Building Effective Parental Involvement In Middle Schools: The Parents' Perceptions

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Concordia University–Portland
College of Education
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Building Effective Parental Involvement in Middle Schools:

The Parents’ Perceptions

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
Transformational Leadership

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Abstract

Parental involvement is an integral variable that bears a significant value in the overall academic achievement and learning process of a student’s educational journey. Therefore, all parents should play a major role in their children’s academic success from elementary through middle and high school. The prime focus of this research was to examine the perceptions of middle school parents and find strategies to build effective relationships between the school and home. This two-part case study utilized Epstein’s (1995) School and Family Partnership Surveys of Teachers and Parents in the Elementary and Middle Grades, and semi-structured interviews to gather a firm understanding of the parents’ perceptions of parental involvement. Guided by Epstein’s (1995) Six Types of Involvement, this study examined the different ways parents are involved in their children’s academic achievement. Forty-five parents completed the survey and 22 of these participants were interviewed. The data were analyzed and the results were coded based on Epstein’s (1995) Framework of the Six Dimensions of Parental Involvement: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. The qualitative findings of this research showed that parents want to be involved, but there was a disconnect in communication between the families and the schools.

Keywords: involvement, parent, family-school, partnerships, community, parent engagement
Dedication

I am dedicating this completed dissertation to the two most influential ladies in my life. The first is my late grandmother, Mrs. Ethne Wood, who I know is smiling down from heaven saying, “Great job.” If she were alive, she would have been one of my biggest cheerleaders. The second is my mother, Ms. Ordene Wood, who has never given up on me, but encouraged and motivated me throughout this journey. Because you did not have the opportunity to pursue your educational dreams, and I know you would have strived for academic excellence, I am dedicating my dissertation to you both.
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Allow me to take this time to thank my husband, Colonel (Ret.) Carter Oates, my children, and my inner circle of friends. My husband supported and encouraged me each step of the way, ensuring that I made it to the finish line. He insisted on me taking a year off from work to focus entirely on completing my research. That year meant so much to me, and for that, I am forever grateful. He understood my stress levels were never personal and was always patient with me. Our family structure remained intact because my husband maintained a strong support system for us. Thank you and I love you. My children have been very patient, especially when I had deadlines to meet and they never complained. Alyssa-Maria was only 5 years when I started and she would always climb into the bed next to me and ask if she could help me read. My son, Hal-Dajon, then 17 years, was one of my biggest cheerleaders who always believed in my aspiration. His phone calls would always end with, “Mom, you got this.”

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Study

The effectiveness of the educational system plays a critical role in society. Salient elements that determine the effectiveness of parental involvement are the interactions and relationships between parents/guardians and educators. Institutions cannot function alone and need reinforcement from families and the community. A plethora of reliable research supports the idea that the behaviors and relationships between parents and teachers promote social and academic performance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Lopez, Kreider, & Caspe, 2004; Pena, 2000).

According to Salinas and Jansorn (2003), fostering parent-school relationships can become complicated in middle schools if there is no clear definition of parental involvement. It is hard to clearly define parental involvement unanimously because some parents and educators share opposing worldviews. Finders and Lewis (1994) noted that some parents believe adequate parental involvement includes helping with homework, providing a safe home, and monitoring their children’s social activities.

Overall, parental involvement has been proven to be an essential strategy to ensure academic success. Several correlational studies have highlighted the dominating benefits of parental participation and increased academic achievement (Barnard, 2004; Desimone, 1999; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Henderson and Berla (1994) posited that when schools and families collaborate to enhance learning, students tend to excel not just in school, but also throughout life. Instilling family engagement practices at all schools (elementary, middle, and high) is the responsibility of school officials, parents, and the community (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Epstein
& Van Voorhis, 2010). As crucial as parental involvement is in middle schools, however, levels of parental involvement in middle schools are not as high as they are in elementary schools.

Parental involvement is undeniably significant on all grade levels, from kindergarten through high school. However, it becomes more paramount during the middle school years because young students need the support, advice, and encouragement of their parents (Dwyer & Hecht, 2001). When students leave elementary school and enter middle school, parents take on the role of advisor and confidant (Dwyer & Hecht, 2001). Hill and Taylor (2004) asserted that overall, parents are active when their children are in elementary schools; however, their presence and parent involvement immensely decline when students enter middle school.

Hughes and Kwok (2007) suggested that building substantial, productive, and trusting parent-teacher relationships are needed to increase parental involvement in middle schools. A productive parent-teacher relationship makes a significant and transformative difference in academic achievement. Understanding how to enhance parent-teacher relationships is the catalyst to reverse the decline of parental involvement in middle schools. There is a correlation between the caliber of the relationships cultivated and the increase of parent involvement. The substructure of the relationship determines how confident and trusting the relationships will be among stakeholders (Hughes & Kwok, 2007).

**Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

Historically, significant changes have taken place in the interactions between families and schools. In the 19th century, churches, parents, and communities had the most control over how schools functioned. During this era, parents were responsible for hiring, firing, and deciding upon the school’s curriculum (Epstein, 1987). Prentice and Houston (1975) pointed out that the
church, home, and community often agreed on how to manage the schools. Unlike today, family involvement in schools was at its peak (Prentice & Houston, 1975).

By the mid-1950s, teachers became more assertive and focused on teaching, and urged parents to play a more supportive role in building relationships with teachers and schools. Subsequently, by the early 20th century, there was a broader spectrum of the relationship between the schools and the family (Berger, 2003). Katz (1995) observed the development of identified jobs and responsibilities delegated to the schools and the families. Teachers appeared to isolate themselves from working with the parents, and moreover justified their refusal to work with parents by stating that parents were not qualified to offer opinions or ideas about the school’s curriculum (Katz, 1995).

In the 21st century, parent involvement has become more than occasional volunteering or attending school activities. Today, parental involvement requires the willingness to share and build great relationships. Parent involvement includes a beneficial partnership that consists of constant communication and participation in implementing plans for school improvement and success (Berger, 2003).

Epstein (1985, 1987, 1995) and colleagues developed a theoretical framework of six major types of parent involvement. The types of involvement are as follows: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Chen and Chandler (2001) wrote that Epstein’s typology is the primary framework most researchers use to study parent involvement. Epstein’s (2009) model has two main components: spheres and the six types of involvement. The spheres recognize the partnership among school, family, and community. They focus on the mutuality and commonality that schools, families, and communities all share. They also concentrate on the time and experiences
in the life of a student, which gives it an overlapping characteristic (Chen & Chandler, 2001). Epstein et al. (2002) argued that parents are more involved in the education of their children during the elementary school years. An equal amount of parent dedication, if not more, is also needed in middle school. A solid parent-school partnership can influence each child in a positive manner along with positive student achievement (Epstein, 2001).

Several schools have adopted Epstein’s model and incorporated a systematic approach to implementing effective partnership programs. Implementing activities and programs that focus on creating partnerships fosters parental involvement at school and home (Epstein, 1995). Epstein et al. (2002) suggested six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Each type of involvement contributes to the partnership model which Epstein et al. (2002) described as the school, the family, the community, and the student. This model encourages input from families, which helps schools to address and overcome challenges and implement outreach academic and social programs. Parents view themselves as beneficial partners, who are working together with the school and community and contributing to their children’s academics. The school-family-community partnership model can be used as a guide to help build parent-teacher relationships that will ultimately benefit children from both social and educational perspectives (Epstein et al. 2002).

**Statement of the Problem**

Parental involvement is paramount at all grade levels, and more so at the middle school level, although the parents are less visible. Parents of young teens tend to be less involved in their children’s education. Research has shown a noticeable decline in parental involvement when children transition from elementary into middle school (Hill & Taylor, 2004). The
breakdown and disconnection between families and schools that occur when students enter middle school affect student achievement negatively (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Active parental involvement is more influential with student achievement than any socioeconomic factor. However, because teenage students need their parents more than ever throughout their teen years, it is critical that all stakeholders contribute to the process and communicate effectively (Hawes & Plourde, 2005). Children learn, develop, and excel when family, school, and community connect with each other (Epstein, 2001).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of middle school parents to gain an understanding of their definition of parental involvement. This study explored what hinders and promotes parental involvement, and analyzed various ways to create trusting school-family partnerships in middle schools. The data collected in this qualitative study will provide useful information that can benefit both parents and school systems throughout the United States. Given the decline in participation among middle school parents, there is a need to find solutions that will help increase their involvement. Finding innovative ways to educate our children adequately should be a top priority for both parents and educators.

**Research Questions**

The researcher gained insight by using the following research questions:

1. How do middle school parents define effective parental involvement in support of their children?

2. How can parents assist in creating trusting family-school partnerships within a middle school environment?
Rationale, Relevance, and Significance

**Rationale.** Parental involvement in school activities has become a national issue. A critical issue facing K-12 schools in the United States is how to define parental involvement (Salinas & Jansorn, 2003). School officials must be willing to create an inviting, positive environment that is conducive to building trusting relationships that will promote high parental involvement (Epstein, 1995; Halsey, 2005; Muscott et al., 2008). Muscott et al. (2008) noted that schools focusing on providing positive learning environments for children should strive to empower parents, regardless of their socioeconomic background. The notion of parental participation in school activities is critical because such involvement can produce exponential rewards for all involved (Muscott et al., 2008).

**Relevance.** Existing research has suggested that the lack of parental involvement can have an adverse impact on students’ educational development (Comer, 2005). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 requires school districts to implement programs to build two-way communication with families about their children’s education and provide strategies to assist student development and success. Although parental involvement is a vital component of the ESSA, it is still unclear to many educators and other school officials how to entice parents and keep them involved in maintaining such partnerships. Many schools coordinate activities that require the participation of families; however, many of these schools need assistance organizing and sustaining goal-oriented and academic programs (Chenoweth, 2016; Gagnon, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Weiss & McGuinn, 2016).
Significance. There is a need to understand how to create a partnership between parents and K-12 school systems that will ultimately benefit children in their pursuit to achieve high academic standards. Although parental involvement is a salient factor in the core of a child’s educational journey, many middle school parents struggle with how to become an integral part of the family-school partnership (Stouffer, 1992). Parental involvement declines in middle schools as students grow older; their parents are less involved. This disconnect makes it difficult for both students and teachers to create bonds and build sustainable relationships. Although parents are considered the most underused resource available to educators, they need to be effectively utilized to improve parental involvement in schools (Hargreaves, 2003). Given the importance of providing a quality education for America’s children, more theoretical and practical research is needed to assist K-12 educators and other stakeholders on how best to meet the needs of students, parents, and teachers.

Definition of Terms

Operationalization. This common term or concept is used to define variables that help to increase the understanding of research results. Operationalization contributes to variables by organizing them into quantifiable factors (Newbert, 2014). Given the current research topic (e.g., building effective parental involvement in middle schools: the parents’ perceptions) and the limited research on the subject, it is necessary to define key operational terms to gain insight into the phenomenon. The following terms are used in this research study:

Parental involvement. A precise definition of the word has not been clearly established (Fan & Chen, 2001). However, for this research study, parental involvement was described as follows: parental ambitions and aspirations for the physical, mental, and academic achievement of their children (Bloom, 1980; Fan & Chen, 2001).
**Partnership.** A parent-teacher relationship that focuses on trust, respect, and communication and extends across all racial and ethnic boundaries. It involves the collaboration of productive school programs and activities that enrich the academic performance of K-12 students (Berger, 2003; Jeynes, 2005; Morris & Taylor, 1998).

**Middle school.** An educational stage that occurs between elementary school and high school. The notion of middle school may vary in age range, classification, and regulation within other countries outside of the United States (Chenoweth, 2016; Gagnon, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Weiss & McGuinn, 2016).

**Perceptions.** A personal analysis of an event or situation. Perception is the marriage between the external environment and the ability to interpret the experience. Some individuals may perceive things differently than others (Witt, 2011).

**Student achievement.** The process of applying uniform measurements of varying stages of accomplishment during study. Letter grades (A-F) and grade point averages (GPA) are used as academic measurements of student achievement (Hawes & Plourde, 2005).

**Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

The researcher assumed that the participants (parents) in this study would give honest accounts of their experiences and recommendations on how to improve parental participation related to school activities. Some parents feel as though they already play an integral part helping their children excel in school—hence, the variety of definitions for parental involvement. This qualitative study was limited in scope and relied solely on the participants’ responses and perceptions. The participant representation in this study was limited to 45 parents of eighth-grade students. Delimitations are conditions that are beyond the researcher’s control. The researcher conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews to encourage participants to give their
perceptions of parental involvement. She selected a private off-school campus location to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Given the various assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of this research study, the researcher hoped to provide sufficient data on the phenomenon.

**Summary**

School officials and educators must use a variety of methods to improve and sustain parental involvement. Parental involvement becomes a collaborative effort when parents, teachers, students, and the community are working together to benefit the students. Although parental involvement is a salient factor at the core of a child’s educational journey, many middle school parents struggle with how to become an integral part of the family-school partnership (Stouffer, 1992). Parental involvement declines as students grow older, making it more difficult for both students and teachers.

Parents are the “most underused resources” (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 128) available to a teacher. Therefore, parents need to be utilized effectively to sustain the success of and involvement in school activities (Hargreaves, 2003). Given the importance of providing a quality education for America’s children, more theoretical and practical research is needed to assist K-12 educators and other stakeholders on how best to meet the needs of students, parents, and teachers. The key to getting all stakeholders involved is to provide them with the knowledge and tools they need to create lasting student-centered partnerships.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Parent partnerships play a crucial role in the education of their children (Decker & Decker, 2003). Therefore, it is the school’s job to nurture the role of parents as partners (Dwyer & Hecht, 2001). The key to increasing parental involvement is creating and maintaining healthy and productive parent-teacher relationships. It is no secret that building relationships among teachers and families has been a constant challenge in K-12 school systems throughout the United States. Although productive school programs and activities contribute to creating stable, effectual relationships, communicating with the parents is also a critical factor. In turn, if these relationships are nurtured with consistency, respect, and trust, they could eventually lead to high parental involvement (Morris & Taylor, 1998).

