Parents may express themselves and confront teachers when new ways of implementing curriculum are established within the classroom. This creates unease for a parent when their child is exposed to school in a
way in which they are not familiar (Drumond & Stipek, 2004; Duncan, 2007; Kaplan, 1950; Kropp, 1956). Other parents have found that their ideas and suggestions fall upon the deaf ears of professionals and are unaccepted (Garriott et al., 2000; Johnson, 1977; Lake & Billingsley, 2000).

In addition to the power struggle that takes place between the home and school, stereotypes are often cast by teachers onto parents and vice versa. Teachers potentially hold beliefs about parents based on culture, race, and socioeconomic status that might influence their practice with incorporating parents into education (Brantlinger; 2003; Lareau & Horvat 1999; Lightfoot, 1981) Inequalities exist within schools and home advantage contributes to this divide. Parents hold different beliefs about their role in education with some parents actively participating, at times too much, in their child’s learning. While other parents struggle to provide the necessary means of survival for their children (Lareau, 2003; Lareau & Shumar, 1996).

Lareau (2003) looks at the home life of children from across the socioeconomic strata. Her in depth look into the lives of these families provides an understanding of the struggles that the middle, working, and poor class encounter. For the middle class parents are trying to establish a sense of entitlement for their children where social and cultural capital provides a distinct advantage by having access to professionals for advice, confidence to approach teachers, and many other benefits. However, within these homes struggling students encounter pressure to excel and are faced with structured lives that leave little room for creativity.
At the other end of the spectrum students whose families are comprised of the working and poor class families struggle in their working relationship with the school. Their fundamental belief resides in natural growth where a child will naturally grow and learn at their own pace (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Lareau, 1987, 2003). Additionally, parents’ priority is survival. The working and lower class parents are working at providing the necessities: home, food, shelter, and clothing. Schooling and education is a teacher’s responsibility. A lack of social and cultural capital contributes to a misunderstanding that poor families do not care about education (Brantlinger, 2003; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Horvat et al., 2003; Lott, 2001, 2003).

Another problem that occurs for both parents and teachers in maintaining a positive relationship is time. In order for involvement to be beneficial a great deal of planning on behalf of a teacher is necessary (Epstein & Becker, 1982; Gestwicki, 2007). It is a time consuming task to create materials for parents to use in order to enrich a child’s learning experience. Parents then are required to take their time to engage their child in the enrichment activity.

Understanding the pros and cons of the relationship that is built between the home and school is necessary in order to analyze the perceptions of teachers. While research has shown that there is a multitude of possibilities and problems that exist within involvement each individual have formed their own knowledge base. This knowledge is based on an individual’s experiences and beliefs that can best be understood through a mixed method approach that will look at possible contributing factors that have led to their current state of involvement.
Factors That Contribute to the Problems of Parent Involvement

It is important to understand that involving parents and families in education has many benefits that extend to the child (Epstein, 2008; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Brissie, 1987; Ingram et al., 2007; Murphy, 2003; Patterson, 2009) the parent, (Cochran & Dean, 1991; Gestwicki, 2007; Lally et al., 2001; Schoor, 1997) and the teacher (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Gestwicki, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Preece & Cowden, 1997; Spaggiari, 1998). However, problems can occur within the home/school relationship that ultimately affects the child (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Epstein, 1986; Greenwood et al., 1972; Kaplan, 1950; Lightfoot, 1981). In order to reap the benefits of parent involvement it is critical to analyze what possible factors might lead to problems within the relationship of a parent and teacher so that future incidents will be better understood or avoided.

Pressure—A Requirement to Involve Parents

It has become standard practice in teaching that parents are included in education through means of conferences, (Cawelti, 1966; Gestwicki, 2007; LeFevre, 1967; Stephens, 2006; Stephens & Tollafield, 2003), parent night, and parent teacher associations (Brooks, 1946; Cheunq et al., 2008). However, a shift to incorporate parents more frequently into schools and education has been stressed by administrators (Beck & Murphy, 1999; Ingersoll, 1996; Knopf & Swick, 2007), organizations (NAEYC; PTA, 1997) and mandated by the government (NASBE, 1991; NCLB, 2002; U.S. Dept. of HHs, 1998). These mandates place pressure upon the teacher to step out of a comfort
zone and address the need to involve parents in the education process. For many current
teachers issues arise in not knowing how to reach out to parents and families. The need
to address preservice teachers and provide support in dealing with parents is being dealt
with in numerous schools that have added family involvement into their curriculum
practices (Baum & Swick, 2007; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009).

Today education is being faced with a controversial government mandate known
as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB requires students to take an achievement test
where by the year 2014 one hundred percent of the student population will pass the test.
This unrealistic goal has sent the field of education into a whirlwind behavior where
schools, administrators, and teachers are feeling the pressure to meet adequate yearly
progress. Adequate yearly progress is a measurement defined by NCLB that allows the
U.S. Department of Education to determine how every public school and school
district in the country is performing academically according to results on standardized
tests. As more and more schools fail to meet the yearly goal of achievement the question
of who takes the blame becomes inevitable. Teachers are faced with the brunt of the
responsibility, but what about the parents? It is the districts and schools that receive
failing marks. This makes the district as a whole unappealing to families. While
excellent teachers may work within the walls of failing schools parents and the
communities have a hard time looking past the end score of NCLB. NCLB takes a
working home/school relationship and pits the two sides against each other in an effort to
place blame for the failure of a high risk test (Wherry, 2007).
Increased Expectations

Just as schools and teachers feel the pressures of government mandates, parents too are placed under the microscope to accept responsibility in the areas of participation and achievement for their child. A look at the history of parent involvement over the past decades shows that expectations for parents to be involved in their child’s education have grown (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Breivogel & Bessent, 1972; Brooks, 1946; Cawelti, 1966; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Jones & Savage, 1972; Kaplan, 1950; Pettengill, 1939). Parents are expected to participate in conferences, (Cawelti, 1966; Gestwicki, 2007; LeFevre, 1967; Starbeck, 1950) extend learning at home, (Epstein, 1986; Epstein & Becker, 1982), participate in school decisions (Epstein 1985) and much more. The increase in expectations for what is expected of their children and themselves creates tension that ultimately gets released onto the school and teacher.

Cultural Capital

Another factor that contributes to problems between the home and school is cultural capital. The theory behind cultural capital was developed by Pierre Bourdieu and delves into the inequality that exists due to cultural knowledge or lack of it (Bourdieu, 1977, 1977). For parents an example of cultural capital might be the professionals that they have access too. For many middle class parents if questions arise about education they can simply turn to a friend or family member that perhaps might be a teacher or educator. Having access to easily accessible advice and help gives these parents inside information on how to help their child succeed within the schools. However, for many working and poor class parents their network of friends and family might not include
similar networks as the middle class. Therefore advice and suggestions that might give parents’ children an advantage in school is never taken (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lareau, 2000).

**Home Advantage**

Lareau shows how cultural and social capital creates issues between the home and school (2000). Lareau completed an ethnographic study that looked at schools and families from a middle class and working/poor class area. She found middle class families spent quite a bit of time working within the school walls. Parents were checking in on their child to see if his/her progress matched that of the class and a competitive element for success was established even in the elementary years. Children whose parents were overly involved in their education were found to experience physical ailments due to stress and pressure to succeed and learn. Parents spent an extreme amount of time worrying and tutoring a child in any area that was not found to be proficient. Issues formed between the home and school when parents requested that their child be placed into certain classrooms and not others. Many parents would stop at nothing to see their child succeed!

On the opposite end of the spectrum in the working/poor class, school parents were found to be subdued when it came to participation within the schools. Parents would only become involved if a problem arose in areas that were not always academic. Education was not stressed as much at home and students were often responsible for extending their own learning. In some of the cases English was the second language spoken at home and parents were unable to help reinforce what was taught in school.
Parents were embarrassed about their own lack of knowledge and so they would not reach out for help from the school. Teachers’ efforts were usually unsuccessful in communicating and working with families to enrich the education of a child (Lareau, 2000).

Socioeconomic status, mandates from the government, and everyday stresses of reaching achievement are a few of the factors that lead to problems within schools. Each home/school relationship is different and each one is exposed to environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that can cause problems to occur. This study seeks to learn more about a teacher’s perspectives and experiences in dealing with the home/school relationship. In addition it looks to understand how a teacher perceives and changes his/her practice based on interactions with parents.

**Summary**

Over time the roles families have played in education have grown and changed immensely. Parents have become what is perceived as a pivotal point in the success or failure of a child’s education. Many benefits have been studied that contribute to a child’s growth. It has become necessary as well as mandated that teachers and schools work together with families to improve the quality of education. However, along with these mandates and the pressure to involve parents and families in education comes a downside to parent involvement. A divide has been established that continues to show how unequal the schools systems are by setting expectations that certain socioeconomic stratus are able to meet while others flounder in an attempt to provide the necessities in life (Brantlinger, 2003; Lareau, 2000, 2003).
By studying the relationship between the home and school I narrow my focus to examine the teacher perspective in dealing with day to day conflicts that occur within high and low income schools. This study seeks to gain insight into why problems occur within the family/school relationship, how those problems are dealt with, and effects of the aftermath of a conflict between the parent and teacher. Through this understanding the hope is that current and future teachers as well as parents can be better equipped to work together in educating a child.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Methodology

Research has shown that parent involvement has many benefits; however, as indicated by the literature review, there is still a need to research teachers’ perspectives when conflicts occur. This study has gained an understanding of both the positive and negative experiences of the teacher, when conflicts or negative encounters occur due to parent involvement. This study employed a mixed methodology. Methodologies included a survey to further clarify parent involvement and experiences that the teachers have had with parents. The study accounted for teacher’s perception of positive and negative encounters with parents, as well as how their relationships have been altered through these interactions. Additionally, a select group of six teachers were invited to provide more in-depth perspectives through interview.

In survey and interview work, teachers recollected from experiences they have had with parents. Both positive and negative encounters were used to provide information about the intricate home/school relationship. Through the use of surveys, current information was gathered to find out how teachers are working with parents and families today. Teachers were asked to share information about how communication takes place between the home and school. In addition open-ended questions attempted to understand how teachers define parent involvement and their own personal experiences in working with parents. Both positive and negative aspects of the working relationship were explored, with a target focus on the outcome of conflict within the relationship. The
survey was distributed to two types of school districts; one representing high income schools and the other representing low income schools.

Based on responses to the survey, participants were selected for further questioning. The main criteria for selecting participants were the answers provided on the survey and the willingness of the participant to speak with the researcher. For the purposes of this study a mixture of participants who have had positive and negative experiences with parents were selected. Past experiences shape the beliefs that impact how a teacher establishes a working relationship with parents and families today (Graue & Brown, 2003). It was crucial to interview teachers who have had what they consider negative encounters to understand how their experiences with parents impact his/her beliefs. In addition, the effects of the encounter on the teacher, the parent, and the child were brought to light to better understand through the lens of the educator. Equally important was interviewing teachers who have had positive experiences in working with parents. It is through the lens of these educators that research was gathered on current practices that are successful in working with parents and families.

**Research Goals and Questions**

This research will contribute to the growing body of literature that is evolving on the topic of parent involvement. While many instances of involvement result in positive outcomes, such as increased academic performance (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ingram et al., 2007) many others, like the amount of time it takes to maintain a relationship, seem to have impacts on teachers in a negative manner (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Duncan, 2004;
Horvat & Lareau, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Longaretti & Wilson, 2006; Sanders, 2008; Swick, 2003). These bad experiences can be irreversible and ultimately lead to a change in beliefs regarding family involvement within the classroom. Hyun (2006) acknowledges that there are experiences or attitudes that somehow, whether intentionally or unintentionally, create views or interpretations of our world. This study gathered information about teachers’ experiences with parents and looks at understanding the teachers’ interpretations of their encounters and how those interactions led to change within their beliefs and practices.

The purpose of this study was to explore the teachers’ perspective in working with the relationship that exists between the home and the school. It will contribute to the research exploring teacher experiences in dealing with home/school conflict situations. A look at survey responses provided a base of knowledge about teachers’ general experiences in working with parents. From these responses participants were selected to engage in further in-depth responsive interviews. Each educator was asked a series of questions that ultimately lead to a better understanding of the teacher’s perspective of working with parents and how he/she has dealt with parent conflict situations. Specifically the questions that informed this research are as follows: How do early childhood teachers view working with parents? What are their positive and negative encounters in maintaining the home/school relationship? What are their reactions to these encounters? In addition, the following research questions were used to investigate that issue.
• How do early childhood teachers at high/low income schools communicate with parents?
• What are the attitudes of teachers towards working with parents in high/low income schools?
• What happens when conflicts occur in the early childhood parent/teacher relationship?
• How do early childhood teachers at high/low income schools respond to conflict situations with parents?
• What types of positive outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?
• What types of negative outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?
• How do teachers of high and low socioeconomic class students perceive the families and the student after a conflict has occurred?
• How do teachers of high and low socioeconomic class students feel they are perceived by parents after a conflict has occurred?
• In what ways has the parent/teacher relationship been altered after a conflict or disagreement has taken place?
• How do parent/teacher relationships differ depending on the socioeconomic status of the school?

**Research Design and Method**

In order to best answer the research questions a mixed method design was used. This research combined both the quantitative and qualitative components of research through the use of a self-report survey and in-depth interviews. A mixed method
research design was used to better understand teachers’ general positive and negative experiences with parents and to explore how teachers are affected by conflict situations.

Quantitative research describes a study using numbers and statistics as opposed to words (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Within Wiersma and Jurs’ (2005) *Research Methods in Education* the quantitative aspect of this research would be considered nonexperimental which means: “it is broad in scope ranging from status quo studies to ex post facto research, which may be causal-comparative or correlational in nature” (p. 156). This research focuses on subjects who were surveyed on their current practices and experiences in working with parents.

The survey used in this study provided a comparison of two school districts; one who is representational of a high socio-economic status and one who is representation of a low socio-economic status based on the free and reduced lunch program. A web based questionnaire was administered to teachers representing high and low income schools. Through responses to the quantitative portion of this project the foundation for selecting the participants for the qualitative aspect of this study was established.

According to Schwandt’s (2001) *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry* the word qualitative refers to:

- Social inquiry that have their intellectual roots in hermeneutics,
- phenomenological sociology, and the Verstehen tradition . . . qualitative inquiry may broadly mean that it aims at understanding the meaning of human action. (p. 213)
The use of qualitative method was selected because this study wanted to understand the experiences that teachers have in working with parents. In particular, it looked to explore teachers’ positive and negative interactions that occur within the home/school relationship. Additionally, it aimed at understanding teacher reaction to situations that emerge with parents.

Qualitative methodology was used in part within this study not only to understand the meaning behind the participants’ experiences but also to understand the particular context by which individuals are influenced (Maxwell, 2005). Through the use of in depth interviews this study inquired into not only particular situations that occurred between the home and school but an overall essence of how teachers perceive working with parents. Qualitative methods offered a deeper understanding of experiences and events that helped shape the beliefs and practices that the teachers currently utilize. In addition, it allowed for the exploration of thoughts, feelings, and reflective behavior that might take place after an interaction with a parent.

Within qualitative research there are many different design techniques that can be applied to gathering research. This study utilized the narrative inquiry strand. Participants in this study engaged in dialogue and shared narratives about experiences they had relating to experiences within the home/school relationship. This method was selected because narrative inquiry analyzes the stories of life experiences (Schwandt, 2001). Additionally, this method allowed for the interpretation by the researcher whose main function is to foster reflection and story retelling by the participant (Lieblich et al., 1998). Through the sharing of life experiences information was gathered that lead to a
realization or insight about the participants (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). The use of both qualitative and quantitative research information was gathered to provide insightful knowledge about the home/school relationships.

**Participants and Site**

The site for this study was located in five public school districts in four midwestern cities; the elementary schools were the focus of the research within the districts. These schools were selected based on accessibility and demographics. The percentage of students in each district receiving free or reduced lunch was used in order to determine if a school district is high or low income. Students who receive free lunches come from families with incomes at or below 130% of the poverty level. Those with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals. The schools in districts A are high income. For the purpose of this study high income schools are considered to have less than ten percent of their population receiving free or reduced lunch. The schools in districts B are low income. This was determined by 40% or higher of the total student body receiving free or reduced lunches.

A web-based survey was administered to the kindergarten through third grade teachers at each site. The purpose for selecting these particular grade levels was determined by the amount of interaction that is expected of parents and families early on in a student’s education. Students at the early elementary level are less independent and need more assistance with home activities. In addition, parent involvement at the early stages is seen as a critical feature in not only the academic development but in promoting positive effects on a parent’s self-development and parenting skills (Hill & Taylor, 2004).
The surveys were administered online. Questions on the survey pertained to teachers’ experiences in working with parents. Teachers were asked to comment about positive and negative interactions or problems that arose when working with a parent. From the responses given six teacher participants were selected for the interview from the last question on the survey as described next.

Teachers were selected to participate in the qualitative aspect of this research based upon two sets of criterion. First participants had to respond that they were interested in speaking with a researcher to share additional information in a follow up one hour interview. This criterion was important in selecting participants who were able to discuss uncomfortable situations, such as conflict. Thirty-three of the participants left contact information indicating that they were willing to discuss their experiences with a researcher.

The second criteria that were used to select teacher participants were based on how they answered questions about experiences between the home/school. Each of the thirty-three surveys was furthered explored. Responses given to questions 17, 18, 25, 27, 31, 33, and 34 helped guide participant selection (see Appendix A). This criterion was important to identify, for the purpose of this study conflict situations. In some cases participants skipped multiple questions or indicated that they had never had a negative encounter with a parent. These four survey participants were not contacted.

Initially, 18 survey participants were contacted based on their responses to the questions mentioned above. In particular these 18 participants might have mentioned that they had a high amount of contact with parents and indicated an interesting negative
experience that occurred with a parent for question 31. However, after additional attempts to contact possible participants only four interviews were secured. The interview participant search was then extended to include an additional 11 invitations. These invitations went out to the remaining participants that indicated responses on the survey. After opening up the search two more participants were secured to participate in this segment of the research.

Based on this criterion the following six participants were selected. Three participants represented the high income schools. Joe is a mid 30 year old male, White second grade teacher. He has one daughter and has been teaching for thirteen years in second grade at the same school. Ann is a White, mid 30 year old female. She has one son. Ann taught first grade for one year at a different high income school and then moved into her current district where she taught first grade for one year and then second grade for an additional eleven years. Alexa is a White, 40 year old female. She has two sons. Alexa worked for an aquatic amusement center doing educational programs to start her career. She then shifted into the private schools for a total of five years. After she had her second child Alexa took time off to raise her family. She eventually went back into teaching where she worked in a private school, but after one year she was able to secure a job in a high income public school as a teacher aide. Alexa was able to then move into a teaching position where she has now taught for a total of fourteen years in second grade.

Three interview participants represented the low income school districts. Sara is a White, mid 30 year old female. She has two daughters. Sara began her career teaching
junior high special education at a high income school. She then moved to second grade within the same district for one year. Sara then switched to the low income school district that she currently works for and has been teaching kindergarten there for the past nine years. Erin is a White, 50 year old female. She has two children. Erin started her career teaching sixth grade for a low income school district. She then moved to the fifth grade within the same district, where she taught for another five years. Erin took 10 years off to raise her family. She made the move back into education teaching GED classes. After six years working with adults Erin began teaching half day at a low income school district. One year later she was hired to teach first grade full time and has taught in the same low income school district for eleven years. Patty is a White, 40 year old female. She does not have any children. Patty was hired in her low income school district after her student teaching experience. Within her district she has taught first, second and third grade. Patty has been teaching for 26 years at the same school. Additional information on each interview participant can be found in chapter 4.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The described mixed methodology of survey and interview was preceded by submission of an Internal Review Board for human subjects. Both school districts approved the study and participation by teachers was voluntary. All participants were informed of the confidentiality of the research and signed permission forms.

**Design and Development of the Instruments**

Phase one occurred prior to submission of the Internal Review Board for human subjects and defense of the written proposal. It involved creating a valid survey to collect
information and to assist in the selection of the interview participants. According to Wiersma and Jurs (2005) survey research is “research that deals with the incidence, distribution, and relationships of educational, psychological, and sociological variables in nonexperimental settings” (p. 492). The type of survey that will be administered is a web based questionnaire. A web based questionnaire is an on line instrument that offers respondents with a selection of answer choices or an opportunity to react to a statement by typing out a response or picking from a group of selected answers (Dillman et al., 2009). The researcher followed Dillman’s (2009) Tailored Design Method (TDM) in the design of the instrument because “this method shifts from a one-size-fits-all approach to one in which solutions are tailored to most effectively and efficiently deal with the contingencies of different populations and survey situations” (p. 12). In the case of this research, the survey method will enable the researcher to study teacher attitudes, reactions and experiences in working with parents and families. In addition, this method will allow for the researcher to gather current information on how teachers communicate with parents and their positive and negative experiences in working with parents and families.

A survey questionnaire was developed by the researcher (see Appendix A), which was divided into five sections to collect general information. Section one, consisted of seven questions, and was intended to gather basic demographic information about the respondents. In this section participants will have the opportunity to identify gender, what grade level was taught, number of years of teaching, and the degree of education received. Additionally, respondents will indicate whether or not he/she has had any prior
training in the area of parent involvement. The demographic data will provide the researcher with background information about the participant.

Section two, comprised of four questions, was designed to elicit information about the general class composition. Questions were created to generate data on the number of students in each class, if special needs students were included in the classroom, and the general boy to girl ratio. The classroom data will provide the researcher with background information necessary to better understand the environmental perspective of the participants’ responses.

The purpose of section three, composed of seven questions, was to understand the manner in which teachers communicate with parents. Questions pertained to the methods used to communicate with parents and the preferred choice for each teacher. In addition questions were created to gather an idea of the frequency in which parents communicated with teachers and the preferred method for parents to communicate. The manner of communication in which teachers communicate with parents and parents communicate with teachers will provide the researcher with current methods that the school and home use to maintain a relationship. Finally, this section seeks to identify teachers who have had involvement with parents that he/she perceives as being overly involved in their child’s education. This information will help the researcher identify possible participants for the qualitative portion of this research, in addition to understanding a teacher’s current environment in regards to working with parents.

Section four, composed of eleven questions, examined teacher encounters with working with parents. Questions pertained to both positive and negative experiences that
teachers have had with parents. Teachers will be asked to write open-ended responses describing both a positive and a negative encounter they have experienced with a parent or family member. In addition, questions will be asked to inform how the encounter was communicated or resolved. This information will provide the researcher with data on different scenarios that have taken place between teachers and parents. For the purpose of this paper, the written answers describing the positive and negative encounters will be further used to select participants for an in-depth interview.

Finally, section five, made up of four questions will explore the outcomes of parent encounters. Teachers will be asked to write about positive outcomes that resulted from a negative encounter or conflict situation. In addition to positive outcomes, negative outcomes will also be explored through a series of questions that inquire about teachers experiences with unresolved situations. These answers will also be used to further select participants for an in-depth interview.

**Validity and Reliability**

In order to establish validity, two panels of experts were invited to examine the questionnaire and provide feedback related to the legitimacy of the instrument. One panel of experts was selected based on their knowledge of questionnaire and survey format. The second panel of experts has backgrounds in early childhood education. Both panels were asked to study the instrument to determine content and face validity of the questionnaire. Each expert was asked to complete a content validation form adapted from Chen (2002). The structure of the validation form was kept the same, where experts were asked to critique each survey question based on clarity and appropriateness to the
research topic. The actual content within the validation form was modified to reflect the topic of teachers’ experiences in working with parents. The content validation form was emailed to each panel member and asked for a review of the items and questions on the survey for face and content validation (see Appendix B). In addition, a cover letter (see Appendix C) inviting their participation in this study, explaining the purpose of the study, and containing directions for establishing face and content validation was attached to the e-mail.

After reviewing the feedback from the first panel many problems were illuminated and it was clear that additional research was needed on developing survey instruments. Comments from the panel focused on concerns that survey questions measured more than one item. In addition, the panel suggested looking over questions to make sure they contributed information for my research goals and objectives. Based on these suggestions more in-depth studying took place. Arlene Fink’s (2003) The Survey Kit, 2nd edition was consulted to assist in the revision of the survey instrument.

Committee members, with experience in early childhood education, were asked to review revisions and provide additional responses. Suggestions were given to help clarify questions. Numerous revisions were made with the assistance of the committee members. Some of the more significant changes included eliminating parent/teacher communication questions that were very detailed. For example, the questions how often do you speak with parents on the phone, in person, through handwritten notes, and email were eliminated. These questions were replaced with a more relevant question that asks, in the past seven days approximately how many times have you been contacted by a
parent? Please include emails, phone calls, handwritten or typed notes, and face to face conversations.

The parent encounter section was revamped by including definitions of terms within questions. For example, the terms negative encounter (i.e., An experience with a parent that you perceived as not resulting with a beneficial outcome) and conflict (i.e., A disagreement) were better defined within each question to provide consistency in the understanding of subjective terminology. In addition to defining terms, questions were added that broke down teacher perceptions of the parent and student after a negative encounter or conflict took place.

Finally, another major revision that was made based on suggestions from the committee, included reworking questions in the section on outcomes of parent encounters. Questions were developed that explored both positive and negative outcomes that teachers have experienced as a result of a negative encounter or conflict. These questions were formulated to help participants explore the possibilities that negative encounters and conflicts can have beneficial outcomes. In addition to these changes, the committee suggested creating a chart (see Appendix D) to link each survey question to the research goals and objectives. After reading survey literature (Fink, 2003) and working closely with committee members the revised survey was ready for the second panel of experts.

Reviewers were sent a revised content validation form and were asked to provide comments on the validity of the instrument. Based on their suggestions and recommendations the questionnaire was revised. In view of feedback and in consultation
with my dissertation advisor, I modified one section of the original survey titled, Parent Involvement, by completely removing it from the survey instrument and into planned interview questions. It was determined that terms in certain questions such as, overly involved, adequately involved, and not showing enough involvement were too subjective in their interpretation and therefore better suited for the interview process. In addition, several questions were revised and restated based on suggestions for clarity. These smaller edits were important for clarification of the survey and to aid in understanding and ease for those teachers participating in the survey response.

**Initial Pilot Study of the Survey Instrument**

Nine elementary educators, from a high income school, were solicited to participate in a pilot study of the survey instrument. These teachers will not be participating in the final survey, but were asked to evaluate the instrument and contribute to a discussion regarding the survey instrument. Each teacher received the same verbal directions to complete the survey and provide comments based on their interpretation of the questions. The content validation form (see Appendix E) allowed participants to comment on the clarity and appropriateness of each question regarding the topic and how it was stated. A final column in the content validation form allowed space for teachers to make additional comments about the questions.

Based on written comments made from the nine teachers piloting the instrument, the questionnaire was revised. Two of the teachers expressed confusion over the concept of family involvement workshops and family involvement courses. To solve this issue a brief description of possible workshops or courses was added to help provide clarity.
Additional clarification was needed throughout the survey to provide teachers with a general time frame for exploring their personal reflection for certain questions. This was addressed by stating phrases such as, *in a month time frame, within all of your experiences, currently.* A suggestion was given to add an answer response for question twenty-four. The addition of *go directly to the administrator* was added as a possible answer choice for question twenty-four, when a negative encounter is initiated by a parent (ex: problem with a grade), how do parents mainly choose to communicate? Teacher responses were analyzed for the purpose of checking question clarity and relevance to the topic.

In addition to the written comments, the pilot group of nine teachers, met after school in March, to discuss the questionnaire. Teachers participated in a 30-minute discussion, while the researcher took notes and audio recorded the conversation. Some of the important items that were discussed included a look at the comments that teachers wrote, feelings about the survey, and the importance of the topic to each teacher. Teachers expanded on their written comments verbally and collectively helped to explain any confusion they experienced with the instrument. These comments were addressed in the revisions described above. The researcher led a discussion about the general flow of the survey and there was a consensus that all of the teachers liked the organization. One teacher expressed that the order was thought provoking and that she really had to take a minute to reflect upon her experiences.

Items that were under scrutiny by panel members were addressed by the teachers through the discussion led by the researcher. Affirmation was provided for the inclusion
of the section on classroom information. Teachers felt that this section helped provide background about their class composite, which ultimately may impact their experiences in working with parents. In addition to the class composite, teachers also suggested including questions in the survey or in the interview about teacher knowledge of a students home life. They felt that this information has been helpful in understanding some parent behavior.

General comments were made about how teachers have very little training in working with parents. Six of the teachers were surprised to learn that more and more colleges and universities are offering classes on working with parents and families. They expressed that it would be beneficial for undergraduates, as well as current teachers to be trained in working with families. Within our discussion, the teachers commented that they had each had one experience with a parent that stood above all of the rest. While our conversation did not lead into the sharing of that one experience, teachers made remarks that “it only takes one parent to ruin your school year.” This revelation will be addressed in future interviews with participants. All of these comments were used to revise the questionnaire in preparation for an on-line format construction.

**Pilot Study of the Web Instrument**

A team of experts in the department of Bureau of Evaluation and Research Services provided information and suggestions on how to structure the on-line instrument. These suggestions included the placement of questions on a page. Originally the survey was structured for one question per page, but by grouping questions participants can stay focused on sets of questions at a time without interruptions. In
addition, to achieve a professional look, the inclusion of the Kent State Logo and the background colors of blue and gold were used to stress the representation of Kent State University.

Finally, upon discovery that the majority of the participating school districts planned to forward along the survey link to the teachers it became necessary to add question thirty-five. If participants answer question thirty-four, would you be willing to talk about your interactions and involvement with parents in a one hour interview with a researcher, as yes then he/she will be asked to complete question thirty-five. Question thirty-five states, thank you for expressing interest in participating in a one hour follow up interview. Please indicate your email address and/or telephone number below so that a researcher may contact you to further discuss this option. The web instrument was then constructed by the survey team using a program called Survey Monkey.

Upon completion, the web survey was then piloted with a group of eight teachers and two committee members. Each participant received an email inviting him or her to participate in the survey along with the link to the instrument. Eight teachers were invited to participate on a morning in April before the school day began. These teachers were selected based on their technology ability. When invited to participate in this pilot each teacher was asked to rate his or her ability as advanced, proficient, or poor with using technology. Out of the eight teachers, three teachers rated themselves as advanced, two rated themselves as proficient, and three considered their technology skills to be poor. This was important in evaluating the survey, in order to ensure that all teachers regardless of their technology skills would be able to complete the survey.
Teachers were timed while taking the survey to determine approximately how long the instrument takes to complete. One teacher finished in eight minutes, three teachers finished in ten minutes, two teachers finished in twelve minutes, one teacher finished in fourteen minutes, and one teacher took eighteen minutes to complete the survey. Based on this information the initial letter to teachers will state that the survey takes approximately ten to fifteen minutes to complete.

Teachers were asked to comment about the initial invitation letter and whether or not it would prompt them to respond by completing the survey. All of the teachers commented that the teacher letter was well written and that they would have freely chosen to participate in the survey. One teacher remarked that she liked how the letter mentioned that the researcher was a teacher as well. She felt a stronger connection and draw to participate.

All of the participants were successful at navigating and completing the web survey. Even the three teachers who rated their technology skill level at poor commented that the survey was easy to access and complete. During the survey one teacher asked how to respond to question two, how would you describe your ethnicity? Her question has led to the addition of examples such as, White, Asian-American, and so forth, to guide participants response. No other questions were asked during the administering of the survey.

After the completion of the survey teachers were audio taped in a brief 10-minute discussion to gather their feedback. Teachers stated that this topic was very relevant to teachers today. They found that the survey questions were clear and thought provoking.
One teacher mentioned that she liked that she finally had a chance to reflect upon her encounters. She mentioned that it was refreshing to think about some of the positive outcomes she had experienced. All of the teachers agreed that it was very easy to forget about positive encounters and instead dwell on the negative interactions.

In order to get a better understanding of teachers’ willingness to participate in the one hour interview teachers were asked how they chose to answer question thirty-four, would you be willing to talk about your interactions and involvement with parents in a one hour interview with a researcher. Five of the eight teachers said that they would be willing to participate in an interview. Two of the eight teachers commented that they did not feel that they had time for a one hour interview. One teacher commented that she did not feel comfortable talking with a researcher about her experiences. This information was insightful in understanding teachers’ possible reactions for a lack of interest in participating in an interview.

**Survey Collecting Technique**

Initial contact was made with each participating district to follow protocol for conducting research. All of the districts received a copy of the survey and consent form. Participating districts agreed to forward the initial email inviting teachers to take part in the survey (see Appendix F). Within the initial email a link to the uniform resource locator directed participants to the survey site. Teachers were then directed to the survey site. A participant consent form was available to each participant explaining the purpose of the survey and their ability to refuse to participate (see Appendix G). At this point participants were able to take the survey. Responses from the participants were gathered
and stored within Survey Monkey. In an effort to improve response rate, a follow up email was sent to encourage those participants who had not responded after a one week time frame.

**Interviews**

Once the surveys have been administered and collected the researcher used part of the data to purposefully select participants for an in depth interview. Each response was read and categorized into two groups possible: participants and rejected candidates. The selection of participants was emergent throughout the study. Possible participants were selected based on their answers given on the survey and their willingness to discuss their experiences. A key component to selecting participants for the in depth interview was an examination of the participants responses to their positive and negative encounters with parents. Within the survey these questions were left as open-ended. The encounters that teachers choose to write about helped to narrow down participant selection. In addition, other survey questions were used in determining the best candidates for interviewing (see Appendix F). The data collected helped guide the selection of participants. A variety of teachers were selected from the high/low income schools. Critical colleagues were consulted in order to help select interviewees. Six teachers were selected to conduct in-depth interviews. Each participant was contacted through email to set up a convenient date and time to meet. Participants were asked to sign a written consent form (see Appendix H). Once the participants had been selected the researcher began conducting the interviews and gathered data. The interviews were tape recorded to allow for transcribing.
Interview Questions

The following guiding questions were developed to further explore teachers’
perspectives and experiences with parent and family involvement through semistructured
interviews.

1. Please speak briefly about your teaching experience.
2. What are some of your beliefs and practices in working with parents and
   families?
3. In your survey you wrote about (positive experience) what have been some of
   your additional positive experiences with working with families?
4. What would you say are benefits to parent involvement?
5. In your survey you wrote about (negative experience) can you share a little
   more in detail about this incident, your feelings and perceptions, and the
   outcome?
6. In your survey you expressed that you felt perceived by the parent in a
   (positive, negative, neutral) manner after the negative encounter occurred.
   What happened that led to those perceptions?
7. Parent involvement can be classified into the overly involved parents,
   adequately involved parents, and parents that are not involved enough. How
   would you define parents that overly involved? Adequately involved? And
   parents that are not involved enough?
8. In your encounter that you wrote about how would you classify the type of
   involvement the parents showed?
9. Did you initiate contact with the family or did they initiate contact with you?
10. How was your relationship affected after the encounter?
11. In your survey you wrote about (specific positive outcomes from negative encounters). Have you ever experienced any other type of positive results from a negative situation with a parent?
12. In your survey you wrote about (specific negative outcomes from negative encounters). Have you ever experienced any other type of negative results from a negative situation with a parent?
13. In your teaching career, is there one negative experience that stands out? How did that experience affect you as a teacher?
14. Have you ever adapted your teaching practices due to a parent or family encounter?
15. How involved do you think parents and families should be in school?
16. In the years that you have been teaching what changes have you noticed over time in regards to parent/family involvement?

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this mixed method study took place in two stages. The first stage in data analysis was analyzing the quantitative data collected through the survey questionnaires. This data was analyzed statistically. Data was inserted into software that allowed for statistical analysis. Wiersma and Jurs (2005) defined descriptive statistics as “procedures and measures by which we describe quantitative data” (p. 352). For the purpose of this study the following descriptive and comparative statistics were gathered
to measure the collected data. Once the data had been collected a detailed account of the descriptive statistics was included. However, some general areas that were addressed are any similarities or differences between the high and low income schools. Furthermore, the data was explored to discover whether or not there is significance in the amount of involvement and type (positive, negative, or neutral) of parent encounters that are perceived by the teacher.