Building parental involvement is a vital part of a teacher’s professional duties and is ranked as a primary concern (Langdon & Vesper, 2000). When teachers from both elementary and secondary schools were asked “What is one thing they would change to improve public schools?” they all listed parental involvement as a top priority (Langdon & Vesper, 2000). However, suggestions for how to create successful parent-teacher partnerships are at a minimum. The quandary about parental involvement across all racial groups is an actual concern for school officials and parents. This matter raises many concerns because parental involvement can be variously defined for different households. It is also treated differently depending on socioeconomic circumstances, personal choices, and cultural diversities (Morris & Taylor, 1998).

Jeynes’s (2005) research study on parental involvement in K-12 schools described parental involvement as being highly related to family structure and availability. Therefore, it is imperative that schools strive to maintain lines of communication with parents. Parental
involvement is significant for determining how well children perform in school. It is important to know that when parents feel emboldened and welcomed, they show more interest in what is transpiring in the schools (Jeynes, 2005). As important as maintaining communication and building relationships might be, teachers reported that they feel unprepared for the responsibilities of developing partnerships with parents (Morris & Taylor, 1998).

**Study Topic**

One of the 14 characteristics of the National Middle School Association (2003) for successful middle schools is to build strong bonds between home and school. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act also requires all schools to promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and foster parent participation: “Every school will promote parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (Decker, Decker, Boo, Gregg, & Erickson, 2000, p. 31). Most school officials should welcome and promote the idea of parental involvement. A relationship should be established between home and school before parents can become volunteers within the school. When families and schools engaged in two-way communication, they create that missing link towards improved and increased parental involvement.

When parents are involved, they become valuable partners in the academic process. The partnerships evolve into successful working relationships that are vital to academic achievement (McEwan, 2004). McEwan (2004) noted that parents should become students of the educational system because the need for active parental involvement is considerably greater than ever before. Parental involvement is viable and useful, especially when teachers invite parents to participate in their children’s education.
Parents should be made to feel comfortable at all times and given a sense of value by the teachers. Middle school teachers are aware of the many advantages of creating and maintaining successful unions. The most prized benefit is encouraging parental involvement in middle schools (McEwan, 2004).

**Context**

Hill and Taylor (2004) maintained that parent involvement drastically declines in middle schools. Therefore, the present study examined parents’ perceptions in middle schools. Researchers (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hill & Taylor, 2004) have shown that the lack of parental involvement begins at the middle school level; hence, studies about building relationships between parents and teachers are still being explored (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). It is important to note that building strong and trusting relationships is critical to any organization. There is a definite correlation between successful parental involvement and student achievement. It is essential that teachers understand the thoughts and beliefs of the parents (Barnard, 2004; Hill & Craft, 2003; Hill & Taylor, 2004). Hughes and Kwok (2007) maintained that productive, successful parent-teacher relationships make a positive difference in student achievement. The success or failure of the educational system, as it pertains to students, families, schools and the community, depends on the types of relationships that the stakeholders create. Henderson and Mapp (2002) postulated that when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to excel in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.

To improve and increase parental involvement, parents and teachers must invest the time and resources to build dynamic and lasting relationships based on trust, respect, and open communication. The quality of the parent-teacher relationship not only depicts the amount of involvement between parent and teacher but also determines the outcome of the relationship.
Significance

The idea of increasing parental involvement in middle schools appears to be laborious to the education system. However, there is a need to identify working practices and programs that can assist both parents and institutions on how to form more efficient and continuous parent-teacher relationships. Parents, schools, and communities stand to reap numerous benefits once parent-teacher partnerships are formed and sustained (Epstein, 1995). This study highlighted the parents’ perceptions and how their beliefs contribute to improving parental involvement in middle schools.

Parental involvement at home is easily recognizable; however, it is also needed in the schools. Epstein (1995) outlined six variables that support parental involvement in the home and school. Undoubtedly, parental involvement is necessary at all grade levels. However, it is extremely critical at the middle school level because parents seem to drift away and become less involved. Hill and Taylor (2004) identified parents as having an active presence in their children’s elementary schools, but the presence expeditiously declines as students enter middle school.

Problem Statement

Dodd and Konzal (2002) argued that parental involvement is the number one predictor of student success. However, it has been a challenge for middle schools across the nation to figure out what parent involvement entails and why it is such a passionate topic for schools and districts (Mitchell, 2008). Parent involvement decreases in middle schools, and there needs to be a concerted effort to implement strategies to increase successful parent involvement programs (Epstein, 2001). According to Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, and Holbein (2005), “students whose parents are involved are more likely to take personal responsibility for their learning” (p. 117).
The existing research suggests that children are better prepared to learn and teachers are less frustrated when families play active roles in their children’s education. Cutler (2000) promulgated that schools should strive to create more opportunities to improve parental improvement because schools cannot afford to ignore the family.

**Organization**

Increasing parental involvement will lessen miscommunication and conflict. Epstein’s (1995) framework serves as a tool to bridge the gap between schools and families. The literature review highlights Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement and the advantages presented when they are implemented in schools. The review includes synopses of parental involvement, the history of the decrease of parental involvement in the middle school, the characteristics of an effective teacher-parent relationship, a teacher’s perception barriers to parental involvement, strategies that influence successful parent-teacher relationships, and the benefits of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995).

**Conceptual Framework**

According to the National Parent Teachers Association (2000), Epstein and her team developed a theoretical framework that provides a “basic blueprint for building the most effective and inclusive types of parent involvement program[s]” (p. 22). The primary hypothesis was that students gain knowledge and develop their learning in the school, home, and community. The researcher chose to focus this study around Epstein’s Typology and the Spheres of Influence as they relate to forming tighter relationships between families and schools. This theoretical model has asserted how children learn, and explored clear and concise ways in which parents can assist their children to adapt, develop, and succeed (National Parent Teachers Association, 2000).
Building positive relationships in education emphasizes the need to understand the various spectrums in which parents can influence student learning, development, and achievement. Parental involvement will increase significantly when school officials communicate the desire to involve parents and consider their needs (Cutler, 2000). Researchers have found remarkable connections between the use of Epstein’s model and increased student achievement and parental involvement (Barnard, 2004; Lopez & Donovan, 2009).

**Epstein’s model.** Epstein’s (1995) model is one of the most commonly referenced frameworks on parental involvement. Based on that notion, the researcher chose Epstein’s model as the conceptual framework to examine and analyze the data in this study. The model defines conventional parental involvement and identifies the role and beliefs of parents. It also provides an overview of an environment where educational activities are supported and encouraged (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Schools follow the critical steps in this model to establish successful relationships between parents and schools.

Epstein’s framework serves to restructure parental involvement in schools and homes. It allows parents the opportunity to become engaged in collaborating with their children, which reflects positively on students’ academic achievement. Students are not the only recipients of positive results. Parents also gain knowledge as they become more involved in the process, along with honing their parenting skills (Epstein, 2009; Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

**Parental involvement.** Being involved allows parents, guardians, school officials, and the community to work towards a common goal, which translates to the success of both students and schools. Parental involvement is establishing a partnership with families, schools, and the community to support the educational paths of students. Parents want to work collaboratively with teachers to support learning because they are interested in the academic welfare of their

However, the problem occurs in demonstrating the concern and forming solid partnerships with the schools. Most parents feel they can support their children’s social and academic development, but they simply do not know how (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). In academic circles, there is the belief that parental participation is an underlying concern for teachers, and when parents are not involved, partnerships are negatively impacted. Colombo (2006) expressed that teachers believe an increase in parent partnerships would also improve academic achievement. Establishing high parent involvement requires all teachers to have a positive attitude towards families and the cultures they represent (Broderick & Mastrilli, 1997). Cooper (2007) stated that the perception among teachers is that low-income families are more of a detriment to their children’s academic success than an asset.

Parental involvement can take many forms and have various definitions from time to time. Over the years, the definitions of parental participation and its roles have evolved immensely. The family structure can take on different characteristics, such as single parents, divorcees, gay couples, foster parents, adoptive parents, or single teenage parents. Hence, given the various dynamics of the family, parental involvement will vary from household to household (Broderick & Mastrilli, 1997).

Parent involvement is essential for guiding and facilitating a child’s growth, development, and learning. Although parental involvement is not the perfect antidote for all academic issues, active parental involvement is more influential in student achievement than any socioeconomic factor (Hawes & Plourde, 2005). There is no question that a healthy relationship between home and school requires constant collaboration. If parents and educators are going to
establish successful partnerships that are in the best interest of the children, the contact between parents and educators should be a two-way process (Barnard, 2004).

The History of Parental Involvement

In the early 1900s, the community governed the logistics of the schools since the home, school, and church were the community. They each had similar goals and desires for learning and preparing students to enter the adult community (Prentice & Houston, 1975). According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), in the early years, laws were enacted to govern society because schools did not entirely trust parents to be responsible for their children’s education, which made parental involvement difficult and sometimes impossible. There were numerous conflicting relationships among teachers and parents.

In the mid-1980s, there was a remarkable shift from the focus on teaching to student success (Markow & Cooper, 2008). Kirshbaum (1998) was keen on parental involvement and proposed a study in support of valuing parents as partners in education. Heise (1994) stressed the importance and impact of Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which was passed in 1994 and signed by President Clinton. This statute focused on how to involve parents through Title IV Parental Assistance, and as a specific requirement under Section 401, urged schools to create and increase parents’ knowledge and confidence in child-rearing activities. Developing action plans under special laws will aid in the inclusion of the parents. It will also strengthen the partnerships between parents and professionals to meet the educational needs of children (Epstein, 2005). In turn, the Parental Information and Resource Centers (PIRC) came into existence. These centers were created to assist in training directed towards parents with children age birth to 5 years old (Heise, 1994). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and the Every Student Succeeds
Act (ESSA) of 2015 also mandated that all schools increase parental involvement in aiding in academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, 2015).

**Parental involvement decreases in middle schools.** There is a noticeable decline in the parent-teacher relationships when children transition from elementary into middle schools. The evidence presented by the following authors suggests that parental involvement is the highest at the elementary level, but rapidly declines around middle school and reaches its lowest in the secondary schools (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1996). In elementary schools, students focus on academic achievement; they take pride in their accomplishments and experience high self-efficacy (Barber & Olsen, 2004). However, when children enter middle schools, there is an apparent change in the parent-teacher relationships, which inadvertently influences student achievement and self-efficacy. The tightly woven and connected partnerships in elementary schools swiftly dissipate in middle schools (Barber & Olsen, 2004).

Wigfield (1996) argued that when students transition to middle school, there is also a decrease in self-esteem. During this adolescent stage, students tend to withdraw from their parents and value their peers’ opinions more. When they gravitate to their peers, student achievement, morale, and motivation suffer, which inevitably leads to academic failure and high numbers in a school’s dropout rate (Wigfield, 1996). Gutman and Eccles (2007) conducted a study on family-school relationships, the results of which suggested that appropriate levels of communication in family-school relations correlated with positive student development.

Therefore, it is essential that middle school officials design more activities to get parents to connect and become more involved with teachers. This type of parent-teacher collaboration helps teachers to set goal-oriented activities that aid students in academics and highlight parental involvement (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). Epstein and Becker’s (1982) research demonstrated that
students whose parents had consistent interaction with the teachers showed a more positive attitude toward school and achieved more socially and academically. Evidence has conclusively shown that parents who have minimal involvement in parent-teacher relationships and show no interest in the academic future of their children are usually from non-traditional families with low levels of education (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1992; Potvin, Deslandes, & Leclerc, 1999). However, parents with minimal education are more active in parental involvement during the elementary years rather than the secondary years (Eccles & Harold, 1996) because the work is not as challenging as it is in middle schools. If parents believe that teaching is the sole responsibility of teachers, they are not likely to get involved in forming strong parent-teacher relationships (Ritter, Mont-Reynaud, & Dornbusch, 1993). Although there is a general interest in parental involvement in middle schools, figuring out how to achieve it remains a challenge for districts across the nation (Mitchell, 2008).

**The Characteristics of an Effective Parent-Teacher Relationship**

Teachers need to understand the significance and rationale for a positive and respectful attitude before venturing into a parent-teacher relationship. Developing relationships with parents takes time, sincerity, trust, open communication, consistency, and experience. The stage of a teacher’s personal and professional development determines how successful a parent-teacher relationship is (Katz, 1995).

However, for a parent-teacher relationship to survive, teachers must exert willingness, be respectful and open to two-way communication, trust each other, committed to the process and be consistent. Parental self-image improves when more parent-teacher collaboration is exercised (Epstein, 2001, 2013; Vosler-Hunter, 1989). Vosler-Hunter (1989) identified a collaborative relationship in which parents and teachers shared common rights and responsibilities and
contributed equally to the process. Vosler-Hunter also proposed that mutual respect for skills, honest communication, mutually agreed-upon goals, and shared decision making are all elements of a well-functioning and collaborative relationship. Furthermore, students are more aware that their parents and teachers genuinely care about their education when parents and teachers invest in creating transparent, productive, collaborative partnerships (Vosler-Hunter, 1989).

**Communication.** Miretzky (2004) concluded that communication is a challenge surrounding parental involvement, and schools cannot be successful without communication from students’ families and communities. Communication is the interacting and exchanging of information, feelings or ideas. The result of effective communication is the mutual understanding between both parties. If there is no understanding, then the connection is unsuccessful. Effective communication is fundamental to building school-family relationships. Families, communities, and schools must work together and invest in mutual relationships. To do so, they must communicate with each other to ensure success for the children. It is important that families and schools know the benefits of building relationships because collaborative efforts make the difference (Fullan, 2011).

Consequently, schools and families should develop vigorous, lasting partnerships. The initial step to a prosperous partnership is communication. Through communication, parents can understand school policies on behavior, attendance, and conduct. Effective communication has been proven to be the core of lasting and meaningful relationships. Communication is known to be the critical factor that strongly impacts parent involvement and home-school collaboration (Berger, 2003; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Fuerstein, 2000). Northouse (2013) explained that consistent communication convinces others to change and is essential to getting the collective clarity and energy necessary for success. There are two categories of communication: verbal or
nonverbal. Body language and facial expressions are nonverbal communication, which is the emotional state of a person and can be easily misread.

Nonverbal communication can be ambiguous because it can have different meanings across cultures. Therefore, it is important that teachers put forth the effort to understand the cultural differences in the students’ families. Teachers must steadily be mindful of the diversity in cultures and focus on communicating without being offensive. Despite the format, Graham-Clay (2005) stated that all communication exchange between families and schools should be thoughtful, well planned, and seen as an opportunity to promote parental involvement.

Communication is vital in school relationships because it is one element of family involvement that results in benefits to children, parents, and teachers. Benefits to children include increased student achievement, positive attitudes toward school and improved attendance (Eldridge, 2001). Ensuring that the lines of communication are consistent between the schools and parents creates a strong bond and reflects in student achievement. Graham-Clay (2005) noted that when parents became involved and communicated with the teachers, a noticeable improvement occurred in student achievement among the low-achieving students. Effective communication brings about understanding from both perspectives of parent and teacher, which strengthens parental involvement and increases student achievement (Graham-Clay, 2005).

Communication, one of the integral components of a viable, collaborative partnership between home and school, is truly necessary. According to Christenson and Sheridan (2001), as cited in the National Parent Teacher Association’s (1997) Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, “regular and meaningful communication is the foundation upon which other standards develop” (p. 93). Active and enriching school communications benefit parents and student achievement. Teachers and school officials should ensure that the communication
process between families is viable and sustainable. Marzano (2003) found that happy, satisfied parents and community involvement relied on three components: communication, participation, and governance.

**Trust and respect.** Parental involvement demands communication; however, the issue resonates with teachers having to gain that initial trust from the parents. Trust is the essential component in which human relationships exist. Trust is said to be one’s willingness to expose oneself to another, based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, credible, and respectful (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). For years, research has shown that when relationships between home and school are analyzed, the teacher holds the authority and the parent remains in the client position. Recently, research has highlighted the importance of mutual respect and “social trust” about the parent-teacher relationship (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Payne & Kaba, 2001) for improved parental involvement in middle schools.

Confidence between parent and teacher is a critical element in obtaining gratifying school-family relations. Maintaining ongoing communication, positive or negative, between schools and families provides the foundation for a relational trusting partnership. It is believed that “relational trust is the connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of students” (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 44). Ballen and Moles (1994) argued that for a partnership to work, there must be a significant level of mutual trust and respect, an ongoing exchange of information, agreement on goals and strategies, and a sharing of rights and responsibilities. Hislop (2013) suggested that positive relationships allow people to feel a sense of belonging and identify with groups, which enable them to shape their willingness to collaborate and share knowledge with each other.
Currie and Kerrin (2004) mentioned that if parties do not trust each other, it is doubtful that the exchange of knowledge and a relationship can ever be viable. As described by Hislop (2013), the existence of trust in a person helps mediate and reduce the perception of risks people experience and provides a level of confidence for those involved. When relationships are not managed in a productive way, there is a loss of confidence and trust and “there are less cohesion and more fragmentation in the school” (Waters & Cameron, 2007, p. 13). An adverse environment with ineffective leadership and a weak organizational structure can never build lasting, trusting relationships among employees (Waters & Cameron, 2007).

School officials are expected to collaborate and create that level of trust by making their positions and intent known to the families and teachers. Rosen (2013) concluded that trust is critical to any relationship because people must feel comfortable sharing. Although building trust is challenging, it is needed to sustain the life of a successful relationship. When mutual trust and respect are optimal in relationships, there is no room for negativity or conflict. As with any relationship, there is uncertainty, and all stakeholders must take the risk. They must be willing to put forth the effort to create trust within families and communities (Rosen, 2013).

Northouse (2013) pointed out that trust has to do with being predictable or reliable, even in situations that are uncertain and evident. It is important that school officials develop strategies to encourage parental involvement and increase cooperation between parents and teachers to build trust between teachers-parents and teachers-students. Research has shown that school-family partnerships are recognized as the primary contributor to improving trust in schools (Adam & Christenson, 2000). Also, when trust is fostered in families and schools, there is higher student achievement (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).
When an adequate level of confidence and a steady flow of communication are in place, then it is safe for school officials and parents to follow Epstein’s typology to create stronger connections, which ultimately lead to increased parental involvement and student achievement. Research has shown that a parent-teacher relationship is successful if it is based on respect and sharing ideas (Chavkin & Williams, 1993). Also, Meier (2002), an American educator and the founder of the small schools movement, adamantly articulated that finding ways to build trust among teachers, school officials, parents, and students was the essential component of the success and camaraderie in her school community (Meier, 2002).

**Commitment.** Beck and Murphy (1996) highlighted the relevance of commitment. They viewed parental commitment as one of the mandates of a successful school system. Commitment is going above and beyond the expected participation, and both teachers and families should demonstrate the willingness to partner. Making a pledge of commitment to building successful parent-teacher relationships is needed from both families and schools in order to improve parental involvement in middle schools. Although teachers are responsible for extending the “olive branch” to parents and doing so with a productive, committed attitude, parents must be unequivocally committed. Mutual relationships are more likely to flourish if programs focus more on the interconnectedness of parents and teachers, through their shared commitment to children (Sumsion, 1999). In the end, the onus of creating fulfilling and promising parent-teacher partnerships should fall upon all the stakeholders involved in the academic process. Hacker, Willard, and Couturier (2002) referred to commitment as keeping one’s word and never breaking a promise. The researchers also defined a trusting relationship as one comprised of commitment, consistency, and capability (Hacker et al., 2002).
A Teacher’s Perception

Teachers’ perceptions of parents are influenced by culture and history and can impede family-school relations. When teachers understand the cultural and linguistic diversity of families, they can build better teacher-parent relationships. Teachers have their personal beliefs, which can conflict with the reality of the situation, making it more complicated to connect with parents. Teachers have mixed sentiments when they hear the words parental involvement. They have definite and unique opinions regarding some parents. On the other hand, there are high levels of frustration and anger and a contrast of perceptions that present themselves as stumbling blocks to building lasting parent-teacher relationships with other parents (Miretzky, 2004).

Teachers acknowledge the demand for more efficient working relationships with parents (Epstein, 1995; Houston & Williamson, 1993). Miretzky (2004) noted that teachers know the importance of parent-teacher relationships, but they do not believe they are a priority given the time constraints. Sometimes principals do not view parent-teacher relationships as important (Miretzky, 2004). In today’s school climate, when test scores are the measure on which to base the achievements or failures of students, teachers, and schools, it is harder to justify spending time, let alone money, on enhancing successful school-family partnerships.

Miretzky (2004) surmised that most teachers believe that productive relationships between families and schools improve student learning. The fact underlying what it takes to build beneficial parent-teacher relationships is the lack of mutual understanding between parents and school officials about what constitutes parent involvement. Research has shown that parents referred to keeping their children safe and taking them to and from school as parental involvement. Davies (1993) noted that teachers believed that parents who were categorized as having low socioeconomic status did not value education. The researcher went on to state that
parents were reluctant to become involved in schools because they did not trust the teachers and staff. After 30 years of research, the U.S. Department of Education (2015) stated, “In many instances, parents don’t feel as if they are welcome in their child’s school. Educators need to be willing to recognize the extent of the disconnection as a precondition for involving families in their children’s education” (p. 2).

A teacher’s perception is different because teachers expect parents to be more involved in school activities and have a more robust presence in the school. Lawson (2003) noted that both educators and parents knew the importance of building relationships, but teachers blamed families due to the lack of consensus around what signifies parent involvement. Although the parent-teacher relationship functions as a two-way unit, teachers are the glue that keeps home/school partnerships together (Patrikakou et al., 2005). Overall, teachers have more faith in parents who share similar teaching strategies, practices, and concerns that assist in raising their children (Powell, 1998; Rich, 1998).

**Barriers to parental involvement.** Although a surplus of evidence shows the benefits of parental involvement, the vast possibilities of how to incorporate parental involvement are still being ignored. Teachers must be mindful that cultural differences can impede understanding, and communication can be misconstrued as either positive or negative. Although cultural norms are not easy to adapt and understand, teachers must be willing to put aside preconceived ideas to establish positive parent-teacher relationships (Bloom, 2002). Building connections with families is a difficult challenge that schools face. Many obstacles can prevent open and ongoing communication between schools and families. Obstacles such as social class differences, family dynamics, economics, employment, culture, language barriers, low parental self-efficacy, and intimidation are just a few examples. Bermudez and Marquez (1996) confirmed additional
barriers that prevent parents and teachers from bonding, which can allow them to communicate openly and honestly. These are as follows: lack of English language skills, lack of understanding parent-teacher relationships, lack of knowledge about the school, lack of confidence, work interference, and school officials who are insensitive or hostile.

Hernandez (2004) reported that a lack of English fluency could limit effective communication and the function of health facilities, schools, or other settings that provide essential resources to children and their families. Holman (1997) examined the needs and remedies of newcomer immigrant families in interactions with schools. The researcher proposed minimizing the language barrier by employing bilingual/biliterate staff, developing a core of bilingual parents who can assist in communicating with new families, providing all communications in the parents’ written language, and becoming aware of varying levels of literacy among parents in the dominant and home languages.

It is understandable that teachers are not always cognizant of the parenting practices and cultural norms of parenting behaviors that resonate and differ across race and ethnic groups (Osborne, 2004). Funkhouser and Gonzales (1996) suggested that “even the best-planned school-family partnerships will fail if the participants cannot communicate effectively” (p. 4). Misperceptions about students’ families contribute to a lack of parent participation. Unfortunately, because parents and teachers come from different backgrounds, communication barriers are exacerbated and further obstacles develop.

Teachers are also not adequately trained to network and build relationships with parents. Swap (1993) claimed that teachers, parents, and administrators receive limited information about how to work together efficiently. Information about creative, effective parent involvement programs is rarely incorporated into preservice preparation programs for student teachers.
Most educators enter the field as novices to the importance of parental involvement. They lacked an understanding of the framework of partnerships, and most school officials are not prepared to design, implement, and evaluate practices of partnerships with the families of their students (Epstein, 1995). Seeing the deficit in this “know-how” of building relationships, teachers feel uncomfortable and unprepared in beginning the process of relationship building. Brand (1996) confirmed this when he agreed that despite the substantial evidence supporting the importance of home-school partnerships, prospective teachers receive minimum training, information, and hardly any experience working with parents. Caspe (2003) suggested that teacher preparation and professional development programs should entirely promote the improvement of communicative skills for teaching staff. It is pivotal to parental involvement that teachers continue to develop and expand their communication skills to maximize effective partnerships. Teacher education can prepare teachers and give them the tools necessary to build positive, effective parent-teacher relationships that result in substantial parental involvement (Caspe, 2003).

Dauber and Epstein (1993) pointed out that although middle school students have the urge for autonomy, they thrive more when there is a parent-teacher relationship to support them without compromising the need for independence. Epstein (1991) suggested that parents often feel a sense of inadequacy, and they choose not to collaborate with schools. However, parents are more likely to become involved if teachers provide the parents with strategies to help their children with homework. This barrier to parental involvement is influenced by the more rigorous level of academic work required at the middle school level, and parents are uncertain about their ability to help their children academically (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Scott-Jones, 1994). Parents’ sense of efficacy can also impede parental
involvement. Parents with a relatively low sense of efficacy tend to avoid assisting their children so as not to face their shortcomings or to assume that being involved will not be positive (Bandura, 1989).

Epstein and Salinas (2004) found that school officials need to be cognizant that most parents work during the day and are not available to discuss students’ issues; hence, they must maintain functional and reciprocal modes of communication to develop partnerships. On the other hand, some parents prefer not to be contacted at work. Some parents do not have access to electronic mail and can only receive messages by phone. These parents might never hear the messages that the teacher leaves; therefore, the parents cannot address the concerns of the teacher. Situations such as these result in the breakdown of communication between school and home, which contributes to a lack of parental involvement. Nevertheless, parents must also take the initiative to monitor what happens to their children in school (Archer-Banks & Behar-Horenstein, 2008).

Parents are also accustomed to receiving negative feedback from the school. Often the first phone call from a teacher to a parent is to report misbehavior, late homework, or a failed test. Reduced or erosive communication from school officials lead to some parents withdrawing from reaching out to the schools. In turn, teachers conclude that parents are unsupportive and uninterested; therefore, some teachers show little to no interest in communicating. Hedges and Gibbs (2005) stated with confidence that building strong parent-teacher relationships in schools requires teachers to have positive dispositions. According to Zhang and Bennett (2003), teachers and school officials need to motivate and encourage the families to become actively involved.

When teachers are responsible for large class sizes, heavy parental involvement is not as evident because teachers struggle to find the time to meet with individual students. Therefore,
scheduling one-on-one meetings with families is an arduous task that rarely ever happens. In his detailed study of family-school relationships, Swap (1993) concluded that teachers’ busy schedules and hectic duties often limit their availability to meet with family members outside of class and can hinder the development of strong family-school relationships. Along with the high demands of teachers’ time and responsibilities, a lack of administrative support (Swick, 2004) can also hamper parental involvement.