In addition to providing quantitative data about the home/school relationship, the survey helped with the identification of participants for the qualitative portion. Answers given on select questions were looked at and compared with one another to decide on possible candidates for future interviews. Furthermore, responses to the survey provided insight into the development of interview questions.

The second phase was to analyze the qualitative data. To assist in the data collection and the data analysis a field log was used by the researcher to gather thoughts and perceptions, the qualitative questions within each survey were analyzed, and all of the interviews were transcribed. Within qualitative research the researcher looks for patterns within the collected data, observations, and interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This information was synthesized based on the interpretation of the researcher. In this instance the gathered data was looked at holistically, and then dissected piece by piece, to finally end up with a holistic view again.

The first step in the qualitative data analysis process was to organize the data. This involved critically analyzing responses given on the Teacher Survey on Parent Involvement to purposively select the participants for the study. Once participants had
been selected and the interviews collected that data was transcribed and field notes were typed. The materials were then read. The goal of the first reading was to gain a general sense of the information gathered and to critically reflect upon the overall meaning: What were the main patterns that have emerged from the data? What were the general impressions and credibility of the information? What was the tone the participants have taken in the ideas they have conveyed? General thoughts were recorded at this stage.

After the initial reading, segmenting and coding the information took place through repeated readings. The process of coding data involves a search through data looking for regularities and patterns for topics or main ideas that the data covers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For example, after rereading interview responses comments that referred to the participant’s own personal family were highlighted in an attempt to document the impact that having a family makes on ones teaching.

Finally, after segmenting the data into codes and patterns the data was read a final time. The final reading was to once again look at the data in a holistic manner aligning the findings to either correspond or not correspond with the literature. As a result of the data analysis the perspectives of teachers was captured in providing information about conflict situations between the home/school.

**Trustworthiness and Validity**

Multiple strategies were used to guarantee internal validity and trustworthiness of the study. In order to address issues of researcher bias a reflective log was kept to ensure that personal feelings, thoughts, personal experiences, and emotions were able to be expressed. By releasing reflective thoughts the researcher’s bias did not interfere and
affect the conducted research. This reflective log was kept throughout the process and was used during the data analysis phase to validate any inconsistencies that emerged between the perceptions of the researcher and what was said by the participants.

In order to strengthen the accuracy and validation of the analysis the concept of triangulation was used. Triangulation is a strategy that compiles different data sources of information that is examined in order to build coherent rationalization for the developed themes (Creswell, 2003). Data triangulation was used by gathering the different data sources from the completed surveys, reflective logs, interviews, and field notes. By using these sources the data gathered was compared and themes were found to remain consistent or problems situations were rechecked.

Another strategy used to validate the findings of this study was member checking. With member checking the researcher solicits feedback from the participants on the findings within the study (Schwandt, 2001). Participants were able to review and clarify the analysis and interpretation of the study. Member checking was conducted by taking the final reports and themes back to the participants to determine the accuracy of the findings. The teachers were given opportunity to view the analysis and were asked questions that relate to the accuracy of the outcome. Some of the questions asked were: Was the data represented correctly? Are there any gaps to the research or anything else that needs to be added?

Finally, a peer debriefer was used to improve the accurateness of the study. This process involved locating a person who will look over and ask questions about the study
so that the findings resonated with others (Schwandt, 2001). Two individuals who are involved in the field of education were asked to look over the data and findings.

**Limitations**

When conducting this research certain limitations were placed upon the findings. A limitation is a possible weakness within the study. By using a purposive sampling procedure the results of the study are not generalizable for all educators. The semi-structured interviews were taken on only a small sample, and the larger survey pool was also limited by a small sample size. Six educators were selected for final interviews.

Another limitation reflected the procedure used to gather the information; the survey. The survey method is limited to those participants who completed the questionnaire. Therefore, those educators who choose to not participate were not represented in the findings.

In addition, the interview method yields to what the participant is willing to share. A participant may skew the information for fear of repercussions, a desire to make themselves look good, the time of year the data was gathered, or other reasons unknown. The researcher assumes by measures of validating that the information provided is accurate, however, there is no way to know for certain if the participant was telling the truth. For these reasons this sample may or may not represent educators in Ohio schools.
CHAPTER IV

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

This study uncovered a large quantity of information. In order to best share the data collected for this study the results have been split into two chapters. Chapter 4 contains the results of the survey, which this chapter will further investigate. Within Chapter 5 the results of the interviews will be explored. Finally, Chapter 6 contains the discussion of the findings.

This chapter contains the survey results of this study. The survey results involve teachers sharing basic information about their backgrounds, class composition, how they communicate with parents, and how they involve parents. In addition, teachers were asked to write about positive and negative encounters that they have experienced and outcomes that had some affect on their practices or their beliefs in working with parents.

Survey Results

Data were analyzed using two different methods. The descriptive data were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). First the descriptive data was explored as a whole to show the demographic information of the participants and to gather current practices that are being used by teachers to involve parents. Next the descriptive data were split into two categories, high and low income, for a comparative analysis that explored any similarities or differences in the survey responses. The qualitative portions of the survey were examined by looking for patterns within the responses and coded based on overarching themes that emerged.
Descriptive Data

Personal Information

To begin the survey participants were asked eight questions to provide the researcher with demographics and background information that pertains to teacher training in the area of parent involvement.

Gender

Table 1 shows that 87.2% of the survey participants were female and 12.8% were male.

Ethnicity

Participants were asked to select their ethnicity from the following choices: Asian, Pacific Islander, or Asian American; Black or African American; Hispanic, Latino, or Mexican American; Multiracial; Native American or American Indian; White, Caucasian, or Anglo American; or other. Table 1 shows that 92.8% of the participants were White, Caucasian, or Anglo American, 6.4% were Black or African American and 0.8% were Multiracial.

Education Level

One hundred (80%) of the 125 participants taking the survey have received their Masters degree. Twenty (20%) of the participants have received only their bachelors degree (Table 1). Zero of the participants that took the survey had their doctorate degree.

School Income Level

Of those who answered the demographic section, 56.8% of the teacher educators taught in high income public schools and 43.2% taught in low income public schools.
**Grade Taught**

Participants were asked to select what grade they currently taught from the following choices: kindergarten; first; second; third; or other. Of the 125 participants that responded to the survey 25 were kindergarten teachers, 16 taught first grade, 25 taught second grade, 24 taught third grade, and 35 held a different position that worked with kindergarten through third grade students.

**Years of Experience**

The number of years of participants’ teaching experience has been grouped into five categories: less than five years of teaching experience; 5–10 years; 10–15 years; 15–20 years; and more than 20 years. Thirteen (10.4%) of the participants had taught for fewer than 5 years, 41 (32.8%) taught between 5-10 years, 36 (28.8%) participants taught between 10-15 years, 16 (12.8%) taught between 15-20 years, and 18 (14.4%) taught over 20 years. One (0.8%) participant skipped this question.

**Attendance of Parent Involvement Course**

Participants were asked whether or not they had ever taken a course on parent or family involvement. Of the 125 participants 52 teachers (41.6%) had taken a course that pertained to the topic of parent involvement, while 72 teachers (57.6%) did not take a course. One (0.8%) participant skipped this question.

**Attendance of Parent Involvement Workshop**

Table 1 shows that 44.8% of the participants have attended a workshop on parent involvement, while 55.2% of the teachers have not.
Table 1

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Classroom Information

After completion of participants’ personal information, each teacher was asked a series of questions about his or her current classroom (see Table 2).

Class Size

Eight teachers (6.4%) had class sizes that had 16 or fewer students. The majority of the participants, 81.6%, had class sizes that ranged between 17 to 26 students. Eight teachers (6.4%) submitted answers that reflected a teaching specialty or an interventionist position, which works with over 30 children in a school day. Seven participants (5.6%) skipped this question.

Special Education Students

Of the 125 participants, 98 (78.4%) teachers had students in their classroom that had been identified with special needs. Twenty-three teachers did not have any students that had been identified and four participants skipped this question.

Number of Boys

Only 12% of the teachers had less than eight boys in their classroom. The majority at 56.8% of the teachers had between 9 and 13 boys. There were 12 teachers (9.6%) that taught over 14 boys and 13 teachers (10.4%) skipped this question.

Number of Girls

Out of the 125 participants, 32 teachers (25.6%) had less than eight girls in the classroom. Seventy-six teachers (60.8%) had between 9 and 13 girls in their classroom. Only six teachers (4.8%) taught over 14 girls and 13 participants (10.4%) skipped this question.
Table 2

*Classroom Information*

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Table 2 (continued)

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*Number of Boys*

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### Number of Girls

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Table 2 (continued)

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<td>Missing</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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**Communicating With Parents**

Within this section of the survey teachers were asked a series of questions to gather information on how they primarily communicate with parents. Teachers were asked to rank their top three preferred methods of communicating. In addition questions were designed to gather information about how parents primarily choose to communicate with teachers. Finally, teachers were asked a number of questions to establish how much communication he/she had with parents recently and to gather data on how a teacher might establish a parent as overly involved.

**Methods of Communicating**

Teachers were asked to select as many methods that were used in communicating with parents from the following choices: email; phone; written correspondence; face-to-face; newsletter; regularly scheduled conferences; impromptu meetings; home visits; other. As shown in Table 3, 82.4% of the participants use emails as a way of communicating with parents, 94.4% use the telephone, 88% use written correspondence,
94.4% meet with parents face-to-face, 77.6% send some type of newsletter, 71.2% attend regularly scheduled conferences, and 64% partake in impromptu meetings. Out of the 125 survey participants only 12 (3.2%) use home visits as a means to communicate with parents. Twenty-six of the participants (20.8%) provided an additional written response in the other category. These responses included the following ways to work with parents: orientation, text messaging, student planners, behavioral passports, parent volunteers, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, concerts, district events, visited parents at work, blogging on school websites, Individual Education Plans (IEP), progress reports, Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) meetings, Multi-Factor Evaluation (MFE) meetings, attending student events such as soccer games, recitals, and so forth, and a class socializing network site (Ning site).

**Preferred Method of Communication**

Survey participants were asked to select their top three methods of communicating with parents by picking out of the following choices and identifying which preference is their first, second, and third method: email; phone; written correspondence; face-to-face; and other (see Table 4). Forty-four percent of the teachers selected email as their first choice, 14% selected it as their second choice, 9.6% rated it as their third choice and 31.2% did not select email as a preferred method. Out of the one 125 survey participants 11 (8.8%) teachers chose the phone as their first choice, 54 (43.2%) selected it as their second choice, 40 (32%) picked it as their third choice and 20 (16%) teachers did not select a phone call as a preferred method. Thirteen (10.4%) teachers selected written correspondence as their first choice, whereas 20 (16%)
Table 3

*Communicating With Parents*

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<td>Impromptu meetings</td>
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<td>Home visits</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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Teachers rated it as second. Thirty-eight (30.4%) teachers choose it as their third pick and 54 (43.2%) teachers did not select it at all. About 30% of the teachers choose face-to-face communication as their preferred method to communicate, 20% choose it as their second choice, 22% selected it as their third favorite method for communicating and 29% did not pick this method. Only two (1.6%) teachers choose the other category for a preferred method of communicating, with one (0.8%) selecting it as their second choice,
two (1.6%) choose it as their third pick and one hundred twenty (96%) teachers did not select this method.

Table 4

*Preferred Method of Communication*

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<tr>
<td>First choice</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second choice</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third choice</td>
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<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not select</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Written Correspondence</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>First choice</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second choice</td>
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</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 4 (continued)

*Preferred Method of Communication*

<table>
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<th>Frequency</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>54</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Face-to-face</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First choice</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second choice</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third choice</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did not select</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second choice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third choice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not select</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How Parents Communicate**

Teachers were asked to identify the main method of communicating that parent’s use from the following choices: email; phone; written correspondence; face-to-face; and other. The majority of the teachers at 46.4% selected email as the chief type of parent communication. The phone and written correspondence both received 16.8% of the
teacher response, while face-to-face had 15.2%. Two participants (1.6%) responded to the other category with the response that they felt that all of the communication was relevant.

**Contact in Seven Days**

Survey participants were asked to approximate the number of times that they had been contacted by a parent in the past seven days. Over 40% of the teachers were contacted between one and five times. Twenty-seven of the survey responses indicated that teachers were contacted between six and ten times by parents. Thirteen teachers (10.4%) responded that they had been contacted between eleven and fifteen times within a seven day time span. Six teachers (4.8%) selected a response that was ranged from sixteen to twenty. Four teachers (3.2%) had between twenty-one and twenty-five contacts with parents, while two participants (1.6%) had thirty contacts. Five teachers (4%) indicated that they had over thirty-five contacts with parents in seven days. Eight participants (6.4%) skipped this question. Table 5 shows exact survey response.

**Same Parents or Range of Parents**

Out of the 125 participants 93 (74.4%) responded that the majority of their contact with parents is with the same families. Twenty-seven (21.6%) teachers indicated that the majority of their contact is with a different range of parents. Five (4%) did not answer this question.
Table 5

*Parent Communication*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Parents Communicate</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
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<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written correspondence</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Contact in Seven Days*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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</table>

(table continues)
Table 5 (continued)

*Parent Communication*

<table>
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<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>10.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>35</td>
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<td>0.8</td>
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<td>50</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (continued)

*Parent Communication*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Same/Range of Parents</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>74.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contact With Overly Involved Parents**

Different opinions have been formed by teachers in regards to how many interactions with a parent it takes before a teacher will consider that parent as overly involved. For question nineteen survey participants were asked to select a range that represents the number of contacts initiated by a parent. These ranges included the following: 1-3; 4-6; 7-10; 11 and up. Table 6 shows that 19.2% of the teachers feel that 1-3 contacts classifies a parent as overly involved, 35.2% felt that 4-6 contacts creates a parent that is overly involved, 28% responded that 7-10 contacts makes for an overly involved parent and 12% selected the answer choice of 11 or more contacts. Around five percent did not respond to this question.
Survey participants were asked to answer whether or not they were currently spending time with an overly involved parent. Of the 125 teachers 44 (35.2%) indicated that they were spending time with an overly involved parent, 76 teachers (60.8%) responded that they were not. Five participants did not answer this question.
Types of Parent Encounters

Question twenty-one asked teachers to identify their parent encounters as mainly positive or beneficial in some way, negative or not beneficial, or a combination of both positive and negative encounters. Table 7 shows that the majority of the teachers at 75.2% responded that they have mostly positive encounters with parents, 19.2% selected a mix of both positive and negative encounters and 1.6% indicated that their encounters and mostly negative. Four percent of the survey participants did not answer this question.

Positive Parent Communication

Teachers were asked when positive parent encounters takes place how do parents mainly choose to communicate from the following selection: email; phone; written correspondence; face-to-face; other. Forty-eight (38.4%) teachers responded that parents communicate using email, eight (6.4%) participants selected the phone, thirty-nine (31.2%) indicated that parents communicate using written correspondence and twenty-three (18.4%) replied with the face-to-face encounter. Two teachers (1.6%) selected the other category and wrote that parents used student planners or communicated through secretaries or other classroom teachers. Five participants (4%) did not respond to this question.

Positive Teacher Experience

Survey participants were asked to write about a positive experience that they had encountered with parents. One hundred eight teachers (86.4%) responded with an experience. Seventeen (13.6%) participants did not type a response.
Table 7

*Parent Encounters*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Parent Encounters</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mostly positive</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly negative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Positive Parent Communication*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Method</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written correspondence</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey responses were read and placed into one of eight categories based on the experience written. The following categories were selected to represent teacher experiences: general thank you, academic, behavior, special education/intervention, teacher appreciation, Mother’s Day, attendance of a function, and other.

Responses that were categorized in the General Thank You section contained comments written by teachers that indicated a parents’ general appreciation for teaching his/her child. Teachers wrote comments such as “thanks for a wonderful school year” or “thanks for helping my child this year.” Teacher responses that focused on an overall implication of thanks or appreciation by parents for the job that they do in working with their child were placed into this group. Out of the 125 participants 28 (22.4%) teachers wrote comments that fit this subgroup.

Nineteen teachers (15.2%) wrote about positive experiences that were related to the topic of academics. This category was comprised of comments made by teachers in which they specifically addressed a parent thanking them for help in a subject area or for making academic progress throughout the year. In addition, specific skills that were mentioned such as “one of my students successfully wrote their name after five months of practice” or “a dad was pleased that his child could read a book we made” were also placed in the Academic group.

The Behavior category contained teacher experiences that referred to a parents’ appreciation for helping with their child’s conduct. Some of the responses that were included in the survey were “I had been dealing with a student who had severe anxiety” or “I had a positive talk about her child's behavior and how to help him improve it.” The
phrase “making good choices” frequently occurred in this section when teachers would refer to parents commenting on the improvement of their child’s behavior. Sixteen teachers (12.8%) wrote about positive behavior experiences with parents.

Another topic that teachers expressed as an area that parents contacted them with positive comments was special education and intervention. Eighteen survey participants (14.4%) wrote about a parent whose child had some type of learning disability. Most of the remarks commented on parents’ acknowledgement of accommodations that teachers made for special education students. Other parents thanked teachers for identifying that their child was in need of special education services. Teachers also commented on parents expressing thanks after intervention assistance team (IAT) meetings where ideas and suggestions are brainstormed to help solve particular problems for a student.

Six teachers (4.8%) identified a positive comment occurring during teacher appreciation week. Four participants (3.2%) described an experience where moms expressed gratitude for a thoughtful Mother’s Day gift. Two (1.6%) teachers provided a response where parents conveyed thanks for attending an event for their child that took place after school hours.

The remaining fifteen (12%) answers did not fit into any of those themes. Within the Other category teachers wrote about many different encounters with parents that ranged from gratitude towards arranging a parent book club to addressing concerns about future placement as their child advances into the next grade. Additional comments covered topics such as a teacher’s inquiry to the care of a parent, looking out for a child’s best interest while a parent was out of town, taking extra steps to share the results of a
test, and excitement over their child’s enthusiasm toward an end of the year video.

Seventeen survey participants (13.6) did not answer this question. Table 8 shows the results of this question.

Table 8

*Positive Teacher Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response to Positive Experience</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answered</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>86.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Types of Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Experiences</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Thank You</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education/Intervention</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Appreciation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Day</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance of a Function</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Negative Encounter

When asked if survey participants had ever had a negative encounter or an experience with a parent that they perceived as not resulting with a beneficial outcome, one hundred-nine teachers (87.2%) responded yes, while eleven participants (8.8%) replied no. Five teachers (4%) did not answer this question (see Table 9).

Conflict

Participants were then asked if they had ever had a conflict or a disagreement with a parent. Eighty percent of the teachers answered that they had experienced a conflict situation with a parent. Fifteen percent replied that they had not experienced a conflict, while four percent did not respond to this question.

Negative Parent Communication

Teachers were asked when negative parent encounters takes place how do parents mainly choose to communicate from the following selection: email; phone; written correspondence; face-to-face; go directly to administrator. Nineteen (15.2%) teachers responded that parents communicate using email, forty-two (33.6%) participants selected the phone, fourteen (11.2%) indicated that parents communicate using written correspondence, twenty-five (20%) replied with the face-to-face encounter and nineteen teachers (15.2%) indicated that parents go directly to their administrator. Six teachers (4.8%) did not respond to this question.

Negative Teacher Experience

Survey participants were asked to write about a negative experience that they had encountered with parents. One hundred eight teachers (86.4%) responded with an
Table 9

Negative Encounter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative Encounter</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conflict</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>80.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

experience. Of those 108 teachers, three teachers (2.4%) indicated in a written response that they did not have a negative experience with a parent. Seventeen (13.6%) participants did not type a response.
Survey responses were read and placed into one of eight categories based on the experience written. The following categories were selected to represent teacher experiences: general, academic, behavior, special education/intervention, retention, recess, questioning ability, and other.

The general category is composed of responses by teachers that were either extremely vague in detail with their answer or touched on parent dissatisfaction with their entire experience. For example, one teacher wrote about a negative experience with a parent who informed the teacher on the last day of school that “it was a wasted year.” This comment shows a general unhappiness with the teacher. Six of the eight responses (6.4%) provided very little detail about their experience. Participants wrote comments such as “a parent came into my classroom to tell me how she felt” or “conflict of philosophies.” These responses were unable to be placed in other discovered themes.

Twenty-two teachers (17.6%) typed negative responses that revolved around the topic of academics. These answers included comments where parents were dissatisfied with grades, student progress, or the teacher’s opinion about an ability level. In many of the situations described teachers wrote that parents were unhappy that their child was not performing better or that parents had a different idea about their child’s ability. One participant wrote “parent was unhappy that her child was average.” One response included in this section discussed a parent’s displeasure with a homework assignment, where as another participant indicated that a parent wanted more of a challenge academically. Eight teachers indicated that a lower than expected grade brought about
the negative encounter they experienced. Comments made about the curriculum were also placed in the academic group.

Behavior was a common response indicated by the survey participants with twenty-seven teachers (21.6%) writing remarks that revolved around a negative parent encounter related to behavior. Phrases that were repeatedly used throughout these answers were “made a poor choice” or “did not like consequences given to their child.” A regular theme that emerged throughout this category was the negative experience a teacher would encounter when a parent was dissatisfied with how a behavior situation was handled. In one scenario a teacher wrote “The parent felt that I was not treating her son fairly when he punched another student and I wrote an office referral (our school policy) for his behavior. She refused to sign the referral.” Multiple participants provided similar responses.

Twelve teachers (9.6%) recalled negative encounters with parents that revolved around the topic of special education or interventions. Within this section teachers wrote about negative experiences where parents were upset when a teacher would suggest testing for learning disabilities. One teacher responded that a parent thought that he/she “wanted to get rid of” her child by having the student qualify for special education services. In other responses, participants indicated that parents were unhappy that their child did not meet the requirements for gifted/challenge services. Additional comments were made by teachers that showed parent discontent at not understanding the intervention process or the goals of individualized education programs.
Five participants (4.0%) indicated that their negative encounter was related to retention. All five participants wrote that the parent did not agree with their recommendation to retain their child.

Six teachers (4.8%) recalled negative experiences with parents over withholding recess. In each response participants pointed out that parents were unhappy with their decision to deny their child recess.

Seven survey participants (5.6%) had negative interactions with parents where they were questioned in their ability. A teacher remembered a parent saying “I was not friendly and was not educating her child the way he is suppose to be educated.” Another participant had a parent who said “I wasn't the right fit for her child and wanted him out of my classroom.” All responses in this category showed discontent with a teacher’s ability to manage classroom duties.

Eighteen responses (14.4%) did not fall into any of those categories. Within this section participants’ answers ranged from negative encounters over miscommunication in a newsletter to making a mistake with a bus pass. Additional comments included problems with food allergies and accusations of students being treated unfairly because of race. One teacher wrote “a parent was trying to get information about other children in my class.” These negative encounter responses varied and were grouped together (see Table 10).
Table 10

*Negative Parent Encounters*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Parent Communication</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written correspondence</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go directly to administrator</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Response to Negative Experience**

| Answered                                      | 108       | 86.4      |
| Skipped                                       | 17        | 13.6      |
| **Total**                                     | **125**   | **100**   |

**Types of Experiences**

| General                                       | 8         | 6.4       |
| Academic                                      | 22        | 17.6      |
| Behavior                                      | 27        | 21.6      |
| Special Education/Intervention                | 12        | 9.6       |

*(table continues)*
Table 10 (continued)

*Negative Parent Encounters*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retention</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recess</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning of ability</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Negative Encounters Resolved*

After writing about a negative experience that teachers encountered with parents they were asked to write about how that situation was resolved. One hundred-seven survey participants (85.6%) responded to this question. Of the one hundred-seven participants that answered the question two teachers indicated in their written response that they did not have a negative experience resolution to share. Eighteen (14.4%) participants did not answer this question.

Responses were read and then grouped into the following categories based on similarities in their answers: involved principal/administrator; discussed problem;
received help from a team; parent came to an understanding; teacher conceded with parent; changed classrooms; retested; issue was not resolved; other.

Twenty-seven teachers (21.6%) wrote that their negative experience was resolved after they involved a principal or an administrator. In some cases, the principal or administrator relieved the teacher of the problem by taking over the situation by handling the upset parents’ concerns. For example, one teacher wrote, “the administrator responded to her, and I was instructed NOT to respond to her at all.” In other situations participants expressed that the principal was present during discussions with parents. One participant wrote that the role of their principal was to “mediate the situation in the best interest of the child.” Participants relied on the help of administrators to help solve their parent problems and as one teacher wrote “my principal had my back.”

Nineteen survey participants (15.2%) indicated that by discussing the problem with parents they were able to resolve any issues. Within this category many teacher responses included one of the following phrases “we talked,” “we discussed the issue” or “I explained the situation.” Problems for these participants were resolved by having a conversation about the issue.

In the case of eight survey participants (6.4%) their negative parent encounter was resolved with the help of a team. For these situations the teacher met with the parent and other school personnel to work out the issue. One teacher wrote that their “team” included the school counselor, the principal, and so forth. The teacher is not alone in handling the problem. As one participant pointed out that “a "team" will help me deal with the mom.”
In the cases of 11 teachers (8.8%) their problems were resolved when the parent came to an understanding or apologized for their behavior. The word “apologize” was used frequently in the responses within this section. In addition, other survey participants wrote about parents first having to observe the problem or issue for themselves before they eventually came to the same conclusions as the teacher. In one situation the participant wrote, “The parents came in to work in the classroom and saw firsthand their child's behaviors.” These problems were resolved by the parent’s comprehension of the situation.

Four (3.2%) of the survey participants found their negative parent encounter resolved when they realized that the parent was correct. One teacher admitted, “I accidentally marked the wrong grade.” While another teacher conceded with the parent writing, “I told the parent that I would keep her goal the same because the parent knows the child better than I do.” For all of these situations the teacher solved the issue by agreeing with the parent and taking the course of action that the parent desired.

Three survey participants (2.4%) found that the only way to resolve the problem was to move the child to a different classroom. In two of these situations the teachers wrote that their administrator moved the student to a different class. One teacher indicated that he/she “would try to be more positive but ultimately student was moved to another class, and is still misbehaving.”

Out of the one hundred-seven responses three participants (2.4%) wrote that retesting a child helped resolve their negative encounter. In one of the situations retesting was done to show parents what academic level their child was performing at. Another
teacher wrote, “I retested the child and charted her progress. I asked mom to chart the progress as well - assessing the same words. I never heard about it again.” In both of these situations retesting the child helped to resolve the issue.

For 14 of the survey participants (11.2%) the issue was not resolved. Teachers wrote responses that included phrases such as “it wasn't really resolved” or “the problem still remains the same.” In one case the teacher wrote, “It was not ever solved. The parent became unhappy with the school in general and eventually changed her child's school.”

The final category was composed of sixteen survey responses (12.8%) that did not fit into any of the previous themes or categories. These responses included a variety of ways that a teacher’s negative encounter with parents was resolved. Some of the different resolutions included “providing additional support” and “asked the parent to be more involved and get to know me.” In some cases the course of action remained the same. For example one teacher wrote “policy was not changed” and another teacher indicated “the grade remains the same.” The remaining teacher responses provided an alternative ways their encounter was resolved (see Table 11).

**Teacher Perception of Parent**

Survey participants that provided a response about a negative experience were then asked how they perceived the parent from their encounter. Teachers had to select one of the following: positively; negatively; or neutral. About 25% of the participants perceived the parents positively. Thirty-seven percent felt negatively towards the parents
### Table 11

**Negative Encounters Resolved**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response to Resolved Encounters</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answered</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>85.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Types of Resolutions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involved principal/administrator</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussed problem</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received help from a team</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent came to understanding</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher conceded with parent</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed classrooms</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retested</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue was not resolved</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and approximately 30% held a neutral feeling for the parents involved in their negative encounter. Eleven survey participants (8.8%) did not answer this question.

**Teacher Perception of Student**

Teachers were then asked how they felt about the student who was involved in their negative parent encounter. Survey participants were asked to choose one of the following: positively; negatively; or neutral. Fifty-five teachers (44%) perceived their student in a positive manner. Ten participants (8%) replied that they felt negatively, while forty-nine teachers (39.2%) selected the answer choice of neutral. Eleven survey participants (8.8%) did not answer this question.

**How Teacher Felt Perceived by Parent**

Finally, survey participants were asked a question about how they felt they were then perceived by the parent after the negative encounter occurred. Teachers were asked to choose a response from the following selection: positively; negatively; or neutral. Of the 125 participants thirty-three (26.4%) felt they were perceived positively by parents after their negative experience. Forty-seven teachers (37.6%) thought that parents regarded them negatively. Thirty-four participants (27.2%) felt that parents had a neutral perception of them after the incident. Eleven survey participants (8.8%) did not answer this question (see Table 12).

**Positive Outcome From Negative Encounter**

Question thirty-two asked survey participants if they had ever experienced a positive outcome from a negative encounter. Table 13 shows that 99 participants (79.2%) had experienced a positive outcome from a negative encounter,
Table 12

*Different Perceptions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Parent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positively</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatively</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Student</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positively</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatively</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How Teacher Felt Perceived**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positively</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatively</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
whereas 15 teachers (12%) have not. Eleven survey participants (8.8%) did not answer this question.

**Examples of Positive Outcomes From Negative Encounters**

Teachers were asked to write about some of the positive outcomes that have occurred because of a negative encounter with a parent. Out of the 125 participants 87 teachers responded to this question. Thirty-eight survey participants (30.4%) did not answer this question.

When creating different categories for survey responses some of the respondents choose to provide more than one positive outcome. Therefore participants’ answers to this question were sometimes placed into more than one of the following categories: learned more information; work with parents; parents struggled with material; documentation; communication; involve parents more; realized administrative support; changed teaching practice; teachers are appreciated; and other.

Twenty-one of the teachers (16.8%) responded that one positive outcome that has been brought about by a negative encounter is that they learned information about the child’s situation. For example, one teacher wrote, “At times, we don't know what happens at home. One of my students just had a new sibling in the home. His behavior was affected by this change. Knowing this allowed me to up my patience with this child and allow more help for a sleep deprived child.” Common phrases that participants wrote in their response that aided in grouping this theme were “learned helpful information” or “learned more about a student's needs.”
Eleven survey participants (8.8%) indicated that a positive outcome for them was learning how to work better with parents. Many of these teachers commented about how these negative experiences help them grow and learn for future encounters with parents. One participant noted, “I've learned how to better handle myself during a conflict with a parent.” Another teacher wrote that he/she learned how to “de-escalate upset parents.” While another commented that he/she now knows “how to approach a situation differently next time to avoid the negative outcome.”

Table 13 shows that three teachers (2.4%) commented that they learned that parents might struggle with understanding curriculum concepts or educational beliefs. One participant learned that the parent was illiterate and therefore adapted by explaining homework concepts to that student before they left school for the day. Another teacher wrote, “I had conferences with parents about their concerns and was able to educate them enough to understand what was causing their concerns...usually parents are negative because they haven't had the chance to understand the philosophies behind the actions that are taking place.”

Six survey participants (4.8%) learned the importance of keeping documentation on their students. Key words that were used to group this category were “documentation” and “data and assessments.” One teacher wrote that he/she learned “how to effectively document situations and prepare for any outcome.”

Twenty-five teachers (20%) found that another positive outcome that came about due to a negative encounter was the significance behind communication. Some teachers discovered that they needed better communication with parents. While others found that
they needed to work on really listening to what it is that the parent has to say. One participant wrote, “Over the years I think I have learned how to communicate better with parents, trying to always put things in as positive way as possible. I always make sure I hear what the parents have to say as well.” Key words and phrases that were used to compose this section were “better communication” or “listen more.”

Four survey participants (3.2%) indicated that the positive outcome that they learned from a negative situation was to involve parents more. All of these teachers wrote that they needed to involve parents more in the classroom. One teacher simply stated that he/she needed to “be proactive about involving parents,” while another participant learned that he/she needed to provide “more volunteering time in room.”

Five teachers (4%) realized that a positive outcome from their negative encounters involved the amount of support they received from their administrators. All of these responses included a reference to an administrator or a principal. One teacher wrote, “I understood that I had the support of my principal and colleagues that made me feel valued and respected.” Another commented that he/she developed an “awareness that I really am a good teacher who helps all children be successful--it took my principal standing up for me for me to really see it.”

Eleven survey participants (8.8%) changed their teaching practice in a positive way due to a negative experience with a parent. Key words and phrases that helped define this theme were “made changes in practices” or “picked up different techniques.” Some of the teachers wrote about making changes in their current practices. For example, one teacher wrote, “I altered my homework policy after a parent expressed
concern over a consequence their child received for not turning homework in on time.”

Other participants discovered that they learned new ideas to incorporate into their teaching from parents. One teacher indicated that “I picked up different techniques on how to communicate with parents as well as strategies to use to work with the students.”

Three survey participants (2.4%) wrote responses that showed a positive outcome by how they felt appreciated by parents. All of these responses included the word “appreciation.” One participant stated that the experience was “validating that the support I provided for their child was adequate and they showed their appreciation for the hard work.”

Finally, 22 teacher (8.8%) responses did not fit into any of the categories. These answers were placed into a separate other category. Some of the positive outcome comments that teachers wrote about that went into this section were “I have learned to try to be less sensitive as a result of some negative and hurtful things parents have said to me.” Another teacher wrote, “I can not think of one specific example but I have learned to just state the facts and not involve feelings with parents when there is a behavior issue.” One participant came to the realization that “It's difficult to remain professional when you're ‘called out of your name,’ and so forth; but it is the best choice and you can rest easy/maintain your dignity/professionalism when the conflict has passed.”
Table 13

*Positive Outcomes From Negative Encounter*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experienced a Positive Outcome</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>79.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completed Positive Outcome</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answered</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Outcomes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learned More Information</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work With Parents</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Struggled With Material</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve Parents More</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realized Administrative Support</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Table 13 (continued)

Positive Outcomes From Negative Encounter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Outcomes From Negative Encounter</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changed Teaching Practice</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are Appreciated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unresolved Negative Experience

Survey participants were then asked if they had ever experienced a negative encounter that went unresolved. Table 14 shows that forty-one participants (32.8%) had an unresolved negative encounter, while seventy-six teachers (60.8%) have not. Eight survey participants (6.4%) did not answer this question.

Outcomes of Unresolved Conflict

Teachers were asked to share some of the outcomes that they have experienced because of an unresolved conflict. Out of the 125 participants 36 (28.8%) completed this question, while 89 (71.2%) did not.

Multiple survey participants responded to question thirty-five by providing more than one outcome that occurred because of an unresolved conflict. Therefore participants’ answers to this question were sometimes placed into more than one of the
following categories: tension; decrease in communication; avoidance; changed schools/classrooms; additional problems; or other.

Table 14 shows that eleven participants (8.8%) found that an unresolved conflict led to tension in the parent/teacher relationship. The use of the word tension was used repeatedly in all eleven responses. One survey respondent described his/her experience as “We "gave each other space" whenever possible. Interactions were very brief and to the point. I made sure there were other adults around when we interacted. There was tension in the relationship.” Another teacher wrote about his/her experience when the parent from the conflict situation comes into the school. “There is a lot of tension when she enters the classroom and she now talks to my assistant and does not communicate with me.”

Twelve teachers (9.6%) noticed a decrease in the amount of communication that took place between themselves and the parent. Some of the participant responses focused on their aversion to making contact with the parent of the conflict situation. One teacher wrote that he/she had a “lack of desire to communicate or a reluctance to call.” Other teacher answers indicated that it was the parent that chose to withdraw communications with the teacher. A participant simply wrote that the “parent will not talk to me,” while another teacher shared that a parent was “ignoring communicative attempts made by the school.” In both cases the result was a decrease in communication between the home and school.

Seven survey participants (5.6%) indicated that another outcome from unresolved conflict situations is avoidance. Similar to the decrease in communication, the avoidance
### Table 14

Unresolved Negative Experiences and Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Had an Unresolved Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer to Unresolved Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answered</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>71.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcomes of Unresolved Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in communication</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed schools/classroom</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional problems</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
theme was commented on by respondents showing both perspectives. Some teachers expressed that they wanted to avoid contact with the parent involved in their negative experience. One teacher stated he/she did, “not want that parent near my classroom,” while other teachers shared experiences where the parent avoided them and the school. A survey participant wrote, “I have had a parent refuse to work with me to help solve behavior problems.” Another participant shared, “It was at the end of the year, so it didn't matter. I just make sure I don't have any of her kids again.”

Four teachers (3.2%) discovered that when their problem went unresolved the family made the choice to move their child either out of the school or into a different classroom. Within each of these teachers negative experience the outcome involved the student being removed from his/her classroom. One participant recalls, “The parent actually transferred their child to another school and said our whole staff was phony and against her children being successful.”

Out of 125 participants five (4%) discovered that additional problems with the parent from the unresolved conflict continued. Teacher responses included phrases such as “more conflict” or “ongoing issue.” One respondent shared, “The same parent a couple of months later accused me of being an unfit teacher and sending inappropriate homework home. Since there had been no resolution on her part from the first conflict, she just continued sending in critical letters to me. I showed them to my principal and supervisor. They tried to call the parent but she would not return the calls. The situation is still unresolved.”
Ten teacher (8.0%) responses did not fit into any of the previously mentioned themes. These answers were placed into the *other* category. One outcome that occurred from a teacher’s negative experience was “difficulty trying to treat the child fairly/equally knowing everything I did was subject to scrutiny and "gossip" in the neighborhood/school community.” One teacher simply wrote the word “betrayal,” while another survey participant communicated that the parent “believed there was a conspiracy against her 7 year old daughter.” All of these responses showed different outcomes from an unresolved conflict situation.

**Willing to Talk With Researcher**

Finally, survey participants were asked if they would be willing to speak with a researcher about their experiences. Out of the 125 respondents, 33 (26.4%) answered yes, while 85 teachers (68%) said no. Seven survey participants (5.6%) did not answer this question (see Table 15).

**Descriptive Data for High/Low Income**

The next section will take a closer look at each survey question in relation to how teachers from high income and low income schools responded. A participant is identified as either high or low income based on his/her response to question five: Is your school a low or high income school?

**High/Low Gender**

Figures 1-8 show that 9.3% of the low income school survey participants were male and 90.7% were female. Eleven (15.5%) of the high income school participants were male and 60 (85.5%) were female.
Table 15

*Willing to Talk With Researcher*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Willing to Talk with Researcher</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**High/Low Ethnicity**

All of the participants (100%) from the high income schools were Caucasian. Forty-five (83.3%) low income school teachers were Caucasian, eight (14.8%) were Black or African American and one survey participant (1.8%) was Multiracial.

**High/Low Education Level**

Eleven (20.4%) of the 54 low income school participants taking the survey have received their bachelors degree. Forty-three (79.6%) of the participants have received master’s degrees (Figure 3). Fourteen (19.7%) high income school teachers have only their bachelors degree, while 57 (80.3%) have obtained a master’s degree.

**High/Low School Income Level**

Of those who answered the demographic section, 56.8% of the teacher educators taught in high income public schools and 43.2% taught in low income public schools.
High/Low Grade Taught

Of the 54 low income school participants that responded to the survey 12 (22.2%) were kindergarten teachers, six (11.1%) taught first grade, nine (16.7%) taught second grade, nine (16.7%) taught third grade, and 18 (33.3%) held a different position that worked with kindergarten through third grade students. Out of the 71 high income school participants that responded to the survey 13 (18.3%) were kindergarten teachers, 10 (14.1%) taught first grade, 16 (22.5%) taught second grade, 15 (21.1%) taught third grade, and 17 (23.9%) held a different position.

High/Low Years of Experience

Three (5.6%) of the low income school participants had taught for fewer than 5 years, 11 (20.4%) taught between 5-10 years, 22 (40.7%) participants taught between 10-15 years, five (9.3%) taught between 15-20 years, and 12 (22.2%) taught over 20 years. One (1.9%) low income school participant skipped this question. Of the 71 high income school responses 10 (14.1%) teachers had taught for fewer than 5 years, 30 (42.3%) taught between 5-10 years, 14 (19.7%) participants taught between 10-15 years, 11 (15.5%) taught between 15-20 years, and six (8.5%) taught over 20 years.

High/Low Attendance of Parent Involvement Course

Of the 54 low income school participants 25 teachers (46.3%) had taken a course that pertained to the topic of parent involvement, while 28 teachers (51.9%) did not take a course. One low income school participant (1.9%) skipped this question. Figure 4 shows that 27 (38%) high income school participants attended a course that taught about parent involvement, while 44 (62%) teachers did not.
High/Low Attendance of Parent Involvement Workshop

Figures 1-8 show that 68.5% of the low income school participants have not attended a workshop on parent involvement, while 31.5% of the teachers have. Of the high income school participants, 26.8% have not attended a workshop on parent involvement, while 73.2% have attended a workshop.

Figure 1. High/low personal information - Gender
Figure 2. High/low personal information - Ethnicity

Figure 3. High/low personal information – Education level
Figure 4. High/low personal information – School income level

Figure 5. High/low personal information – Grade level taught
Figure 6. High/low personal information – Years of experience

Figure 7. High/low personal information – Parent involvement course
High/Low Class Size

Five low income school teachers (9.3%) had class sizes that had sixteen or fewer students. The majority of the low income school participants, 85.2%, had class sizes that ranged between seventeen to twenty-six students. One low income school teacher (1.9%) submitted an answer that reflected a teaching specialty or an interventionist position, which works with over thirty children in a school day. Two participants (3.7%) skipped this question.

Three high income school teachers (4.2%) had class sizes that had sixteen or fewer students. The majority of the high income school participants, 78.9%, had class sizes that ranged between seventeen to twenty-six students. Seven high income school
teachers (9.9%) submitted an answer that reflected a teaching specialty or an interventionist position. Five high income school participants (7%) did not answer this question.

**High/Low Special Education Students**

Figures 9-12 show that of the 54 low income school participants, 39 (72.2%) teachers had students in their classroom that had been identified with special needs. Thirteen low income school teachers (24.1%) did not have any students that had been identified and two participants (3.7%) skipped this question.

Of the 71 high income school participants, about 83% responded that they had special needs students in their classroom, while 15% did not have any identified students. Two high income school teachers (2.8%) did not answer this question.

**High/Low Number of Boys**

Only 11% of the low income school teachers had less than eight boys in their classroom. The majority at 72% of the low income school teachers had between nine and 13 boys. There were six participants (11%) that taught over 14 boys and three teachers (5.6%) skipped this question.

There were nine high income school teachers (12.7%) that had less than eight boys in their classroom and 65% of the high income school participants had between nine and thirteen boys. Six teachers (8.5%) taught over 14 boys and 10 high income school participants (14.1%) did not answer this question.
High/Low Number of Girls

Out of the 54 low income school participants, 17 teachers (31.5%) had less than eight girls in the classroom. Thirty-four (63%) had between nine and 13 girls in their classroom. Three low income school participants (5.6%) did not answer this question.

Figures 9-12 show that 13 high income school participants (18.3%) had less than eight girls in the classroom. Forty-two high income school teachers (59.2%) had between nine and 13 girls in their classroom. Only six teachers (8.5%) taught over 14 girls and 10 participants (14.1%) skipped this question.

Figure 9. High/low classroom information – Class size
Figure 10. High/low classroom information – Number of classrooms with special education students

Figure 11. High/low classroom information – Number of boys in the classroom
Figure 12. High/low classroom information – Number of girls in the classroom

**High/Low Methods of Communicating**

As shown in Figure 13, 61.1% of the low income school participants use emails as a way of communicating with parents, 94.4% use the telephone, 94.4% use written correspondence, 94.4% meet with parents face-to-face, 83.3% send some type of newsletter, 74.1% attend regularly scheduled conferences, and 75.9% partake in impromptu meetings. Out of the fifty-four low income school survey participants only one (1.9%) use home visits as a means to communicate with parents. Fourteen of the low income school participants (25.9%) provided an additional written response in the *other* category. These responses included the following ways to work with parents: orientation, text messaging, student planners, behavioral passports, parent volunteers, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, concerts, district events, visited parents at work and Individual Education Plans (IEP).
The high income school participants responded with 98.6% of the participants using emails as a way of communicating with parents, 94.4% using the telephone, 83.1% using written correspondence, 94.4% meeting with parents face-to-face, 73.2% sending some type of newsletter, 69% attending regularly scheduled conferences, and 54.9% partaking in impromptu meetings. Three high income school teachers (4.2%) use home visits as a means to communicate with parents. Eleven of the high income school participants (15.5%) provided an additional written response in the other category. These responses included the following ways to work with parents: blogging on school websites, Individual Education Plans (IEP), progress reports, Intervention Assistance Team (IAT) meetings, Multi-Factor Evaluation (MFE) meetings, attending student events such as soccer games, recitals, and so forth, and a class socializing network site (Ning site).

Figure 13. High/low communicating with parents
High/Low Preferred Method of Communication

Figures 14-18 show that 16.7% of the low income school teachers selected email as their first choice, 7.4% selected it as their second choice, 11.1% rated it as their third choice and 64.8% did not select email as a preferred method. Out of the 54 low income school survey participants six (11.1%) teachers choose the phone as their first choice, 26 (48.1%) selected it as their second choice, 13 (24.1%) picked it as their third choice and nine (16.7%) low income school teachers did not select a phone call as a preferred method. Eleven (20.4%) low income school teachers selected written correspondence as their first choice, while 10 (18.5%) teachers rated it as second. Twenty (37%) teachers choose it as their third pick and 13 (24.1%) low income school participants did not select it at all. Of the teachers, 42.6% chose face-to-face communication as their preferred method to communicate, 16.7% chose it as their second choice, 18.5% selected it as their third favorite method for communicating, and 22.2% did not pick this method. Only one (1.9%) teacher selected the other category for a first choice method of communicating, with 53 (98.1%) low income school participants skipping it.

Of the seventy-one high income school participants 66.2% selected email as their first choice, 19.7% selected it as their second choice, 8.5% rated it as their third choice and 5.6% did not select email as a preferred method. Shown in Figures 14-18 five high income school teachers (7%) choose the phone as their first choice, twenty-eight (39.4%) selected it as their second choice, twenty-seven (38%) picked it as their third choice and eleven (15.5%) high income school teachers did not select a phone call as a preferred method. Two (2.8%) high income school teachers selected written correspondence as
their first choice, while ten (14.1%) teachers rated it as second. Eighteen (25.4%) teachers choose it as their third pick and forty-one (57.7%) high income school participants did not select it at all. 19.7% of the teachers choose face-to-face communication as their preferred method to communicate, 22.5% choose it as their second choice, 23.9% selected it as their third favorite method for communicating and 33.8% did not pick this method. Only one (1.4%) teacher choose the other category as a first choice for a preferred method of communicating, one (1.4%) selected it as their second choice, while two high income school teachers (2.8%) choose it as their third pick. Sixty-seven high income participants (94.4%) did not select this method.

Figure 14. High/low preferred method of communication with parents - Email
Preferred Methods for Communicating with Parents - Phone

![Bar chart showing the preferred methods for communicating with parents via phone for low and high teachers.]

Figure 15. High/low preferred method of communication with parents - Phone

Preferred Methods for Communicating with Parents - Written Correspondence

![Bar chart showing the preferred methods for communicating with parents via written correspondence for low and high teachers.]

Figure 16. High/low preferred method of communication with parents – Written correspondence
Preferred Methods for Communicating with Parents - Face-to-face

Figure 17. High/low preferred method of communication with parents – Face-to-face

Preferred Methods for Communicating with Parents - Other

Figure 18. High/low preferred method of communication with parents - Other

High/Low How Parents Communicate

Low and high income school teachers were asked to identify the main method of communication that parents use. Figures 19-21 show that three low income school
teachers (5.6%) selected email as the primary type of parent communication. Fourteen low income school participants (25.9%) responded that the phone was used as the chief means to communicate between the parent and the school. Both written correspondence and face-to-face received 31.5% of the teacher response, while face-to-face had 15.2%. Three low income school participants (5.6%) did not respond to this question.

The high income school responses show that fifty-five teachers (77.5%) selected email as the primary type of parent communication. Seven high income school participants (9.9%) responded that the phone was used as the chief means to communicate between the parent and the school. Four teachers (5.6%) selected written correspondence, while face-to-face received 2.8% of the teacher response. Two high income school participants (2.8%) responded to the other category indicating that they felt that all of the communication was relevant and therefore could not select just one answer. One high income school teacher (1.4%) did not respond to this question.

**High/Low Contact in Seven Days**

Survey participants were asked to approximate the number of times that they had been contacted by a parent in the past seven days. Almost 60% of the low income school teachers were contacted between one and five times. Eleven (20.4%) of the low income school survey responses indicated that teachers were contacted between six and ten times by parents. Four teachers (7.4%) responded that they had been contacted between eleven and fifteen times within a seven day time span. One low income school participant (1.9%) had been contacted thirty-five times by parents and two teachers (3.7%)
responded that they had been contacted approximately fifty times by parents. Four low income school participants (7.4%) did not answer this question.

The high income school participants responded that 31% had been contacted between one and five times with a seven day time frame. Twenty-three high income school teachers (32.4%) answered that they had been contacted by parents between six and ten times. Nine teachers (12.7%) indicated that they were contacted between eleven and fifteen times. Six teachers (8.5%) selected a response that ranged from sixteen to twenty. Four teachers (5.6%) had between twenty-one and twenty-five contacts with parents, while two participants (2.8%) had thirty contacts. One high income school teacher (1.4%) indicated that they had fifty contacts with parents in seven days. Four participants (5.6%) skipped this question. Figures 19-21 show exact survey response.

**High/Low Same Parents or Range of Parents**

Out of the fifty-four low income school participants thirty-eight (70.4%) responded that the majority of their contact with parents is with the same families. Twelve (22.2%) teachers indicated that the majority of their contact is with a different range of parents. Four low income school teachers (7.4%) did not answer this question.

Figures 19-21 show that fifty-five (77.5%) of the seventy-one high income school participants responded that the majority of their contact with parents is with the same families. Fifteen (21.1%) high income school teachers answered that the majority of their contact is with a different range of parents. One high income school participant (1.4%) did not answer this question.
Methods Parents Use to Communicate

Figure 19. High/low parent communication

Communication with Parents in the Past Seven Days

Figure 20. Communication with parents in the past seven days
Figure 21. Contact with parents that are from the same parents or a range of parents

High/Low Contact With Overly Involved Parents

Figures 22-23 show that 13% of the low income school teachers feel that 1-3 contacts classifies a parent as overly involved, 33.3% felt that 4-6 contacts creates a parent that is overly involved, 25.9% responded that 7-10 contacts makes for an overly involved parent and 16.7% selected the answer choice of 11 or more contacts. Six low income school participants (11.1%) did not answer this question.

In order to be classified as an overly involved parent 23.9% of the high income school participants answered 1-3 contacts would establish a parent as overly involved, 36.6% choose 4-6 contacts, 29.6% selected the answer choice that 7-10 contacts makes for an overly involved parent and 8.5% responded that 11 or more contacts are needed. One high income school participant (1.4%) did not answer this question. This
information gives insight on how both high and low income school teachers view parent involvement.

**High/Low Current Time**

High and Low income school survey participants were asked to answer whether or not they were currently spending time with an overly involved parent. Of the 54 low income school teachers 15 (27.8%) indicated that they were spending time with an overly involved parent, thirty-five teachers (64.8%) responded that they were not. Four low income school participants (7.4%) did not answer this question.

Figures 22-23 show that 29 of the high income school survey respondents (40.8%) answered that they were currently spending time with an overly involved parent, 14 (57.7%) were not. One high income school teacher (1.4%) did not answer this question.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 22. Number of times parent contacts teacher before parent is considered overly involved*
Figure 23. Number of teachers currently spending time with overly involved parent

High/Low Types of Parent Encounters

Figures 24-25 show that the majority of the low income school teachers at 64.8% responded that they have mostly positive encounters with parents, 25.9% selected a mix of both positive and negative encounters and 1.9% indicated that their encounters were mostly negative. Four low income survey participants (7.4%) did not answer this question.

Similar to the low income school teacher responses, 83.1% of the high income school participants answered that the majority of their encounters with parents is positive, 14.1% responded that they experience a mix of both positive and negative encounters and 1.4% indicated that their encounters were mostly negative. One high income participant (1.4%) did not answer this question.
High/Low Positive Parent Communication

High and low income school teachers were asked when positive parent encounters take place how do parents mainly choose to communicate from the following selection: email; phone; written correspondence; face-to-face; other. Three (5.6%) low income school teachers responded that parents communicate using email, six (11.1%) participants selected the phone, twenty-four (44.4%) indicated that parents communicate using written correspondence and fifteen (27.8%) replied with the face-to-face encounter. Two low income school teachers (3.7%) selected the other category and wrote that parents used student planners or communicated through secretaries or other classroom teachers. Four low income school participants (7.4%) did not respond to this question.

Figures 24-25 shows the high income school responses which included: forty-five teachers (63.4%) selecting that parents communicate using email, two (2.8%) participants picked the phone, fifteen (21.1%) indicated that parents communicate using written correspondence and eight (11.3%) replied with the face-to-face encounter. One high income school participants (1.4%) did not respond to this question.
Types of Parent Encounters

![Chart showing types of parent encounters](chart1.png)

**Figure 24.** High/low parent encounters

Methods Parents Use to Communicate a Positive Message

![Chart showing methods of communication](chart2.png)

**Figure 25.** Methods parents use to communicate a positive message
**High/Low Positive Teacher Experience**

Survey participants were asked to write about a positive experience that they had encountered with parents. Forty-five low income school teachers (83.3%) responded with an experience. Nine (16.7%) low income school participants did not type a response. Sixty (84.5%) of the high income school participants responded to this question, while eleven (15.5%) did not answer this question. Three survey participants (2.4%) answered this question, but did not identify themselves as a high or low income teacher.

Low and high income school survey responses were placed into one of the eight previously mentioned categories based on the experience written. The following categories were selected to represent low and high income school teacher experiences: general thank you, academic, behavior, special education/intervention, teacher appreciation, Mother’s Day, attendance of a function, and other.

Low income school participants responded in the following manner: 14.8% had general thank you responses; 24.1% were related to academics; 18.5% wrote about positive behavior experiences; 9.3% involved special education or intervention; 5.6% included an experience brought about by Teacher Appreciation week; 1.9% commented on Mother’s Day; and 9.3% fit the *other* category. None of the low income school participants wrote about attending a function.

High income school participants responses showed that: 26.8% had a general thank you experience; 8.5% were related to academics; 8.5% wrote about a behavior experience; 18.3% involved special education or intervention; 2.8% shared a Teacher
Appreciation encounter; 4.2% responded with a Mother's Day experience; 2.8% had a positive experience that resulted from attending a function; and 12.7% wrote a response that fit the other category. Figures 26-27 show the results of this question.

**Figure 26.** Number of teachers that wrote a positive parent experience

**Figure 27.** Types of positive experiences
High/Low Negative Encounter

When asked if low income school survey participants had ever had a negative encounter, forty-nine teachers (90.7%) responded yes, while one participant (1.9%) replied no. Four low income school teachers (7.4%) did not answer this question.

Sixty high income school participants (84.5%) selected yes to having had a negative encounter, while ten teachers (14.1%) responded that they had not. One high income school participant (1.4%) did not answer this question.

High/Low Conflict

High and low income school participants were then asked if they had ever had a conflict. 83.3% of the low income school teachers answered that they had experienced a conflict situation with a parent. 9.3 % replied that they had not experienced a conflict, while 7.4% did not respond to this question. 78.9% of the high income school participants answered that they had experienced a conflict situation with a parent, while 19.7% did not. 1.4% of the high income school survey participants did not respond to this question.
Figure 28. Number of teachers that have had a negative encounter

Figure 29. Number of teachers that have had a conflict
**High/Low Negative Parent Communication**

High and low income school teachers were asked when negative parent encounters take place how do parents mainly choose to communicate. Thirteen (24.1%) low income school teachers responded that parents communicate using the phone, nine (16.7%) indicated that parents communicate using written correspondence, fifteen low income school participants (27.8%) replied with the face-to-face encounter and thirteen (24.1%) answered that the parent went directly to the administrator. None of the low income school participants selected email as the main method to communicate. Four low income school teachers (7.4%) did not answer this question.

The high income school teachers responded that eighteen participants (25.4%) found that parents communicate using email, twenty-nine (40.8%) participants selected the phone, five (7%) indicated that parents communicate using written correspondence, ten (14.1%) replied with the face-to-face encounter and six high income school teachers (8.5%) indicated that parents go directly to their administrator. Two teachers (2.8%) did not respond to this question.

**High/Low Negative Teacher Experience**

Survey participants were asked to write about a negative experience that they had encountered with parents. One hundred eight teachers (86.4%) responded with an experience. Of those one hundred eight teachers, forty-six participants were from a low income school. Eight low income school teachers (14.8%) did not answer this question. Figures 30-32 show that low income school responses were placed into one of eight categories. Two low income school teachers (3.7%) provided a general answer to share
their experience; ten participants (18.5%) wrote about a negative experience that involved academics; fourteen (25.9%) low income survey participants had negative encounters that dealt with behavior; three teachers (5.6%) shared incidents that involved either special education students or some type of intervention assistance; four low income school teachers (7.4%) dealt with a negative parent retention situations; one participant (1.8%) wrote about a negative recess encounter; three (5.6%) teachers had negative experiences where a parent questioned their ability; and nine low income school teachers (16.7%) shared experiences that did not fit into any of the previously mentioned categories so were therefore placed into the other category.

Out of the seventy-one high income school participants that answered this question fifty-nine (83.1%) answered this question while twelve teachers (16.9%) did not type a response. Of the fifty-nine responses six high income school answers (8.5%) were placed in the general category; eleven (15.5%) teachers wrote about a negative experience that involved academics; thirteen (18.3%) indicated in a written response that their experience pertained to behavior; eight high income school participants (11.3%) choose to write about a negative experience that involved special education students or intervention assistance; one teacher (1.4%) had a negative encounter over a retention issue; five high income school participants (7%) indicated a negative response that was related to recess issues; four high income school teachers (5.6%) had experiences where a parent questioned their ability; and eight survey responses (11.3%) shared a written answer that did not fit any of the previously mentioned themes and so they were placed
into the *other* category. Three high income school teachers (4.2%) wrote a response that was not applicable to answering this question.

**Figure 30.** Methods parents used to communicate a negative message

**Figure 31.** Number of teachers that wrote about a negative encounter
High/Low Negative Encounters Resolved

High and low income school survey participants were asked to write about how their previously written negative experience was resolved. One hundred four teachers (83.2%) responded with an experience. Of those one hundred four teachers, forty-six participants were from a low income school. Responses were read and then grouped into the following categories based on similarities in their answers: involved principal/administrator; discussed problem; received help from a team; parent came to an understanding; teacher conceded with parent; changed classrooms; retested; issue was not resolved; other.

Results from low income school teachers’ show that fifteen participants (27.8%) resolved their negative encounter with the help of a principal or administrator. Five low income school responses (9.3%) show that discussing the problem with parent helped to
resolve the issue. Three low income school teachers (5.6%) received help from a team composed of teachers and specialists from their staff. Seven participants (13%) wrote that the parent of the negative encounter eventually came to an understanding that favored the teachers’ perspective. Two low income school teachers (3.7%) resolved their situation by conceding with the parent. Three survey responses (5.6%) indicated that the student changed classrooms to resolve the encounter. In two (3.7%) of the negative encounter resolutions students were retested. Four low income school teachers (7.4%) commented that their issue was not resolved. Five participants (9.3%) remarks did not fit into any of the previously mentioned categories and were placed into the other theme.

Figures 33-34 show out of the seventy-one high income school participants, fifty-eight (81.7%) teachers shared their resolution from the previously written negative experience. Thirteen high income school teachers (18.3%) did not answer this question. Eleven participants (21.6%) indicated within their response that a principal or administrator became involved in their negative encounter. Thirteen high income school teachers (18.3%) found that their problem was resolved after discussing it with the parent. Four participants (5.6%) received help from a team of teachers or other specialists that work for the school. Four teachers (5.6%) had encounters where the parent came to an understanding. Two high income school survey responses (2.8%) showed that the teacher ended up agreeing with the parent. There were zero written responses that indicated a student changed classrooms. One teacher (1.4%) wrote about a resolution that involved retesting. Ten high income school participants (14.1%) found that their negative encounter was never resolved. Eleven teachers (15.5%) wrote
responses that did not fit any of the previously mentioned themes and therefore were placed into the other category. Two high income school teachers (2.8%) indicated in their written response that they did not have a negative experience resolution to share and were as a result were considered not applicable to this question.

**Figure 33.** Number of teachers that responded to how a negative encounter was resolved

**Figure 34.** Types of resolutions to negative encounters
High/Low Teacher Perception of Parent

High and low income school survey participants were asked to answer they perceived the parent from their negative encounter. Fourteen low income school teachers (25.9%) responded that they perceived parents positively, twenty-one participants (38.9%) indicated that they felt negatively towards the parent, and fifteen teachers (27.8%) selected the answer choice of neutral. Four low income school teachers (7.4%) did not answer this question.

Figures 35-37 show that 17 high income school participants (23.9%) perceived parents positively after their negative encounter, while 25 teachers (35.2%) had negative feelings towards the parents involved in their experience. Twenty-two participants (31%) indicated that they had a neutral feeling towards the parents. Seven high income school teachers (9.9%) did not answer this question.

High/Low Teacher Perception of Student

High and low income school teachers were then asked how they felt about the student who was involved in their negative parent encounter. Twenty-two low income survey participants (40.7%) indicated that they perceived the student involved in their negative experience in a positive manner. Seven teachers (13%) responded that they had negative feelings towards the student involved in the encounter and twenty-one (38.9%) selected the answer choice of neutral. Four low income school participants (7.4%) did not answer this question.

Thirty-three (46.5%) of the seventy-one high income school responses indicated that teachers perceived the student involved in their negative encounter in a positive way.
Three teachers (4.2%) responded that they felt negatively towards the student after the encounter, while twenty-eight high income school teachers (39.4%) stated that they had neutral feelings towards the student involved in their negative experience. Seven high income school participants (9.9%) did not answer this question.

**High/Low How Teacher Felt Perceived by Parent**

Finally, high and low income school survey participants were asked a question about how they felt they were then perceived by the parent after the negative encounter occurred. Thirteen low income school teachers (24.1%) felt they were perceived positively by the parent that was involved in their negative encounter, while twenty-five participants (46.3%) indicated that they felt they were perceived negatively. Twelve low income school survey responses (22.2%) showed that the teacher felt they were perceived a neutral manner by the parent. Four low income school participants (7.4%) did not answer this question.

Figures 35-37 show that twenty high income school teachers (28.2%) felt they were perceived positively by the parent involved in their negative encounter. Twenty-two participants (31%) felt that the parent perceived them in a negative manner, while twenty-two teachers (31%) responded that they felt the parent perceived them neutrally. Seven high income school participants (9.9%) did not answer this question.
Figure 35. Teacher perception of parent

Figure 36. Teacher perception of student
High/Low Positive Outcome From Negative Encounter

Question thirty-two asked high and low income school survey participants if they had ever experienced a positive outcome from a negative encounter. Figures 38-40 show that 41 low income school participants (75.9%) had experienced a positive outcome from a negative encounter, while eight teachers (14.8%) have not. Five low income school survey participants (9.3%) did not answer this question.

Fifty-eight high income school participants (81.7%) responded that they have experienced a positive outcome from a negative encounter, while seven teachers (9.9%) have not. Six high income school survey participants (8.5%) did not answer this question.

High/Low Examples of Positive Outcomes From Negative Encounters

High and low income school teachers were asked to write about some of the positive outcomes that have occurred because of a negative encounter with a parent. Out
of the fifty-four low income school participants, thirty-eight teachers (70.4%) responded to this question. Sixteen low income school survey participants (29.6%) did not answer this question.

When creating different categories for survey responses some of the respondents choose to provide more than one positive outcome. Low and high income school participants’ answers to this question were sometimes placed into more than one of the following categories: learned more information; work with parents; parents struggled with material; documentation; communication; involve parents more; realized administrative support; changed teaching practice; teachers are appreciated; and other.

Figures 38-40 show that 10 low income school teachers (18.5%) learned more information about a student from having a negative experience with a parent. Seven (13%) survey responses showed that teachers learned how to work with parents better. In three low income school teachers’ situations (5.6%) they learned that the parent had struggled with material. Three participants (5.6%) wrote about the need to keep documentation, while eleven low income school teachers (20.4%) addressed the importance of communication. Two survey responses (3.7%) expressed a need to incorporate more parent involvement, while three teachers (5.6%) realized that they had administrative support. Four low income school teachers (7.4%) responded that they made changes to their own practices because of a positive outcome from a negative encounter with a parent. One participant (1.8%) shared that one outcome they have experienced was feeling appreciated. Finally, six low income school survey participants
(11.1%) wrote responses that did not fit into any of the previously mentioned themes and were therefore placed into the *other* category.

Out of the seventy-one high income school participants, forty-six teachers (64.8%) provided a positive outcome that they have experienced from a negative encounter. Twenty-five high income school teachers (35.2%) did not answer this question.

Eleven high income school responses (15.5%) indicated that teachers learned more information about students as a positive outcome. Four participants (5.6%) shared that they learned how to work with parents better, while one teacher (1.4%) wrote that he/she learned that the parent was struggling with some of the curriculum concepts. Three high income school teachers (4.2%) commented about the importance of documentation. Twelve participants (16.9%) addressed the need for better communication, while two teachers (2.8%) learned that they wanted to involve parents more. Two high income school teachers (2.8%) realized that they had administrative support. Seven participants (9.9%) made changes within their teaching practices because of an outcome from a negative encounter. Two survey responses (2.8%) indicated that they felt appreciated after their negative encounter with a parent. Finally, five high income school participants (7%) provided a response that did not fit into any of these themes and was therefore placed into the *other* category.
Figure 38. Number of teachers that have had a positive outcome from a negative encounter

Figure 39. Number of teachers that wrote a written response about their positive outcome
High/Low Unresolved Negative Experience

High and low income school survey participants were then asked if they had ever had an unresolved negative experience. Figures 41-43 show that 20 low income school participants (37%) have had unresolved conflict situations, while 29 teachers (53.7%) have not. Five low income school survey participants (9.3%) did not answer this question.

Out of the seventy-one high income school responses twenty-one teachers (29.6%) have experienced an unresolved conflict situation, while forty-seven (66.2%) have not. Three high income school survey participants (3.2%) did not answer this question.

High/Low Outcomes of Unresolved Conflict

High and low income school teachers were asked to share some of the outcomes that they have experienced because of an unresolved conflict. Out of the fifty-four low
income school participants, nineteen teachers (35.2%) completed this question, while thirty-five (64.8%) did not.

Several high and low income school survey participants responded to question thirty-five by providing more than one outcome that occurred because of an unresolved conflict. Therefore participants’ answers to this question were sometimes placed into more than one of the following categories: tension; decrease in communication; avoidance; changed schools/classrooms; additional problems; or other.

Figures 41-43 show that six low income school participants (11.1%) found that an unresolved conflict led to tension in the parent/teacher relationship. Seven teachers (13%) noticed a decrease in the amount of communication that took place between themselves and the parent. Three low income school survey participants (5.6%) indicated that another outcome from unresolved conflict situations is avoidance. Additionally, three teachers (5.6%) discovered that when their problem went unresolved the family made the choice to move their child either out of the school or into a different classroom. Out of the fifty-four low income school participants three (5.6%) discovered that additional problems with the parent from the unresolved conflict continued. Four low income school teachers (7.4%) responses did not fit into any of the previously mentioned themes. These answers were placed into the other category.

Sixteen (22.5%) of the seventy-one high income school participants provided a written response for outcomes they have experienced due to unresolved negative parent encounters. Fifty-five high income school teachers (77.5%) did not answer this question.
Figures 41-43 show that five high income school teachers (7%) experienced tension in the parent/teacher relationship after an unresolved conflict took place. Four participants (5.6%) noticed that there was a decrease in the communication that occurred between the home and school. Four teachers (5.6%) indicated that another negative outcome from their unresolved conflict was avoidance. One high income school teacher (1.4%) wrote that the child moved to a different school. Two participants (2.8%) experienced a continuation of problems. Six high income school responses (8.5%) did not fit any of the previously mentioned themes and were therefore placed into the other category.

Figure 41. Number of teachers that have experienced unresolved conflict
Figure 42. Number of teachers that responded to outcomes of unresolved conflict

Figure 43. Outcomes of unresolved conflict

High/Low Willing to Talk With Researcher

Finally, high and low income school survey participants were asked if they would be willing to speak with a researcher about their experiences. Out of the fifty-four low
income school responses, seventeen (31.5%) answered yes, while thirty-three teachers (61.1%) said no. Four low income school survey participants (7.4%) did not answer this question.

Sixteen high income school participants (22.5%) responded that they would be willing to talk with a researcher, while fifty-two (73.2%) would not. Three high income school teachers (4.2%) did not answer this question.

![Bar Chart](image)

*Figure 44. Number of teachers willing to speak with a researcher*

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the results of the survey. Participants’ responses were analyzed as a whole to establish a foundation of information on current practices and experiences teachers have today in working with parents and families. In addition responses were categorized by the income level of the school district. Data was gathered
to determine if differences exist between high and low income school teachers in methods of communicating and both positive and negative experiences in working with parents. The following chapter will take a closer look at three high income and three low income school teachers’ personal experiences in establishing relationships with parents, defining the different types of involvement, and both positive and negative encounters they have experienced.
CHAPTER V

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

In addition to taking a survey on parent involvement, six teachers were selected to participate in a one hour interview. Teachers were selected based on their willingness to speak with a researcher and their responses to the survey questions. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. Three teachers were associated with the high income schools and three participants taught at low income schools. This chapter contains the results of the six interviews. The information is divided into the following segments: (a) a summary of each interview is provided giving highlights from individual conversations with each participant; (b) general themes that emerged from all of the six interviews; and (c) a look at commonalities between high and low income school teacher interview responses.

Interview Summary

Prior to each individual interview the six participants’ surveys were read multiple times in an attempt to understand their background. Additionally, interview questions were tweaked dependent on how each participant responded to the survey. For example, if a participant responded in the survey that they did take a course or workshop on parent involvement then a follow up question was asked during the interview if they found that class to be beneficial now as a teacher. Some participants did not attend a class or workshop and therefore were not asked that follow up question.

In general the six interviews participants were asked the same basic questions (Appendix I). Background information was gathered along with beliefs about
participants’ views on parent involvement. Each teacher was asked to elaborate on questions answered throughout the online survey. In particular, the questions on the survey that pertained to negative experiences with parents and the outcomes were further investigated. Teachers were also asked to comment on how they define overly involved parents, adequately involved parents and under involved parents. Highlights from each interview will be further reviewed in the following section.

**Joe Interview**

Joe is a high income school, second grade teacher. He received his undergraduate degree at a Jesuit University and his masters at an independent liberal arts college. He has been teaching for twelve years in the same school district. Joe indicated on his survey that he had attended a course on parent involvement. When asked if the course was helpful he replied,

> A lot of it was phooey. I mean it was all theory and we didn’t actually get to practice any of it because it was early in the undergrad program. A lot of it was getting to yes, getting parents and student teachers to interact, how to avoid conflicts if you could, how to address parents at conferences. I mean it was a decent class.