**The benefits of building parent-teacher relationships.** As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, parental involvement is imperative in all schools. Parental representation in schools serves as a remarkable factor to reaping countless benefits. The union of families and schools is becoming a growing movement to collaboration. There is now a national cry from district, state, and federal agencies for increased parental involvement. Ballen and Moles (1994) reported that all schools should promote the social, emotional, and academic growth of children because it leads to building partnerships with their families.

Parental involvement is improved through adequately maintained parent-teacher partnerships, which then leads to students’ academic achievement, an increase in parent/teacher self-efficacy, parental empowerment, and a more inviting work environment for all stakeholders. Research has shown that parent-teacher relationships help to improve student outcomes such as academic achievement and overall student behavior (Epstein, 2001; Nweze, 1993; Weitock, 1991). In 1994, Bever reported that when parents are inclined to create partnerships, teachers often exhibit positive attitude changes. Parents feel empowered when they participate in making educational decisions for teachers that will benefit their children. Reed and Sautter (1990) reiterated this, stating that when parents’ roles are meaningful and empowered, they make a difference in their children’s academic lives.
Also, active, open, and honest communication brings about connectedness to the community, school, and families. As a result of being connected in a family-school relationship, there are positive outcomes, lasting relationships, clear expectations, and camaraderie among all those involved. Henderson (1988) conducted a review of 49 studies of parental involvement programs and the benefits recorded were exorbitant. The results were higher test scores, long-term academic achievement, positive behavior, more successful programs, and more efficient schools. Schools that consistently implemented effective partnership programs tended to result in higher levels of parent involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Sheldon, 2005; Sheldon & Van Voorhis, 2004).

An essential study conducted by Nweze (1993) concluded that student behavior increased when parents and teachers participated in the discipline process. When it comes to teaching, it is believed that teachers who are consistent in nurturing the parent-teacher relationship experience a low level of stress. In their thorough analysis of the parent-teacher relationship, Lazar and Weisberg (1996) found that teachers who invited and were receptive to parents’ commentaries were more likely to understand the social-situational context that determines a student’s academic performance.

Research has shown the definitive relation between parental involvement and student achievement. Children whose parents have productive and healthy relationships with their teachers perform better academically and socially than children whose parents do the opposite (Hughes & Kwok, 2007). Studies conducted by several researchers identified the many results of parental involvement. For example, Kratochwill, McDonald, Levin, Bear-Tibbetts, and Demaray (2004) pointed out that students were less aggressive and their disruptive behavior had diminished after parent-teacher partnerships were created. Rumberger (1995) observed that the
student dropout rate in middle schools was relatively lower when parents and teachers collaborated.

**Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

**Overlapping spheres of influence.** Epstein’s (1987) overlapping Spheres of Influence model depict an interrelated holistic vision of partnership. This model projected that the unifying factor between parents and teachers relies on respect and a collaboration of skills, mutual goals, interests, and concerns (Epstein, 1991, 2001). The word *partnerships* represents schools, families, and communities, which are all expected to collaborate and share responsibilities towards student achievement through overlapping Spheres of Influence.

The spheres overlap to highlight and stress the importance of and reasons behind creating an increase in parental involvement. They depict that schools, families, and communities each have a vested interest and influence in the child’s education. The overlapping Spheres of Influence project that schools and parents share the same characteristics.

As Epstein (1987) stated, “the maximum overlap occurs when schools and families operate as true partners with frequent cooperative efforts and clear, close communication between parents and teachers in a comprehensive program of many types of parent involvement” (p. 128). Epstein (2001) showed that there is a difference between the terms *school-like families* and *family-like schools* (p. 32). In school-like families, parents are the encouragers and supporters who are willing to develop their children’s academic skills. These families instill in their children the value of school and see school activities as routine on a day-to-day basis. Family-like schools are perceived to be the caring family. They try to understand and meet the needs of each child. In these families, they strive to create more open and caring relationships between teachers and students.
Epstein’s (1995) framework applies to building parental involvement and overall student success. Students are at the core of the model, but school and family partnerships do not deem the students’ success. Rather, the partnership activities create collaboration, engagement, and positive reinforcement and motivate students so they can propel to their greatness (Epstein, 1995).

Epstein’s (1995) model of parental involvement has been proven to work in schools. Partnering with families and communities has become a more dynamic process sought by most schools. As a result of this framework, more schools are trying to produce well-organized programs, with the hope of creating healthy environments for family and community partnerships. These partnerships, if effective and organized well, can yield numerous benefits for schools and students.

Schools should conduct activities to engage all parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Schools must formulate well-organized, goal-oriented, and beneficial partnership programs to create forceful parental involvement in communities. Many schools have taken innovative approaches to foster such partnerships. For instance, Roosevelt Elementary School in Minnesota organized a monthly activity called the “Second Cup of Coffee” program. During this time, parents are afforded the opportunity to sip tea or coffee as they meet with teachers and school officials and mingle with other parents as they discuss many topics or issues. On-site translators serve parents of all different nationalities who are challenged linguistically.

The literature surrounding parental involvement is a combination of studies focused on the complexity theory and the systems theory. The purpose was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of the parents to gain an understanding of their definition of parental involvement. The findings presented in this section suggest there are countless benefits of parental

Today, developing family-school connections is one of the top policy initiatives in schools. Parent involvement is a national concern and investing in programs to foster stronger parent-teacher relationships is crucial. Kessler-Sklar and Baker (2000) surveyed many school districts and 90% had included a policy to implement parental involvement.

**Epstein’s six types of involvement.** Epstein, Simons, and Salinas (1997), among others, have devoted their time to working with schools, districts, and state departments of education to develop programs that foster productive school, family, and community partnerships. The literature has emphasized that effective programs associate partnership activities with the goals of the schools, utilizing six types of involvement—(a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating with the community—“to improve schools’ partnership climate and to increase student success” (Epstein & Epstein, 2009, p. 57). When schools incorporate and execute activities that are geared towards building positive parent-teacher partnerships incorporating the six types of involvement, eventually there is a noticeable difference. In a study conducted with 39 elementary schools that set out to determine the advantages of using the six types of involvement, Epstein et al. (1997) found that the quality of family, school, and community partnerships created was associated with rates of student achievement as well as attendance.

Newport (2001) reported on a study involving 1,000 randomly selected adults, who were asked what schools could do to reduce school violence and abuse. The number one response, which was identified more than any other, was parent involvement. The Gallup (2001) study also perceived parental involvement as the most valuable reason why selected schools perform
better than others. The results highlighted that Americans agreed that the families played a significant role in their children’s lives and they need to build partnerships with teachers (Newport, 2001). Overall, teachers were shown to have great intentions and wanted to engage parents in building positive relationships. However, challenges and misconceptions are fueled by lack of knowledge about diversity issues (Davis & Cabello, 1989). Teachers can benefit tremendously when given the opportunities to create bonds with families. They are privy to learn about the children’s abilities and the culture of the family (Harry, 1992).

Reed, Jones, Walker, and Hoover-Dempsey (2000) studied the connection between children requesting help with homework and parents’ level of involvement. The study focused on Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1995) model of the parent involvement process. The authors agreed that there are four characteristics to get parents on board and involved with homework activities. The characteristics are: (a) acknowledging the level of performance of the student, (b) being aware of the challenges and struggles the student is experiencing with homework, (c) keeping an eye out for the student’s desire to become independent, and (d) observing if the student is receptive to the parents’ involvement. The results proved that parents are enthusiastic about helping with homework activities if their children were facing difficulty or receiving low grades.

**Examining Epstein’s model.** Epstein’s framework described in detail the overall categories of partnerships that exist among schools, families, and communities. According to Epstein (1994), “We take stock in our partnerships; we account for our resources and investments, and we look for profits for all concerned” (p. 40). Epstein recognized that parental involvement is a significant factor needed in schools to improve the quality of a child’s education.
Epstein and colleagues researched and presented the School-Family-Community-Partnership Model (Partnership Model). This model has two central components: Six Types of Involvement and the Spheres of Influence. Schools can use the Six Types of Involvement to create and engage reciprocal relationships among parents, teachers, and the community. This model has also been influential in developing activities and setting goals for parental involvement. It is important to be creative when implementing different types of school practices that can lead to effective parental involvement (Epstein, 1994).

The Colorado Department of Education Prevention Initiatives suggested the use of Epstein’s research-based model in their schools. The design allowed schools to take a holistic approach to promote meaningful family and community involvement in schools. The schools in Colorado focused on each of the Six Types of Involvement. The following is a review of the relevant research under each section, with a focus on 12 Colorado school districts and over 20 elementary, middle, and high schools (National Center for School Engagement [NCSE], 2005).

**Type 1-Parenting.** Parents are the first teachers in a child’s life, and this begins with parenting. Hence, parenting involves being committed to raising happy, healthy children with the prospects of becoming responsible students and later adults. Schools should assist in social and academic activities to support a child’s development. Offering parent education courses, literacy workshops, and programs to help families with health and other services would help families establish home environments that are conducive to supporting children.

Parental involvement has been proven to have such an impact on students’ performance. The factors that influence it have become a matter of keen interest to educational decision makers (Feuerstein, 2000). Studies have shown that when schools enforce successful programs, parents become more aware of how to support their children as students. The following are
examples from Colorado schools. Schools host parenting classes titled “Nurturing Parent” and “Love and Logic.” Some school libraries also lend books and other materials to parents (NCES, 2005).

**Type 2-Communicating.** There are many ways to communicate with families. Conferences, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and school websites are all modes of communication. It is important to use language translators to assist families who speak other languages. The overall idea is to design robust forms of school-to-home communications to ensure that families are knowledgeable about school programs and their children’s academic achievement.

According to Epstein et al. (2004), two-way communication between parents and schools demonstrates that parents and teachers care about their children’s education. It has been proven that families feel connected when schools involve them in outreach activities and programs. Studies demonstrate that two-way communication between home and school enhances parental involvement, which is pivotal to students’ academic achievement. The following are examples from Colorado schools. School websites, community pages, automated phone calling systems, email announcements, student handbooks, school papers, and fliers are some of the most common methods of communication used in the district (NCES, 2005).

**Type 3-Volunteering.** Schools should welcome parent volunteers because parents are extending their services and time selflessly as they assist the teachers. Volunteer programs help teachers tremendously and can include a parent room at the school with resources for families. A class parent is necessary; this individual communicates first-hand with the teacher and is responsible for organizing events such as classroom parties and collaborating with other families in the classroom.
The overall goal in volunteering is to recruit and coordinate parental support for teachers. Carter (2002) believed that when parents are knowledgeable and visible in the schools and classrooms, trusting relationships begin to develop. Also, educators who develop a personal relationship with parents are more likely to notice an increase in communication and more volunteers in their schools. Studies have shown parent volunteering to have a powerful impact on student achievement in all subject areas. When parents volunteer, they also boost their self-efficacy and parents become learners in the process. The following are examples from Colorado schools. Some school districts formally recruit for positions such as field trip helpers, coaches, playground monitors, and classroom assistant. Overall, the communities welcome and value the parents, hence increasing parental involvement (NCES, 2005).

**Type 4-Learning at home.** Family participation is seen more when parents feel a sense of belonging and have self-efficacy. Schools should send information to families about homework policies, students’ and teachers’ expectations, strategies on how to improve skills in math and reading activities, and learning packets for each school break. The essential idea is to provide ample information and resources to the parents to ensure that they feel comfortable and adequate to assist the students at home. Through research, it was evident that when schools and families worked together to support student learning, the children succeeded throughout life. Parents need programs and consistent training to play an integral role in assisting student learning. The following are examples from Colorado schools. The schools offer homework tips in newsletters and host family event nights to discuss academic issues (NCES, 2005).

**Type 5-Decision making.** This is the active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or other parent associations, advocacy groups, district-level committees, school election boards, and all other networking avenues that disseminate pertinent information to families. The inclusion of
parents in decision making helps to develop parent leaders and representatives who can give an account of the parent population.

According to Mullendore and Banahan (2005), the most common and favored means of initiating a forum for parental contributions are parent councils, associations, and advisory boards. Parents are encouraged to participate actively in the decision making and governance of the school. Parents as decision makers help to create positive relationships between schools and families. The following are examples from Colorado schools. According to legislative mandates, parents are encouraged to serve on school councils and governance committees. Title I schools must also adopt a policy on parent involvement. Most schools have provided childcare during meetings and worked around parents’ schedules (NCES, 2005).

Type 6-Collaborating with the community. Schools can offer information to families on cultural, recreational, and community activities that link to exploring skills and talent. Collaborating with the community allows schools to integrate resources and services from the community to form effective relationships within the community to work toward student learning and development (Epstein et al., 1997).

The cultural, socioeconomic, social, and recreational needs of the families depend on the effectiveness of the family-school partnerships. Evidence has linked student achievement to the quality of the connections formed between the community and the schools. The following are examples from Colorado schools. Many schools allow the community to use the school buildings for after-school activities and educational activities. Collectively, businesses and private groups support fundraisers and provide student scholarships (NCES, 2005).

The National Network of Partnership Schools conducted many reading-partner programs. For example, the Dr. Lydia T. Wright School in Buffalo, New York, held a reading marathon.
The entire community focused on reading for 26 days. The families, churches, mayor, police, and many others in the community also participated in the reading activities.

Due to hectic work schedules and family dynamics, most parents cannot visit the schools during the day to observe what their children are learning. Hence, Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) is an interactive homework process that helps elementary and middle school teachers. The program designs and assigns homework, and enables all students to share what they are learning with a family member (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Epstein et al., 2002).

A school in Baltimore, Maryland created a partnership program named the “I Care Program.” This program has since birthed the “I Care Parent Club” and the “I Care Newsletter.” It is important to know that schools have choices to implement such programs. It is disheartening that today, there are still too many schools where teachers and school officials do not comprehend the families of their students, and where families are unaware of what occurs in their children’s schools. Moreover, some school districts need to provide fiscal support to schools where they can develop effective parent-teacher partnerships.