He continued to comment about how his Jesuit university experience attempted to provide undergraduates with exposure to both high and low income schools, which therefore lead to a variety of experiences with different types of parents. Ultimately, Joe did find that this course was helpful in preparing him for working with parents.
One area of interest that Joe shared involved how he communicated with parents. In addition to his survey response which indicated Joe used email, the phone, written correspondence, face-to-face meetings, newsletters, conferences, and impromptu meetings. He also selected the other selection where he wrote in the response Ning Site. During the interview Joe was able to clarify that the Ning Site was a website for his class where only select individuals could have access. Joe invited parents to join his class website where they could then view pictures that Joe would upload or stay up to date on activities that were taking place by looking at the classroom calendar. When asked if he found that the majority of the parents used his Ning Site Joe commented, “Unfortunately I didn’t have a lot of participation with that. I had four parents who used it religiously and they loved it!” Joe shared that his district had canceled all free websites so he would no longer be able to use the Ning Site.

Joe spoke more about his use of email as a tool for communicating with parents. Instead of using paper copies of newsletters Joe found that he would use email distributions as a means to keep parents informed of what was happening in his classroom. Sometimes he would send out email distributions to the parents informing them of a skill that was taught that day and how they could extend their child’s learning experience at home. He also used email as a way to communicate with individual parents. Joe would send emails informing a parent of both good or bad behaviors that he observed. He found that students were held more accountable. “It kind of keeps them like they know school is not just a place where they go, then they go home.”
Joe does have parents volunteer inside the classroom. He commented that for the previous school year he had eleven of the twenty-two parents volunteer to come and help. Some of the parents would come in daily, others were weekly or bi-weekly, and a few would only volunteer when they could get off of work. Joe would have his parent helpers read with students, do math flash cards and he even had one parent give spelling from word study tests. Additionally, Joe commented that parents do “anything from field trips to last year it was mostly behavioral – take this child out and work on his math with him and keep him out of our hair for about thirty-five to forty minutes a week.”

At this point in the interview Joe talked about some behavior issues that he had experienced with students who had attention deficit disorder. He attributed a large part of their misbehaving to a lack of response from the parents. Joe said,

I don’t want to say they chose to ignore it but they didn’t really do anything to help their kids whether it was medication, whether it was change in diet, earlier to bed earlier to rise, whatever, they just didn’t do anything that would help their kid.

His experience led him to form beliefs about those parents that he was dealing with in regards to their attitudes towards attention deficit disorder and their children.

After discussing how Joe communicates and works with parents throughout the school year the topic changed to positive experiences in working with parents. In the survey Joe wrote about a parent giving him a thank you note for helping with their autistic child. Joe commented that the same family wrote another note at the end of the year and said “hopefully I can get their younger son when he gets up to second grade
because he is in kindergarten right now.” When asked to share some of his other experiences Joe remarked “It’s nice when you hear from the principal, like you did a great job so and so just came to my office and said what a wonderful experience.” Having an administrator pass along positive feedback from parents made a lasting impression on Joe.

While placement was not a formal interview or survey question the topic arose when Joe commented that he had taught four of a family’s six children. When asked if that was done on purpose Joe responded,

No, well it depends. Let me rephrase that because this mom that I had can be a pain so sometimes they will just say to you that Joe had a great experience with her. Joe can keep her at bay. She likes him so let’s give her what she wants in that respect. Other times there can be a negative experience as well so they will avoid giving me the sibling out of the kindness of their heart for me I suppose because I have gone through it already so let’s share the wealth.

When it comes to the placement process at Joe’s school he explained that all of the teachers for one grade level meet together and sort students into the next grade. An attempt is made to balance academics and ethnicity. In addition, placement cards are written on by teachers that provide suggestions as to students who should not be in a class together or a specific teacher that should be avoided. This card is passed on from one year to the next. When the teacher finally receives their confidential list, abbreviations are used that denotes different areas such as a heart by a student name indicates that the parents “need a lot of love.” In other words those parents might be high maintenance and
require additional teacher time. This was another area that the teachers would try to 
balance during the placement process.

Next Joe discussed some of the benefits he has experienced from having parent 
involvement. He stated,

It makes a lot of my life easier because I can give them some of the how shall I 
phrase this not really busy work, but like kids who need flashcards. I don’t have 
time in my day to do that. I’m doing essential learnings, get the kids in guided 
reading and instruct them. I’m doing word study and helping them learn their 
words. They can do the busier work sort of stuff where the kids have to know it, 
but I don’t have the time to do it.

He also mentioned that parents’ help with organizing student data binders, help students 
learn their snap words, and they help to personalize instruction. Joe talked a lot about 
differentiating the curriculum and how his parent helpers were able to focus on providing 
additional one-on-one help for students that were struggling or extend material for 
students who were ready to move onto the next topic.

Within Joe’s survey he wrote about a negative experience that involved a parent 
who was upset with him for moving her daughter’s seat placement within the classroom. 
Joe elaborated on the situation with some background about the parent. This parent had 
many issues with Joe and the school throughout the year. In addition to complaining 
about her daughter’s seat placement she complained about a miscommunication about 
when a birthday treat should be brought into school. Joe stated, “she started screaming at 
me in the middle of the hallway that I didn’t communicate well…you said to be here at
11:30.” This parent also sent Joe a two page email about how a teacher, who was running a fundraiser, tried to steal her daughter’s money by taking her $5 for a glass of lemonade. Joe commented “She didn’t even know what the event was for, didn’t even know who the kid was that sold the lemonade, much less the teacher that ran the event.” She even had issues with her daughter’s report card. Joe remembered her writing a letter stating, “You never say anything positive about my daughter on her report card.” This parent was very vocal throughout the entire year which eventually led Joe to his feeling of “I am just so glad she is gone now.” Joe shared more about the experience he wrote about in his survey. At the beginning of the year she was very disorganized. In order to help her with that as well as not have her peers hate her for having all of her stuff all over their desks which is what was starting to happen. I moved her desk over by herself and I said “Suzy as soon as you can start getting your stuff under control, your clutter under control…” plus it helped her focus a lot better. I mean she is by herself so she can’t be looking at what are you doing, why are you doing, dadada. Well mom came in and saw that she had been moved and was like went crazy. “Why did you move her by herself!” And then after I explained it number one I did it to help her because I didn’t want her friends hating her already it’s the first few weeks of school and her stuff is starting to get all over and students are starting to complain. Number two she is focusing better. She focuses on me. She is looking up at the board. Plus this parent said that this child had had surgery on her eyes. One of them was a lazy eye that tends to drift. So she is closer to the board.
This parent communicated her dissatisfaction with Joe through an email. After her email where “she ripped me apart” Joe tried a different solution.

So then I moved her back to the table group just to avoid conflict with that parent. Fine you know what if the other kids get upset with your kid well then I tried! You can’t say that I didn’t try. So I put her back with the table group. She became a little more distracted. Then I put her with a couple of girls that I thought would be good peers for her. They would help her – Suzy we’re cleaning up now get your stuff cleaned up. Let’s go. They would even help stuff up some of her things into her pencil box for her. Close it up and show her where it goes. It was a good pairing. Then that parent said you are pushing these two girls onto my daughter and they are becoming very bossy with her. They are not being respectful. Everything I tried…

This parent was dissatisfied with the way Joe handled her daughter’s situation.

The same parent went on to write complaints critiquing Joe because he had students sitting all around the room. To address her comments Joe responded,

I will talk to you about your child anytime you want but I’m not going to explain to you another person’s child because that is just not professional. But I will tell you one thing, they choose to sit there.

Joe suggested a meeting with the parents and the assistant principal, but the parents did not want to meet with her. Joe commented, “They knew. They were a little apprehensive. They knew they were off base.” The meeting never took place.
Joe continued to share another story about this same parent that happened around the end of the school year.

And then another thing she complained about is I have another parent give a word study test. Well the mom she happened to be there that day and this was the problem because she was one of my volunteers and I wanted to have her in so that she could see what goes on. She sees the mom giving the word study test and then the mom I’ve had this mom in before, the one giving the word study test – Joey’s mom, awesome mom, great mom. She starts trying to help Suzy by showing her which ones she got wrong, why she got them wrong, trying to explain it to her. This mom goes off like on me after that mom left and I walked the kids to lunch, she stayed behind. “How dare you let her give the word study test and she is asking the kids about their scores and writing it in my binder and why is she trying to teach my kid how to do that, how to do the words. She is trying to boss my kid around and this and that… So after that I was like I’m done with this mom. I started counting down the days, only 30 more days and then she is out of my hair.

This time the parent had issues with the privacy of her child’s education, which combined with all of the previous encounters led to a teacher shut down in communication.

Joe discussed how he felt that he was perceived in a negative way by this parent. He felt this way because this particular parent would just try to show up in his classroom to have a conference. The office staff had to stop her periodically because she would
want to come to his room during instruction times. After his negative encounters with
this parent Joe decided to never talk on the phone with her. He said,

I never met with her one-on-one. I emailed everything to her from then on. You
could just tell. She was short with me. She would do that fake smile thing it was
like die scum sort of look. I was just like whatever. I don’t have to deal with you
and your kid for that many more days.

Joe’s reference to the student in the above quote shows that his eagerness to be rid of the
parent had also transferred to the student as well.

Joe’s comment about his student led into the next topic of discussion, his feelings
towards the child. On the survey Joe responded that he did have negative feelings
towards the child after his encounters with the child’s mom. In his interview Joe
responded in general about how he feels about the children of parents who might have
negative encounters with. He stated,

It’s only human nature and that’s why I try not to do that with my child’s teacher
as horrible or as wonderful as they may be. You never want to get on their bad
side… then how do you expect me to want to do the best for your kid. I mean I
try to because I’m a professional but if you keep ripping on me and doing that but
it is only human nature that I’m not going to like you and I’m not going to try
what’s probably best for your kid because I have 19 other kids whose parents are
trying to help their kids, they want what’s best for their kids.

Joe spoke genuinely about how his negative encounters made an impact on how he views
and treats the child.
The next area that was discussed included how Joe defined overly involved parents, adequately involved parents and under involved parents. To Joe an overly involved parent is one who emails frequently about items that are not that important or to inform about miniscule details about the child. However, he commented that being an overly involved parent does not necessarily lead to negative experiences. He shared a story about a parent that wanted Joe to know everything about her child and communicated frequently with him, however, her comments were always about the child and were not directed towards his teaching style. He remarked “I loved her kid but she was involved in a positive way. I mean wanting me to know everything about him.”

An adequately involved parent communicates with Joe only when there are things he needs to know about the child that might impact his school day. Joe provided the example of a parent going out of town and the child was going to be staying with relatives. This would be a good time to contact the teacher and inform him of what is happening at home.

An under involved parent is one who has little to no contact with him or the school. Joe commented,

I need to meet you. I need your child to know that we are a team and a partnership and that what I say goes and that a parent is going to back me up and I’m going to back you up. Not getting that is under involved.

Joe’s definitions for the layers of parent involvement seemed to revolve around the frequency of contacts with him.
Next Joe was asked to share more about his outcomes that he has experienced as a result of negative encounters. Within his survey Joe wrote about a couple of positive outcomes from his negative experiences. He wrote that he made adjustments so that he would have better communication with parents and that he tried to incorporate parents more in the classroom. Joe provided an example where a parent would point out a problem or something that was incorrect and he would communicate by sending an email distribution letter to all of the parents with the correction made. He realized, 

When they can communicate with me in a nice manner and I can communicate back. Where it’s not like oh you fool you spelled this word wrong didn’t you go to grammar school, but instead say hey Joe you made a mistake. Then I fix it. 

The parents’ way of communicating with Joe impacted how Joe viewed the situation and handled the problem.  

Within Joe’s survey he wrote about negative outcomes that involved feelings of betrayal, tension in the relationship, a lack of desire to communicate, and not wanting that parent near his classroom. Joe’s recent negative encounter taught him to choose a particular mode to communicate, more specifically to use email. By using email his comments were then documented and could be used if needed in the future. Within the community where Joe teaches he also found he might not know about a problem until it becomes too bad and then the parent goes straight to the principal or begins to talk with other parents. Joe shared a story where parents had heard negative gossip about him within the community. He commented, “They can ruin your reputation and they don’t even know what’s going on in your room or what kind of teacher you are.”
When asked if he had ever adapted his teaching practices because of a parent encounter Joe replied,

Yes. You sharpen your skills in watching how you send email. I am always thinking is there anything that the parent can take away as negative. Or when I communicate with parents is there anything they can think that I am being mean to their kid. You are always trying to think one step ahead of them to avoid some of those conflicts.

Awareness of how Joe responds to parents ultimately helps in avoiding potential negative encounters with parents.

**Ann Interview**

Ann is a high income school second grade teacher. She received her undergraduate degree from a Big 10 university and taught in a different high income school district for one year in the first grade. After that she made the move into her current district where she has been teaching second grade for ten years. She received her masters degree at small Catholic college in the area of reading.

Ann indicated within her survey that she communicates with parents through email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face meetings, newsletters, conferences, and impromptu meetings. Additionally, during the interview Ann talked about a grant that she applied for and received through the Parent Teacher Organization that provided financing to begin a parent book club. The grant funded the purchase of books that second and third grade parents could use if they choose to participate in the book club discussions. Ann and another third grade teacher met monthly with a group of parents
that were interested in discussing different school related topics such as homework, motivating kids to read, teaching towards the test, and so on.

Ann’s participation and organization of this book group lead to her positive encounter that she wrote about in the survey where a parent thanked her for starting the club. In addition Ann mentioned in her interview that teachers do not receive enough praise and compliments for the job that we do. She commented,

The little things really mean a lot to me, like when parents write me a nice note. I still remember, this was years ago, a parent called me and left me a message that said, “I just wanted to let you know Suzy loves Social Studies. Bye!” Those kinds of things just mean so much…it’s the little things like that I don’t know if parents realize that but those kinds of notes go really far, for me at least.

Even though Ann is accustomed to receiving generous gifts from the majority of families in her classroom she still finds that a thank you note or call is the most rewarding.

Ann defined parent involvement as:

Working with kids at home. Supporting the learning that is taking place at school and showing an interest in what we are doing in the classroom. Part of me wants to say being available to come in, although as a working mom now I know that can be really hard, so when I schedule things I try to make it at the end of the day, or give parents flexibility by letting them know at the beginning of the year, end of the year events. We also did this thing where we scheduled multiple events all on the same day so that way parents wouldn’t have to take off work three times, they could just take off once. Some of the events we have in 2nd grade, I call the
big events of the year, so it is really nice that they can be there. I have had a really nice turn out with parents coming. Also like I said before it is being able to support what is happening in the classroom, whether it is helping with homework or making conversation about what they learned because if parents can contribute then it shows students that they are interested and supported. It becomes more meaningful to the kid if they can feel that their parents are interested in what they are learning. Parent involvement might be coming to conferences, asking questions when they don’t understand something, not many parents do that.

For Ann parent involvement takes place at home and at school. While there is some understanding for parents who are unable to help in school there is still an assumption that parents will make the effort to take time out to come in for the “big events.” Ann also incorporates the idea that parents need to be vocal when they do not understand, which implies that parent involvement is about the parent taking an active role in a child’s education.

Within Ann’s survey she wrote about a negative encounter that took place where a parent “yelled at me for his son’s lack of improvement.” Ann provided more details about this encounter that took place over three years ago. Prior to the encounter Ann had been very excited to have this family in her classroom because they lived only two doors from the school and the mom was available to help out in the classroom. Ann had this mom come into the classroom every day in the morning for ten minutes to help with morning work, answer student questions, tie shoes, or just listen to student stories. For conferences she scheduled this family for a morning conference before school began.
So the father kind of sat back the whole time. The mother listened to everything I was saying. He was a good student, needed to be pushed a little in terms of writing. He was an only child so that kind of, not that it makes a big difference, but for this family it did because they didn’t have anyone else to compare him too. All of a sudden he just got very angry and defensive. I don’t remember the exact things he said. I almost thought he was kidding when he said it. I mean here we are I have met with the mother almost everyday, it was the end of the conference, and then he was bringing up the fact that about his son’s progress or something. He was doing fine. So he got really angry. I basically felt like I was going to cry right there. I have never had that experience in all of my years of teaching of somebody being really attacking. So I said we really need to stop this conference now. From then on my principal was so supportive. She told me and the 3rd grade teacher the following year, “Do not ever meet with these parents alone. There will always be an administrator present.”

Following the initial conference the parents went to speak with the administrator where they expressed their dissatisfaction with Ann and their concern for their son for over two hours. Ann said that her principal,

Did not give in. She was very confident in what I was doing. My principal did a fantastic job. This was the first time I ever needed her to go to bat for me. She was very supportive. She listened to their comments. She told them we need to agree to disagree.

Ann took comfort in receiving so much support from her principal.
After this incident these parents tried to convince other parents who had children in Ann’s class to “side with them.” They began complaining that their child was not happy and that Ann could not deal with a behavior problem that kept occurring in her classroom. Because of the situation that had been created Ann did not invite this parent to come in to help out on a daily basis anymore. In fact she stopped having any parents come into the classroom to volunteer.

We said it was because I had a student teacher, so at least we were able to use that as an excuse. I was able to justify that we didn’t need the extra help anymore because I had two adults in the classroom at all times.

Additionally she listened to a recommendation that her principal gave her which was to pass out a survey to the students each week where each child had to answer the question: How are you feeling about school this week? The students had to select an appropriate face (happy, sad, or ok) and then write an explanation. This would provide sufficient documentation that could be used if the parents complained that his/her child was not happy in Ann’s classroom.

When asked about how Ann knew that other parents had become involved with the initial complaint by the parent Ann replied that she had received complaining emails. She said,

It was to the point that the whole staff knew that I was going through this. It ended up being such a dramatic thing that, I mean everyone has bad years but this really felt like I was being attacked by the parents. I mean it wasn’t the kids, it was the parents. That really makes you on edge and you question everything you
do, everything you say to the kids. That year the music teacher had said
something like, “your kids were acting like kindergartners one day.” They went
home and told their parents that and so that teacher got in trouble by the parents. I
ended up really thinking so much about the management of my classroom and
how I was talking that it really took away from instruction.

Ann had to be extremely careful in how she spoke and handled every situation within her
classroom.

Ann commented in the survey that she felt that she was perceived negatively by
the parents involved in her encounter. She shared that her main reason for this was the
fact that the parents were talking about her to other parents so negatively. This led to
another negative encounter that took place with the best friend of the initial bad
experience parent. The best friend’s mom began emailing Ann with concerns about her
son’s progress. She complained that if she could not be in the classroom each week then
she wanted “work samples sent home and an explanation of his progress each week.”
Ann complied and provided documentation and explanations for this student’s progress
each week. This added quite a bit of extra work for Ann.

On the survey Ann commented that she felt neutral about the student involved in
the negative experience, however, during the interview Ann commented:

It really is too bad because it really does make you think differently about the
student. Even now I saw this family the other night and I didn’t even say hello. I
would never do that even to those families that you aren’t that crazy about, but I
just can’t look at that family. You know the parents. Well you couldn’t help but
think that the parents were saying things to the kids like to make them not like me. Maybe plant ideas in their head. Its true there are really three kids that stand out to me that year that I feel are stuck up.

Through discussion Ann did admit that she treated the student in a different manner than the rest of her students because of the possible repercussion that could occur with his parents.

After the incident Ann commented that she “avoided the parents at all costs.”

Similar to the parents, Ann talked about her frustrations with the situation to her colleagues and this particular mom “became an outcast at my school.” Ann shared,

All of the teachers are aware of her. She used to be a mom that helped out in the book room but my principal basically kicked her out of there. She put a sign on the door like don’t come back kind of thing.

Because of Ann’s experience this parent developed a negative reputation which ultimately hurt her relationship with the entire school.

In addition to avoiding parents, gossip in the community and an end to volunteers Ann shared another story that had negative outcomes.

This was the one where the child wasn’t making any progress. The mother was convinced that her daughter had a learning disability. Everything I was doing as far as evaluating her showed that she was within the normal range of everything. She wasn’t very strong but she also wasn’t very weak. So the mother had a really hard time understanding that her daughter wasn’t learning disabled. I don’t know I guess she wanted her daughter to be doing better than she was and
so then she wanted to have her daughter tested in school. So that came back normal as well. Everything showed that I was right. Well then she had her daughter tested at an outside source and that came back normal. So basically everything came back normal.

She ended up being really upset with me. I don’t know that I wasn’t doing more to help her child. That I wasn’t I don’t know what she wanted me to be doing but I guess she thought I wasn’t making enough accommodations for her. It was really awkward with that mom and she was also really tall, which was kind of intimidating. For the spring conference I invited the guidance counselor, any time you have any type of issue the guidance counselor will come in and be another set of ears. Well when she found out she was like “no one told me you were coming and I don’t want you to be there. I’m not letting you come in.” The guidance counselor and I looked at each other like can you do that? We didn’t know. Who is right? So basically the guidance counselor stayed in the hallway so that if things got awkward or crazy then she could be there to intervene. This mom actually resigned as my room mother.

Later in the interview Ann shared that this parent hired a parent advocate to come in as a parent coach. The advocate’s job is to question the school and essentially help the parent push to get what they want. However, even with the advocate help this mom was unsuccessful in getting her child special education services. Ann continued to share that this family’s grandmother would come in weekly to help in the classroom and after the negative incident she stopped coming. This situation shows that parent and family
avoidance can be a result from a negative experience, the experience was powerful enough to have not only an effect on the teacher but on the parent as well.

The positive outcome that Ann wrote about and discussed as a result of her negative encounters involved receiving praise from her principal. She wrote in the survey that she had “An awareness that I am a good teacher who helps all children be successful. It took my principal standing up for me for me to really see it!” Ann shared that her principal does not provide praise frequently so when she stood up for her it meant a lot and “did a lot for my self-esteem.”

Ann was asked how she would define overly involved parents, adequately involved parents and under involved parents. The overly involved parent as

The ones who bring the library book when they forget it. I mean this is the perfect time to teach them responsibility. If you forget your book then you have to wait until the next time when you bring them back. The over involved ones email you many times a day. Sometimes I don’t think they really understand the big point. They get hung up on all of the little things that they aren’t seeing the big picture of what is really important.

For Ann an overly involved parent is one who enables the child to continue his/her behavior, which ultimately affects the child’s growth and maturity.

The under involved parent is the parent that you have to expend energy trying to get things returned or get in contact with. Ann commented,

An under involved parent is the one that you have to be after to return the permission slip or send in the folder, or unpack the kids backpack because it
hasn’t been done in a week. They don’t return phone calls or emails – sometimes they don’t even give a phone number. They don’t come to the events at school or are constantly late. They make excuses about why their kid doesn’t turn in homework. I had one of those this year.

In Ann’s experience within the high income school she had only one student in her classroom where she would consider the parent as under involved. She continued to define under involvement by adding “under involved means I guess the child not having what he needs for school.”

Adequate involvement was defined as

the right amount of involvement returning necessary emails, checking a child’s homework or at least looking at it, coming in to help every so often, just being in contact about a child’s progress at conferences or at open house.

Ann expects parents to participate both at home and in the classroom. For Ann the right amount of parent involvement is the adequate amount.

Finally, Ann shared a little information about the district’s placement process.

Within this high income school district teachers are asked to indicate on placement cards if a child requires a high amount of teacher time or an average amount of attention. This is where a teacher would show if the parent impacts the amount of teacher time. In some cases the teacher is rating a child based on his/her family instead of his/her own needs within the classroom.
Alexa Interview

Alexa is a high income school second grade teacher. She received her bachelor’s degree at a top Ohio university and after graduating worked at Sea World in the education department. Following her work at Sea World Alexa got a job teaching fifth grade at a private school. She worked at the private school for two years and then left in hopes of securing a job at a public school. Unfortunately, she did not find a job in a public school so she worked as an office temp. After one year as an office temp her previous fifth grade position at the private school became available so she went back and worked for another three years. Then she stayed home for a number of years taking care of her children. Once her children were in school she found a job teaching fifth grade math and seventh/eighth grade science at a Hebrew school. Alexa continued to search for a public school job and she finally made it into her current district as a teacher aide. After working as an aide, Alexa was able to get a position teaching second grade. She has been teaching second grade for thirteen years.

While working on her masters in Special Education, Alexa took a class where a professor and a parent co-taught the course. Alexa commented “The parent was an educator but her role was that of a parent and her view on her side of a parent. She had a child with Down Syndrome.” When asked if she was able to use any of the information she learned from the class Alexa said,

The one thing that really hit home was the discussion we had about parents as your partners. The hard thing is that as teachers we have our domain. But we do have their children and their children are their focus. So when you meet with
them you kind of have to have that mindset that they only want what is best for their child, no other child in your classroom, just their child.

This thought process is how Alexa approaches her parent encounters.

She continued talking about another important factor that she felt teachers needed to keep in mind when working with so many different types of families.

The other part of that topic is the stuff from that class is what parents bring with them like their financial problems. There could be addictions and there could be a lot of things standing in the way of them being supportive of what is going on in your classroom. You can’t be too quick to make judgments.

At this point Alexa shared that many teachers at the beginning of the school year look at a student’s address and begin forming opinions about the type of support they will receive even before meeting the child or the family.

While many teachers do make judgments, Alexa does not even look at the student files until after she has met with the family. She stated,

I think the reason why teachers are doing that is because they are trying to figure out who is going to be a supportive parent because I think a lot of times the perception here is that the apartment dwellers, their families are a little more transient, these kids might have switched schools. Things are a little less stable. They might be less able to provide for their kids. They might be working at less paying jobs so they have to work more hours and are able to provide less support.

A lot of that is true but I just don’t want to know that before I meet them.
She tries to start the year by treating each family equally, without forming any preconceived notions about their life styles based on where they live.

When it comes to working with so many different families Alexa tries to keep an open mind when first meeting. She prefers if parents call her by her first name. This helps establish a less formal relationship where parents hopefully feel more comfortable and will approach Alexa if a problem arises. Alexa has also found, 

If there is a problem I have something in my history where I have four kids I try to share it with them. A lot of times one of my four kids has something that they are going through you know and that connection is helpful.

By sharing with parents her own personal experience with raising children, she hopes to strengthen her relationship with families and create a comfortable atmosphere where she is more easily approachable.

As the topic moved onto parent volunteers in the classroom, Alexa’s attitude towards parents shifted to one of distaste. She commented,

Our school kind of has an unwritten policy that we have to have volunteers in the classroom. So we have to do it at least up to second grade and then it kind of peters off after that because of how the classroom is set up. It is a distraction to me. I wish that I didn’t have to do it.

Alexa shared that her reason behind not enjoying having parents in the classroom is that she had “been burned with confidentiality.” In the past she had a parent make copies of a spelling test before she would send the test home. She discovered that this parent was notifying other parents of their child’s test score before the test actually went home.
Additionally, Alexa had other issues with parent volunteers. She shared another example where she found a parent talking on her cell phone instead of doing the one-on-one help with a child. Alexa also found that having parent volunteers created a financial problem for her around the holidays. It became tradition at her school to give volunteers a gift at the holidays. This became a problem because there were quite a few parents that volunteered and it became an expensive tradition to uphold.

Alexa shared in her survey that she encountered a positive experience with a parent who thanked her for helping his child succeed in school. She talked about how receiving verbal praise or written notes are the nicest ways parents can say thank you. Alexa commented “In fact I try to do that with my own kids because I know that I value that.” She went on to say that one of the biggest compliments is when the first grade teacher will say “so and so parents really want you next year.” For Alexa this meant that the parent was truly satisfied with their experience having her as their child’s teacher and would trust her with educating additional family members in the future.

When Alexa was asked about her views on the benefits of parent involvement she remarked “I would say that to some extent getting to know them on a personal basis and then they feel comfortable about their child in the room.” She then continued with her response commenting on issues she has encountered with involving parents in the classroom. The first involved a mom who would come to volunteer in the classroom. Every time this parent visited she would pick her second grader up and allow her daughter to sit on her lap while she was supposed to be helping other children. Alexa has
also had multiple situations where the parent will try to bring in other children which have never worked out. The babies became too much of a distraction for the students.

Because of the large amount of parents that volunteer Alexa has had to devise a schedule to organize the extra help. She commented, “It’s like a manager trying to work with schedules at a retail outlet! You know that takes me forever.” Alexa has found that this time consuming task often does not become established until later in September or sometimes even October. She explained that parents will often ask her about it and she will say “working on it, working on it” and then if they keep complaining she will ask “do you want to do it?”

In addition to the amount of time it takes to organize her volunteers Alexa has had parents who simply want to work with their child when they come in to help. She shared, I never assign them to their child. I had a parent that would gravitate over to their child and the poor kid would shrink down and you could tell that she was a little over bearing. He wasn’t doing as well as she wanted and she would point over at his paper and say “Look at this! You know this!” I would have to say “So and so your table is number two!” In other words get away from that poor kid! Then the boy told me that he didn’t like it when his mom came in.

The discomfort that some of her students felt after having their parent come into the classroom contributed to Alexa’s dislike of having parent volunteers.

Alexa also had parents complain about some of the jobs that she would ask them to complete. At open house Alexa tries to set her expectations for her parent helpers by informing them that they will either be helping students in the area of math or they will
be helping her by completing different jobs such as sharpening pencils or cutting out laminate. At times when parents would come in and Alexa would have them working on her odds and ends jobs they would complain that they wanted to work more with the children. Alexa was able to vent her frustrations about having parents come into the classroom.

The conversation shifted to Alexa’s negative encounter that she wrote about in her survey. The incident took place seven or eight years ago and has really stuck with Alexa because it was one of her first negative encounters that she experienced with a parent. The problem began at the beginning of the school year one of her students would come to school with dried sinus on his face. Alexa attempted to help him get it off but he reacted by yelling “No, no, no, no!” Alexa talked to the mom about it and she responded that she had never experienced the problem. The sinus problem continued for this student and he was referred to the speech pathologist. The speech pathologist found that he had speech issues but the parent refused to allow him to participate in the school program. The mother kept insisting that “he didn’t have a problem.” Alexa remarked,

I think I offended her by saying that he had boogers on his face and I’m sure I put it a little more delicately or that I was trying to help him clean up and he didn’t want it. So there was a little bit of friction from that part.

This incident that occurred at the beginning of the year caused some tension in the parent/teacher relationship which only grew more as the year progressed.

Then this parent took issue with her son’s report card. According to Alexa they had just implemented a new type of report card that was very subjective and this parent
was distraught that her son did not perform as well compared to her other two children.

This student was part of a triplet and the other two siblings were involved in the districts
gifted program. Alexa said,

I was judging the boy on what I knew. I guess that was the fault of the report
card. It was very subjective to what your opinion was in your classroom. Each
year you compare a child to the curriculum but also to the other children in the
class. The top student in the class you are going to place higher. She had a big
beef with that. I referred her to the principal for that because that was you know a
school issue. So I recommended that she talk with the principal and she did.

Then the principal suggested that the three teachers get together to talk about the
bars because it was important to the mother. I think she was thinking a long bar
was an A and yet in explanation to the report card she just couldn’t hear that.

After working with the other two teachers on the report card issue Alexa ended up
changing how she graded on the new report card system. She switched her method to a
line that corresponded more with the other two teachers.

Alexa would not give up on working with this parent so she invited the mom to
come in weekly to volunteer. She commented, “I kept trying to build the relationship
better.” After speaking with her co-teacher about this particular parent Alexa became
aware that this mom had told another teacher that she was having some marital problems.
She stated, “So there is that baggage that people are bringing that are going to affect their
attitude.” Alexa attributed her home life problems to part of the reason why this parent
was being so difficult with the school and herself.
In addition to the report card issue this parent began to make special requests of Alexa. She wanted Alexa to accept oral answers because her son struggled with writing. Alexa refused to do this because as this student makes his way through the grades written response is going to be expected and second grade is working towards that transition.

The parent went to the principal again, where this time, unless the mom wanted her child tested for a learning disability and possibly placed on an IEP then the student would have to perform written responses. The mom did not want her child tested and so he had to complete the written response.

Alexa did some investigating into this parent’s background with the school and discovered a couple of things. First she found that prior to her boys being of school age she interviewed the principal and decided to send her children to a Montessori school instead. Alexa commented that her student “probably did nothing” in a Montessori environment. Eventually they made the switch to Alexa’s school where in first grade the mom caused problems for the teacher when her child was tested for a speech and language problem without her permission. Back at that time if the teacher thought there was a speech and language issue the speech teacher would take a look. Alexa reported that

The mom was livid that the speech teacher even looked at her child and now we do have parent permission before we can do anything with the child but then the state didn’t require it so we didn’t do it. So she really had something against the school and her boy.
Alexa struggled with how opposed this mother was with getting her son help that the school was offering.

She also found that in first grade this same student broke his leg. The mom wanted the teacher to pull him around in a wagon and to help him in the bathroom. “She didn’t want him in a wheelchair. She didn’t want people to make judgments so he rode around in a wagon.” The teacher refused to be responsible for him in the bathroom so the mom went to the principal and accommodations were made where the mom would come in a couple times a day to help her son use the bathroom. This parent’s history showed that she was not afraid to discuss any issue with the principal.

Then another problem occurred where again this same student hit somebody. Alexa commented that

He had a very short fuse. Most kids avoided him. First of all they didn’t like how he looked because of the sinus issue. Kids don’t come to school like that. The kids just thought it was yucky. They avoided him and I don’t remember him having friends in the classroom.

At the time of this incident the school had implemented a new discipline process that involved filling out a referral for behavior issues.

After Dan hit someone Alexa followed the procedure and filled out a referral reporting the incident.

The mom didn’t like that it was written down. She felt that it should have just been handled in the classroom. There should have been a smaller consequence.
She didn’t think hitting somebody was so bad. She wanted a meeting and I told her this was the school procedure so she went to the principal.

At this point the principal requested a meeting with all of the parties which included the parents, Alexa, and the co-teacher. It was decided at the meeting that the referral would be ripped up. Alexa commented,

There just comes a time when you just have to think what is really important here and we ripped it up. I was against it but ok you gave me this procedure and I’m following it and then I guess you don’t have to follow it. I never filled out a referral form again. I just never did it!

This incident made such an impact on Alexa that her beliefs in following school procedure for behavior issues changed and she no longer complied with school policy.

For Alexa the problems with this parent went on all year. She stated, “It was really hard to separate my feelings with what was going on with the mom from the little boy and with the little boy some things were negative anyway.” When it came time for placement Alexa said,

So what we do at placement, among other things like we try to place the special ed kids and the gifted kids, but the other thing we make sure of is that one teacher isn’t getting too many difficult parents. I certainly put her as a difficult parent. I mean just wanting to communicate with a teacher that is not a difficult parent. She was a difficult parent. We write notes to the teacher getting the child so that they can look at those. I just said “see teacher” and that meant that there was too
much to write down. When she came to me I told her the history and said “I hope it is better for you.”

As a result of her experience with this one parent Alexa remarked, “After that whole year I have been a little more guarded about how I get to know a parent.” One parent had the power to change Alexa’s perceptions of how she went about getting to know parents.

Alexa shared that recently this same student came back to visit with her. She was very surprised that he came because it took the effort of walking to a different building. Alexa inquired about his mom and had a pleasant conversation. Afterwards she commented,

I was shocked because I would have thought that that boy had a very negative experience here. I would have thought that the mom would have been talking negatively about me at home because of how she treated me! Maybe she didn’t do that!

Alexa was able to realize that her perceptions of this student and his mother might not have been correct. While she assumed that his mother was extremely unhappy with her as a teacher her student’s visit showed Alexa that overall she was still able to provide a positive experience for him.

Next Alexa was asked how she would define overly involved parents, adequately involved parents and under involved parents. Alexa provided a couple of examples of what an overly involved parent looks like to her. In one situation Alexa encountered a father who would “hover outside the classroom.” She found that this father would simply watch his child. Another parent once asked Alexa during a conference “I just wanted to
know when I can stop wiping his bottom?” Alexa informed that parent that they needed to stop immediately and give him some responsibility for himself. She talked about another parent that refused to let their child go on any classroom field trips unless the mother was present. This resulted in the child not attending one of the class trips. Finally, Alexa referred to another overly involved parent as one who came to school and picked up her children and walked around holding them at the age of seven or eight. For Alexa overly involved parents are ones who “hover and can’t let go.”