Overall, research has demonstrated that there are many advantages when families and schools are active and mutually interested in the process of building effective relationships. Research has shown that one of the main reasons why parents become involved is the use of teacher outreach strategies (Epstein, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In other words, teachers are the initiators to building long-lasting parent-teacher relationships.

**Strategies used at some state and district levels.** Agronick, Clark, O’Donnell, and Stueve (2009) conducted a study involving nine pilot districts to analyze how they supported the basic principles for parent engagement outlined in NCLB and Title I legislation. The following strategies were implemented by the various school districts. Some schools produced written and
online guides to help families understand their rights and obligations (Syracuse City School District, 2001; Worcester Public Schools, 2004) and formulated databases with parents’ information on their strengths and interests (Worcester Public Schools, 2004).

Other schools ensured that school facilities were available to the families and community (Connecticut State Board of Education, 2003), and provided parents with school performance information and allowed them the opportunity to engage in decision making (New Haven Public Schools, 2008). School districts encouraged staff to participate in professional development that focused on working with families (Connecticut State Board of Education, 2003; New York State Education Department, 2007). Additionally, schools provided families and the community with accurate and updated communication (Syracuse City School District, 2001). They helped to develop and maintain school-based parent organizations and employed parent facilitators (Buffalo Public Schools, 2008). Some schools utilized strategies that established parent centers and provided academic assistance to parents, students, and the community (Buffalo Public Schools, 2008). Agronick et al. (2009) affirmed that Buffalo Public Schools, Syracuse City School District, Worcester Public Schools, and the Connecticut State Board of Education cited the Epstein model and framed the strategies around the state’s commitment to increasing parental engagement.

**Review of Methodological Issues**

**Reliability of the studies.** In-depth research has shown that when parents become involved in their children’s academic welfare, there is a higher chance of success for parents, teachers, and students (Anthony & Pollack, 1985; Quinton & Rutter, 1988). Most people can then agree that building parent-teacher relationships is associated with positive elements about children’s development, success, and improvement (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Fan & Chen,
2001; Gonzalez, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). With such in-depth and substantial research, academic experts have also concluded that parent-teacher partnerships call for a more comprehensive theoretical framework to direct the expansion of parental involvement (Caspe, 2008; Ferguson, 2008).

Collectively, research studies have shown the struggles that principals and teachers face as they acknowledge the importance of parental involvement, while negatively questioning its impact (Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that educators and school officials experience numerous barriers in maintaining communication across familial and cultural boundaries (Dodd & Konzal, 2002; Epstein & Becker, 1982).

Studies over the past few years have furnished exhaustive research to evolve parental involvement, stripping the focus from systemic interventions with a more definitive look at the replication of programs in schools (Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Ferguson, 2008; Henderson, 1988; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). One study by Henderson (1988) examined and agreed with Epstein’s classifications of parental involvement and students’ academic achievements.

On the other hand, other researchers have found no correlation between academic success and Epstein’s six types of parental involvement (Catsambis, 2001; Sacker, Schoon, & Bartley, 2002). Other academic researchers such as Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) and Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey (2005) preferred to focus on the psychological aspect of intrinsic motivation and role identity in parents. Although there are many conflicting perspectives of this topic, considerable fundamental research has affirmed the significance behind the parental involvement paradigm.
Synthesis of research findings. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) maintained that parents’ beliefs are correlated with how students perform. Reliable research has emphatically proven parental involvement to increased levels of academic achievement and overall student success (Griffith, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Holistically, the studies mentioned in this chapter have alluded to a positive and plausible relationship between family involvement and improved academic prosperity. The studies revealed that parents’ education level did not take precedence over what the families did with their children.

Interacting with their children at home appeared to be more important to the parents. Whether parents finished high school or graduated from college, they were willing to participate and devote the time because doing so led to improvement in student learning, especially in the upper grades (Epstein, 1991; Henderson & Berla, 1994, Liontos, 1992). Dauber and Epstein (1993) and Griffith (1996) agreed on the numerous benefits of families actively participating in the process of educating children. Some of the benefits are higher grades, positive attitudes, improved attendance, and higher graduation rates.

The research has concluded that there is much more to parent involvement than simply being involved in an active volunteer program or demonstrating excellent attendance at school events. Learning at home, engaging in nightly reading, and assisting with homework show tremendous support as related to connecting with families (Comer & Haynes, 1992; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein, 1997). The need for tighter parent-teacher relationships begins from the preschool stage to middle school and continues throughout high school. Both Epstein and Lee (1995) and Catsambis (2001) have discovered that communication with teachers will be different in middle school than it is in elementary school because the needs of the population drastically change when students enter middle school.
Epstein and Lee (1995) reported that 70% of the parents said they were never asked to volunteer at the school, and about 60% of the families reported they never contacted the school to give information about the students. Although students in middle schools value their independence more, parents should remain connected with teachers to assist with increasing student achievement (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997; Scott-Jones, 1994). The evidence from these studies suggested that middle schools are not actually reaching out to families with assistance in organizing or building family involvement in school or at home. Overall, related studies have suggested that when parental involvement increases, academic success increases and behavior issues decrease (Frazier, 1997; Nweze, 1993).

Critique of Previous Research

The research presented in this chapter has revealed how pertinent relationships are between families and schools. Epstein’s (1995) framework of parental engagement showed that when parents become involved, students showed more effort, paid greater attention, and succeeded in school. Parents who willingly show interest in their children’s academic success are providing a foundation for children to persist, despite academic challenges. The studies presented in this chapter have lauded many credible explanations for the benefits of building constructive relationships between families and schools.

The evidence was also consistent in suggesting that communication is about making family-school connections. Ames et al. (1995) believed that because parents are interested in their children’s academic success, they are more apt to ensure a stronger support system at home, thereby reinforcing the value of education. There is a definite connection between parental involvement in schools and increased overall student achievement (Griffith, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Although researchers seem to have various definitions of parental
involvement, it is apparent that teachers and parents have similar beliefs. Barge and Loges (2003) stated that parents, students, and teachers hold similar perceptions of what counts as parental involvement.

That said, however, Epstein’s model of parental involvement might not be feasible in all schools, including high-minority and high-poverty school districts. The present researcher is convinced that Epstein’s model can be favorable in all schools, but schools that implement the model need to be innovative in creating effective strategies and programs to encourage parent ownership in schools and homes. Upon analyzing the various studies that have used the Epstein’s model, they all seemed to present a universal approach to parental involvement. Other researchers who have examined Epstein’s model have found that it highlighted a vague approach to parent engagement but did not consider diversity, cultural norms, ethnicity or sociocultural factors (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Tillman, 2009).

After reviewing the evidence, it can be said that developing secure and trusting parent-teacher relationships is the preface to increased and continuous home-school partnerships, which leads to students’ success. All the studies mentioned here support the hypothesis that when parents and teachers build positive relationships, parents are more eager to become involved in their children’s academic journey. This view, supported by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), posits that parents are more involved and more enthusiastic to cooperate with the school if faculty and parents build trust between each other.

Summary

Parental involvement flourishes when teachers, parents, school officials, and community members value each other’s contributions and unite for the greater good. Parents feel a sense of value and belonging when teachers are willing to build respectful parent-teacher relationships.
They obtain self-efficacy and confidence as they contribute to their children’s academic achievement, resulting in parental involvement. Stonehouse (1991) noted that when parents and teachers address the child but fail to work together, “each is relating to the child without the whole picture” (p. 22).

Finally, communicating with parents and providing them with effective home-based, learning strategies benefits parents, teachers, and children (Fullan, 2011). When partnerships are fostered and nurtured through ongoing communication, trust, honesty, and respect become a shared responsibility and everyone benefits. Epstein’s parent involvement typology explained that without the establishment of precise communication, creating teacher-school relationships is not feasible. Schools that are determined to build bridges to great partnerships and close the communication gap between teachers and families are striving to create better learning environments. Thus, they create meaningful, trusting, and productive parent-teacher partnerships in middle schools that allow for extensive and improved parental involvement which, in turn, leads to an acute effect on the student’s academic experience. The evidence has implicitly uncovered a correlation between the importance of maintaining trusting parent-teacher relationships and increased parental involvement in middle schools. One can optimistically note that when families participate and cooperate with schools, everyone benefits—parents, teachers, school officials and, most importantly, students.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The researcher examined the attitudes and perceptions of middle school parents to gain an understanding of their definition of parental involvement. Wright and Stegelin (2007) stated that in any discussions about education, parental involvement is an important factor in the learning process that seems to cut across race, religion, and gender lines. One advantage to using the qualitative approach in this study was to understand the parents’ perceptions through their experiences and interactions with the school. The overall study focused on how to create trusting partnerships taken from the parents’ perspectives.

A detailed literature review was conducted, and the researcher gathered a thorough and in-depth review of the evidence to analyze parental involvement in middle schools. The researcher searched a variety of educational databases such as Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Sage journals, Journal Storage (JSTOR), and Google Scholar, using an array of keywords, including parent engagement, parent-teacher relationships, family-school partnerships, parent involvement, and parent relationships.

Research Questions

The researcher utilized surveys and semi-structured interviews and, as a result, gathered an in-depth and rich narrative of the subject matter. She also obtained full insight by using the following research questions to guide the study:

1. How do parents define effective parental involvement in support of their children?
2. How can the parents’ perceptions assist in developing new strategies to create trusting school-family partnerships?
Purpose and Design of the Study

Studies in research have substantiated that building effective relationships between families and schools is important and can reap many positive benefits (Epstein, 1996; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy & Weiss, 2008). One of the main issues with parental involvement is the decrease that is noted when the students transition to middle school. Hill and Tyson (2009) reported that in 2003, the U.S. Department of Education conducted a study showing that there was 90% parental involvement in elementary school, but only 75% in middle school. The researcher was interested in finding out whether the parents at this site were involved and what strategies the school used to build working relationships between home and school. In the present study, the researcher made every effort to examine the attitudes and perceptions of middle school parents to gain an understanding of their definition of parental involvement. The researcher hoped that the parents’ perceptions would benefit the process to aid with an increase in parental involvement. She also believed that if teachers understood the parents’ perspectives, there could be a consensus on the definition of parental involvement.

Given the nature of the problem, the researcher utilized a two-phase qualitative methodology. In the first phase, the parents completed surveys; in the second phase, the parents were interviewed. This research design helped the researcher to gain knowledge about the dynamics surrounding building partnerships. Creswell and Poth (2017) noted that qualitative research involves an interpretive and more naturalistic approach to the world. In other words, the participants and issues would be studied in their natural settings and the researcher can, therefore, make logical sense of the findings. Rudestam and Newton (2014) concluded that the common denominators across qualitative methods are: (a) a holistic view, (b) an inductive
approach, and (c) a naturalistic inquiry. According to Patton (2002), the qualitative approach is ideal when studying a process, since the experience of the process usually varies for different people. That is why the participants’ experiences were documented in the participants’ own words. Hence, the participants’ perceptions were an essential process consideration when examining this topic.

There were several strengths in using a qualitative approach. Not only did the researchers’ approach aid in data collection and analysis, but it also generated rich, detailed, and valid data from the participants’ viewpoints (Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird, & McCormick, 1992). In a qualitative design, researchers tend not to rely on a single data source, but typically use multiple forms of data such as interviews or observations (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research, as seen by Yin (2013), is a multimethod process of inquiry used to explore a human or social concern in its natural setting.

According to Creswell (2013) and Leedy and Omrod (2005), conclusive methods help to predict, confirm, and validate. Along with addressing the parents’ perceptions, the researcher also analyzed the demographic characteristics to assess whether demographics played a part in determining what it took to engage in partnerships. Likert instruments were used in this case study to look at such descriptive statistics as mean, median, mode, and range. The first phase of this study examined the descriptive statistics using Epstein’s Likert-scale survey to assess the parents’ attitudes. As Gall, Gall, and Borg (2014) stated, “the purpose of a survey is to collect data from a sample that has been selected to represent a population to which the general findings of the data analysis can be generalized” (p. 222). This phase of the research examined the beliefs and perceptions of parental involvement of randomly selected parents. Creswell (2013) stated that a survey design provides the researcher with a numeric description of attitudes and opinions.
of a population by conducting a study on a sample of that population. The results of the surveys were calculated in percentages using the Qualtrics software. The sample consisted of the parents of the eighth-grade student population of the selected middle school. Babbie (2004) believed that while the surveys were customarily used in the social sciences, it was also the best method to collect original data to describe a population too large to observe directly. The surveys were extracted directly from Epstein’s framework and were administered to the parents to ascertain their perceptions of parental involvement. Gall et al. (2014) suggested that questionnaires are documents that asked the exact questions of all individuals in a sample. Upon collection of the survey results, the researcher used the techniques recommended by Hatch (2002) to analyze the data for commonalities from the participants’ responses related to parent involvement as well as commonalities from the responses gathered in the interviews.

In the second phase, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the parents using the questions in Appendix C. The interviews were categorized as being exploratory. According to Creswell (2013) and Leedy and Omrod (2005), exploratory methods are used to describe and interpret the results. Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison (2011) stated that one of the main types of qualitative research includes interviews. Hence, interviews were selected as the second method of data collection. The researcher opted to utilize semi-structured individual interviews and surveys because they provided two sets of opulent information. This also provided the convergence of evidence by data triangulation to strengthen the validity of the study (Yin, 2014). The researcher used semi-structured interviews because they sanctioned some discretion about how the questions were asked, and also left room for probing the participants if needed. The hope of the researcher was to engage in a professional but reflective dialogue with the parents. She ensured that there was a caliber of mutual trust among all the participants and
conducted the interviews in a relaxed and comfortable setting to promote open and honest communication. The interviews were scheduled around the parents’ availability. The parents who were unable to meet in person were given several options to use various applications for the interview. Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed within 48 hours into a word document. The participants were given a copy of the transcription in a sealed envelope to check for accuracy.

**Research Population and Sampling Method**

The target population in this study was a random sample obtained from the eighth-grade parents whose children attended the research site. The site was located in a suburban neighborhood in the south. The total enrollment, according to the 2016-2017 school year, was 1,200 students from Grades 6-8. The staff’s roster was comprised of 78 teachers, including Special Education (SPED), Community Referenced Instruction (CRI), Talented and Gifted (TAG), English as a Second Language (ESOL), and the General Education population.

The overall focus of this study was to analyze the perceptions of only the parents. The researcher deemed it necessary to include the parents’ demographic data about their age, gender, and educational level. The sample population in this study included a total of 45 parents of the students registered in Grade 8. Forty-five parents completed the Epstein questionnaire, and 22 parents were interviewed. The parents of the students were identified as African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Caucasian.

The school’s counselor worked closely with the president of the school’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA), informed the parents of the ongoing study, and encouraged them to participate. Also, the researcher posted flyers around the school at eighth-grade Parent-School Night to capture the parents’ attention. She assigned numbers to the parents who participated in
the study; the numbers served as the participants’ numerical identifiers. The participants were also made aware that participation in this study was solely voluntary.

**Instrumentation**

The researcher used two instruments to collect data in this study. The first was entitled “Surveys and Summaries—Questionnaires for Teachers, Parents, and Students on School, Family, and Community Partnerships in Elementary and Middle Grades” (Epstein & Salinas, 1993). The second was the semi-structured interview questions compiled by the researcher. The researcher sought permission from Epstein and Salinas to use their surveys to analyze and measure the attitudes and perceptions of middle school parents in viewing parental involvement.

Parents completed 10 closed-ended questions on Epstein’s survey. According to Babbie (2004), these types of questions are popular in survey research because they provide a greater uniformity of responses. However, the last questions on the survey were open-ended questions to elicit ideas from the parents. The open-ended questions, although subjective, allowed the parents to express their feelings and ideas in their own words. Reja, Manfreda, Hlebec, and Vehovar (2003) stated that open-ended questions in surveys allow discovery of natural responses and avoid the biases that arise with suggested answers.

The parents’ survey consisted of six pages and 11 sections. Four of the 10 sections contained Likert-type items; the other six sections included multiple-choice or short written responses. Gall et al. (2014) stated that a Likert scale is a common type of attitude scale. The Likert scale was coded as follows: 1 = Strongly Agree (SA), 2 = Agree (A), 3 = Disagree (D), 4 = Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire sought to find answers from parents surrounding their feelings about the middle school their children attend, whether the parents were participating, and what programs and practices the parents would like to see implemented.
The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews as the second instrument. The researcher formulated a total of nine interview questions for the parents. These questions assisted in identifying the goals and needs of the parents. The intention of the interview would be to allow others to see and understand the parents’ point of view. The questions also elicited the necessary information to provide suggestions for what was needed to build strong parent-teacher partnerships.

**Data Collection**

The researcher gained permission from the principal of the school and received approval from the Concordia University IRB panel to begin conducting the research. Upon approval, the researcher met with the school’s principal to discuss the study in detail. During the meeting, the researcher explained that participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The eighth-grade counselor also assisted in encouraging the parents of the Grade 8 population to participate in the study.

The researcher posted flyers around the school’s building on Parent-School Night, which brought awareness to the study. The flyer informed parents on how to get in touch with the researcher if they were interested in participating in the study. The researcher also distributed the surveys to the students during lunch with the goal of having at least 60 parents demonstrate an interest in participating. The data for this research were collected in two phases, using parent surveys and semi-structured interviews. In the first phase, the parents completed the surveys, and in the second phase, the researcher interviewed parents.

The researcher organized a meet-and-greet at the school with the parents who agreed to participate in the study. At the meet-and-greet, each parent received the informational letter, the survey, and a postage-paid return envelope. The parents had the opportunity to ask any
questions they had about the study. The researcher stressed the importance of the deadline set for completing and returning the surveys to the schools. The informational letter entailed the researcher’s contact information, the rationale for the research, a description of the study, and an emphasis on the participants’ confidentiality. For those who expressed interest but were unable to attend the meet-and-greet, the researcher called to inform the parents of the study and assure them that the packets could be sent home with the students.

Due to the population, the surveys were printed in both English and Spanish and placed in unsealed numbered envelopes, which the parents were to seal upon completion. The parents were given 10 calendar days to complete and return the surveys. The parents who participated in the survey received a friendly reminder phone call 5 days before the deadline. The surveys were expected to take about 30 to 40 minutes to complete. The students returned the parents’ surveys and placed them in a box in their classrooms, which was provided by the researcher. The researcher checked the box at the end of each day. All the classes with at least 20 completed, returned surveys enjoyed a pizza party. Upon collection of all the surveys, the researcher entered all the information from the 45 surveys into the Qualtrics Research survey software. The data was later exported in order to create charts and graphs.

Thai, Chong, and Agrawal (2012) considered semi-structured interviews to be crucial because they provide the researcher with a richer and deeper insight into complicated issues from field experts. The researcher was mindful that the parents had busy schedules and assured them that those involved in the interviews could participate using a variety of formats: face-to-face, Skype, FaceTime or telephone. The interview questions not only allowed an opportunity for spontaneity, but also increased the reliability of the study. The researcher and participants were in contact to schedule the appropriate method they were most comfortable using to conduct the
interview, along with the date, time, and place. The participants were referred to by their numbers to protect their confidentiality during the interviews.

Each interview, despite its method, was recorded and then transcribed by the researcher within 48 hours. Some of the interviews were held at the local Starbucks for those participants who opted to have face-to-face interviews. The interviews for those participants were approximately 30-45 minutes in length. The researcher transcribed the interviews within 48 hours and a copy of the transcripts were made available to each participant in a sealed envelope with their identification number to ensure member-checking. The researcher stored the matrix in a separate, locked place away from the recordings for the protection of all the participants (Creswell, 2013).

**Identification of attributes.** The parents’ survey measured the parents’ perceptions of the quality of the school and of how well teachers invited and involved the parents’ expectations of their role in parental involvement and assessment of the parent demographic characteristics.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

After the process of coding and analyzing, data interpretation began. Patton (2002) argued that data interpretation is attaching significance to what is found in research, making sense of findings and drawing conclusions. The collected information from the surveys was transferred into raw data in a table format showing percentages using the Qualtrics software. The range, mean, mode, median, and standard deviation were computed to present a descriptive analysis by group samples. The results from the data were used to determine if there was a relationship between the variables and the parents’ perceptions.

According to Hatch (2002), data analysis is the format the researcher used to organize the data to identify themes, discover relationships, and make interpretations. The researcher
employed Miles and Huberman’s (2002) approach to analyze the data gathered from the interviews using descriptive and pattern codes. First, frequently used vocabulary words were identified and highlighted from the interviews, which is known as descriptive coding. Then, the researcher looked for patterns and relationships to code the data based on Epstein’s (1995) framework for Six Types of Involvement (for example, similarities, differences, and frequencies in the parents’ responses). The entries were recorded under the specific categories generated from the responses. The researcher made connections with the Six Types of Involvement across the data and identified what the parents considered typical components of a growing parent-teacher relationship and whether they could offer any suggestions to build more effective parental involvement in middle schools. According to Miles and Huberman (2002), descriptive codes focus on identifying and labeling what is in the data. The researcher identified the pattern codes to interpret and conceptualize the data. The researcher used tally marks to note the number of participants with the same responses and to calculate the frequency of how many parents used one of Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement in their responses. This study relied heavily on the analysis of understanding the parents’ perceptions about creating partnerships with the schools. The findings will hopefully bridge the gap between families and school, and provide a greater cognizance about what parents believe it takes to maintain solid partnerships.

The researcher compared the data accumulated from interviews with the data from the questionnaires to get a detailed understanding of the school, policies, and climate as they pertained to what the parents envisioned to be effective partnerships. The responses from the parents’ perceptions in the surveys were categorized and measured differently in questions 1, 3, and 4. Question 1 measured how the parents felt about the school and were classified as agree strongly, agree a little, disagree a little, and disagree strongly. Question 3 asked how did the
families get involved at home and school using the following Likert scale: never, 1-2 times, a few times, and many times. Question 4 inquired how the school contacted the families using the following scale: does not do, could do better, and does well. The other questions measured if parents were engaged in school involvement initiatives, what their children were learning, whether the parents were interested in workshops, and what their role was in community efforts.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

The study was designed to assess the parents’ perceptions of parental involvement and explore different strategies to help build successful family-school partnerships. One limitation of the study was that it included only parents at the research site. Another limitation was using the written surveys because some parents did not have the literacy skills necessary to read and understand the survey. Timing was also another constraint in the distribution of the questionnaires to the families because parents were given only a month to become familiar with the teachers. A delimitation in the study was the inclusion of all three grade levels which could have possibly provided a more generalized outcome.
Validation

Credibility. The surveys were formulated to assess the degree of parent and community involvement in schools, along with the Six Types of Involvement (Epstein & Salinas, 1993). According to Creswell and Miller (2000), a researcher must examine eight verification procedures in qualitative research: (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, (b) triangulation, (c) peer review or debriefing, (d) negative case analysis, (e) clarifying researcher bias, (f) member checks, (g) full description, and (h) external audits. The researcher established credibility through member-checking of interview transcripts, remaining neutral, triangulation, and the use of a systematic process to code documents.

Dependability. The researcher purchased the School and Family Partnerships Surveys (Epstein & Salinas, 1993) for use in this study. The parent survey had 10 sections, four of which were Likert-type; the other six sections included multiple-choice questions or short responses. The dependability of the scale was determined by the consistency of scores on questions that measured the patterns and frequencies of parental involvement.

An integral component when designing a study is to ensure that the instruments used in the research are valid and reliable. The Cronbach’s Alpha (α) was used because the survey include Likert-type questions. Epstein and Connor’s (1992) surveys on School and Family Partnerships included scales for the parents’ general attitudes, overall school programs, overall family practices, and subscales of some of the major types of involvement that would create comprehensive programs of partnership. The reliabilities of the parent scales ranged from a modest (α = .44) to a very high (α = .91). However, the alpha (α) is only a reliability estimate since there are always errors with survey measures.
The surveys were updated and published in 1993, and items were added to provide more coverage of important concepts. These additions were included with the intention of increasing the internal reliability of various scales. The scales were based on a sample inclusive of 243 teachers and 2,115 parents from 15 diverse elementary and middle schools in Baltimore, Maryland. The surveys also contained many single-item indicators of experiences, practices, and observations reported by parents and teachers, which were useful descriptive and analytic data.

**Expected Findings**

The objective of this study was to increase and improve parental involvement in middle schools. The findings from the study showed that the parents were enthused and requested assistance in how to build relationships within the schools. The researcher hoped that families and teachers would recognize that bridging the gap between home and school is only possible by establishing and maintaining trusting parent-school partnerships.

**Ethical Issues of the Study**

**Conflict of interest assessment.** The researcher was the principal investigator who was qualified to conduct this study. However, the researcher was currently working with the sixth-grade population at the school. The role of the researcher was to analyze the parents’ perceptions primarily to determine how parents defined active parental involvement, and devise strategies that can be used to build successful family-school partnerships. The researcher recorded the parent survey data, engaged in active listening with the parents about their perceptions, analyzed statements, and identified patterns, all of which are salient factors that contributed to the establishment of increased and effective parental involvement in middle schools. The researcher looked forward to the final written report that would include the voices
of the participants (parents), the reflexivity of the researcher, a sophisticated interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the call for change (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The participants were guaranteed confidentiality for their identity and the option to withdraw from the study at any time. All participants were anonymous and the name of the participating school was kept confidential. Because the interview process tends to create a power imbalance through a hierarchical relationship between the participant and the researcher, it was important that trust was established between the researcher and the participants to avoid leading questions (Stake, 2010). The researcher stored the names of the parents in a password-protected file. All personal identifiers were eliminated from any interview transcripts. The completed questionnaires will also be stored in a safe for 3 years and then destroyed.

**Summary**

The lack of parental involvement in the general population at the research site was a growing concern. The goal of the survey was to gain an understanding of the parents’ perceptions of what parental involvement entails and the current relationship parents have with the schools’ officials. Conducting the semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher to analyze the views of the parents on what encouraged and prevented parent involvement had positive results for all involved. Allowing parents to be a part of the process and affording them the opportunity to share their input about partnerships were of tremendous help. This chapter explained the rationale for choosing the research design, along with analyzing and examining the variables of beliefs and the perceptions that parents had pertaining to building partnerships. Investigating the relationship was crucial because it provided the school with a solid understanding of the parents’ expectations. When school officials understand the parents, they
can develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and expertise to form a school family and community partnerships (SFCP).

It is imperative for educators to partner with the people who share the ultimate responsibility for their students—the parents/legal guardians. Although creating partnerships can be challenging, this study provided detailed insight into the minds of parents. It highlighted their perceptions and beliefs surrounding what it takes to create and sustain meaningful relationships. Moreover, the findings of the research had significant implications for future practice and can be used to relieve some of the misunderstandings between parents and the schools.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Introduction

This chapter describes the data analysis and findings of the study. The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of middle school parents to gain an understanding of their definition of parental involvement. The perspectives of the parents offered some potential ideas on how to develop flexible strategies that can be used in middle schools to improve partnerships between schools and families. The two research questions addressed in the study were:

1. How do middle-school parents define effective parental involvement in support of their children?
2. How can parents assist in creating trusting family-school partnerships within a middle school environment?