For the adequately involved parents Alexa described parents who take the time to pay attention to school details. She commented,

These are the parents that return their forms on time. It’s like they are looking through the book bag. They are checking things out. Their homework comes back and you can tell that there are eraser marks where maybe the parent helped correct them. They always have their homework and we make them write it in their planner and the parents are into that. Another thing that shows that they are adequately involved is that they are able to make the meetings. An adequately involved parent shows that they are supportive.

The under involved parent for Alexa is the parent that does not show support. “Those are the kids that come without homework. They don’t turn their forms in. Usually we have to go on a field trip for those forms to come in.” Alexa shared a story about a parent who she would consider as under involved. Alexa had a couple of the siblings in this particular family and she had discovered that every year she had a child from this family that they came to school with no supplies. She contacted the mom at the
end of the school year and offered her a bunch of extra supplies that she had discovered in the classroom. The mom made remarks that she would come in and get the supplies and that she was very grateful, but then never came. Under involvement for Alexa is not making the effort to support a child’s education.

Within Alexa’s survey she wrote about positive outcomes that came about because of negative encounters. She has found that getting to know the parents early on in the school year is most beneficial to establishing a positive home/school relationship so that if a negative encounter takes place you already have a strong foundation built with that parent. Alexa wrote and elaborated on being positive in conference situations. She shared how important it is to always start with a positive comment about a child and then ease into additional areas of concern. Ultimately the parent needs to know that “you like their child” which strengthens the partnership.

When asked on the survey what negative outcomes Alexa had experienced because of her encounters with parents she responded that she did not have any. However, throughout the interview negative outcomes did emerge as Alexa shared her experiences. For example, after Alexa had issues with her sinus issue student and the behavior referral she commented that “I never filled out a referral from again. I just never did it!” This shows that she felt a lack of support from administration when her principal agreed to tear up the office referral that Alexa had written. Therefore she made the decision to not involve administration when behavior problems took place in her classroom.
Additionally, Alexa has also changed how she utilizes parents within her classroom. Based on the interview she has had to shift from having parents work with graded papers to completing other tasks that are more basic in the classroom. Her beliefs in having volunteers had become jaded over the years and negative encounters she experienced to where she resents the unspoken implication from her school that she includes volunteers regularly.

Alexa had many encounters that she was so willing to share that helped her get her points across. One of her final remarks about how she feels about parents currently is that “teachers are being held more accountable by the parents today than by principals.” Alexa’s experiences have shown that some parents have taken more control over what is happening within the classroom than administration.

Sarah Interview

Sara received her undergraduate degree in the area of business management and then went on to receive her Masters in Education at a Big 10 University. She taught in a high income school district for two years, where she spent one year teaching special education and one year teaching second grade. After that she moved to her current low income school district where she has been teaching kindergarten for eight years.

In order to communicate with parents, Sarah sends weekly newsletters that include important information such as material that was covered, upcoming units of study, or struggles that students are having where additional reinforcement at home is needed. When asked if she thought the majority of parents read her newsletter Sarah responded, “I am more confident that if a parent was questioning me I was like you
should have read the newsletter.” She shared a story about a parent stopping by her classroom to confront her about an issue. Sarah pointed out that there was a reminder written in the newsletter, which ultimately diffused the parent’s anger and helped the parent realize that she needed to read the weekly newsletter. Sarah stated,

I am confident that about five out of my twenty-five students would read it. I am just more confident if they ever had an issue with what I was doing well I was like well it was in the newsletter if they didn’t know when picture day was or when we were having field day or gym class because you still have those parents at the end of the year that don’t know what day gym day is.

Sarah used her newsletters as a way to document what was happening in the classroom and protect her from questioning parents.

Sarah indicated that parents mainly communicated with her through phone calls. In her years of teaching at the low income school Sarah mentioned that she has had very few parents who have used email to communicate. She was fairly confident that the reason behind the lack of emails was simply that parents did not have access to a personal computer to use on a regular basis.

The conversation progressed onto Sarah’s positive experience that she wrote about in her survey. She commented on a mom that had thanked her for a wonderful school year. Sarah went on to share a couple of additional memories about positive recognition from parents. She commented,

A couple of parents will come up and say thank you. They’ll say “I can’t believe that my kindergartner could read by the end of the year and they’ve made so
much progress.” Some parents do send in thank you notes, but very rarely.” She went on to say “But you know that is not why I’m here. It’s like I’m here to see the kids’ progress.

Sarah’s remark shows that for her the praise of a parent is not as important as the success of the child.

Sarah went on to share that for her the biggest praise was when her former students would stop by to visit. She shared,

Sometimes the kids will come over when they are in junior high and they will come visit. That is even more of a compliment than anything. I mean they still remember me and they will say things like “oh I remember where I sat and I remember what I learned.”

For Sarah admiration from her former students meant more than remarks made by the parents.

When asked about the benefits of parent involvement Sarah responded with “help at home.” She elaborated on her answer by saying,

I see more progress in the child academically and socially when the parent is more involved. They know what is going on in the classroom. If I call them with a good report or a bad report I will ask the child the next day “did your parent get my message and talk to you about it” and some of them will say “yes.” You can definitely tell a difference in that child. They are proud of themselves or they work hard to change.
The conversation shifted to general observations that Sarah made when parents were not as involved in their child’s education. She commented that students would “continually break the school rules, they would not get along with others, they would use inappropriate words or act inappropriately.” For these students she remarked,

Sometimes you just have to realize that those parents aren’t going to be there for their child. They aren’t there for their child right now and they have other things they need to do. So you have to work throughout the school to see who can help you out when they are behaving that way so they are not around the other kids. Sarah’s response shows understanding and acceptance that some parents are simply absent from their child’s academic learning so instead of dwelling on what should be happening in the home Sarah and her school try to make accommodations so those children can still be successful in the school environment.

Within her parent involvement survey Sarah wrote a response about a negative experience she had encountered with a dad of one of her students. She described this child’s behavior.

There were many different things she would do. Sometimes it would be where she would do nothing that you would ask her to do. Sometimes she would walk and climb on things. Sometimes she would just start yelling no. I know the more I ignored her the more she wanted my attention. At times she would hit me. She would crawl under the tables. So there were a variety of things. There were obviously other issues going on with her.
When the father was confronted with these issues he commented that they only occurred at school and that he did not see this type of behavior at home. However, Sarah found that this child behaved this way for all of the specials teachers and her sitter.

Sarah shared some information about this child’s background.

When she was three years old her dad moved away and she was living in the car with mom. Mom had a drug problem. Dad came back. I don’t know all of the problems that she had but the school psychologist thought that it was an abandonment issue.

The problems began occurring in March. The father was insistent that the reason why his child was acting out was because of the other children in the classroom. He was in denial about his daughter’s behavior. Unfortunately, when Sarah asked for help within her school the intervention assistance team no longer met after the month of March so it took until May before Sarah was able to get a team together to address her concerns.

At the meeting the assistant principal, the school psychologist, Sarah and the father met to discuss the issues and brainstorm solutions. Sarah commented,

The father wanted to blame me. He wanted to place the blame on me which we tried to explain to him that this wasn’t a blaming game. These things happened to her when she was small and maybe they are starting to come out. He said that he had appointments at the Cleveland clinic with certain psychologists, but I don’t know if he followed up with them or not.

Sarah found that having the team together was helpful in supporting her in getting through to the father. She was sympathetic towards the parent and said,
I mean this is his daughter. This is his baby and you don’t want to accept things like that. You would rather place the blame on other teachers or children or the school. I just tried to explain you know that if she doesn’t get the help now that in a couple of years it was just going to get worse.

Based on this meeting the team decided to try an intervention where the child would call her dad after a certain point each day whether it was a positive phone call or a negative one. Sarah found that this strategy did not work and after two weeks of trying the child was suspended for kicking another teacher.

Sarah indicated in her survey that she felt she was perceived in a neutral manner by the parent. When asked to explain why she felt that way, she responded that she had a prior experience with this father’s stepdaughter. At that time she had a positive experience with the family and she felt that the father thought she was a good teacher “just not for his daughter.” Ultimately she stated “we left on good terms, but I still think he blamed me a little bit for it.”

Sarah had learned a lot about this particular child and her family so further questions were asked to clarify how she discovered the background information. She commented that she learned a lot of the information at parent/teacher conferences when she confronted the father with the many issues his daughter was experiencing. At that point the father opened up and shared a lot about his daughter’s background. Sarah commented that “It was really helpful. I mean any information like that helps you see where the child is coming from and addresses issues.” She felt sympathy for the child
and what the child had already experienced in life. An understanding of why she behaves the way she did became evident to Sarah.

The interview moved onto the topic of over involvement, adequate involvement and parents that were under involved. Sarah stated “I think over involvement would be 3-5 contacts throughout the week from phone calls, emails, notes, or even showing up at the door.” She then went on to say that in her experience she has had very few over involved parents. An adequately involved parent is one who,

Reads the newsletter. If I sent home anything that needs to be signed it’s brought back. Knowing that the parent is reading the newsletter, like knowing gym days because they have to wear gym uniforms that shows me that they are reading the letters or turning back the homework when the homework needs to be sent back.

Sarah commented that about half of her class has adequate parents.

Finally an under involved parent is a parent where:

Parents are not returning my phone calls, not turning in things even after I have called to remind them, not sending in homework, not having their children dressed appropriately when I ask for their gym clothes, or if we are going on a field trip, or anything like that. Not having lunch money.

Around thirty-five percent of Sarah’s class fits her description of being under involved. However, while Sarah has discovered while the parents might be under involved she has found that in order to get things accomplished she will rely on an older brother or sister to relay information to mom or dad. Sarah went on to comment about her under involved parents. She said,
Because sometimes the parents, you know it might not be that they don’t want to help, they might not be able to read or there are other things going on in their life and you have to be understanding. Especially in a district where you have to look at that not everyone can read, sometimes they can’t even see their children until 7:00 at night. There are all of these different things. So I hate to say that that is under involved because sometimes it is out of their control.

Sarah has empathy towards her under involved parents and keeps an open mind.

The conversation then shifted to a discussion about positive outcomes from negative experiences. Within Sarah’s survey she wrote about how she learned to improve her classroom management based on her negative experiences with parents. Sarah shared about her first couple of years of teaching and how her beliefs and practices changed.

I would have to say that when I first started teaching I had such a rigid view of this is how it is, this is what I was taught, this is what a family looks like and I think it was really important that I took a step back. It took me a couple of years to realize that I needed to quit blaming the parents for everything they were not doing, but you have to except that and you have to go on with it. You have to make changes in your classroom to make up for that.

She then went on to provide an example about homework. In her experience she had found that children were coming to school unprepared for the day. Their homework would be incomplete. While a part of her had blamed the parents in the past, she instead looked at what she could do as a teacher to solve this problem. She adapted by providing
those children with morning time to complete their homework assignment. She commented,

I mean that is not the ideal situation but I think you just have to change. No matter what you say, no matter what you think, or do it’s not going to change. This is that child’s life and each child is an individual. Not all children are like that but I think you have to take a look at their family situation.

She continued on explaining that any piece of information you can gather on a child is helpful to know. Making contact with any of the child’s family is useful even if that family member is not a parent and turns out to be a sibling instead.

Rather than getting discouraged with her job Sarah instead chooses to help children celebrate their successes. For example she shared the following story,

I had a little boy who came into the class knowing nothing, not even how to write his name. By the end of year, the parent was involved. The parent did a lot of work with him at home. I sent things home. He was at reading at grade level by the end of the year! He was writing. I mean I still think he needs extra practice but he did it! I think it had to do with the extra support he had at home. I mean if he didn’t have that support at home he probably wouldn’t have made it to first grade.

By taking this type of positive approach and with the help of parent involvement this child was able to succeed.

When Sarah began talking about negative outcomes from parent experiences her negative outcome actually turned out to be positive. Within her survey Sarah did not
indicate a response for having a negative outcome. However when asked the question a second time she responded that she did not like to call a parent multiple times about a child. Based on prior experience she had learned that a parent did not enjoy being confronted about their child. She learned that rather than being accusatory towards the parent that she needed to first establish a positive rapport. In order to do this Sarah makes attempts to send home positive notes or make positive phone calls home about the child. If she does have to call for a negative reason then she will tackle the situation with a plan of action. First she will say something positive and then move into the negative behavior that she has observed. She will then try to provide an action or a suggestion on what she is going to do within the classroom and ask the parent to be supportive at home. Finally, she follows up with another positive. By using this strategy Sarah learned that parents would respond better to her phone call.

Sarah was asked if there was one negative parent encounter that stood out beyond the rest. After thinking for a moment Sarah commented that she couldn’t think of one, “I guess you just sort of learn from them and let them go.” She went on though to share an encounter from her first year teaching at a high income school. At the time Sarah had a student whose parents thought their child was dyslexic. They approached Sarah with their concerns and Sarah inquired with administration about the proper procedure for handling the situation. She was told that the school could not test for it. After relaying the information to the parents they called the school and received different information. The child was eventually tested and diagnosed with dyslexia. To Sarah she felt that the parents “thought I didn’t know what I was talking about.” She was embarrassed about
being misinformed and felt that she was perceived in a manner that questioned her teaching ability.

Sarah knew that the parents doubted her ability. She shared,

They would come in and watch him to make sure that I was doing things properly. They were looking out for the best interest of their child, but I did make sure that I didn’t have any more of their children in my class. They had three or four other kids and I was like no.

As a result of this encounter Sarah deliberately found a way to avoid having the same family in the future. She did not want to have any more encounters with parents who were already questioning her teaching. The process of making sure that the family did not end up in Sarah’s class was simply a matter of swapping with another child of similar ability during the placement process.

The conversation then shifted to looking at whether or not Sarah had ever made changes in her teaching practice because of a parent encounter. Sarah talked about having to make changes in her teaching style the year she had a child who had a disability where she could not speak. The student had to use a machine to speak for her. Sarah found that by working with the parent that it was necessary to use more picture clues and that questions had to be phrased a certain way. Additionally extra work was required in handling the other students in her class and teaching them how to respond and behave.

Sarah has had an exposure to many difficult children and to try to put things into perspective Sarah commented,
I try to find the good in the kid and I always think “wow that could be my
daughter, what if that was my daughter – how would I handle that?” How would
I want an adult to treat my kid? How would I want them to talk to her?

She tries to look at the situation from a different perspective which helps in
understanding the backgrounds of her students. Sarah had an accepting attitude and
continuously showed empathy for the families that she works with.

Instead of showing frustration with the families Sarah instead critiqued the school.
She stated,

I think the most frustrating thing is not being able to help the kids the way I think
they need to be helped. I think we need to have a counselor there. I think the
classes need to be smaller. I think if they took a step back, and unfortunately they
need to think about the budget, make the class sizes smaller. I just get so
frustrated because we are laying the foundation here in kindergarten and do you
think they are going to do well in first grade? Even though they have more help
in first grade. First grade has all of these wonderful programs. There is nothing
in kindergarten. And then when we are evaluated they don’t even look at that. I
wish they would take a look at the progress that each student made. Look at
where they were before they came in and where they are when the finish.

The lack of resources and additional support at the kindergarten level stand out more as
an issue to Sarah than the parents. She continued,

Those are the things it’s not the parents, it’s not the kids, it’s the whole system. I
get very frustrated. I understand that we don’t have the resources, we don’t have
the money and we made all of these budget cuts, but it is just frustrating. It is just heartbreaking.

Sarah was asked if she had noticed any changes with the amount of involvement over the course of her teaching career. She responded that in her opinion the amount of involvement has decreased. More moms are going back to work and there are a variety of other reasons but as a whole the involvement has decreased. Tying into her observations Sarah’s final remarks were

I think parent involvement is crucial in order for a child to be successful in the majority of cases. There are some children that are able to get by and they have their foundation and they are able to get along, but I know that their parents are involved at some point in order for them to have that foundation. I think it is crucial and I think it is very important for the children to see the teacher interacting with their family at home or grandma or whomever it might be. They see that communication and they know that we are both doing things for the good of them.

For Sarah, parent involvement is important for the success of a student.

**Patty Interview**

Patty went to an Ohio community college for her undergraduate where she then spent ten years in the industry. She decided to make a career change and went back to school at Urban University for her bachelors and masters degree in curriculum and instruction and reading. Patty ended up getting a job where she did her student teaching in a low income school and has taught there for twenty-five years. Over the course of her
teaching career she has taught first, second and third grade. Currently, Patty teaches second grade.

One of Patty’s primary means to communicate with the parents in her classroom is through a weekly homework/newsletter information sheet called the homework hang-up. Within her newsletter Patty will outline what events are taking place that week (ex: gym class, pictures, etc.) and then on the back she will include practice problems or questions that go along with material taught that week or take home books. Patty expects that this sheet is returned on a weekly basis and if it is not returned then she will call parents and inquire about its whereabouts.

While Patty commented that she was unsure if parents actually read the material she included in the newsletter she found different ways to encourage the return of the homework. One idea that she mentioned that was successful was to put a note in the newsletter that if it came back signed then the student would receive a little treat. However, Patty keeps in mind that

Sometimes with some parents I don’t know how well they read and that is always a consideration when you send things home, if they can really read. A lot of the parents that we have are a low income socioeconomic group and their experience in a school hasn’t been positive.

Patty continued to share that because there is often uncertainty about a parent’s education Patty will try her best to give suggestions to parents on how to help support and extend learning at home. For example,
I try to give them ideas of what they can do. I tell the kids that the homework hang-up is called that because you should hang it up on your refrigerator. So I tell the parents that anytime they go in ask their child to spell a word or act it out, because sometimes we act out our vocabulary words. I try to explain to the parents what we do. I say “I know you are busy, I know you have other children but while you are cooking or setting the table you can say a math problem or spell a word.” So I try to relate it to their lives. I don’t know how much is implemented but I try to be sympathetic or empathetic with their situation but also lay down my expectations, not to just let them say “no I can’t do that.” I think every person can do something.

When asked how Patty learned about students backgrounds she went on to share that for some of her students she had actually taught the parent. For those situations Patty referred to the families as “long time families.” However, quite a few of the families are new. For these Patty shared,

Kids often open their mouths and they tell a lot. Some parents have been incarcerated and the kids are living with the grandmother. Whatever, you kind of pick up on things. When we have lessons about drugs or alcohol you get a whole outpouring of family life, but I try to not let them share family business, but I also know that they need to talk about it. I’ll say “why don’t you hold that thought and you and I will talk about it later.” This way it doesn’t get out into the community. I think a lot of times parents are reluctant to share. I wish we were seen more as a help and a resource and not just me but I think teachers in general. We really
want what is best for your child and when I say something I’m not just high in the sky. I mean the parent has had four or five seven and eight year olds. I have had five hundred. So when I say that something isn’t quite right I’m not just picking on your child. It’s based on my education, my background, my experience and this is how you can help your child. I’m not saying this to demean you, but if there is something like a learning disability or aggression or things that aren’t exactly as they should be I’m going to say something. I wish it was more of a give and take and its not always like that.

The conversation then shifted to whether or not Patty had parents come into the classroom to help. For Patty the biggest help was in having parents volunteer to go on class field trips. She does not have parents come into the room to help. However, she mentioned at one time in her career she had a mom who was seamstress who would make costumes for her class. Patty has found that she does not have parents anymore that would really like to come in and help.

In her survey Patty wrote about a positive experience with a parent being pleased about the amount of assistance she provided in helping to get a diagnosis for attention deficit disorder (ADD) and the accommodations necessary to help. Patty provided additional information sharing that this parent had a reputation as a “difficult parent.” In previous years she had been verbally aggressive towards her older children’s teachers, which caused anxiety for Patty in confronting her about her child’s behavior issues and her suspicions that the child had ADD. Once the behavior became more under control the mom would make comments to Patty about how impressed she was with what her
child was sharing at home. Patty went on to share that verbal praise was nice to receive and that it was very rare to get gifts or notes of gratitude.

Patty was then asked to comment on any benefits that she found were associated with parent involvement. She spoke about how “the children that are supported are the children that have the effort are the ones that generally are your better students.” Her general observations showed that academic success and parent involvement are linked. Patty continued to share that benefits do not necessarily mean that parents have to come into the classroom. A positive example might be “having them at school on time and having their homework completed.”

She went on to share how within her own classroom she will try to teach students to be responsible for their own well being. Patty tries to encourage her students to put homework in a spot where an adult might see it and check it over or to put their own clothes out the night before and pack their bag so that they will be organized and ready to start the next day. Patty will try to not only coach her students but the parents as well by offering small suggestions for how to help their child study for a spelling test or practice a skill. In this way she tries to equip her students and parents with the skills to be successful.

The interview then went on to cover the topic of Patty’s negative experience that she wrote about in her survey. Her experience was about a boy who transferred into her class in May. After completing some assessments Patty made the decision that he was not ready to move onto third grade. In addition to being weak academically, this student was often tardy, missed school completely, or fell asleep in class. Patty commented “I
took a picture of him sleeping on the rug. I mean if you are that tired I am not going to try to wake you up. If you are sleeping through regular classroom noise then you must be tired.” A letter was sent home informing the parent, or in this case the grandma, that the student would not be promoted. Patty never heard a response so she placed him on the do not promote list.

On the last day of school the grandma came into the school. Patty recalled,
She had on bright go-go boots, a short mini skirt, a red blouse that had ruffles in the front, and some kind of hairpiece or wig. She came to my door and said, “I don’t want my grandson to fail.” I mean no appointment, just coming in on the last day and I said, “I understand what you are saying but his work isn’t meeting grade level standards. We can talk about this after school if you would like to talk in morning, but right now I have the children here and I can’t really talk to you about it right now.

At this point the grandma went to the assistant principal.

Patty went on to share that the assistant principal had background experience from working in a high school. In the past the school use to offer a waiver that parents could sign which indicated that they refused the retention. However, at some point Patty’s school switched to a standards based retention program, where if the student has not met the benchmarks within the curriculum then they are retained. The assistant principal instructed the grandmother to sign a waiver that was associated with the old program. She then went back to Patty to ask for a waiver. At this point Patty still had children in
her classroom but she had to leave to explain to both her administrator and the grandmother that the waiver program no longer existed. Patty went on to say,

So she said that she would talk to the administrators. She would go to the principal. So the principal was out for something. The next day the principal had heard about it and the grandmother was going to come in again. It was maybe the last day then where it was a teacher work day with no kids and he said that she was suppose to come in the morning so I just kind of waited for her and she never showed.

Instead of coming and speaking with Patty’s principal the grandmother called the area superintendent and wanted a meeting with him. Patty had shared work samples with her principal and he was in support of her decision. She passed along the information to the superintendent and after two weeks the grandmother never showed up for the meeting. When the start of the new school year came the grandmother had pulled her grandson out of Patty’s school. She tried to register him in another school in the same district, but in third grade. Patty’s principal shared the retention information with the new principal and ultimately the student was placed back into the second grade. Patty commented, “When they are doing poorly, they pull them out of school and then they play that game.”

Patty indicated on her survey that she felt she was perceived negatively by the parent, or in this case the grandmother. She responded that she felt this way because she didn’t give any excuse or reason and she didn’t address any of the academics. Nothing about checking over his homework and then I guess I got offended when
she went over my head and went to the administrator. It was like she was saying
I’m not getting anywhere with you and what I have to say doesn’t have value.
The grandmother did not address any of Patty’s concerns by sharing any information
about the child’s background. Instead she went to Patty’s superior to try to solve the
problem and get the outcome that she wanted.

The interview then shifted to focus on how Patty defines overly, adequately and
under involved parents. Patty stated that an overly involved parent is
a person that doesn’t foster a child’s independence. They accompany them to the
room still in second or first grade. You know they take their child’s coat off and
hang it up and they have to be there for everything. That just kind of starts the uh
oh and the warning bells go off. Ding. Ding. Ding. Ding. Then they kind of look
at all of the work with a critical eye not with an interesting eye like “oh what are
you learning or tell me about this.” It’s more “hmmm…” more of an evaluative
thing compared to maybe the other teacher like “you aren’t doing that or your
doing this and they aren’t doing that.

She went on to talk about overly involved parents as those who will disagree with the
teacher about what reading level their child can perform at. Patty commented that for
these parents she will have a child in her class who can demonstrate fluency at an average
rate read for them so that the parent can see what her expectations are for an on level
reader. Patty has found that this type of modeling is the most successful in helping a
parent understand her expectations.
When referring to her definition of an adequately involved parent Patty expressed concern that perhaps her ideas and expectations were to low. She went on to say,

My expectations are having their children at school on time, in dress code now, not sleepy but ready to work and their homework is fine. I’d be glad if it was fine. It just shows parents being supportive. Also when report cards go home and conferences come that parents attend and not just come and pick up their report card and walk out and ask about their child.

At Patty’s school parents are expected to pick up report cards every quarter and then talk with the teacher about their child’s progress. Patty feels very strongly that all parents should be able to set aside ten minutes a quarter to discuss their child’s progress at a conference.

Patty then continued to define the under involved parent. She stated,

A noninvolved parent would be one whose kids are late. When they do come to school their kids are hungry they haven’t eaten. We have what they call a universal feeding program. We have such a high poverty rate that they do get breakfast, but not if they aren’t on time. Then we don’t service. They used to eat in the room and that was nice because if there was extra cereal I could put it by my sink and if kids were hungry I could give it to them. But now I have to bring graham crackers or something and that shouldn’t be my responsibility. But they aren’t going to learn if they are hungry. So back to my definition – they aren’t on time, they don’t have regular attendance, their work isn’t finished, they are doing poorly and there are no comments. After repeated attempts to contact there is no
response from anyone a grandmother or an uncle or anybody. I feel bad for those kids.

For Patty an under involved parent does not provide for the necessities of survival for her students.

The conversation then moved onto the topic of what positive outcomes have come about because of a negative parent experience. Within her survey Patty had written that she learned to keep documentation and to always remain professional. In her interview Patty added another outcome. Tying into her definition for under involved parents, Patty responded that

Sometimes we have these situations where I might have to call social services or try to find out where they might be able to get clothes, uniforms or whatever, a jacket. That will help the family do better. It’s kind of like that Maslow’s hierarchy when you need your food, clothing and shelter you can’t be looking at sub actualization when you are looking for your basic needs. I think that a lot with the situation that I am in and I know that those needs need to be met before we can move on to the other needs.

Patty has learned that students need to be physically sound in order to maximize their learning experience.

Next Patty elaborated more on her survey answer for the question that looked at negative outcomes that have occurred because of a negative interaction with a parent. Within the survey Patty wrote about tension between the parent and herself, gossip in the community and difficulty in treating the child fairly. Patty went on to clarify about the
Patty continued to share how she would have treated a child differently had she had important information about this student’s background. She went on to share,

So what I did was some kids had to finish some work and it was the end of the day so I said, “these people stand up and have their papers ready for me.” I was going by collecting them and I went “You didn’t finish these, you don’t have these done. What happened? You did more talking than you did work.” So she went home and I did this (demonstrates pointing finger and tapping on the desk). I didn’t touch her, but I was doing this (taps finger) on her paper. She went home and said that I hit her or whatever. Her mom came in and said that I abused her or hit her.

The mother went directly to the principal with her daughter’s accusation. She informed the principal that she taught her daughter that she should never let anyone touch her or “get in her face.” Patty’s student had taken the gesture of tapping her finger on her desk as being “in her face.”

After the parent stated her daughter’s accusation Patty was summoned to speak with the principal and mother. When Patty arrived she recalled that the mother began to shout threats at her saying that she wanted to meet her in the parking lot. The principal
intervened at that point with the response that he would have to document the threat. The parent then backed off and calmed down. Patty went on to share that “then the mom went on to say how this child had been abused and that she had these sexual things happen to her. She was in counseling and they had talked about good touches and bad touches and not letting people invade your space.” Patty was then able to view her student’s reaction in a different way. She said,

I was so hurt about the accusation but then I was so angry because here was this major piece of information that it took this for you to tell me that. So then I’m going back in my head thinking no wonder she acted this way.

The decision was made to remove this student from Patty’s room. Patty strongly encouraged the mother to share all of the information she had learned with the new teacher so that the situation would not repeat itself. After learning the abuse information Patty discussed how she would have made adjustments in her teaching with how she handled this student.

After this particular incident Patty really struggled within herself. She commented, “It was just so frustrating and I was like here goes my career, and schooling and now I’ll have this horrible reputation. It just really gnawed at me. The principal wrote me a little note after that.” Patty went on to share that the principal commented how professional he thought she behaved in a tough situation and that he was very impressed. This note made a big impact on Patty and helped her feel better about the most traumatic parent situation she had encountered so far in her career. She respected the words of her administrator.
Finally, Patty was asked to share any observations in regards to parent involvement that she had observed over the course of her career. Patty stated,

I think there is less parent involvement and there are less stay at home parents, where even in a poverty or low income situation that even that has changed where there are more parents working. I think because a majority of our parents, I would say are unskilled, they might be working the late night shift at like a Taco Bell or be working third shift stocking shelves at Target or something like that. They are not at home with the kids in the evening. I think that has changed. I remember in the past having…there are still grandparents I think helping more with the kids because the mom works so the kids go to grandma’s house. Now I think there are more parents who have been incarcerated so the grandparents have custody. So that is different too where there is an older person who has already raised a family helping out and there are some that seem just tired. They have a lot of responsibility and they have house problems and they are trying to do what is best for their family. I think some of it is guilt you know, like “my daughter is a crack head” or something like that. It is sad to hear and I think does the grandmother say that in front of the child? That is another difference so I think you get less involvement because they are already overwhelmed. I think I seem more dads bringing kids to school or uncles or big brothers, whatever, but I don’t see their involvement.

With less involvement from families Patty went on to point out,
On the other hand there is more corporate involvement. So we have people that have kind of adopted us. So one place is giving us backpacks filled with supplies. The company across the street will judge our science fair and they will do the junior achievement program with our kids. They have also done supply drives and stuff like that.

Patty finished her interview with final thoughts that were supportive of cooperate sponsors, however, ultimately companies are unable to replace the benefits of an involved parent.

**Erin Interview**

Erin grew up in the same district that she currently teachers and live in. She received her undergraduate degree from a state university within Ohio. After graduating with her teaching degree Erin interviewed at a low income school district and was told by the principal that he was looking for an experienced male teacher. To her surprise she received a job offer to teach sixth grade. Erin commented, “it was quite an eye opener, not to say that I was just a rookie teacher but being in a totally different setting.” She went on to say,

So I taught sixth grade and I really learned a lot just I really grew as a person, you know because I was so far removed from my middle class background. Then to be in a setting where there were no White children within the schools. It really was an eye opener and fortunately for me the two other sixth grade teachers kind of took me under their wing and really helped me through the year.
Erin had help and guidance for her first years teaching in a school that was so different than her own personal experience.

After teaching sixth grade for one year, Erin had the opportunity to make the move to teaching fifth grade. She switched grades and taught fifth grade for five years. At this level Erin shared,

There were a lot of issues that sometimes took a racial switch. There was one parent that wasn’t happy their child got the “White” teacher. Of course fifth graders have big ears and they hear what mom says and it made for a rough year.

But overall I enjoyed my time there.

Erin had difficulties with students who picked up on their parents distaste at having the “White” teacher and acted out.

After her time in fifth grade Erin made the decision to take the next ten years off to raise her family. While raising her family she worked in her current district teaching Graduate Equivalent Diploma (GED) classes in math and science. With having as much background in her community Erin made some observations about her city.

I am a life long resident and I have seen my city go from a White middleclass baby boom generation kind of sprawl to quite a bit of poverty here. It is a very eclectic population. There are a lot of people who are like my parents generation, the senior citizens and you got to get them on board if you want a levy to pass. Then there are a lot of new people coming in. They are the renters and they move around a whole lot. There just seems to be a lot more mobility with that brings difficulty for some parts of the population who liked things the way they were.
These observations did not stop Erin from using her GED connections to obtain a job teaching first grade half time in her district.

Erin started off teaching half day and then eventually went on to receive a full time position teaching first grade, which she has been teaching for ten years now. Along that course of time she went back to school at a university within Ohio and received her Masters degree in remedial math. She currently teaches first grade.

Next Erin was asked to talk about her beliefs about parent involvement. Her first remarks were

I think when I became a parent I became a better teacher because I could kind of see what parents go through also. I understand the idea of working and having small children and having lots of things on your plate in the evening. Kid comes home in whatever kind of mood and there is homework that has to be done. But I really think that parental involvement will make or break a kids’ education.

She went on to talk about how important parent involvement is in a child’s life right from the start. Erin knows when a child comes in ready to read that their parent has spent time working with him/her.

Additionally, she commented on the act of a parent attending events. It has been Erin’s experience that parents typically stop attending functions the older their child gets. She said,

I mean a lot of people drop off with the PTA scene or the conference scene in the junior high school. You know I’m tired of hearing that my child struggles or the fact that they have so many different teachers. Maybe they don’t feel quite as
connected. But in elementary school we are spending six or seven hours with your child and you need to get to know me and I need to get to know you.

She has high expectations for parent participation with their child’s education at an early age.

Erin continued to share her views on teaching at the younger level. She had found that there would be years where she would have six or seven parents absent for parent/teacher conferences. This would be completely unacceptable because she stated, I’m still one of the good guys, you know. I haven’t called you from the office for years and years to tell you that your child is struggling. There are a lot of behavior issues in our school and usually in the primary grades we are still the good guys. They like to come in.

However, her experience in working with the GED students she learned that a lot of parents in district are under educated themselves and are uncomfortable in the school setting. Erin refers to this as “the baggage” that parents bring with them. This “baggage” includes how a parent views schools and opinions and experiences they have encountered over the years, which ultimately leads to a lack of involvement for their children’s education.

The poverty level for the parents that Erin works with is very high. Erin commented that many of the parents are working hourly jobs and she had encountered situations where a parent would not answer a cell phone call from the school informing them that their child was sick because they had to put in the hours in order to get paid. She went on to say,
You kind of have to understand where our parents are coming from and that is the reality for them too. I think a lot of our parents have a lot of things that they do or they are tired. I just think for so many of them being overly involved is not a part of their background from when they were a child. It kind of cycles.

Erin believes that her students will repeat the same behavior that they see when they become parents.

One of the biggest issues that Erin went on to discuss about her district is the amount of transient students. She explained that she teaches about twenty-eight to thirty students each year. By the time her first grade class reaches third grade there are only about eight or nine students remaining that she taught. The rest of the students have left the district. This realization led the conversation to testing. Erin stated,

When you are holding a school responsible for that then you have to understand where the kid is coming from I mean that is just part of the reality. We are talking about merit pay potentially down the way. I mean a sixth grade teachers pay is going to be determined by that child who just enrolled and came in at a second grade reading level. How fair is that? I mean we don’t have a magic wand! I think behaviorally children have problems when they don’t have those roots in a classroom. Sometimes you do have a problem with the teacher. But if there was a teacher from the previous year that you connected with I mean that teacher that will wave at you in the hallway that gives you a reason to come to school. If that teacher can even make a connection like "I hear you are taking a test tomorrow – good luck!” I mean maybe you will get two extra points – who knows?! But
when you have so many students that are in and out it is hard for parents to form a bond, it is hard for kids to form a bond “I’m not going to be here next year. I don’t have to do my best.” They know that they are going to be moved around and I think that it plays a big role both academically and behaviorally in their success.

The transient population poses a serious problem for the success of a student which ultimately is up to the parent to help remain stable residency.

Within Erin’s survey she had written about a positive experience involving a parent. She expanded on her answer by sharing that about a fourth of her student population is picked up from school. Erin stopped a father as he was picking up his child and spoke with him about his child’s behavior. The next day at school Erin could notice an improvement in her student’s decisions and wrote a note thanking the dad for speaking with his child. Erin said,

The kids see that we are serious about the situation and that we are working together rather than it is school versus home. Those are the happy moments, when the kid makes the connection. And we do often see a little bit of a change, maybe they are putting forth more effort or maybe they are stopping to think before they act.