The researcher also analyzed some demographic information to determine the influence, if any, that gender, level of education, and employment status had on the perceptions of parents who participated in this research study.

Having taught in an elementary, middle, and high school, the researcher has witnessed first-hand how parental involvement dramatically declines when students transition from an elementary to a middle school setting. Parents are more active and present in elementary schools, and Dauber and Epstein (1993) supported this view. Eccles and Harold (1996) also argued that parental involvement is highest at the elementary level, but significantly declines around fourth grade and reaches its lowest peak at the secondary school level. For example, elementary parents volunteer as chaperones on field trips and helpers in the classrooms, but they are rarely seen volunteering in middle schools. According to educators at the administrative
level, this is classified as good parental involvement at the elementary school level (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Eccles & Harold, 1996). Further, Epstein and Voorhis (2001) noted that parents have less contact with upper-grade teachers when compared to parents at the elementary school level. Adam and Christenson (2000) suggested that the parents felt they lacked the ability to assist their children with the more advanced subjects. By contrast, Wright, Daniel, and Heimelreich (2000) noted that middle-school teachers felt as though they were not adequately trained to engage parents beyond elementary school. Middle-school teachers need support from parents more than ever to aid them in guiding students through adolescence and puberty (Wright et al., 2000).

The first phase of this study used Epstein’s Likert-scale survey to assess the parents’ perceptions of parental involvement. Gall et al. (2014) suggested that the purpose of a survey is to generate data from a sample that has been chosen to represent a population to which the overall findings of the data analysis can be generalized. A series of in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews with the participating parents was conducted in the second phase. Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (2001) viewed quantitative research as the gathering of facts on a relatively large scale, whereas qualitative research is more focused on smaller numbers, with the aim of achieving depth rather than breadth.

**Description of the Sample**

The families at the targeted school were about 60% Latino/Hispanic, 30% African-American, 5% Caucasian and 5% other. Six hundred eighth-grade students were enrolled for the 2016-2017 school year. The sample population of this study included 45 parents of the eighth-grade students attending the middle school, with 40 females and five males among the participant sample. Five hundred surveys distributed to parents yielded a response rate of only
45 parents. Therefore, the sample size used for the surveys and semi-structured interviews consisted of 45 eighth-grade parents. The survey results showed that from the parents’ responses, 22 (48.89%) had completed a college degree, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Highest Education Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not complete high school</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed high school</td>
<td>8.89</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college of training</td>
<td>37.78</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College degree</td>
<td>48.89</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding employment, 27 (60%) of the parents were employed full-time and 10 (22.22%) parents were unemployed, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2

*Employment Status*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Status</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
<td>17.78</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding gender, 88.89% were mothers—the highest parent respondents, compared to the 11.11%, which was a relatively small number of fathers who completed and participated in the study, as shown in Table 3. The overall data suggested that the mothers were more inclined to take the time out of their schedules to complete the survey as well as participate in the interview process.

Table 3

*Gender of Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>88.90</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Methodology and Analysis**

The qualitative methodology measures used for this study included two distinct phases: parent surveys and parent/researcher interviews. According to Cohen et al. (2011), document analysis and interviews are the main tools used in qualitative research. The analysis of the study (based on the surveys and interviews) was to gain an understanding of the parents’ perceptions of what parental involvement entails and the current relationship parents have with the schools’ officials. The total sample size for the study was 45 parents. Twenty-two participated in the individual interviews, but all 45 parents took the survey. The data collected from the individual interviews were transformed into transcripts. To ensure the participants’ confidentiality, a number was given to each participant to protect everyone’s identity.
Qualitative measures were used to collect the data; however, the survey consisted of a Likert scale, which produced descriptive statistics. The Likert instruments were utilized in this qualitative case study because the researcher also looked at such descriptive statistics as mean, median, and mode. Gall et al. (2014) believed that surveys are used to collect data from a sample that has been selected to represent a population to which the findings of the data analysis can be generalized. The data generated from the survey examined the beliefs and perceptions of the 45 parents who participated in the study.

The second phase of the study utilized a semi-structured interview format to gain a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding. The interviews gave the parents a platform to express their thoughts and offer suggestions about building partnerships in middle schools. During the interviews, approximately nine questions were presented. This protocol of questioning allowed the interview to follow the trajectory of the interviewee, which led to an element of exploration. According to Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008), the semi-structured interview process consists of significant questions that help to narrow the areas that need to be investigated and allows the interviewer or interviewee to deviate in order to analyze or probe for more detail.

Several options were offered to the parents, for which they chose their preferred method to be interviewed: face-to-face, telephone, Skype or FaceTime. The parents who were not necessarily concerned about distance or time met with the researcher at the local Starbucks. Face-to-face interviews were preferred because they made it easier for the researcher to gauge nonverbal cues. Face-to-face interviews were helpful because they avoided any unnecessary probing, which could have irritated the interviewee. However, 80% of the parents/interviewees preferred telephone interviews because they required no travel and less time. The researcher also
reminded the participants that they were not obligated to participate and could withdraw at any time. With all these concerns noted, the researcher agreed to the parents’ time, method, and place convenient to conduct the interviews.

The researcher began analyzing the data from the surveys and the interviews by first using data reduction. Punch and Oancea (2014) stated that data reduction “happens through editing, segmenting and summarizing” (p. 174). Data reduction should take place in the early stages because the data are reduced without losing important information. According to Hatch (2002), a typological analysis separates the culminating data into categories based on predetermined typologies. The researcher was not limited to Epstein’s original categories, but was opened to inducing new meanings from the data. The categories used after data reduction were: communication, respect, volunteering, training and workshops, relationships, community, welcome/comfortable, homework, and, personal experiences/parenting. The researcher used tally marks to note the number of participants with the same responses and to calculate the frequency of how many parents used one of Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement in their responses. The participants’ responses and common themes were entered into a matrix making it easier to analyze the data. Punch and Oancea (2014) recommended displaying the data in a matrix because qualitative data can be voluminous and bulky.

According to Miles and Huberman (2002), there are two main types of codes: descriptive and pattern. All the keywords from the participants’ responses in the interviews were coded based on themes and patterns. The researcher initially identified the descriptive codes by color-coding words based on word frequency in the participants’ responses that were aligned with Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement. Descriptive codes are valuable in beginning the analysis process and getting a feel for the data (Punch & Oancea, 2014). According to Hatch (2002), data
analysis is the format the researcher used to organize the data to identify themes, discover relationships, and make interpretations. The researcher used Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement strategies as the final themes to cross-reference the overall findings. Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement were used as the predetermined categories: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community.

The researcher interpreted and conceptualized the data using the pattern codes. Saldaña (2015) stated that codes used in qualitative research are often words or short phrases that symbolize an important or evocative attribute.

**Summary of the Findings**

Based on the results of the surveys and interviews, parents wanted to be a part of their children’s academic success. The data from the surveys showed that 55.56% of the parents said that schools did not ask them to volunteer. Twenty-two percent of the parents who were surveyed checked that they were unemployed and would be willing to volunteer. Participant 8 reported, “I stay at home all day, I can volunteer if the school ask me because I don’t feel comfortable just walking in the classroom.” During the interviews, all of the parents suggested that if the schools asked them to volunteer in any capacity, they would. Despite some challenges that the parents voiced, they unanimously expressed their desire to help the schools however they could. A total of 48.89% of parents who reported never being to their child’s classroom stated that it was more of a personal feeling of incompetence that prevented them from ever visiting.

Another critical perspective was that all the parents felt they should be given an option to be on the school committees. The data showed that parents were ready to assist their children at home, regardless of their lack of knowledge in the content areas. Participant 12 stated, “I don’t have a college degree but if I knew the formulas to the math I would help my son.” Participant 2
also said, “If the schools offer a class to educate us I would feel more comfortable helping with the homework.” About 35.56% stated that they had helped their child with homework on many occasions. The descriptive statistical data showed the mean = 3, range = 3, and mode = 3 from the sample (n = 45). Although parents showed an interest in helping their children at home, the majority was not familiar with the schoolwork and were not as comfortable as they were when their children attended elementary school. Eccles and Harold (1996) postulated that parents at the secondary level appear to have less confidence in their ability to help with schoolwork. Dauber and Epstein (1993) agreed somewhat and added that low parental involvement is also true for parents with a lower level of education.

The results from the present study showed that 60% of the parents felt as though language was a barrier because English was not their first language. The parents who did not speak English felt intimidated and said they never reached out to the teachers. They were embarrassed and thought the teachers might judge them as being incompetent. Participant 4 recalled an incident where a teacher once humiliated her in the presence of her daughter because she did not quite understand the language. Currently, the school’s parental involvement is at a minimum. The purpose of conducting the interviews was to collect data on the questions that were not measured by the surveys. The qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic deductive method (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The data from the interviews were transcribed, summarized and analyzed. The categories used after data reduction were: communication, respect, volunteering, training and workshops, relationships, community, welcome/comfortable, homework, and, personal experiences/parenting. Then the researcher used Epstein’s Six Types of Involvement strategies as the final themes to group the overall
findings. The Six Types of Involvement are Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community.

Of the 22 parents who were interviewed, 20 parents voiced that schools should extend the initial invitation to parents to establish genuine partnerships. Effective partnerships clearly cannot transpire overnight because a successful and viable partnership takes time. This view was strongly supported by Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), who wrote that parental involvement is a dynamic process that occurs over time. Family, school, child, and community contributions collectively constitute the parental involvement process. Nevertheless, the parents who were interviewed requested more open, honest, and consistent communication from the schools. Participant 30 reported, “I wish the teachers can call to say something positive sometimes.” Participant 5 stated, “If the teacher made me feel welcomed and was more respectful I would make time to build a relationship.” They wanted to feel a sense of belonging and acceptance if they were to create effective relationships with the school. Overall, the parents who completed the surveys and were interviewed agreed that if they were involved in their children’s academic journey, their children would show more interest in school, which would then lead them to soar in educational success. At present, the school has no effective formal partnership programs in place to foster parental involvement. The following two factors—parents’ employment and parents’ level of education—were analyzed in the study to ascertain how much of an influence they had in the process of building partnerships between schools and families.

**Parents’ schedule.** In his analysis of parental involvement, Caspe (2003) noted that parents’ work patterns and schedules could hurt their level of parental involvement at home as well as at school. Flood et al. (1995, as cited in Trotman, 2001) also found that most parents were deeply vested in their children’s education. However, their busy work schedules, younger
children at home, single parenting, and personal ideologies could limit their partnering with their child’s school.

The results of the survey revealed that about 60% of the parents were employed full-time and worked two jobs. The data also showed that 71.11% of the parents had never volunteered in the child’s classroom, and over 60% had never attended PTA meetings. Therefore, the responses to the question asking how many parents had ever taken their children to the library were not surprising, mainly because they showed a consistency among parents who were employed and worked routinely. No time was allotted to visit their children’s classrooms, attend PTA meetings, or take them to visit the local library. Participant 2 acknowledged that she loved spending time with her daughter, but she rarely got the time to take her to a zoo or even the library because of her two jobs. The data confirmed that from a sample population of $n = 45$, the mean was a mere 2.7, with a range of 3, clearly showing that 11 parents had never taken their children to the library.

**Educational level of parents.** A survey conducted by Rioux and Berla (1993) showed that single parents who lived in the inner cities with very minimum income and low educational levels were less satisfied with the parental involvement opportunities that were being offered to them, compared to parents who had attended college and had higher incomes.

In 2016, it seemed as though some parents who did have college experience and held full-time jobs shared similar perspectives with the single parents from Rioux and Berla's (1993) study. The data from the present study showed that almost 50% of the parents who participated in the study had a college degree. Sixty percent of the parents were also employed full-time, while 23% were unemployed.
Despite the parents’ level of education, all the parents who were interviewed were committed to investing any amount of time to help their children succeed. Based on the data, the majority of the parents expressed that they wanted to spend quality time with their children doing homework and projects, and willing to attend conferences and workshops to assist them in any way. The parents who did not complete high school, or who had some college training regardless of their educational level, all indicated a strong desire to establish a relationship with their children. They also expressed a desire to become more proactive with the school and discussed the importance of succeeding in school (Rioux & Berla, 1993).

**Presentation of Data and Results**

Table 4 represents the parents’ attitudes about the school and parental involvement as measured by the following items drawn from Q1. The means ranged from 3.1-1.64, reflecting minimal differences in each question. The raw score for each question ranged from 1-4. The items coded from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” and the analysis showed that less than 50% of the respondents strongly agreed with all five statements. Forty-four percent of the parents, which was the highest percentage for “strongly agreed” and 40% agreed “a little” that they felt welcomed at the school.
Table 4

*Statistical Descriptive Analysis of the Parents’ Attitudes About the School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is a very good school.</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teachers care about my child.</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel welcome at the school.</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school views parents as important.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school is one of the best schools for parents and students.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many parents I know help out.</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over 42% agreed that this was a very good school, but 40% checked “agreed a little” that the school was one of the best for students and parents. There seemed to be some disparity in why 40% of the parents would only agree on a little and not strongly agree. Although the overall percentages were less than 50% when analyzing the parents’ attitudes about the school, the researcher had assumed that the parents were somewhat hopeful about creating stronger parent partnership programs. If the families are provided with the strategies and support to build healthy and happy partnerships, this percentage will eventually increase. Upon examining and understanding the data, the school must work on building a more comfortable welcoming environment for the parents. Only 24% of the parents who were surveyed agreed that the school viewed them as important partners. The school should foster a climate that welcomes the parents, identify them as equals, and create a unifying place that has their best interest and that of the students.
The data compiled in Table 5 showed evidence that parents identified five items of how involved they are at home. The mean ranked from 2.9-3.8. The highest ranked item revealed that parents did engage in dialogue with their children informing them of the importance of school. However, in the question that asked if the children talked about school at home, there was a small median of 1.5 and a standard deviation of 0.78. This low mean suggested that when children were at home, they rarely talked about school and what was happening there.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talk to my child about school</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child talks about school</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help my child plan for homework and chores</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell my child how important school is</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I listen to my child read</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to a story my child wrote</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This section measured how well the school involved and communicated with the parents. The parents were in total agreement that the school did better in some areas than others. Over 40% of the parents said the school did not contact them when their children did well, or invite them to PTA meetings, or ask them to volunteer, or include them on school committees. The participants expressed their concern about the minimum communication between home and school. Only 6.67% of parents agreed that the school did a good job asking them to volunteer.
This small percentage yielded a mean of only 1.6. It was clear that only three parents out of a sample size of 45 felt that the school did a great job of asking for volunteers. At least 55.56% of the parents responded that the school did not do a good job of asking them to volunteer. Therefore, there is indication that the school needs to find ways to improve parent volunteering.