Erin felt supported by the parent and was able to see a change in her student’s behavior.

In addition to this positive experience Erin went on to share a situation where she had made the decision to retain one of her students. The mother was against the retention so Erin had to really work hard to prove that her student needed to spend another year in
the first grade. She involved the reading specialist to test the child to make sure her assessments were accurate. Ultimately the child was retained. The following year Erin shared this encounter with the mother.

The next year, she was retained and placed into another teacher’s classroom. At the end of the year the mom caught me and she said “last year I was really against retention but I see how my daughter has really grown this year and she is doing great at reading and she is having fun with it. A year ago I was absolutely wrong and you were right and I want to thank you. That was the highlight of my career! It was just really nice because the mom didn’t have to say anything. She didn’t have to say that, so I definitely found that was something to smile about.”

These positive remarks were affirmation for Erin that she had pushed for the right decision.

Erin then went on to talk about some of her negative experiences she has encountered with parents. In her survey Erin had written about an encounter where a parent went directly to the principal with issues concerning her. As she recalled this situation involved a parent who was not from a low socioeconomic environment, instead this family had moved from a wealthier district. Erin commented,

I mean going from a wealthy successful district and then coming here. Her older son was doing fine in the junior high, but this child moved into my classroom and there was only one other White kid. This kid was really very immature and we have some really very street wise kinds of kids. What the mom didn’t understand was that I couldn’t make other kids be your child’s best friend.
From what Erin had observed this particular child wanted the other students to play “her way.”

The mother spoke with Erin about her daughter’s seat placement and so Erin moved her classroom around so that this student would be sitting with good students. Erin remarked, “I put the sweetest, nicest child next to this other child and she had the most stable table in the entire class.” The friendship still did not blossom. Erin continued,

The other child still wouldn’t be her buddy. So it got to be more and more where the situation really got to be frustrating like the mom was taking too much of a role and she was listening to everything. You know I listened to her when she came to pick up her child and she interrogated the kid to find out what happened today. She would keep driving at her and then they would walk away and I don’t know what would happen after that. It almost seemed like she was digging until the child would complain about something.

Erin found that this parent really struggled with helping her daughter find friendships.

The situation continued to escalate and at dismissal Erin would often spend time talking with parents in the parking lot. She frequently saw this parent go to the principal with concerns about her daughter. The mother would complain about issues that occurred at lunch time or how the other little girls would not play with her daughter. Then in May the mother verbally attacked Erin in the parking lot. She recalled,

She was screaming at me in front of all of these other parents. So she said “I’m going to take my child out! I’m going to find another school!” So I replied very,
very calmly “As a parent you really do have to do what you think is right for your child.” I didn’t walk away. I didn’t want to be construed as “she didn’t want to talk with me and she just walked away.” Even though the school year was just about over the child was moved into a different school.

Erin went on to say,

Well there was another parent that wasn’t really happy either and so both of them ended up at the other school because they were friends. I didn’t say anything. It’s their choice where their child goes. I didn’t actually let them know that I had spent seven years teaching at the other school and it is very much alike and these same situations are going to happen.

Both children were moved from her classroom and left the school.

Erin was asked to comment on her response to the survey question that she felt she was perceived negatively by the parent in this encounter. In addition to the verbal confrontation by the mother she went on to share that later in the year she happened to see this family at a carnival. While her old student came right up to Erin and hugged her, Erin commented that “the mom pretty much snubbed me.” The mother did not extend any greeting or acknowledgement.

The discussion then turned to understanding Erin’s ideas of what an overly involved, adequately involved and under involved parent looks like. She stated,

An overly involved parent is one who does things for their child constantly instead of allowing the child to grow. You can tell when the paper comes back and it’s in adult handwriting. I want you to help your child. I want you to go
over your child’s mistakes but have them correct it. I don’t want you to write down the words. An overly involved parent instead of letting their child make mistakes and grow from that experience and accept the consequences have to come up and fight their child’s battles for them. It’s not beneficial at all.

She went on to define an under involved parent,

as a parent that does not correspond with the school at all, does not support school decisions, does not push their child to complete assignments one who does not correspond with the school, provide support for their child with homework and does not support school decisions.

Erin has found that the under involved parent is the one you typically do not hear from unless “something is drastically wrong.”

Finally, a parent that is adequately involved is one who makes the effort to come into school for different events and conferences. Erin said, “The parent is in contact with me and we have either met face-to-face or have talked over the phone more than once throughout the year. The parent will support school decisions as far as placement of children.” She also commented that an ideal parent is one who helps their child with their homework and is prepared for the day.

Erin was then asked to elaborate on her answer in the survey to the question about positive outcomes that have occurred because of negative interactions. Within her survey Erin had written that she had learned to make more of an effort to relay positive news and to try to keep situations from escalating into negative encounters. Erin had learned from having negative encounters that her best line of defense is to set a good foundation for
approaching parents. In order to do this she calls parents before the school year begins to introduce herself and to gather any information she can that might help her teach. Erin attempts to create a comfort level for parents where they can view her as easily approachable. Additionally, if Erin has an encounter with students she is very open to contacting parents and explaining the situation from an adult perspective first. She is proactive in working with parents. Her efforts help to avoid potential negative encounters.

Next, Erin went into more depth about negative outcomes that she has experienced because of a negative encounter. She elaborated on her answers within her survey first discussing the types of interactions that occur with the parent after a negative incident has taken place. Erin has found that interactions are very brief if at all. She shared that “one parent even hung up on me.” When face-to-face communication has taken place Erin will try to make sure that another adult is present. As she shared earlier in the interview Erin has had parents actually remove their child from her classroom. This Erin commented is the “final cut in the parent/teacher relationship.” Erin has found that in some cases she was the one who avoided contact with parents after certain negative situations occurred and in other encounters she found that the parent is the one who would become unavailable. Tension in the relationship severs the communication link between the home and school.

Erin was asked to share in her teaching career if there was one negative experience that stood out above the rest. Erin shared a story about one family she had taught in her first few years of teaching. She commented, “The mom was not happy that
her daughter got the White teacher.” Erin was suspicious that comments about her were made in front of the child based on how this child would act in her classroom. Erin caught this student chewing gum in her classroom and her punishment was to stay after school. When her student went home that day she told her mother that Erin physically abused her. The mother came into school with her daughter’s accusation and after a meeting with the principal and Erin the truth eventually came out. There were only three weeks left in the school year at that point so the mother declined the principal’s suggestion of having her child removed from Erin’s class. Instead this child did not return to school because the mother claimed that she had “the mumps.” However, this family lived across the street from the school and Erin could see the child playing around outside and suspected that she was never sick. For Erin, this parent would rather her daughter receive no schooling than to receive an education from her. This experience of being accused of physically harming another child stands out as one of the worst in her career.

Erin’s final thoughts for the interview reflected on her years of teaching. She commented:

Parents are more frazzled now. Kids go to daycare and less time is spent with the family. Parents and kids are under more pressure. There seem to be more things to do at home which takes up time when they should be doing other family related things. Financial situations cause more stress. It just seems as a whole there are different values within education. We are expected to fill some of those voids. It is a lot of work.
Erin still has hope for the students and families that she teaches and works with. She puts on a smile and goes forth with a positive attitude.

**General Themes**

Each interview accounted for the participants’ experiences in working with parents, specifically their negative encounters. While their individual stories were all different commonalities were found amongst the participants. One theme that emerged in five out of the six interviews related to the fact that not only are the participants’ teachers but they themselves are parents as well. Additionally, all of the interview participants referred at some point in their interview to the role that administration took during a negative encounter. Finally, all of the teachers shared similar ideas when it came to defining overly involved parents, adequately involved and under involved parents. This next section will highlight the following themes: teachers as parents, administration, and defining the types of parent involvement.

**Teachers as Parents**

In all of the interviews, with the exception of Patty who does not have any children, the participants at some point during the interview made reference to themselves as parents. During Joe’s interview he commented about how becoming a parent makes you view things differently as a teacher. A common ground is established because now as a teacher there becomes an understanding of what other parents are going through with their children. Erin commented,
I think when I became a parent I became a better teacher because I could kind of see what parents go through also. I understand the idea of working and having small children and having lots of things on your plate in the evening.

For these interview participants they felt that after having children themselves they became more relatable to parents and the experiences that their students’ families might be going through.

Alexa mentioned her role as a parent when she would try to create a positive relationship with a parent. She would share stories with parents about her own children if similar situations occurred for one of her students’ families. By doing this she was attempting to reassure the parent that things happen and this was how she personally handled the situation when it happened to her. She stated,

If there is a problem I have something in my history where I have four kids I try to share it with them. A lot of times one of my four kids has something that they are going through you know and that connection is helpful.

By sharing personal stories Alexa is making an attempt to show parents that she not only understands about their situations from a teacher’s perspective, but from being a parent herself.

Ann relates to her parents by being considerate of their time and schedules. She shared that from her parent perspective she understands how difficult it might be to take off of work and always attend school functions. So as a teacher she tries to schedule events far in advance and group projects and presentations where parents will be invited to come into the school all on one day. Her hope is that parents will be able to make
accommodations for one day a year that is preplanned as opposed to a last minute
warning and multiple functions on different days.

When dealing with difficult children on a regular basis Sarah tries to visualize
these students through the eyes of a parent. She commented,

I try to find the good in the kid and I always think - wow that could be my
daughter, what if that was my daughter – how would I handle that? How would I
want an adult to treat my kid? How would I want them to talk to her?

By picturing the child as her own her practices reflect her own beliefs and views as a
teacher.

Both Joe and Alexa referred to examples of how they have changed their behavior
as a parent when it comes to their own children’s education because of experiences they
have encountered as a teacher. Joe shared a story about how he was approached in a
negative manner by a parent before the school year began. This parent vocalized
discontent about her child being placed in the classroom. Joe spoke that after negative
encounters with parents he does look differently at that parent’s child and not always in
the most favorable way. Joe believed that a negative encounter with a parent would mean
a more difficult and strained relationship with that student. For his own child Joe always
tries to make a positive impression and is very cautious about how he handles
communication with the teacher, knowing that he does not want his daughter to receive
any type of consequence for his role as a parent.

Alexa also addressed how she has changed as a parent because of her interactions
with families as a teacher. She remarked about how much she enjoys hearing or reading
about a parent’s satisfaction with her role as their child’s teacher. She talked about how receiving verbal praise or written notes are the nicest ways parents can say thank you. Alexa commented “In fact I try to do that with my own kids because I know that I value that.” Her experience as a teacher transferred into how she behaves as a parent.

**Administrative Involvement**

All of the participants shared a parent encounter where the administrator was summoned. The teachers at some point during the interview referred to needing the help of their principal. For Joe he encountered a parent that was upset about her child’s seat placement in the classroom. When she vocalized her concerns to Joe she also mentioned the seat placement of other students in his classroom. Joe argued with her about the privacy issue of his other students and spoke to the fact that those students choose their seat location. At that point in the conversation he suggested that they go and speak to the principal. It only took the power of suggestion to speak with the principal and then the parent he was working with backed off of the problem. From Joe’s perspective he took the parents reaction as a surrender to the fact that Joe was ultimately right.

The negative encounter that Ann shared with a parent who expressed extreme dissatisfaction with their child’s progress at conferences went straight to the principal after their meeting. Ann was able to take away great comfort at the fact that her principal stood up for what she had reported to the parents and “sided” with her. Her administrators’ support proved to be rewarding in letting Ann know that she approved with her methods and was in complete agreement. Ann stated that while her principal rarely gives compliments after the incident she knew that her administrator had
confidence in her as a teacher. She felt “an awareness that I am a good teacher who helps all children be successful. It took my principal standing up for me for me to really see it!” This boosted Ann’s self esteem and worth as a teacher.

Ann’s administrator took things one step further in handling these parents. She made a point to let future staff of that child know that they were to always have an administrator present when meeting with this particular family. This was done in an attempt to prevent other staff members from being verbally attacked. While this situation for Ann was extremely unpleasant she was able to come away from the experience knowing that she had full support and approval from her principal.

Alexa’s negative encounter that she wrote about in the survey and further reported on in the interview ended with the administrator becoming involved, several times. In Alexa’s situation the principal did not completely support her decisions. Instead in one situation that she shared where she was questioned about a grade on the report card the administrator gave Alexa the direction to collaborate with her other colleagues to revisit how she was scoring her students. She ultimately ended up making changes in how she evaluated her students.

Additionally, the same parent went to the principal again for a behavior issue, where Alexa had written the child a referral for hitting another student. After meeting with the principal the parent was able to convince him that a written documentation of the incident was not necessary and the referral was ripped up. Again Alexa’s decision was not supported by administration and this act led to her refusal to fill out behavior referrals
in the future. Alexa’s examples show that how an administrator handles a parent situation is very sensitive in how a teacher will react to the decisions that are made.

Patty also experienced involvement from an administrator who did not support her decision. In Patty’s situation she explained that a grandmother wanted to challenge her recommendation to retain a student. This grandparent went to one of her administrators who was not current on the school’s policy to retain students. The administrator gave contradictory information to the grandparent and Patty had to correct not only the parent, but the administrator. The grandmother proceeded to go to higher power and requested a meeting with the superintendent, who supported the documentation that Patty shared. However, the grandmother never showed up for the meeting and ultimately tried to move her grandchild into a different school.

On another occasion Patty was accused by a student of abuse. The mother of the student came into the school and became verbally abusive towards Patty. The principal stepped in to protect Patty and offered to contact the police to document the threat that the mother had shouted at Patty. Once the mother had calmed down and the principal, mother and Patty were able to sit down and discuss what had happened Patty was able to explain the situation from an adult perspective. The mother also revealed some background information about the child which helped to understand why she accused Patty of abuse when Patty “invaded her space.” The principal ultimately made the decision to remove the child from Patty’s classroom and after the meeting wrote Patty a nice note complimenting her on how she handled herself in the situation. The kind words from her principal helped Patty recover from a traumatic incident in her career.
Sarah’s interview revealed the administrator’s support in handling a difficult parent situation. In her case Sarah had a student who needed a lot of extra care in the classroom. Sarah was struggling with helping her student be successful because of behavior problems. The father blamed Sarah for the behavior claiming that his child did not behave like that in any other situation.

In order to get more help from the school Sarah brought her student to the intervention assistance team (IAT). This team is a gathering of an administrator, the school counselor, the teacher, parent and any other school personnel that might be of use to the situation. When the problems of this student were discussed Sarah had the support of the team to attempt different interventions to help the student. The father also disclosed information about his child’s past and ultimately it was discovered that he also experienced similar problems. The administrative support in Sarah’s situation helped to redirect a parent’s anger onto the problem and search for solutions, which would help the child.

While Erin did not reveal in great depth the role her administrator played in her experiences working with parents, she did mention involvement of her school principal. Erin shared a negative parent experience where the mother was unhappy about her daughter’s experience in her classroom. This parent had problems with many issues regarding the school and would not hesitate to contact the principal. Erin was confident that the mother had spoken to the principal on many different occasions. At one point during the school year, this parent approached Erin after school in the parking lot when Erin was saying good-bye to her students. She began screaming at Erin. At that point
Erin felt relief at knowing that her principal was also outside and she was able to politely excuse herself from the altercation and join her administrator. Erin had a sense of comfort that her principal would be able to support her had the situation turned worse.

All of these situations show that administrative intervention made enough of an impact that each participant remembered negative experiences that involved an administrator. For some the support of the administrator was rewarding in knowing that they had support and approval of how they handled a situation. For others the intervention of an administrator meant changing a practice or making accommodations for a parent and losing confidence in school policy. Additionally, the suggestion to parents to speak with an administrator was enough to resolve the situation, but for others the parents went directly to an administrator to solve their problem. The interview participants’ responses show that administrators play a pivotal role in how they help handle negative parent encounters.

**Definitions of Types of Parent Involvement**

In general all of the participants shared similarities in their responses of how they each defined over involvement, adequate parent involvement and under involvement. Some of the teachers shared their definitions through examples of parents they had dealt with that had the qualities of one of the types of involvement. Other participants shared traits or behaviors that showcased the definition. Many of the characteristics for the participants’ definitions were similar.

When defining the overly involved parent one characteristic that shared a common thread was the number of communications a parent would have with the teacher
or school. Sarah gave the exact number of “three to five contacts a week” as being classified as overly involved. Joe also spoke about the frequency of emails and went more in depth revealing that the emails might not necessarily contain important information. Alexa shared a story about a parent who would “hover” outside the classroom and watch their child, while another parent refused to let her child go on field trips unless she was present.

Patty, Erin and Ann all spoke about how the overly involved parent, ultimately ends up enabling their child to continue negative behavior. Patty commented that the overly involved parent “doesn’t foster independence.” Erin stated that an overly involved parent “does things for their child constantly instead of allowing them to grow.” By constantly stepping in and doing things for the child, the child is unable to make their own mistakes and learn and grow. Finally, Ann also remarked that an overly involved parent “enables the child to continue his/her behavior which ultimately affects the child’s growth and maturity.” The participants shared in similarities based on the qualities they described and the frequency of the contacts an overly involved parent evoked.

When asked to define adequate parent involvement, similarities surfaced. For many of the participants the word “supportive” was referred to over and over again. The idea of being supportive took the form of a parent helping their child with homework, attending conferences and picking up report cards. Additionally, turning forms in on time and communicating when absolutely necessary were also reoccurring themes. The general quality that the participants described for an adequate parent is one who is supportive of school based made decisions.
When asked to define parent under involvement similarities in responses were common amongst the participants. All of the teachers mentioned that under involvement meant little to no contact with parents. Parents who are under involved would not show up for conferences, open houses or other school functions. Definitions included a lack of support in helping their child complete homework assignments. Additionally, forms would not be returned on time and phone calls, emails and any attempt from the school to communicate would not be reciprocated. For those parents who were labeled as under involved there was simply a lack of presence and support in the school environment.

While participant responses to defining the different types of involvement shared many similarities a few differences did surface. When defining under involvement those teachers who worked at low income schools made additional comments that student physical needs were not being met. Under involved parents would send their children to school without lunch money, hungry, and tired. Patty referenced Maslow’s hierarchy of needs when defining under involvement. It is the parent’s responsibility to make sure that their child has the basic needs met before coming to school so that optimum learning can take place.

Another difference that was revealed when participants were defining the three types of involvement were the amount of parents that they would classify from their classrooms into the categories of overly involved, adequately involved and under involved. While the definitions themselves were very similar teachers at the high income schools reported more contact with overly involved parents than those at the low income schools. Sarah, a low income school participant, reported that she had only had to deal
with a few in her career, compared to the high income school teachers who remarked that there are usually a few every year.

The low income school participants also reported a significantly higher rate of under involved parents. Two of the three low income school teachers reported that one third of their parents would fit under this definition, while the high income school teachers found that under involved parents were rare. Joe commented that he typically would only have one a school year. Even though these participants held similar beliefs in defining the types of parent involvement their experiences were greatly different in the quantity of parents from each type of involvement that they dealt with on a daily basis.

**High Income School Themes**

While all of the interviews were vastly different for the simple reason that each individual shared his or her own experiences in working with parents, a few themes surfaced within closer examination of the content within each interview. All of the high income school interview participants taught second grade. Additionally, for the high income school teachers the themes that emerged included: the placement process and parent involvement within the classroom.

**The Placement Process**

When discussing with each high income school participant about their experiences in working with parents the topic of placement came about. The placement process is a procedure that each school district takes towards the end of the school year where students are grouped for the following school calendar year. In the case of the second grade teachers they would discuss the placement for their current students into a
third grade classroom. Depending on the district students are often closely looked at in 
an attempt to group based on academic need, boy/girl ratio, and behavior needs. 
Additionally special education needs are taken into account during placement. Within 
the high income schools each participant also shared that high maintenance parents are 
also looked at for placement purposes.

Joe shared that when he first received his class list he was able to immediately tell 
which parents might need a little more attention from him. Next to the student name a 
heart would be placed to symbolize that the parent “needed extra love and care.” In other 
words this parent had the potential to be a highly involved parent and might require 
additional teacher time. For placement purposes it was taken into consideration to try to 
spread out the number of high teacher time parents that were assigned to one classroom. 
This way a teacher would not be subject to spending all of their planning time responding 
to overly involved parents.

In addition to giving teachers a warning that he or she might have overly involved 
parents in the classroom, the placement process is also used as a way for teachers to 
avoid having siblings from families where a negative encounter might have taken place in 
the past. After having negative experiences with parents the teacher might indicate at 
placement that future children from the same family should be placed in a different 
teacher’s classroom. Based on previous experience in working with families, negative 
encounters are avoided by placing the child into another class, with hopes that the “new” 
teacher will have better success in forming a positive relationship with the family.
Parent Involvement Within the Classroom

All of the high income school participants indicated in their surveys and in their interviews that parents are involved in their classrooms, some on a daily basis. Two of the three interview participants spoke about parent volunteers in a positive way. They found ways to utilize parents to help with differentiation. Alexa, however, spoke about feeling pressured to include parents in her classroom. It was the unspoken protocol that elementary teachers invite parents to come into the classroom to help. For her this created negative experiences which spanned from parents complaining about how long it took for Alexa to get her volunteer schedule started to criticizing the type of work that Alexa would ask parents to complete. She also noticed that parents who came in treated their children in a different manner and in some cases made her students feel uncomfortable. Her opinions about working with parents in the classroom were negative and she would altogether prefer that they not be invited into her room.

While the other two high income school teachers did speak positively about having parents come into the classroom, a closer look at their stories and encounters with parents showed that some of the negative experiences that they had revolved around a parent being invited into the classroom to help. Joe shared a story about a parent coming into his room and discovered that her child’s seat had been moved. She expressed her dissatisfaction with Joe about the new seat placement. On another occasion this same parent complained to him that she noticed another parent who was in the classroom volunteering helping her child with a word study skill. Again she made this observation because she was invited into the room to help and she was displeased that Joe was not
instructing her child, but instead a parent was aware of the mistakes her child had made and was trying to help her correct them. Joe commented that he then had to try to limit the amount of time this parent who complained was allowed to come into the classroom.

Ann had a parent come into the classroom on a daily basis to help with students getting settled into their work. This parent made observations about a behavior student in the classroom. Later when conferences were taking place and Ann had to stop her conference with the parents because it had turned negative, where the parents expressed dissatisfaction over their child’s progress, the parents went to the principal and stated that they had concerns about whether or not Ann was able to handle this student in her classroom that had behavior issues. This parent brought up the previous observations she had made after she had been invited into the room to try to prove that Ann was an incompetent teacher. Luckily, Ann’s principal supported her decisions and choices. After the conference Ann did not allow any parents to come into the classroom for the remainder of the school year.

While having parents involved in the classroom has many benefits both Joe and Ann had to deal with negative encounters because of what parents had observed or by chance what they were exposed to when they volunteered. In both cases Joe and Ann had to tweak how they handled parent volunteers for the remainder of the school year. However, these negative experiences did not prevent them from including parents the following years. Alexa from the start did not approve of feeling pressured to accommodate parents’ needs to be in the classroom to help. Therefore, she limits the
types of tasks parents are asked to do and holds off on inviting parents into the classroom for as long as she can.

**Low Income School Themes**

Similar to the high income school participants the low income school teachers all had different experiences that they shared. However similarities were pulled from the answers they provided based on the survey and interview questions. The following themes emerged based on their responses: communication, understanding family situations, abusive accusations, and links to student success.

**Communication**

In order to communicate with parents on a regular basis all of the low income school participants had similar beliefs. At some point early on in their students academic experience each of the teachers would try to take time to set positive foundations with each family. For Erin this took the form of calling parents before school started to learn about her students and their backgrounds. Both Patty and Sarah mentioned the importance of starting conversations about students in a positive manner. Either in person for a conference or over the phone each participant acknowledged how important it was to say something positive about the child. Each teacher stressed how important it was to try to start the year off in a good way because inevitably at some point they would have to contact a parent about an issue and they needed support from parents to help handle their children.

All three participants mentioned communicating not just with parents of students, but with grandparents, aunts or other adults that were involved in their students’ lives.
Sometimes communication would take place between the teacher and a grandmother who was caring for her grandchildren. Other times information would be passed along or gathered by speaking with older siblings in the family who attended the same school. Patty also shared that in her case she had been teaching for such a long time that she had taught some of her students’ parents at some point. These teachers would search for information any way they could so that they could adjust their curriculum to best fit the needs of their students.

**Understanding Family Situations**

Another common theme that emerged throughout the low income school interviews was the empathy and understanding that the three teachers shared towards their students’ situations. Each participant commented in general about reasons why some parents were absent from their child’s academics. Erin commented that many of the parents are working hourly jobs in order to account for the basic needs of their family. She went on to share that at times within her school a parent would refuse to answer a call from the school nurse informing them that their child was sick because if they did not work then they would not get paid. If they did not get paid then they would not be able to care for their family.

Sarah spoke about her change in beliefs after a few years of working in her low income school. At first she placed a lot of blame on the parents for the lack of success of her students. She had a hard time understanding how parents could be so under involved because in her own situation her parents were very involved. However, she reached a
point after working with low income school parents over the years where she developed an understanding. She commented,

Because sometimes the parents, you know it might not be that they don’t want to help, they might not be able to read or there are other things going on in their life and you have to be understanding. Especially in a district where you have to look at that not everyone can read, sometimes they can’t even see their children until 7:00 at night. There are all of these different things. So I hate to say that that is under involved because sometimes it is out of their control.

Sarah did not want to label parents as under involved because of her understanding and empathy towards each individual situation within her classroom.

Patty commented about how in her years of teaching she noticed over time that parents had become less involved. She explained,

I think there is less parent involvement and there are less stay at home parents, where even in a poverty or low income situation that even that has changed where there are more parents working. I think because a majority of our parents, I would say are unskilled, they might be working the late night shift at like a Taco Bell or be working third shift stocking shelves at Target or something like that. They are not at home with the kids in the evening.

She went on to talk about how many of her students might not be receiving help at home from their parents but instead a different family member or possibly not at all.

Instead of harboring ill feelings towards parents that do not show as much involvement these three low income school teachers do the best they can to make
adjustments in their own behavior and make accommodations within their practices. Sarah stated, “No matter what you say, no matter what you think, or do it’s not going to change. This is that child’s life and each child is an individual.” The home life and parent involvement piece is something that a teacher can not control. Instead these teachers take charge of what they can control.

Sarah provided an example where she found that many of her students were not completing homework. Her expectations were that parents were helping to support what was being taught in the classroom by assisting their child in homework activities that were extensions of what was being taught. However, after realizing that sometimes parents do not have the time or the ability to help their children Sarah began giving morning time in class for students to complete any unfinished homework. Instead of getting upset with the parents for not helping their child she made accommodations for those students so they could still be successful. All of the low income school participants vocalized an understanding for each student’s situation and tried to make accommodations for any lack of involvement.

**Abusive Situations**

Two out of the three low income school participants shared an experience that involved an abuse accusation. Neither teacher wrote about these situations in their survey, but after inquiring more into their past experiences involving parents both recalled similar accusations.

For Erin the memory was triggered when she was asked to share her worst parent experience. She shared her story which occurred within the first few years of her
extensive teaching experience. Erin felt strongly that the student who had made the accusation had been exposed to listening to her mother talk about her dissatisfaction at having the “White teacher.” This attitude from the parent transferred to her child. At the time when Erin was teaching it was a common punishment to keep a student after school if a discipline issue occurs. This student was caught chewing gum in class and was asked to stay after school for a detention. After serving her punishment she went home and informed her mother that Erin had physically abused her.

This mother then came into the school and went straight to the principal with the accusation. The principal followed up with Erin and in a meeting with the parent and the principal the truth about the situation came out. At that point in the school year there were only a few weeks left of school so the decision was made to keep this student in Erin’s class. However, soon after this incident this same student came down with a case of the “mumps” and did not return back to class. Erin was fairly certain based on the fact that she could see this student running around outside at her home, which happened to be across the street from the school, that she was not sick. This parent ultimately made the decision to allow her child to miss school rather than attend and be taught by Erin.

Patty also shared an experience where she was accused of abuse. Her story was triggered when she was asked to share about negative outcomes that result from parent interactions. Patty shared that she found tension would exist in a relationship and in the case of the abusive situation this tension could have been avoided had the parent communicated her child’s background information.
Patty was unaware that there was a history of abuse in this student’s life. So when Patty tapped the desk space in front of this particular student, she felt threatened and went home and told her mother that she was abused. The mother went to the principal and when Patty entered the room to address the accusation the mother was full of anger and she shouted threats. After the principal suggested that he call the police to document the threat the mother calmed down and they were able to talk out the problem. Once Patty discovered that the student had a history of abuse she commented,

I was so hurt about the accusation but then I was so angry because here was this major piece of information that it took this for you to tell me that. So then I’m going back in my head thinking no wonder she acted this way.

After the misunderstanding was resolved the principal suggested that the child be moved into a different classroom. Patty agreed with the suggestion and advised the mother to share that personal information about her child to the next teacher. In both of these situations the low income school teacher had to defend herself against an abuse accusation.

**Links to Student Success**

The final theme that emerged from the three low income school teacher interviews was the importance of parent involvement in achieving student success. All three participants acknowledged that students who had support from home made greater strides within the curriculum. Sarah found that she was able to tell which students had support from home by how well prepared her students were at the beginning of the school year. She commented,
I see more progress in the child academically and socially when the parent is more involved. They know what is going on in the classroom. If I call them with a good report or a bad report I will ask the child the next day “did your parent get my message and talk to you about it” and some of them will say “yes.” You can definitely tell a difference in that child. They are proud of themselves or they work hard to change.

Sarah found that involved parents had children that were more successful academically and were supportive of behavioral consequences that Sarah established.

Both Patty and Erin shared that in their years of teaching they had noticed a link between student success and parent involvement. Patty commented, “the children that are supported are the children that have the effort.” Patty went on to share what she meant by “supported.” She shared that supportive parents are the ones who make sure that their child is at school on time and that they have their homework completed. These students Patty stated “are the ones that generally are your better students.” Erin had similar views with the ideal parent being one who helps their child be prepared for the day so that they are ready at the start to be successful.

Summary

Each interview revealed different experiences when working with high and low income school parents. The participants’ stories helped to reveal their personal emotions that they experienced and positive and negative outcomes that resulted from parent encounters. While each interview revealed insights into the participants’ beliefs and practices as a teacher in working with parents similarities were discovered amongst all of
the interviews. Additionally, themes emerged within both the high income and low income school participants’ responses that highlight some of the differences between working in the two socioeconomic school districts.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter I have summarized major findings as they related to the research questions that guided this study. The findings include a closer look at differences in the parent/teacher relationship within the high and low income school responses. Next, a deeper discussion follows highlighting important suggestions for teachers and administrators. In addition, I have outlined significant implications for those who currently teach in the educational field as well as stated suggestions for teacher education programs and curriculum design in the future. Furthermore, suggestions for additional research have been included at the end of this chapter for those interested in related areas.

Summary of Findings

Communication With Parents

Teachers reported that many different types of communication are currently being used to support the home/school connection. The survey revealed that over ninety percent of the participants communicate with parents through use of the phone or a face-to-face meeting. Eighty-eight percent of the teachers who participated in the survey indicated that they use written correspondence as a means to communicate. As a whole the survey showed that email was selected eighty-four percent of the time. However, when broken down to examine high income school versus low income school survey response the high income school participants selected email closer to ninety-nine percent of the time, while the low income school participants had a response rate of sixty-one
percent. This statistic supports that low income school parents are less likely to have access to the technology needed to communicate with the school through email.

Another interesting finding found that over three-fourths of the participants indicated that they sent some type of newsletter home for parents to read. One low income school interview participant commented that their newsletter became a source of written documentation that clearly stated what students had learned and what items were needed for the following week. If a parent questioned what was being taught or accused her of not being given the information then she could simply state that it was written in the newsletter. The purpose of her weekly newsletter was to not only provide information about what was happening in her classroom, but to keep recorded documentation for her own personal well being.

Many of the more traditional means of communicating are still being used. These include parent/teacher conferences, impromptu meetings and handwritten notes. However, home visits were only selected by three percent of the participants, suggesting that this form of communication is seldom used. In addition to the different types of communication that were listed in the survey multiple participants selected the other choice and typed in another form of communication. These responses included: parent orientation, writing in student planners, behavior plans, district events and parent teacher association meetings. Additionally, responses included technology driven ways of communicating such as blogging on a website, participating in a class socializing network site and text messaging. Technology has opened the door for making communication between the home and school more accessible.
Attitudes of Teachers

When looking at the attitudes of teachers in working with parents, this study discovered that each individual differed based on his/her own experiences. In general, there was an unstated assumption that teachers were expected to communicate with parents. This can be seen through the number of teachers that actively work at maintaining a relationship with parents through the multiple modes of communication stated above. Additionally, teachers were contractually bound to meeting with parents at parent orientation and conferences. In this way the school systems support the development of the home/school relationship.

Within the high income school districts interview participants shared that there was also a push from administration to include parents within their classrooms as a source of volunteering. The expectations of the district were to include willing parents on a weekly or even daily basis to help within the classroom. One of the high income school participants had a positive outlook about incorporating parents into his everyday routines. He found them to be useful and ultimately found that he did a better job of differentiating the curriculum with the help of other parents. Furthermore, parents were looked upon with a more favorable attitude from the high income teachers when they were able to utilize their help in ways that extended from making copies to practicing sight words and flashcards.

However, this study also found that not all teachers feel that having parents involved in the classroom is a positive trait. One high income school participant reflected quite a bit on the pressure of having to invite parents into her classroom to volunteer. She
would have ultimately preferred to not have any help. Problems that were mentioned in having parents come into the classroom ranged from a breach in privacy for students to inappropriate behavior towards their own children. These experiences led to a negative attitude in general towards having parent volunteers on a regular basis.

Teachers in the low income school districts held positive beliefs in working with parents who were responsive to their efforts to work with them. These interview participants all stated within their interviews that students who had involved parents were more successful (Ashton, 2008; Carlisle et al., 2006; Epstein, 2008; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ingram et al., 2007). While this research did not attempt to make any correlation between student success and parent involvement, it is important to state that the teachers felt that an impact was made when the parents participated actively in their child’s education.

However, through the interviews with the low income school teachers it became evident that the majority of parents that these participants dealt with on a regular basis were not actively participating in their child’s education. For many of their students the low income teachers referred to the parents as being absent. However, even with the absence of parent assistance for their students in aiding with the curriculum, teachers still emphasized an empathetic tone towards their uninvolved parents.

An understanding of each individual situation developed and the teachers’ effort became one of learning more about the background in order to address any issues that resulted. These teachers shared student stories of parents working later shifts and were unable to be home to help with homework or others who lacked the education necessary
to assist with any extension of schooling. Some students were being raised by 
grandparents or an aunt or an uncle because a parent might have been in jail. Even for 
the most extreme situation the teachers’ attitudes were one of trying to understand so that 
they could help the child be successful. The teachers’ main focus and attitude towards 
parents ultimately always included the child.

While the attitudes of teachers varied based on their own personal beliefs and 
experiences, this study found that they also varied for each individual based on the 
different parents that they encountered. A teacher might have a positive attitude towards 
a parent and then an altercation could take place, which might then cause a shift in that 
teacher’s attitude towards that particular parent. For example, Ann was very excited 
when a student was assigned to her classroom because she knew that the parent lived 
very close to the school and she would be able to utilize her as a volunteer. In fact she 
invited this mother to come into her classroom on a daily basis to help get the students 
ready to start their day. She went about this relationship with a very positive manner.

During conferences with this parent Ann found herself being verbally abused with 
accusations that she was not doing everything she could to help their child be successful 
in certain academic areas. Ann promptly ended the conference, stating that they would 
have to continue with the principal present. After enduring this negative encounter, 
Ann’s attitude towards working with this parent changed drastically. She was advised by 
her principal to always have another administrator present when dealing with the parent 
and she ultimately ended having the mother in to volunteer. Ann still maintained a 
positive attitude towards parents, but when it came to that particular parent she tried her
best to remain professional. This example shows that attitudes towards parents differ not only based on the teacher and his/her beliefs but also in each independent situation for every parent whose child they teach.

Conflicts in the Parent/Teacher Relationship

The majority of the teachers who participated in this study at some point in their careers experienced a negative encounter that involved a conflict or disagreement with a parent. Survey participants were able to express one conflict situation within their responses while the teachers who participated in the interviews were able to not only articulate their negative experiences, but provide additional stories that they have encountered. Based on this information gathered conflicts that occur in the parent/teacher relationship can be brought about by many different factors.

This study found that among the more popular responses that caused conflict were behavior and academics. Teachers expressed themselves by writing or stating stories that involved parents communicating their dissatisfaction with a grade received or how a discipline situation was handled. For those participants that provided examples of the academic theme, parents were typically upset by a grade received that they felt should have been higher. Teachers were also faced with situations where parents did not agree with homework assignments or what was being taught in the curriculum. Others encountered parents who had a difference of opinion from the teacher as to their child’s actual ability. With regards to negative behavior situations, teachers shared experiences where parents expressed displeasure with how a behavior situation was handled. These
responses often included a parent that was dissatisfied with the consequence their child received from partaking in the behavior situation.

Responses from participants also showed that conflicts occur in the parent/teacher relationship when special education and interventions are being discussed. Parents in these teacher responses were found to have difficulty when the suggestion that their child might have a learning disability was discussed. Testing for special education was a sensitive topic for parents to deal with which led to conflict. However, other situations that were expressed in relation to special education occurred when a child did not make it into a gifted special education classroom. In these situations parents were upset because their child did not meet the requirements necessary to qualify for gifted services.

Other conflicts were brought about by the suggestion of retention and a withholding of recess. When a teacher felt that a child should not be promoted to the next grade, in the situations described the parent disagreed with the recommendation. In one interview participant situation, the grandmother went to the superintendent to override her decision. Parents also created conflict situations when they disagreed with the teacher decision to withhold recess. In these examples, parents did not feel that recess should be withheld as a form of punishment.

Another theme that emerged when exploring conflict in the parent/teacher relationship was teacher ability. Teachers’ shared written responses that articulated how a parent did not feel that the teacher was performing his/her job correctly. Teachers expressed that parents were dissatisfied with their overall performance as an educator and were unhappy with their child’s education. In some cases parents reacted to their belief
that a teacher was not performing as a teacher by trying to remove their child from the classroom. Conflict between the parent/teacher relationship was brought about by parents who questioned the ability of their child’s teacher.

While this study found that general themes such as behavior, academics, special education, retention, recess and teacher ability led to negative encounters between the parent and teacher, additional topics were also mentioned. These conflict experiences were found to be mentioned by only one participant, but the information is still relevant in understanding what might lead to conflict situations. The responses ranged from negative encounters over miscommunication in a newsletter to making a mistake with a bus pass. Additional comments included problems with food allergies and accusations of students being treated unfairly because of race. One teacher expressed that a parent was trying to get information about other children in the class. While many themes emerged throughout this study on conflict, some teacher experiences did not fit into any category, which shows that a wide range of interactions can take place and that each parent/teacher relationship is different.

Response to Conflict

Interview participants were able to inform this study on how teachers in the high and low income schools respond to conflict with parents. Responses varied based on the conflict situation and the number of previous encounters that teachers had already experienced with a parent. However, when both the high and low income school teachers were initially confronted with a problem by parents their first reaction was to address the
issue. Teachers in both the high and low income schools wanted to work towards a solution to rectify the situation.

After the initial response to address a problem the parent then has a chance to respond to the teacher. This parent response then brings about another reaction from the teacher. This study found that in both the high and low income school teachers’ experiences that if a parent continues to challenge a decision or a problem is not able to be resolved then the help of an administrator is often sought. In the majority of the situations involved in this study the teacher suggested that the administrator or an intervention assistance team be contacted to help resolve the situation. Both the high and low income school teachers looked for help and support within administrators to resolve a conflict situation.

The administrator then became an integral part of solving the conflict situation. Both the high and low income school teachers found that if they felt supported by their administrator in response to the parent, then ultimately the principal was able to help mediate the conflict in favor of the teacher. This reinforced to those teachers that their practices were correct and that the parent was off base for questioning them to the extent that an administrator needed to become involved. Additionally, some of the high and low income school teachers received positive feedback from their administrator on how they handled the conflict situation, which helped boost self esteem in those teachers who were questioned by parents. By seeking the help of an administrator they received not only help in resolving the conflict situation, but positive recognition for the work that they do as a teacher.
In some of the conflict situations described by high and low income school teachers the administrator did not favor the response of the teacher. The parent’s perspective of the situation was therefore found to be correct and the teacher was asked to make adjustments within his/her practices. This can lead to feelings of distrust for a teacher in approaching administration for help, even if the suggestions made were to help better a teachers’ practice. The teacher will come away from the conflict changed in some way, knowing that they were doubted not only by a parent, but ultimately by their administrator.

**Positive Outcomes From Conflict Situations**

While conflict situations are generally not viewed as a positive experience, outcomes can result from the encounter that lead to constructive changes within a teacher’s practice. Teachers were able to learn from their conflict experience and ultimately changed their own behavior based on what they gained from the encounter. This study found that there was a range of positive outcomes that resulted from conflict situations.

One positive outcome that numerous survey participants wrote about and interview participants mentioned was that during conflict situations they were able to learn helpful information. The information that was learned looked different for each individual situation. For some the conflict might have brought out more background about the child’s life, while other teachers discovered important insight into the family’s life. For teachers learning new information about a student and family usually elicited a deeper understanding for why a behavior occurs or even an understanding for what
triggered the initial incident that brought on the conflict situation. After being informed through the conflict situation the teacher was then equipped with information to better handle or understand future occurrences.

Survey results showed that teachers found a positive result to conflict situations was learning how to deal with upset parents. Teachers found that when confronted by an angry parent, they were able to learn strategies to help de-escalate the situation. By experiencing these conflict situations teachers were able to learn how to handle themselves for future encounters with the same parent or additionally, use the same skills with different parents. A teacher’s repertoire is better equipped for dealing with future conflict situations.

The importance of documentation was brought to light as another positive result that occurred because of conflict situations. Teachers learned that it is necessary to keep documentation that could take on many different forms. For some teachers conflict situations showed the importance of having student work readily available to share with parents. This work might include test scores or class work that would help support a negative encounter that revolves around a grade. Other teachers found that it was important to inform parents of weekly activities through the documentation of a newsletter. The newsletter provided a source of documentation for teachers who were confronted by parents who throw out accusations about not being informed of certain events or activities. Finally, teachers found that keeping documentation of encounters with parents through the use of email was helpful in showing exactly what a parent communicated and how a teacher responded.
The art of communication became another positive outcome that resulted from conflict situations. Teachers made the discovery that negative encounters could be resolved or even avoided by clear communication with parents. Really listening to parent concerns and taking the time to understand what the problem is that parents are trying to resolve before responding to a situation was found to be a positive result by teachers. In addition to truly listening to a parent, teachers also learned how to effectively communicate a problem that has the potential to turn into a conflict situation. By experiencing conflict situations with parents that resulted in poor communication teachers learned to begin difficult conversations with a positive comment about the student. By starting off a difficult situation in a positive manner teachers were attempting to show the parents that they see the good within their child. This helps ease into expressing the problem and possible solutions. Through clear communication teachers are able to rectify conflict situations or avoid them entirely.

Another positive outcome that resulted from negative encounters with parents is that teachers discovered they had administrative support. Experiencing a conflict situation with a parent can cause a teacher to question themselves as a professional. Conflict can lead to a weakening of a teacher’s self esteem as they see themselves as educators. Administrative support helps to counter those negative feelings and ultimately provides reassurance into one’s practice. Kind words to the teacher or the act of administration standing up to a parent on behalf of the teacher provide reassurance to the teacher that they are correct in their thinking. Teachers found that a positive outcome to a conflict situation was the realization that their administration supported them.
As a result of conflict situations with parents some teachers found that they learned new ideas or made changes within their practices that ultimately made them a better teacher. When faced with different conflict situations some teachers had parents offer alternate suggestions for how to improve their practices. These ideas could take on many different forms. They spanned from suggestions on how to improve a homework policy to a change in thinking of how teachers grade. Ultimately, those teachers that listened and implemented the ideas and suggestions made by parents and made the discovery that they liked their suggestions better than what they were previously implementing found that there were benefits to conflict situations.

**Negative Outcomes From Conflict Situations**

Teachers at both the high and low income schools reported that they had encountered parent conflict experiences that went unresolved. In many conflict situations that were shared within this study teachers were able to find ways to resolve the parent problem. A few of the strategies that teachers used to help resolve a parent conflict included asking for help from administration or an intervention assistance team, discussing the problem with the parent, helping the parent understand the teacher perspective or the teacher making concessions to satisfy the parent. Many teachers were able to address the parent conflict by utilizing one of these strategies. However, not all of the teachers were able to resolve their parent conflict situation. When a negative encounter was unable to be resolved the teacher often found that ultimately the home/school relationship was impacted. This study uncovered some of the negative outcomes that resulted from an unresolved conflict situation.
Some of the negative outcomes that resulted from a parent conflict situation were tension in the home/school relationship, a decrease in communication and avoidance. For those teachers who shared about an unresolved negative encounter many discovered that future interactions with the parents were found to be tense and unpleasant. Teachers tried to keep all contact brief and to the point. Teachers tried to keep contact with parents to a minimum and in some cases communication ceased altogether. Avoidance was found to occur on two different levels. In some situations the parents avoided having any additional contact with the teacher or school. In other situations the teacher would sever the relationship by avoiding any contact with the parent. For both scenarios the home/school relationship was in danger of being destroyed.

In extreme cases where conflict between the parent and teacher went unresolved students were removed from the classroom. When certain parent conflict situations went unresolved, teachers found that parents choose to express their dissatisfaction by requesting that their child be removed from the classroom. In some cases the parents made the decision to transfer their child to a different school. The act of physically removing a student from a classroom or school indicated that what was best for the home/school relationship was to simply start over with a new school or teacher.

Another negative outcome that resulted from an unresolved conflict that surfaced from this study was gossip. Negative gossip could be viewed from two perspectives. If a teacher had a negative experience with one parent, there was a possibility that the parent would share his/her experience with others and tarnish the reputation of the teacher. In some cases this could lead to additional conflict situations for the teacher with different
parents. Additionally, the teacher might also vent frustrations over the conflict situation and gossip with colleagues. This also makes an impact for teachers who encounter children from the same family, by possibly altering how a teacher perceives a parent.

One teacher shared a story about a negative encounter with an initial parent who expressed dissatisfaction over their child’s grade. When it became apparent to the teacher that she was unable to reassure the parent of her findings for their child, the parents proceeded to go to the administrator. The parents were unsuccessful at reaching their goal and so they began to talk negatively about this teacher within the community. They created uncertainty for other parents about this teacher’s classroom management. Additional parents began to come forward and question the skills of the teacher and the happiness of their children. The teacher had to go to great lengths to prove that there was complete control within the classroom and that students were generally happy to be in the class. Negative gossip created a hardship for this teacher, which tarnished the home/school relationship and hurt the teacher’s reputation within the community.

While in the above example the teacher’s skill level was questioned because of negative exposure from a parent who spoke out within the community, gossip can also be harmful to a parent. Continuing with the same story from above the administrator stepped in to help the teacher in need. After learning about the verbal lashing that the parents bestowed upon her teacher, the administrator directed the teacher to limit contact. The teacher was given directions to sever communication and if any face-to-face meetings were to take place that another administrator needed to be present. News of what had happened to the teacher spread throughout the teachers in the school and the
administrator gave directions for future teachers of the child to have limited contact with the parents as well. These parents were not viewed in a favorable way and to some degree the child was not a welcome presence within the classroom or future classrooms.

**Teacher Perceptions of Parents/Child After Conflict**

After a conflict occurs between a parent and teacher, the teacher’s perceptions of the parent and child have the possibility of being altered. This study asked participants whether or not their perceptions of parents and their student remained positive, negative or neutral. Responses from high and low income school teachers showed similar results in regards to how they perceived parents after a conflict situation occurred.

In general there was a split in participant responses in regards to how teachers perceived parents after a negative encounter. Over thirty-five percent of the participants that answered the question on the survey responded that they had negative feelings towards the parents. About thirty percent stated that they had neutral perceptions towards parents, while only twenty-five percent maintained that they felt positive perceptions towards parents after a conflict took place. The high and low income school teacher responses were similar.

Information gathered in the interviews supported the statistic data that negative perceptions followed the negative encounters. A theme that emerged throughout the interviews was a request made by teachers to avoid having future children from the family where the negative experience occurred. Teachers spoke about the placement and how it was possible to avoid having future encounters by avoiding having future children from the family. Additionally, many forms of contact were severed to steer clear of any
possible interactions that might lead to conflict. In one teacher's experience, she stopped inviting all parent helpers to come into her classroom to help in an effort to avoid additional contact between herself and one other parent. In some teacher experiences the negative perceptions or feelings towards one parent led to changes within their practice.

In addition to learning about high and low income school teachers’ perceptions on parents, this study also inquired into how the teacher perceived the student after a conflict occurred with their parent. The survey results showed that forty-four percent of the participants who answered the question on how they perceived the student responded in a positive manner. Close to forty percent responded that they had neutral feelings towards the students and only eight percent replied that they had negative perceptions towards the student.

When looking at the data for differences between the high and low income school teacher responses only the negative perceptions showed a more distinguished disparity. The low income school teacher responses indicated that thirteen percent replied with a negative perception, while only four percent of the high income school teacher responses selected negative perceptions. Both the positive and neutral perceptions were similar in their percentages with less than a six percent difference amongst their statistic data.

While the majority of the interview participants responded that they felt they perceived the student in a neutral manner, one participant spoke freely in regards to his response to perceiving the student in a negative way. Joe shared a story about being approached by a parent before school had even begun and the parent began the
conversation by saying that they were not overly thrilled that their child received him as their child’s teacher. He responded by stating,

Why would you tell me that on day 185? And then how do you expect me to want to do the best for your kid. I mean I try to because I’m a professional but if you keep ripping on me and doing that but it is only human nature that I’m not going to like you and I’m not going to try what’s probably best for your kid because I have 19 other kids whose parents are trying to help their kids, they want what’s best for their kids. I can see that they genuinely like me and they aren’t ripping me behind my back or even to my face. I mean it’s just human nature.

As Joe states, it’s only “human nature” to think negatively about the child, when a conflict takes place with the parent.

While the other participants selected neutral perceptions through discussion it became apparent that neutral might have been the intention but it became difficult to always separate a conflict with a parent and teaching the child. Ann spoke about struggles with keeping a neutral mindset in working with one of her students because she often found that this child would report back to his mom and dad, which had potential to lead to additional conflict situations. For Ann she became subject to constant scrutiny of what she was saying and how she spoke to her students. She went overboard in trying to avoid any occurrence within the classroom that might lead to additional negative encounters with a particular parent. Ann felt immense relief for the end of the school year to come so that the façade of having to project neutral feelings towards the student was over and so was the relationship with the parent.
How Teachers Feel They Are Perceived by Parents After Conflict

While some teachers’ perceptions of the parent and student changed after a conflict occurred, the same could be said about the parent. Another aspect of this study looked at how the teacher felt they were perceived by the parent after a conflict had taken place. Teachers were asked how they felt parents perceived them after they described a conflict and based on their experience had to select either positively, negatively or neutral.

In general, responses varied between positive, negative and neutral perceptions. Around twenty-six percent of the participants felt that they were perceived in a positive manner by parents after a conflict. Thirty-eight percent of the responses indicated that teachers felt they were perceived negatively. Twenty-seven percent selected the answer choice of neutral perceptions. This data suggests that many of the teachers who participated in this survey felt they were perceived in a negative way by parents following a conflict situation.

When analyzing the high and low income responses a few similarities and differences were uncovered. Both the high and low income school teacher responses showed similarities in the number of participants that selected they felt they were perceived in a positive manner. Twenty-four percent of the low income school teachers responded they perceived positively, while twenty-eight percent of the high income school teachers felt positively perceived.

A closer look at negative perceptions shows that the low income school answers had a higher response. Forty-six percent of the low income school responses showed a
negative perception, while only thirty-one percent of the high income school answers supported a negative perception. Twenty-two of the low income school responses showed a neutral feeling of being perceived by parents, while twenty-two percent of the high income school teachers felt they were perceived in a neutral manner.

Information gathered in the interviews supports teachers’ perceptions of negative feelings by parents. Within the interview setting teachers were asked to explain why they felt they were perceived so negatively by parents and a range of responses was provided by the participants. Not all of the interview participants responded that they felt they were perceived negatively by parents; however, each teacher shared additional stories where they felt they were perceived negatively. For two of the teachers in the low income schools they supported their negative perceptions with additional stories of verbal threats issued by the parent. In their situations an administrator intervened and offered support in documenting the threats of assault.

Another teacher spoke about seeing the family during the summer and the parent would not make eye contact or acknowledge her presence. This “silent treatment” provided enough evidence to support her feeling negatively perceived. This same teacher shared another story about a mother quitting as her room mother before the school year was over. This drastic action showed her exactly how unhappy she was with her.

Additionally, other teachers within their interview shared that they knew parents had a negative perception of them because of the tone of voice they used when speaking to them. In some cases the parents were actually screaming at the teacher. Teachers also made discoveries that the parents involved in the conflict situation were spreading
negative gossip to others about their experiences. This again supported the teachers’ feelings that the parents perceived them in a negative manner. All of these parent actions led the teacher to believe that a negative opinion of them had been formed.

**Parent/Teacher Relationship After Conflict**

This research shows that after a conflict situation has taken place different outcomes may occur as a result. For some encounters teachers are able to come away with positive outcomes, while other conflict situations can damage the parent/teacher relationship beyond repair. However, in some way either positive or negative the parent/teacher relationship has been altered.

When taking a closer look at how the parent/teacher relationship could be altered in a positive way, one main idea continuously surfaced throughout the surveys and interviews, which was that more information was gained. From the teacher perspective information about the student or family was often revealed which in some way provided a source of enlightenment for the teacher to understand the situation better. The parent/teacher relationship is then at times able to grow stronger by having more common knowledge about the student or the family. The teacher is better equipped to help the child and form a better understanding of why certain behaviors might exist or do not exist at all. By sharing important information with the teacher, the parent is also helping to strengthen the home/school relationship by showing that they trust the teacher to utilize the new knowledge to best help their child.

While learning more information about a student and their family is a positive alteration to the parent/teacher relationship, many negative impacts have been made that
can severe the relationship. When conflicts are unable to be resolved and in some cases even when conflicts are resolved the home/school relationship can suffer many consequences. In some cases the relationship becomes filled with tension and future encounters are unpleasant or avoided altogether. An uncomfortable feeling can exist for the teacher or the parent, which creates unease in working together.

Tension in a relationship can often lead to a break down in communication between the home and school. Communication from the teacher can become very formal, such as a documented email or a meeting with additional supervision from an administrator. In other situations communication might cease altogether from either side of the relationship, which entails either the teacher stopping the communication or the parent severing ties. One of the interview participants was instructed to stop communicating with a parent because of tension and anger that was directed at the teacher by the parent. Once communication does not exist from one side or the other then a break down of the home and school working together to help educate a child becomes fractured.

In some of the most extreme cases the decision is made that the damage to the parent/teacher relationship is beyond repair. For some of these situations the student is usually removed from the classroom and in some cases transferred to a different school. In other cases when a teacher has a conflict that leads to a negative altercation to the parent/teacher relationship they often will request to avoid having future children from the same family. By requesting to not have additional children from the same family teachers are trying to avoid continuous exposure to a relationship that had already been
tainted by the earlier conflict. This helps to avoid any future conflict between the teacher and the parent.

**Differences in High and Low Income School Parent/Teacher Relationships**

This study uncovered several differences that exist within the parent/teacher relationship between high and low income school teachers. In order to establish the differences between the high and low income school teachers the results from the survey were compared and the interviews were consulted for themes. Based on this information the following areas were found to be of significance when looking at the relationships between the parent and the teacher in different socioeconomic backgrounds: methods of communication, how teachers defined adequate and under involvement, the total number of parents classified as overly involved, adequately involved and under involved, and then in general how teachers make accommodations for the types of parents that make up their classrooms.

A significant difference between the high and low income school teachers that this study uncovered are the primary means of communicating with parents. For high income school teachers email was found to be the preferred method for communicating with parents. Sixty-six percent of the high income school participants selected email as their first preference for communicating with parents. It is assumed that students who attend high income schools have parents who have access to computers or some form of the internet on a frequent basis.

The low income school teachers did not favor the method of email as their first preference for communication. Only sixteen percent of the low income school
participants selected email as their first choice of communication. Instead over forty percent selected the face-to-face method of communicating with parents as their first preference. After inquiring with the low income school interview participants it was discovered that the problem with using email as a means to communicate information is that the majority of families do not have regular access to a computer or the internet. This makes using email an ineffective method for communication and establishing a parent/teacher relationship.

Another difference between the high and low income school parent/teacher relationships focuses on the number of parents that would be considered by the teacher as an overly involved, adequately involved or under involved parent. During the interviews teachers were asked to provide their own personal definitions for overly involved, adequately involved and under involved parents. While definitions were given by each teacher had similarities, differences also surfaced between the high and low income school teachers.

Of the three definitions the greatest difference between the high and low income school teachers was recognized in the definition of adequately involved parents. When defining adequately involved parents all of the low income school teachers mentioned fulfilling a child’s basic needs. This means a parent provides their child with breakfast, sends their child to school well rested and the child has on appropriate clothing and is prepared with supplies. If these basic needs were not being met then a parent would be classified as an under involved parent.
For the high income school participants their definition of an adequate parent centered more on being supportive of what was going on in the classroom. One participant even suggested that an adequate parent is one who can volunteer in the classroom. Having homework completed and forms turned in on time was a recurring statement made by both high and low income school responses, the high income school teachers did not refer to a child’s basic needs. For the high income school teachers the majority of their experience is in working with families where fulfilling the basic needs has not been a problem.

Understanding how the high and low income participants define overly involved, adequately involved and under involved parents helped to recognize about how many parents fit each category within their classrooms. For each teacher a new school year brings about a new set of parents and families to work with. While the number of parents that are categorized as overly involved, adequately involved or under involved would change from year to year, in general the interview participants made comments about an approximate number of parents that they dealt with each year.

The low income school teachers all stated that they had a larger percent of under involved parents. Percentages that the low income school teachers spoke about ranged from thirty to fifty percent of their class. Based on the definitions given by the low income school teachers this meant that for some of these students basic needs were not being met and the parent was generally absent from the school community. The remainder of the class was generally composed of parents who were adequately involved in their child’s academics. For these children the basic needs were being met and the
child came to school prepared to learn. Overly involved parents were very rare. One low income school teacher, who had been teaching for over twenty years, commented “I’ve had a couple of those in my career.” This statement shows how uncommon overly involved parents were for that teacher in the low income school setting.

High income school teachers found that the type of parents that composed their classrooms was different than those of the low income school. The majority of the parents in the high income schools would fall under the adequately involved category. Most of the students came to school prepared and parents provided additional support in any academic area. When it came to parents that were under involved the high income school teachers commented that they usually would have one or two each year. However, this did not necessarily mean that students would come to class not having their basic needs met. In most of the cases that the high income school teachers shared this meant that parents might not have turned in forms or homework did not get turned in every time or a parent failed to attend a parent/teacher conference. The high income school teacher typically found that they encountered a small group of overly involved parents, typically one to five, every year. In fact efforts were made during placement so that one teacher would not receive too many overly involved parents. The main reason for separating so many overly involved parents is to give the teacher reprieve from the amount of time it typically takes teachers to respond to the needs of an overly involved parent. Accommodations often have to be made on the part of the teacher when working with overly involved parents.
The types of parents that the high and low income school teachers are faced with reflects in the types of relationships they build or attempt to build in working with parents. When a low income school teacher has almost half of the parents categorized as under involved the effort for the teacher becomes in getting a parent involved and compensating in other areas to make up for what the parent is not providing. For example, one low income school teacher discovered that she had a consistent group of students who came to school without their homework completed. While her expectations were that homework should be completed at home with the parents or a family member she had to change her practices to accommodate for the fact that it was not being completed. She began to give those students time in the morning to complete their homework activities while the rest of the class had free play or worked on something else. Another low income school teacher found that she spent a considerable amount of time trying to get in contact with unresponsive parents to communicate about student progress. The parent/teacher relationship in these low income school cases becomes completely one sided where the teacher is the only one communicating.

While low income school teachers are often struggling to make contact with under involved parents, the high income school teachers are often trying to keep up with responding to overly involved parents comments. One example that a high income school teacher shared involved a parent who wanted to see documented work samples of her child’s progress above what was already being sent home on a daily basis as class work. This teacher had to spend precious minutes making copies of work samples that no other student required to prove to doubting parents that learning and progress were taking
place. Additionally, this same teacher spent class time having students record their feelings about being in her classroom on a weekly basis so that she would have documented proof that her students were happy and satisfied with her as a teacher. This documentation was then filed for future reference if parents complained that their children were not happy in the classroom. All of these efforts were made to placate overly involved parents who questioned the ability of a classroom teacher and to serve as documented information if these same parents decided to confront or cause additional conflict.

Both the high and low income school teachers are faced with challenges of working with overly involved, adequately involved and under involved parents. However, each type of school is faced with different problems because of the number of either overly involved or under involved parents they are asked to work with each year. For the low income school teachers the under involved parents make up a large number of the parents that they are faced with while the high income school teachers deal with more of the overly involved parents. Each type of parent brings about different challenges that elicit changes within practices and beliefs for the teachers.

Discussion

This study has focused on the delicate relationship that occurs between the parent and teacher. It aimed at understanding the positive and negative impacts that conflict can have on the home/school relationship. While this study intended to gather information on both the positive and negative interactions that teachers experience in working with
parents it became very clear through the passionate recounts of the negative interactions on which type of encounter leaves a lasting impression on teachers.

Within the survey and in each interview participants were asked to share positive experiences in working with parents. Many of the interview participants referred to a simple “thank you” in person or a handwritten note from parents meaning more than a gift. Teachers appreciated being recognized for the hard work that they do everyday to make learning meaningful for the students.

However, from my own personal experience and through the gathering of this research it has become clear that while the majority of interactions with parents are positive, the negative encounters are what linger in teachers. Many of the interview participants were able to share negative encounters that happened years ago. Similarly, my own personal stories took place almost ten years ago, yet I can still retell my negative experiences which this research shows is not an isolated experience. Negative experiences and conflicts can leave a lasting mark on a teacher that is not easily forgotten.

This study gathered information on parent conflicts that teachers have encountered in an attempt to help future teachers avoid similar situations. However, the greater lesson for future teachers to learn from these conflict situations is not how to necessarily avoid conflict with parents, but instead how to handle them when a situation arises and further how to reflect upon the encounter after it is over. As this research found unresolved conflict can lead to a break down in the parent/teacher relationship, which ultimately can affect the education of a child, regardless of the teacher’s intent.
In order to better prepare teachers for negative encounters it is necessary to provide instruction on conflict resolution. I find that in my daily professional life as a teacher that I mediate student, parent and teacher situations on a daily basis. This mediation includes listening to the problem and brainstorming solutions. Understanding that defusing an angry parent and finding out the real problem is the first step in handling parent conflict. While a teacher is unable to control how a parent might be reacting to a situation, he/she has to be in control of how they react to the encounter. Often by simply listening calmly to a problem a stressful situation can be defused. When Patty was accused by a parent of abusing her daughter, Patty kept control of her own personal emotions and was able to address the issue in a calm manner. This had the effect of diffusing the parent. Patty was then able to share her perspective which helped show that the accusations were false.

Once a parent has stated a problem it then becomes the teacher’s decision on how to handle the situation. In some cases a teacher’s belief in a practice might be called into question or how a teacher handled a particular situation might be met with resistance. At this point it is extremely important for the teacher to reflect upon the situation in order to understand the perspective of the parent. Reflective practices help teachers keep an open mind when handling different situations so that other perspectives are able to be understood. It also allows for change within a teachers’ practice that can lead to improvement for all students.

“It is hard to admit when you are wrong.” These were the thoughts that I had after a phone conversation with a parent who was upset with me for marking a red F on
her daughter’s paper in addition to the sixty-five percent I had written above it. This parent was trying to communicate that my markings were deflating her daughter’s self esteem and that she was fully aware that she had not passed the test. My initial reaction was defensive; it had always been my policy to mark the letter grade in addition to the percent on everyone’s papers. However, I could hear the stress in this mother’s voice knowing that her daughter was not succeeding and that I was only hurting the situation by making my comments.

I had to take a deep breath, let go of my initial anger at being questioned and admit to myself that it really was not necessary to mark a red F on papers for failing students. I quickly made the decision to change my practice. In the years to come I found that the importance was not on conveying that a student had failed, but instead to search for positive growth, provide encouragement and ultimately look for ways to reteach a struggling student. This led to a new way of thinking about failing grades; when a student does not succeed then in many ways I did not succeed as his/her teacher and that my job is to try again until that child has learned the concept. While my negative interaction with this mother at the time left me feeling inadequate the impact it made on my teaching practices was tremendous. Reflection is critical in order to see benefits within conflict situations between the home and school.

This study also uncovered that for some teachers a parent/teacher conflict situation can directly result in a change in how the child is treated. In some of the interview stories shared and in my own personal experience as an educator I can relate to those accounts of a child passing inaccurate information onto a parent, which triggers a
negative encounter. In some of the stories shared within this study, children made serious accusations of abuse by teachers which caused a natural parent reaction of complete anger. Other stories included children repeating phrases that a teacher made out of context or simply implying to a parent that he/she is extremely unhappy in the classroom. The student in these situations became the driving force for parents to take action.

Once the conflict had occurred between the parent and teacher an awareness then exists for the teacher of what the child had conspired. While some interview participants made a conscientious effort to treat the child the same as other children, other participants were very vocal about counting down the number of days left of school until that child would no longer be in the class. Teacher reactions varied, but interviews with those teachers who tried to remain positive or neutral towards the child revealed an understanding that they had to be careful around that child. Sometimes in order to avoid issues with a parent, the teacher had to avoid issues with the child. The need to reflect on each conflict situation is important so that a teacher is able to acknowledge how they ultimately might be responding to a student.

When issues occur between parents and teachers that are unable to be resolved, administrators play a key role in fixing the situation. This study found that when a parent situation was out of teacher control that the administrator became involved. Administrators became the mediator in resolving problems that were occurring between the parent and teacher. This third party presence was often brought in to determine the correct solution, which would either favor the parent or the teacher. The power that an
administrator holds over the situation can be very damaging or encouraging towards the teacher dependent on the outcome.

Again, conflict resolution and mediation training are vital to resolving issues. The administrator has responsibility to serve the needs of the student even if that means siding with a parent. However, the administrator needs to be aware of the impact that their actions can have upon a teacher, both positive and negative. Further action might be needed by an administrator to help a teacher who might be struggling. Reflection is also necessary for principals and administrators so that similar to the teacher they might be able to realize situations where they might be wrong or a change needs to occur within their practice.

With an education system that is continuously evolving and changing it is no surprise that the parent/teacher relationship has also evolved and changed. Means in which communication is delivered, the types of parent involvement that are present within schools and the very different relationships that are formed between the teacher and parent are all examples of how the home/school relationships have advanced. This study brings to light the importance of teachers and administrators critically reflecting on negative encounters with parents. While many negative outcomes can result from a conflict situation it is important to understand and seek out the positive outcomes that can also result from a negative altercation. By reflecting on negative situations both teachers and administrators might see areas of improvement and room for growth within themselves.
Summary

This study takes a closer look at the parent/teacher relationship from the perspective of the early childhood educator. Research has shown that there are many benefits to a healthy home/school relationship that range from a child’s educational success (Ashton, 2008; Carlisle et al., 2006; Epstein, 2008; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ingram et al., 2007) to better attendance (Epstein, 2008; Ingram et al., 2007). It is documented that this relationship does not just benefit the child but the teacher (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1987; Preece & Cowden, 1997) and the parent (Cochran & Dean, 1991; Gestwicki, 2007; Morrow & Malin, 2004) as well. Within this study over seventy-five percent of the participants found that the majority of their parent relationships were positive. Teachers expressed the importance of maintaining these positive relationships by the many different methods used to communicate. Effort is needed on the part of the educator to reach out and share information about what is going on within the classroom and with individual students. This can be seen through the use of teacher newsletters, one-on-one meetings, phone calls, hand written notes, text messages, websites and many other types of communication. For some teachers, parents are invited into the classroom to participate as a volunteer. However a teacher chooses to reach out to the parents of his/her students, the ultimate goal is to foster a partnership that will help in the development of the student.

In order to make this possible teachers establish relationships with the different families. In most situations these relationships are positive. Within this study teachers
shared in their survey or interview responses a memorable positive parent experience. Many of the experiences that took place included a parent gesture of simply saying “thank you for teaching my child” or giving praise to a teacher for how he/she handled an academic concern or behavior issue. One of the biggest compliments mentioned by interview participants is when a parent expresses their hope that future children will receive them as their teacher.

While many interactions between parents and teachers are positive, occasionally negative encounters occur. Research has shown that problems sometimes exist within the parent/teacher relationship (Ingersoll, 1996; Sanders, 2008; Swick, 2003). This study contributes to current literature to show that negative encounters can be brought about by parent dissatisfaction in many different areas. While each interaction within a parent/teacher relationship is unique, answers on the survey were grouped based on similarities. Survey results showed that behavior (22%) and academics (18%) were frequently mentioned as a source of conflict between the home and school. Other triggers for negative encounters included disagreements over a special education issue, retention and withholding recess.

In addition to gathering information about the general cause for the negative encounters that took place between the home and school, this study looked more in depth at how the problems were resolved and the different outcomes that came about because of the experience. Over twenty percent of the survey participants indicated that their negative encounter was resolved with the help of an administrator. All of the interview participants also referred to the role of the administrator in solving their parent conflict.
Additionally, fifteen percent of the survey participants indicated they were able to resolve their issue with the parent by having a conversation and communicating. Other teachers found that the uses of an intervention assistance team or the realization by the teacher or parent that they were incorrect were also mentioned. However, eleven percent of the teachers indicated in their response that the issue was not resolved.

For unresolved situations, this study found that in some situations negative outcomes did occur. These outcomes included a decline in communication, which in some situations the teacher withdrew and in others the parents stopped the communicating. Tension between the teacher and the parent developed causing a strain on the home/school relationship. Additionally, parents or teachers would avoid contact and in a few extreme cases this study found that students were moved out of the classroom or even the school. While the survey data indicated that teachers perceive students in a positive or neutral manner after a negative encounter has taken place with the parent, the interviews showed that often there is some change in how the teacher perceives the student. For one interview participant who had continuous problems with the same parent he stated, “It is only human nature that I’m not going to like you and I’m not going to try what’s probably best for your kid because I have 19 other kids whose parents are trying to help their kids, they want what’s best for their kids.”

While many negative outcomes do occur because of parent/teacher conflict, this study looks at both the pros and the cons of parent/teacher conflict. Conflict is often seen in a negative way; however, this study found that twenty percent of the participants learned the importance of communication between the home and school and seventeen
percent indicated that they learned more information about the student and family which helped to bring about an understanding of the student’s situation. Other positive outcomes included learning the value to keeping documentation and for some teachers a negative encounter resulted in a positive change within their teaching practice. For these teachers positive results were discovered as a result to a negative encounter or conflict situation.

Finally, this study took a closer look at differences within the parent/teacher relationship for high and low income school teachers. Email communication was found to be more widely used amongst the high income school teachers. The low income school teachers shared within their interviews that many of the families might not have regular access to the internet so a different method was used to communicate. Another difference between the two strata resulted in the type of parent that teachers were faced with that ranged from overly involved, adequately involved and under involved. High income school teachers expressed that they had a higher rate of working with parents that they would classify as overly involved, while the low income school teachers dealt with a larger number of under involved parents. Similar to Brantlinger’s findings (2003) low income school teachers often expressed empathy for the under involved parents and an understanding for each particular situation. One low income school interview participant shared that instead of dwelling on what support she did not have, she put her energies into making accommodations for those students and doing what she could to help the student be successful.
Parents and families play a vital role in the education of a child. Research on family involvement has increased as the realization has come about that it is crucial to understand the intricate relationship that forms between the home and school. This study has helped to gather current information about the home/school relationship in order to contribute to literature and promote a healthy team that ultimately works toward the same goal; educating the child.

**Implications**

The information found in this study has served as the foundation for the following recommendations for implementation in early childhood teacher education and for future administrators.

First, the overall teacher educator program plan and curriculum should include exposure to working with parents and families. Courses should be incorporated into the teacher educator program that allows for preservice teachers to learn about the home/school relationship. Within this course preservice teachers need to be able to reflect on their own personal beliefs about parent involvement to understand fully their own perspective and how that might transfer into the classroom. Additionally, preservice teachers should be aware of the benefits that parent involvement can have on students and the parent/teacher relationship.

Second, to strengthen preservice teachers’ understandings of parent involvement and forms of communication, preservice teachers should be required to spend time observing teachers working with parents. This might take the form of attending parent/teacher meetings, sitting in on an intervention assistance team, parent/teacher
conference or any other form of parent/teacher communication. Exposure to different methods of communication will help to lay the foundation for preservice teachers in establishing their own methods of communication with parents.

Third, preservice teachers need to be exposed to overly involved, adequately involved and under involved parents. In order to accomplish this preservice teachers should be offered a variety of opportunities to observe teachers and parents within both high and low income schools. By working with teachers in high and low income schools, preservice teachers can complete interviews and document field notes of their own observations of different accommodations that teachers make when working with overly involved, adequately involved and under involved parents. This will ultimately help prepare preservice teachers for the variety of partnerships they will be asked to form when they become teachers themselves.

Fourth, preservice teachers should be educated on parent/teacher conflict. Preservice teachers need to be aware of both the positive and negative outcomes that can occur as a result of a conflict with a parent. In order to accomplish this preservice teachers should spend time interviewing current teachers on conflicts they have encountered in working with parents. Additionally, real life conflict scenarios would be beneficial for preservice teachers to role play or respond in suggestion of how they would handle themselves in different situations. This is necessary to help preservice teachers gain exposure to potential issues that might arise during a parent/teacher relationship.

Fifth, teacher educators should be strongly encouraged through staff development to reflect on their own parent encounters with the families they have taught. It is
important for teachers to understand that past conflict with parents can impact their beliefs and current practices in both positive and negative ways. Teachers who have been impacted in a negative manner by parent conflict need to reflect on their own behavior in an attempt to learn more about themselves as teachers. If a negative outcome of conflict continues to exist within a teacher’s practices then reflection is necessary to evoke change for the better. Additional development can also be supportive in helping teachers develop methods for working with all types of parents and engaging them within the curriculum.

Sixth, future administrators need to be educated through coursework on the intricacies of the home/school relationship. Future administrators need to be aware of the importance of establishing a positive parent/teacher relationship. Additionally, the topic of conflict needs to be fully explored including both the positive and negative outcomes that can result from conflict situations. In many of the conflicts shared throughout this study, teachers or in some cases parents, went to the administrator for support in rectifying the problem. It is important that future administrators are well trained in how to mediate and solve potential problems that might arise between the teacher and parent.

Seventh, current administrators should be aware of the significance that their involvement can have on a teacher within their staff. This study found that when a principal showed support in the teachers favor that the teacher had a renewed sense of self as a teacher. Teachers took away from the conflict a confidence knowing that administration approved of their decisions. However, in some cases where the administrator favored a parent’s perspective the teacher lost their confidence and negative
outcomes resulted. Administrators need to be cautious of how they handle working with both the teacher and the parent involved in a conflict situation.

**Limitations**

This study is applicable to mainly early childhood teachers in the Midwest. Additionally, the results of this study are limited to the early childhood educational field because the participants targeted for this study were limited to kindergarten through third grade teachers. However, teachers of all grade levels might find the information this study revealed helpful in establishing and maintaining positive parent/teacher relationships.

**Conclusions**

Each year a teacher will be given a classroom of students to teach and along with those students comes families and parents to work with in order to reach the ultimate goal of educating a child. Every teacher will form a different type of relationship with each parent and family that they work with, where no two relationships will be exactly the same. For many of the parent/teacher relationships a positive team will be established where both the parent and teacher are able to work together successfully. However, this study showed that conflict can occur between the parent and the teacher. When this happens negative and positive outcomes are possible, which can lead to changes in a teachers practices and beliefs about working with parents. Unresolved conflict can have drastic results that sever the home/school connection. Research has shown that when parents are involved the child benefits in many different ways that extend beyond learning (Ashton, 2008; Carlisle et al., 2006; Epstein, 2008; Gestwicki, 2007; Greenwood
& Hickman, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Ingram et al., 2007). It is crucial for educators to maintain a healthy relationship with parents so that students can reap these benefits. Early childhood programs need to educate preservice teachers on the benefits of parent involvement, along with how to handle conflict situations. Additionally, future administrators need to be aware of the role they will play as mediator for the parents and teachers. Current educators need to continuously reflect on the relationships that they have formed and conflicts they have encountered in order to make appropriate accommodations within their practices that ultimately will help to strengthen parent/teacher relationships.

**Need for Further Research**

Future researchers may choose to investigate the following: First, a continuous need remains to gather current information on teacher practices in maintaining a home/school partnership. The field of education is constantly in a state of flux and it is crucial to document how teachers are communicating with parents today and to what capacity parents are involved within the schools. Secondly, this research study focused on the teacher’s perspective when faced with a parent conflict situation. In order to fully grasp parent conflict the parent perspective should be researched to further gather information on the home/school relationship. This would help to better and fully understand the intricacies involved in the parent/teacher relationship. Third, one theme that emerged from the interviews that needs further exploration was the idea of a teacher as a parent. Further research is needed to see how becoming a parent affects teachers’ practices and beliefs when looking at the parent/teacher relationship. Fourth, another
area in need of further research is the placement process for students. For the purposes of this study the placement process was brought up to address how teachers avoided future conflicts with families where negative encounters took place. Additionally, the placement process became a time to separate high maintenance parents so that one teacher would not have a higher amount of overly involved parents in one classroom. This makes the placement process of formulating classrooms for the following year a very powerful ordeal that should be better documented. Fifth, additional research needs to be done on the administrator’s role in the parent/teacher relationship. This research showed the depths to which an administrator’s involvement can have positive and negative effects on teachers. The role they play is crucial in guiding and helping teachers maintain healthy home/school relationships.
APPENDIX A

SURVEY
Appendix A

Survey

Teacher Survey on Parent Involvement

Personal Information (PI)

1. What is your gender?
   (Male, Female)

2. How would you describe your ethnicity? (e.g., White, Asian-American, etc.)
   (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type ethnicity)

3. What is your highest level of education?
   (Bachelor’s Degree, Master’s Degree, Doctorate)

4. What grade do you teach?
   (Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, other)

5. How many years have you been teaching?
   (Drop down menu with years posted)

6. Have you ever attended an educational course related to parent involvement (ex. a course that taught strategies on how to maintain a healthy home/school relationship)?
   (Yes, No)

7. Have you ever attended a workshop related to parent involvement (ex. a workshop that taught strategies on how to maintain a healthy home/school relationship)?
   (Yes, No)

Classroom Information (CI)

8. How many students are currently in your class?
   (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)

9. Have any of your students been identified as special needs?
   (Yes, No)

10. How many boys are in your classroom?
    (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)
11. How many girls are in your classroom?
(Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)

**Communicating with Parents**

12. How do you communicate with parents, both formally and informally? Please select all that apply. (Offer the following options and allow as many responses as needed – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, newsletter, regularly scheduled conferences, impromptu meetings, home visits, other option – fill in the blank)

13. What is your preferred method for communicating with parents? Please type a 1 indicating your first preference, a 2 indicating your second choice, and a 3 for your third method for communicating. (Offer the following options and allow the numbers 1,2,3 to be typed next to the choices – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank)

14. How do parents mainly communicate with you?
(Offer the following options and allow for one response – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank)

15. In the past seven days approximately how many times have you been contacted by a parent? Please include emails, phone calls, handwritten or typed notes, and face to face conversations.
(Drop down bar with numbers attached)

16. Do you find that the majority of your interactions with parents, throughout your experiences, are with the same parents or a range of parents?
(Same parents, range of parents)

17. Sometimes teachers work with parents who require a high amount of teacher contact due to the needs of their child. Other times teachers are required to spend a lot of their energy on parents who in the teacher’s opinion are overly involved in the life of the child or school. After how many interactions, in a month time frame, do you consider a parent overly involved?
(Offer the following ranges and allow one response: 1-3, 4-6, 7-10, 11+)

If the above question is answered yes participants will be directed to the following question:

18. Are you currently spending your time with a parent you consider to be “overly” involved?
(Yes, no)
Parent Encounters

19. A parent encounter is an interaction between you and a parent that may result in a positive (beneficial in some way) or negative (not beneficial) manner. As an experienced teacher do you think your encounters with parents are (a) mostly positive, b) a mix of positive and negative encounters or c) mostly negative)

20. When a positive encounter is initiated by a parent (ex: a thank you email), how do parents mainly choose to communicate? (Offer the following options and allow one response – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank)

21. In a few statements please describe a recent positive encounter you have had with a parent. What was the encounter about and why was the outcome positive? (Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response)

22. Based on your experiences have you ever had a negative encounter (i.e., An experience with a parent that you perceived as not resulting with a beneficial outcome)? (Yes, No)

23. Based on your experiences have you ever had a conflict (i.e., A disagreement) with a parent? (Yes, No)

24. When a negative encounter is initiated by a parent (ex: problem with a grade), how do parents mainly choose to communicate? (Offer the following options and allow one response – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, go directly to administrator, other option – fill in the blank)

25. In a few statements please describe one example of a negative encounter or conflict (ex: disagreement over a grade, issues with how a behavior problem was resolved, etc.) (Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response)

26. How was the problem resolved? (Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response)

27. How did you perceive the parent of the above conflict after the encounter was over? (Positively, negatively, neutral)

28. How did you perceive the student of the above conflict after the encounter was over? (Positively, negatively, neutral)

29. After the above conflict, how did you feel you were perceived by the parents?
(Positively, negatively, neutral)

Outcomes of Parent Encounters

30. Have you ever experienced positive outcomes (ex: learned helpful information, made changes in your own practices) from a negative encounter? (Yes, no)

If responder selects yes then he/she will answer the following question.
31. What are some of the positive outcomes you have experienced as a result of (negative encounters, conflict situations)?
(Open ended – blank space for teacher response)

32. Have you ever experienced a negative encounter with a parent that went unresolved? (Yes, no)

If responder selects yes then he/she will answer the following question.
33. What were some of the outcomes that resulted from your unresolved conflict? (ex: tension in the relationship, lack of desire to communicate)
(Open ended – blank space for teacher response)

34. Would you be willing to talk about your interactions and involvement with parents in a one hour interview with a researcher? (Yes, No)

If responder selects yes then he/she will answer the following question.
35. Thank you for expressing interest in participating in a one hour follow up interview. Please indicate your email address and/or telephone number below so that a researcher may contact you to further discuss this option.
APPENDIX B

CONTENT VALIDATION FORM
Appendix B

Content Validation Form

Teachers’ Perspectives of Parent Involvement: A Look at Conflict Situations

Survey Questionnaires Item Content Validation Form

Directions: There are 44 items listed on the following pages designed to investigate how early childhood teachers view working with parents and their positive and negative encounters in maintaining the home/school relationship. Please rate each item based on two criteria: 1) the appropriateness of the item in representing the topic, and 2) the clarity of the meaning of the item. Please **bold** your response.

1) Is the item appropriate?

   YES = Appropriate
   NO = Inappropriate

2) Is the item clear?

   YES = Meaning Clear
   NO = Meaning Unclear

If the item is appropriate but unclear, please reword the item on the blank lines below the item.

If the item is inappropriate and not clear, please indicate the item should be deleted from the questionnaire by writing the word “Delete” on the blank lines.

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<thead>
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<th>Personal Information Questions</th>
<th>Appropriate</th>
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<td>What is your gender? (Male, Female)</td>
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<td>What is the level of your education? (Bachelor’s Degree, Master’s Degree, Doctorate)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______________________________________________________________________</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What grade do you teach? (1st, 2nd, 3rd, other)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______________________________________________________________________</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many years have you been teaching? (Drop down menu with years posted)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______________________________________________________________________</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever attended an educational course related to family involvement? (Yes, No)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______________________________________________________________________</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever attended a workshop related to family involvement? (Yes, No)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______________________________________________________________________</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Information Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many students are currently in your class? (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have any of your students been identified as special needs? (Yes, No)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many boys are in your classroom? (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many girls are in your classroom? (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Communicating with Parents Questions**

How do you communicate with parents? Please select all that apply. (Offer the following options and allow as many responses as needed – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, regularly scheduled conferences, impromptu meetings, home visits, other option – fill in the blank)

What is your preferred method for communicating with parents? Please type a 1 indicating your first preference, a 2 indicating your second choice, and a 3 for your third method for communicating. (Offer the following options and allow the numbers 1,2,3 to be typed next to the choices – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank)
In the past seven days approximately how many times have you been contacted by a parent? Please include emails, phone calls, handwritten or typed notes, and face to face conversations. 
(Drop down bar with numbers attached)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you find that the majority of your interactions with parents are with the same parents or a range of parents? 
(Same parents, range of parents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes teachers work with parents who require a high amount of teacher contact due to the needs of their child. Other times teachers are required to spend a lot of their energies on parents who in the teacher’s opinion are overly involved in the life of the child or school. In the past 6 months have you spent time with a parent (or parents) who you consider to be overly involved? 
(Yes, no)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the above question is answered yes participants will be directed to the following question:

Are you currently spending your time with a parent you consider to be “overly” involved? 
(Yes, no)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Parent Interaction Questions**

Do you involve parents in the classroom? 
(Yes, No)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If parents are involved in the classroom please check the following ways they are used:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Work with students, monitor center activities, edit student work, clerical jobs, field trips, other blank,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they are not used)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you do not use parents in the classroom please check the following reasons why they are not used.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lack of volunteers, parents’ lack of knowledge about the school curriculum, inability to find time to work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with them/train them, ethical/confidentiality reasons, other blank space for written response)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you define <em>parent involvement</em>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Open ended question)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on your definition of parent involvement and the number of children currently in your classroom, how</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many parents would you consider as overly involved? (DDM with numbers listed)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on your definition of parent involvement and the number of children currently in your classroom, how</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many parents would you consider as adequately involved? (DDM with numbers listed)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on your definition of parent involvement and the number of children currently in your classroom, how</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many parents would you consider as adequately involved? (DDM with numbers listed)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on your definition of parent involvement and the number of children currently in your classroom, how</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many parents would you consider as adequately involved? (DDM with numbers listed)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Parents' Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you consider as not showing enough involvement? (DDM with numbers listed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>_______________________________________________________________________</td>
<td>-----</td>
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<tr>
<td>How would you describe the majority of your relationships with overly involved parents? (Positive, negative, neutral)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>_______________________________________________________________________</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe the majority of your relationships with adequately involved parents? (Positive, negative, neutral)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>_______________________________________________________________________</td>
<td>-----</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe the majority of your relationships with parents who show little involvement? (Positive, negative, neutral)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Parent Encounters Questions

A parent encounter is an interaction between you and a parent that may result in a positive (beneficial in some way) or negative (not beneficial) manner. As an experienced teacher, do you think your encounters with parents are (a) mostly positive, (b) a mix of positive and negative encounters or (c) mostly negative?

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

When a positive encounter is initiated by a parent (ex: a thank you email), how do parents mainly choose to communicate? (Offer the following options and allow one response – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank)

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________
In a few statements please describe a recent positive encounter you have had with a parent. What was the encounter about and why was the outcome positive? (Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on your experiences have you ever had a negative encounter (i.e., An experience with a parent that you perceived as not resulting with a beneficial outcome)?

(Yes, No)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on your experiences have you ever had a conflict (i.e., A disagreement) with a parent?

(Yes, No)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you were to recall instances in which conflicts or negative encounters between you and a parent were brought to your attention who would most likely initiate these communications?

(Principal, colleague, parent, other community member, other option – fill in the blank)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How would these disagreements or conflicts be communicated to you?

(Email, letter, face to face communication, telephone call, other option – fill in the blank)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Please describe one example of a negative encounter or conflict</strong> (e.g., disagreement over a grade, issues with how a behavior problem was resolved, etc.) (Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **How was the problem resolved?** (Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response) |
|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No |

| **How did you perceive the parent of the above conflict after the encounter was over?** (Positively, negatively, neutral) |
|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No |

| **How did you perceive the student of the above conflict after the encounter was over?** (Positively, negatively, neutral) |
|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No |

| **After the above conflict, how did you feel you were perceived by the parents?** (Positively, negatively, neutral) |
|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No |

**Outcomes of Parent Encounters**

| Have you ever experienced positive outcomes (e.g., learned helpful information, made changes in your own practices) from a negative encounter? (Yes, no) |
|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No |
If responder selects yes then he/she will answer the following question.
What are some of the positive outcomes you have experienced as a result of (negative encounters, conflict situations)?
(Open ended – blank space for teacher response)

Yes No

Have you ever experienced a negative encounter with a parent that went unresolved?
(Yes, no)

Yes No

If responder selects yes then he/she will answer the following question.
What were some of the outcomes that resulted from your unresolved conflict? (ex: tension in the relationship, lack of desire to communicate)
(Open ended – blank space for teacher response)

Yes No

Would you be willing to talk about your interactions and involvement with parents in a one hour interview with a researcher?
(Yes, No)

Yes No

Please remember to address the items requested in the letter:

Face Validity: Does the instrument “look like” it is measuring what it is supposed to measure?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
**Content Validity:** Are the items representative of concepts related to the dissertation topic?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**Clarity:** Are survey questions clearly conveyed overall?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**Format:** Does the survey have a logical flow? Please provide any suggestions.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please make any additional suggestions as warranted.
APPENDIX C

EXPERT LETTER
Appendix C

Expert Letter

Dear:

I am writing to ask for your assistance in the development of an important survey and interview instrument regarding my doctoral dissertation. Through my own experiences and years of teaching first, second, and third grade I have developed an interest in the parent/teacher relationship. My dissertation topic reflects my interest in exploring “Teachers’ Perspectives of Parent Involvement: A Look at Conflict Situations.” You have been chosen as a member of my panel of experts because of your commitment to and knowledge of the field of education.

This survey and interview instrument proposes to gather information on the teachers’ perspective in relation to working with parents and families. In particular it will measure how teachers currently correspond with parents and will explore both positive and negative encounters teachers have had with families. The survey questionnaire will be administrated to kindergarten, first, second, and third grade teachers in high and low income school districts. In addition six teacher participants will be chosen for in-depth interviews.

This review by the panel of experts will help establish the validity of the survey and interview instruments. I am requesting that you review the survey and interview questions to determine the appropriateness and clarity of the questions and their applicability to the dissertation topic.

A special form has been developed for your use in commenting on the items I have developed for the instrument. Please feel free to comment based upon the following criteria:

**Face Validity**: Does the instrument “look like” it is measuring what it is supposed to measure?

**Content Validity**: Are the items representative of concepts related to the dissertation topic?

**Clarity**: Is each item in the instrument clear? Is the language/wording appropriate?

**Format**: Logical flow? Suggestions

**Other**: Please make any additional suggestions as warranted?

A web based questionnaire will be sent to participants email. Subjects will be asked to answer a variety of open and closed questions. For each closed question the answer choices are indicated. Please feel free to comment on the questions and answer selection and delete those items you feel inappropriate.
If possible, please return the enclosed expert form with your comments to me by February 26, 2010. If you have any questions, please contact me at missgeorge123@yahoo.com. Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Theresa George
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Teaching, Leadership and Curriculum Studies
Kent State University
APPENDIX D

CHART FOR SURVEY RELEVANCE
## Chart for Survey Relevance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Research Question Addressed</th>
<th>Reason Included In Survey</th>
<th>Qualitative Purpose</th>
<th>Quantitative Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Information</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your gender? (Male, Female)</td>
<td></td>
<td>To obtain information about the participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe your ethnicity? (e.g., White, Asian-American, etc.) (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type ethnicity)</td>
<td></td>
<td>To obtain information about the participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your highest level of education? (Bachelor’s Degree, Master’s Degree, Doctorate)</td>
<td></td>
<td>To obtain information about the participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What grade do you teach? (Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, other)</td>
<td></td>
<td>To obtain information about the participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many years have you been teaching? (Drop down menu with years posted)</td>
<td></td>
<td>To obtain information about the participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever attended an educational course related to family involvement? (Yes, No)</td>
<td></td>
<td>To obtain information about the participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever attended a workshop related to family involvement? (Yes, No)</td>
<td></td>
<td>To obtain information about the participant</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Information</td>
<td>Classroom demographic</td>
<td>To obtain information about current teaching environment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many students are currently in your class? (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)</td>
<td>Classroom demographic</td>
<td>To obtain information about current teaching environment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have any of your students been identified as special needs? (Yes, No)</td>
<td>Classroom demographic</td>
<td>To obtain information about current teaching environment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many boys are in your classroom? (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)</td>
<td>Classroom demographic</td>
<td>To obtain information about current teaching environment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many girls are in your classroom? (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)</td>
<td>Classroom demographic</td>
<td>To obtain information about current teaching environment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communicating with Parents</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you communicate with parents? Please select all that apply. (Offer the following options and allow as many responses as needed – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank)</td>
<td>1. How do early childhood teachers at high/low income schools communicate with parents?</td>
<td>This will provide an idea for how teachers currently communicate with parents</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your preferred method for communicating with parents? Please type a 1 indicating your first preference, a 2 indicating your second choice, and a 3 for your third method for communicating. (Offer the following options and allow the numbers 1,2,3 to be typed next to the choices – email, phone, written)</td>
<td>1. How do early childhood teachers at high/low income schools communicate with parents?</td>
<td>This will provide an idea for how teachers currently prefer to communicate with parents</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the past seven days approximately how many times have you been contacted by a parent? Please include emails, phone calls, handwritten or typed notes, and face to face conversations. (Drop down bar with numbers attached)</th>
<th>10. How do parent/teacher relationships differ depending on the socioeconomic status of the school?</th>
<th>This will provide information on the amount of contact teachers receive from parents in a week time frame – I will look for one participant that has a lot of contact with parents</th>
<th>X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you find that the majority of your interactions with parents are with the same parents or a range of parents? (Same parents, range of parents)</td>
<td>10. How do parent/teacher relationships differ depending on the socioeconomic status of the school?</td>
<td>This will provide information on the parents that are requiring teacher time</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes teachers work with parents who require a high amount of teacher contact due to the needs of their child. Other times teachers are required to spend a lot of their energy on parents who in the teacher’s opinion are overly involved in the life of the child or school. After how many interactions do you consider a parent overly involved? (Offer the following ranges and allow one response: 1-3, 4-6, 7-10, 11+)</td>
<td>10. How do parent/teacher relationships differ depending on the socioeconomic status of the school?</td>
<td>To help select participant for qualitative interview</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you currently spending your time with a parent you consider to be “overly” involved? (Yes, no)</td>
<td></td>
<td>To help select participant for qualitative interview</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Parent Encounters**

A parent encounter is an interaction between you

| 2. What are the attitudes of teachers | This question will help give a general | | X |
and a parent that may result in a positive (beneficial in some way) or negative (not beneficial) manner. As an experienced teacher do you think your encounters with parents are (a) mostly positive, (b) a mix of positive and negative encounters or (c) mostly negative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Towards working with parents in high/low income schools?</td>
<td>understanding of the teachers perceptions of his/her relationships with parents. This question will help to select interview participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How do parent/teacher relationships differ depending on the socioeconomic status of the school?</td>
<td>This question will provide information about how parents choose to communicate about positive encounters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a few statements please describe a recent positive encounter you have had with a parent. What was the encounter about and why was the outcome positive? (Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response)</td>
<td>Main research question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on your experiences have you ever had a negative encounter (i.e., An experience with a parent that you perceived as not resulting with a beneficial outcome)? (Yes, No)</td>
<td>3. What happens when conflicts occur in the early childhood parent/teacher relationship? This question sets the stage for RQ #3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on your experiences have you ever had a conflict (i.e., A disagreement) with a parent? (Yes, No)</td>
<td>3. What happens when conflicts occur in the early childhood parent/teacher relationship? This question sets the stage for RQ #3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>This question will provide information about how parents choose to communicate about negative encounters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When a <strong>negative</strong> encounter is initiated by a parent (ex: problem with a grade), how do parents mainly choose to communicate? (Offer the following options and allow one response – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, go directly to administrator, other option – fill in the blank)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What happens when conflicts occur in the early childhood parent/teacher relationship?</td>
<td>This will provide information on the types of negative encounters teachers experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What types of positive outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?</td>
<td>This will provide information about how problems are resolved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What types of negative outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How do teachers of high/low income schools perceive the families and the student after a conflict has occurred?</td>
<td>This will indicate the teachers perceptions of the parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How do teachers of high/low income schools perceive the families and the student after a conflict has occurred?</td>
<td>This will indicate the teachers perceptions of the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After the above conflict, how did you feel you were perceived by the</td>
<td>This will indicate how teachers think they are perceived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please describe one example of a <strong>negative</strong> encounter or conflict (ex: disagreement over a grade, issues with how a behavior problem was resolved, etc.) (Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you perceive the parent of the above conflict after the encounter was over? (Positively, negatively, neutral)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you perceive the student of the above conflict after the encounter was over? (Positively, negatively, neutral)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents? (Positively, negatively, neutral)</td>
<td>perceived by parents after a conflict has occurred?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Outcomes of Parent Encounters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you ever experienced positive outcomes (ex: learned helpful information, made changes in your own practices) from a negative encounter? (Yes, no)</th>
<th>5. What types of positive outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?</th>
<th>This will provide information about positive outcomes related to negative encounters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If responder selects yes then he/she will answer the following question. What are some of the positive outcomes have you experienced? (Open ended – blank space for teacher response)</td>
<td>5. What types of positive outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?</td>
<td>This will provide information about positive outcomes related to negative encounters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This question will help to select interview participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you ever experienced a negative encounter with a parent that went unresolved? (Yes, no)</th>
<th>6. What types of negative outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?</th>
<th>This will provide information about negative outcomes related to negative encounters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. How do teachers of high/low income schools feel they are perceived by parents after a conflict has occurred?</td>
<td>6. What types of negative outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?</td>
<td>This will provide information about negative outcomes related to negative encounters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This question will help to select interview participant</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If responder selects yes then he/she will answer the following question. What were some of the outcomes that resulted from your unresolved conflict? (ex: tension in the relationship, lack of desire to communicate) (Open ended – blank space for teacher response)</th>
<th>6. What types of negative outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?</th>
<th>This will provide information about negative outcomes related to negative encounters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. In what ways has the parent/teacher relationship been altered after a conflict or disagreement has taken place?</td>
<td>6. What types of negative outcomes have resulted from conflict situations?</td>
<td>This question will help to select interview participant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Would you be willing to talk about your
| interactions and involvement with parents in a one hour interview with a researcher? (Yes, No) |   |   |   |
APPENDIX E

TEACHER CONTENT VALIDATION FORM
Appendix E

Teacher Content Validation Form

Teachers’ Perspectives of Parent Involvement: A Look at Conflict Situations

Survey Questionnaires Item Content Validation Form
Directions: There are 34 items listed on the following pages designed to investigate how early childhood teachers view working with parents and their positive and negative encounters in maintaining the home/school relationship. Please answer each question and rate each item based on two criteria: 1) the appropriateness of the item in representing the topic, and 2) the clarity of the meaning of the item. Please circle your response.

1. Is the item appropriate?
   - YES = Appropriate
   - NO = Inappropriate

2. Is the item clear?
   - YES = Meaning Clear
   - NO = Meaning Unclear

If you have additional thoughts about the question please use the third column to write your comments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Information Questions</th>
<th>Appropriate</th>
<th>Clear</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your gender? (Male, Female)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>How would you describe your ethnicity? (e.g., White, Asian-American, etc.) (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type ethnicity)</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is your highest level of education? (Bachelor’s Degree, Master’s Degree, Doctorate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>_____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>What grade do you teach? (kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, other)</td>
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<td>_____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>How many years have you been teaching? (Drop down menu with years posted)</td>
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<td>_____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you ever attended an educational course for college credit related to family involvement? (Yes, No)</td>
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<td>_____________________________________________________________________</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever attended a workshop related to family involvement? (Yes, No)</td>
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<td>_____________________________________________________________________</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Information Questions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>How many students are currently in your class? (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)</td>
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<td>_____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have any of your students been identified as having special needs? (Yes, No)</td>
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<tr>
<td>_____________________________________________________________________</td>
<td>-----</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many boys are in your classroom? (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)</td>
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<tr>
<td>_____________________________________________________________________</td>
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<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many girls are in your classroom? (Open ended – empty box for teacher to type in number)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicating with Parents Questions</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you communicate with parents, both formally and informally? Please select all that apply. (Offer the following options and allow as many responses as needed – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, newsletter, regularly scheduled conferences, impromptu meetings, home visits, other option – fill in the blank)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your preferred method for communicating with parents? Please type a 1 indicating your first preference, a 2 indicating your second choice, and a 3 for your third method for communicating. (Offer the following options and allow the numbers 1,2,3 to be typed next to the choices – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do parents mainly communicate with you? (Offer the following options and allow for one response – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past seven days approximately how many times have you been contacted by a parent? Please include emails, phone calls, handwritten or typed notes, and face to face conversations. (Drop down bar with numbers attached)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you find that the majority of your interactions with parents are with the same parents or a range of parents? (Same parents, range of parents)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes teachers work with parents who require a high amount of teacher contact due to the needs of their child. Other times teachers are required to spend a lot of their energy on parents who in the teacher’s opinion are overly involved in the life of the child or school. After how many interactions do you consider a parent overly involved? (Offer the following ranges and allow one response: 1-3,</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are you currently spending your time with a parent you consider to be “overly” involved? (Yes, no)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Parent Encounters Questions

A parent encounter is an interaction between you and a parent that may result in a positive (beneficial in some way) or negative (not beneficial) manner. As an experienced teacher do you think your encounters with parents are (a) mostly positive, b) a mix of positive and negative encounters or c) mostly negative)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

When a positive encounter is initiated by a parent (ex: a thank you email), how do parents mainly choose to communicate? (Offer the following options and allow one response – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</thead>
</table>

In a few statements please describe a recent positive encounter you have had with a parent. What was the encounter about and why was the outcome positive? (Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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</table>

Based on your experiences have you ever had a negative encounter (i.e., An experience with a parent that you perceived as not resulting with a beneficial outcome)? (Yes, No)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Based on your experiences have you ever had a conflict (i.e., A disagreement) with a parent? (Yes, No)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
When a **negative** encounter is initiated by a parent (ex: problem with a grade), how do parents mainly choose to communicate?
(Offer the following options and allow one response – email, phone, written correspondence, face-to-face, other option – fill in the blank)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

Please describe one example of a **negative** encounter or conflict (ex: disagreement over a grade, issues with how a behavior problem was resolved, etc.)
(Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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</table>

How was the problem resolved?
(Open ended – space for teacher to fill in with a response)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>

How did you perceive the parent of the above conflict after the encounter was over?
(Positively, negatively, neutral)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

How did you perceive the student of the parent from the above conflict after the encounter was over?
(Positively, negatively, neutral)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

After the above conflict, how did you feel you were perceived by the parents?
(Positively, negatively, neutral)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes of Parent Encounters</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever experienced positive outcomes (ex: learned helpful information, made changes in your own practices) from a negative encounter? (Yes, no)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If responder selects yes then he/she will answer the following question. What are some of the positive outcomes you have experienced as a result of (negative encounters, conflict situations)? (Open ended – blank space for teacher response)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever experienced a negative encounter with a parent that went unresolved? (Yes, no)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If responder selects yes then he/she will answer the following question. What were some of the outcomes that resulted from your unresolved conflict? (ex: tension in the relationship, lack of desire to communicate) (Open ended – blank space for teacher response)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you be willing to talk about your interactions and involvement with parents in a one hour interview with a researcher? (Yes, No)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

TEACHER LETTER
Appendix F

Teacher Letter

Dear Teachers,

My name is Theresa George and I am a doctoral student at Kent State University. In addition to being a doctoral student I am also an elementary school teacher. Through my own personal experiences in teaching I developed an interest in interactions between the home and school. My interests led me to pursue a dissertation topic that explores teachers’ experiences in working with parents. I am currently in the process of collecting information and am seeking your help. Listed below is a link that will connect you to an online survey, which takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. All of your responses will remain confidential. Your input would be extremely valuable in helping to further progress the research on this topic. I appreciate you taking the time to help me. Thank you!

Warmly,

Theresa George
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Teaching, Leadership and Curriculum Studies
Kent State University
APPENDIX G

SURVEY CONSENT FORM
Appendix G

Survey Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Thank you for participating in the 2010 Teacher Survey on Parent Involvement. We are interested in learning about your positive and negative encounters in maintaining the home/school relationship. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and your answers are confidential. We hope you will participate in this survey as your answers will help progress the topic of parent involvement.

It will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete this survey. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Martha Lash at Kent State University (330-672-0628). This project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have any questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. John West, Acting Vice President of Research, Division of Research and Graduate Studies (330-672-2581).
Appendix H

Interview Consent Form

Audiotape Consent Form

Teachers Perspectives of Parent Involvement: A Look at Conflict Situation
Theresa George

I agree to participate in an audio-taped interview about my positive and negative experiences in working with parents and families as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Theresa George may audio-tape this interview. The date, time and place of the interview will be mutually agreed upon.

_________________________    ________________________
Signature      Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the recording of the interview before it is used. I have decided that I:

_____want to listen to the recording  _____do not want to listen to the recording

Sign now below if you do not want to listen to the recording. If you want to listen to the recording, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Theresa George may / may not (circle one) use the audio-tapes made of me. The original tapes or copies may be used for:

_____this research project _____publication _____presentation at professional meetings

_________________________    ________________________
Signature      Date

Address:
APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Appendix I

Interview Questions

1. Please speak briefly about your teaching experience.

2. What are some of your beliefs and practices in working with parents and families?

3. In your survey you wrote about (positive experience) what have been some of your additional positive experiences with working with families?

4. What would you say are benefits to parent involvement?

5. In your survey you wrote about (negative experience) can you share a little more in detail about this incident, your feelings and perceptions, and the outcome?

6. In your survey you expressed that you felt perceived by the parent in a (positive, negative, neutral) manner after the negative encounter occurred. What happened that led to those perceptions?

7. Parent involvement can be classified into the overly involved parents, adequately involved parents, and parents that are not involved enough. How would you define parents that overly involved? Adequately involved? And parents that are not involved enough?

8. In your encounter that you wrote about how would you classify the type of involvement the parents showed?

9. Did you initiate contact with the family or did they initiate contact with you?

10. How was your relationship affected after the encounter?
11. In your survey you wrote about (specific positive outcomes from negative encounters). Have you ever experienced any other type of positive results from a negative situation with a parent?

12. In your survey you wrote about (specific negative outcomes from negative encounters). Have you ever experienced any other type of negative results from a negative situation with a parent?

13. In your teaching career, is there one negative experience that stands out? How did that experience affect you as a teacher?

14. Have you ever adapted your teaching practices due to a parent or family encounter?

15. How involved do you think parents and families should be in school?

16. In the years that you have been teaching what changes have you noticed over time in regards to parent/family involvement?
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