The results showed that currently, the school suffers from a lack of two-way communication and a useful school-wide parent involvement program. The parents expressed feelings of being non-existent because the school never asked for their assistance to participate in fundraisers, volunteer, or be a part of the school’s decision-making process. Evidently, 71% of the parents never volunteered at the school, 66% never attended a PTA meeting, and 46% never talked to the teacher on the phone. Because the school failed to initiate and maintain effective communication appropriately, the parents would like to see the trajectory of the school climate improve. The parents wanted to have an open dialogue about their children and how they could help as parents. Although 55% of the parents agreed that the school did a great job of sending home alerts about new things happening in the school, they wanted to hear about their children. The data calculated only 37% of the parents confirming that the school told them how their children were doing in school, while 22% also agreed that the school contacted the parents if the child did something well. Over 51% of the parents checked that the school could do a better job of helping parents understand their children’s stages of development. Overall, parents were not satisfied with the communication and how the information was being transferred from school to home.

Over 40% of the parents suggested that to create lasting partnerships, the schools could do better and would benefit by helping parents understand the stages in the development of middle-school students. Participant 6 confirmed this when she stated, “I wish the school could
offer workshops to help us understand our children at this age. We also need help as parents.”

The parents also agreed that the schools should provide them with skills that the students needed to learn, keep them informed about the students’ academic concerns, and invite them to voice their concerns about the curriculum and overall school improvement. The parents were in unanimous agreement that the school should consider a parent involvement program. Epstein and Dauber (1991) suggested that a comprehensive parent involvement program would benefit parents, teachers, and students and improve the attitudes of everyone involved. Five parents agreed that the school had made some strides over the years to foster relationships between families and schools, but the school needed to try harder. About 50% of the respondents said although they appreciated the online access to the students’ grades, schools should be mindful that not all families had access to computers or were knowledgeable about how to complete the setup process.

Question 5 assessed the parents’ interests in whether they would attend specific workshops at the schools. Over 50% of the parents at this school indicated an interest in workshops on how to deal with stress and how to help their children develop their talents. It was surprising that less than 40% of the middle school parents had expressed interest in attending workshops about raising children as single parents, solving school problems, and preventing early dropout and health problems.

Table 6

Workshop Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to deal with stress</td>
<td>55.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help my child develop his or her talents</td>
<td>53.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Raising children as single parents 34.88
Solving school problems and preventing early dropout 25.58
Preventing health problems 30.23

Question 6 on Epstein’s (1993) survey measured parental involvement from year to year. About 35.56% (16) of the families said that the school involved them less this year than the last. One family reported that the school involved them more this year than last year. It is important that schools implement appropriate activities and programs to increase parental involvement from year to year. It is evident that the school did not offer any opportunities to develop family-school relationships.

Question 8 analyzed the amount of time parents and children spent on homework on an average night. The results showed that 75% of children spent over 30 minutes doing homework on most school days. However, 20% of parents spend over 30 minutes helping their children with homework. When asked if the percentage of parents could increase the time spent helping their children if the teacher guided the parents, only 37.78% of parents agreed that they would spend over 30 minutes. This percentage could increase if parents were more knowledgeable and comfortable with the different subject areas. Evidently, 46% of the parents stated that school could do a better job informing them of what skills their children needed to learn. The parents were asked which subject areas they needed more information in from the school. Eighty percent of the parents requested more information in Math, while 53% said they needed more information in Reading. Many of the parents did not feel they were adequately prepared to assist their children comfortably with homework assignments. For example, 11% of the parents said that on an average night, they could spend over an hour helping their children with homework.
However, the number increased to 17% if the teacher showed the parents what they needed to do to help the children.

Ninety-six percent of the parents noted they would find time on weekends to help their children with schoolwork. Participant 4 reported on the open-end question in the survey, “I can give up getting my nails done if I need to help my son with his project or homework.” If the parents are willing to spend the time to assist the children, then it is the school’s responsibility to implement a support system in which the parents have access to communicate with teachers if they are unsure about the homework. Finding different ways to communicate with the parents effectively would certainly impact the amount of time the parents are willing to commit to helping their children with homework. Over 80% of the parents agreed that meeting with the teachers in the evenings was the best option, mostly because the parents worked full-time jobs and had hectic schedules which prevented face-to-face meetings in the mornings or afternoons.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Along with surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the parents’ perceptions of parental involvement in middle schools. These interviews allowed the parents to expound on their experiences when building relationships with schools and suggestions for how they can maintain effective partnering. The researcher created and used a matrix to align the aggregated data collected from the surveys with Epstein’s (1995) Six Types of Parent Involvement along with the responses from the five optional open-ended questions. The analyses were transcribed, and frequently used keywords were coded using thematic deductive analysis. A total of 45 parents completed the survey; however, only five participants completed the five optional open-ended questions. Twenty-two of the 45 parents agreed to participate in the interview process.

Question 1 asked: How does the school ask you as a parent to be involved? This question
aligned with the second open-ended question on the survey: What school practice to involve parents has helped you most and why? The responses were unanimous among 20 parents. They expressed interest in volunteering if the school had extended the invitation to ask for assistance. Only two parents responded that the school did a great job asking to join the PTA, but they have never seen an invitation to become involved in any activities pertaining to their children. The majority of the parents said they assumed that the school preferred to exclude parents. Participants 4, 7 and 19 all responded with, “the school does not ever ask for us to volunteer.” One participant also voiced that she assumed the school do not need help because the parents are never asked to assist. Some recurring responses from the participants were: “I don’t recall ever being asked to volunteer at the school.” “I would love to volunteer when I am off, but the school never asked.” “The school wants me to be involved through the PTA, but that is how I will stay connected with what is happening with the school, but I need to know what is happening with my daughter.” However, all the parents agreed that they looked forward to attending Back to School Night because it was usually their only opportunity to make any connections with the staff. Communication appeared to be the number one factor for the participants. The researcher concluded that schools and families should communicate with each other to support student performance and build partnerships. According to McEwan (2004), “Parents crave communication—real communication that specifically describes how their child is doing, tells them what is going on at school, and gives them practical and reasonable ways they can help their children at home” (p. 104). Based on the findings, the school lacks adequate communication tools along with the inability to create family-school partnerships.

Question 2 asked: As parents, how can you get involved? This question aligned with the third open-ended question on the survey. The parents expressed interest in attending activities,
such as socials and happy hour, instead of always meeting at the school. More than half of the parents would prefer to see the school use social media platforms. They believed that the use of social media would increase communication, hence leading to increased parental involvement. The following were some of the responses from the participants: “Let the teachers know that I am on the same page with them.” I would love to attend happy hour socials or fun activities with the teachers.” “Make certain my son is respecting the teachers.” Participant 30 stated that she could tell her daughter the importance of school, along with volunteering in the classroom. Ten of the parents who struggled with job flexibility said that reiterating respect for the teachers and offering to send in basic classroom commodities to the school comprised their definition of staying involved. When probed further, most of the parents said they would be willing to volunteer and work around their work schedules if they had to, or attend workshops to be trained on becoming more involved. The millennial parents appeared to be more comfortable with the idea of using social media as a method to keep in touch with the school. The parents said they would welcome the thought of more teacher-parent social event settings to discuss their children’s academic success.

Question 3 asked: How can parents and teachers work together? The responses to this question were similar. All of the parents wanted to work with the teacher and wanted to feel comfortable enough to ask a question. All the parents agreed that the schools can offer workshops where parents are exposed to what is happening in the classroom and what the teachers expect from the parents. The majority of the participants’ responses were: “It is all about showing respect, if we respect each other we can get along.” “If teachers and parents respect each other, they will have successful relationships.” Participant 4 said that teachers
should always reach out to parents to make parents feel welcome and comfortable.” Participant 22 said that she would like to see the schools offer classes to help with the communication between teachers and parents, because English was not her native language.” Overall, parents voiced that teachers and parents can work together if parents knew what was expected of them and there was mutual respect from both sides. Parents wanted to know that the teachers will be supportive and respectful in order to create a successful working relationship.

Question 4 asked: Why are respect and trust major factors in creating partnerships with school officials? Some of the following responses alluded to the fact that if people do not respect each other, successful relationships are impossible. Over 90% of the parents interviewed stressed that a relationship must be built on respect and then trust is earned over time. Participants 3 and 14 stressed that relationships must have trust and respect. Some of the following participants’ responses were: “If I don’t feel as though I can trust the teacher, I wouldn’t want to be engage in a relationship.” “As a parent, I want to be able to trust the teacher especially since my child is in the classroom.” “If we trust each other then everyone will feel comfortable.” The researcher concluded that when trust and respect are established, there is a mutual flow of knowledge from both parent and teacher. Both parties are willing to communicate and understand each other, and the children ultimately benefit from a strong partnership. What parents appeared to value most was teachers showing them respect and making them feel a sense of belonging. Overall, the parents expressed that when teachers respected them, they felt appreciated and their self-confidence was boosted, especially when communicating and helping their children at home.

Question 5 asked: Why is it important for everyone, including the community, to create partnerships in schools? The majority of the parents agreed that the small businesses
neighboring the school should be committed to creating partnerships because the students will benefit. Some of the suggestions from the parents were that the local businesses could contribute resources to help the school offer more after-school activities to the students. Participant 7, said that having worked as a manager of a small business he knows that partnering within the community will be a success for the school because more people will invest time and money.” Over 80% of the parents voiced that when the community becomes involved, it shows that everyone cares. One participant stated, “We all play a part in helping the children succeed, I see the principal as the head, teachers the neck and we, parents are the body, so we all have important roles.” Another participant said, “The parents can also benefit if businesses in the community offer resources to help families.” Participant 35 explained it as, “No one is an island, we all need each other to grow and learn. My daughter will see that everyone is coming together because they care and she will try even harder.” The researcher believed that successful things happen when parents, teachers, and the community create strong partnerships. It is evident that parents know the importance of establishing effective partnerships in schools. Creating an effective academic partnership is a shared responsibility between home, school, and community, with the ultimate benefit for the students.

Question 6 asked: How would you and your child benefit from being an involved parent? The parents expressed that if they were welcomed into the classroom, they would be more comfortable in helping their children. Dodd and Konzal (2002) noted that the number one way to develop parental involvement is to invite parents directly into the schools. Once the parents gain the knowledge of the coursework, they become more confident in assisting their children at home. A large majority of the parents voiced that their parenting skills might also become better and they can help their children as students while at home. Some of the participants’ responses
were: “As a parent I would feel important knowing that I can contribute to my child’s education.” “My son will know that if he misbehaves the teacher will contact me.” “It just keeps everybody in the know, there is no guessing.” Participant 16 said, “I will not be seen as a silent parent, because my concerns will be heard.” Most of the parents believed that when the children see how involved parents are with the teachers, there will be less negative phone calls and more positive calls. The researcher believes that parents are the greatest resource for their children; therefore, when parents extend their knowledge and become involved parents, half of the teacher’s work is already accomplished. However, teachers must be willing to invite the parents into the classrooms to initiate parental involvement. The researcher surmises that allowing parents to interact in the classrooms will be a tremendous benefit because the knowledge gained will enhance their parenting and academic skills.

Question 7 asked: How can parents sustain meaningful relationships? More than 50% of the parents stated that the school needs to be consistent with implementing parent programs. If a program fails the first time, parents stated that the school should try and try again until they find what fits. All the parents were positive and willing to assist the schools in creating an environment of respect. Some of the participant’s responses were: “Give the parents assistance and help us understand what is being taught.” “Help my son at home with homework and projects.” “Keep communicating with the school.” “Attend workshops and classes if the school offer us.” “Tell the teacher of changes in my family, like if I lost my job or I have a divorce.” Participant 8 stated, “Be committed to being a parent and stay focus and do whatever is needed to help.” Another participant 19 said, “Parents can also check in with teachers, they do not have to wait for the teacher to call.” The participants agreed that all teachers might not have the required training to handle parent relationships, but the schools should ensure there is adequate
and consistent training. The parents understood the importance of being committed to the involvement process. They were also aware that there must be a commitment to establishing and maintaining the relationship, especially if it means assisting with learning at home. Hence, consistency from the parents and teachers would be the key element to sustaining parent-teacher relationships.

Question 8 asked: How do you expect teachers to build effective and strong partnerships? The parents wanted to see more initiation from the teachers to create relationships. More than half of the parents stated that if teachers are respectful and courteous, they would be willing to volunteer in the classrooms. Some of the participants’ responses were: “Teachers should always be honest.” “Teachers should initiate the relationship.” “Make us [parents] feel welcome.” “Allow parents to help make some decisions.” “Teachers should smile more and be engaging when they first meet parents.” “Respect all parents even if they are uneducated and single.” Participants 5 stated, “Teachers should be courteous, show parents that they care and don’t give up.” One parent stressed that her child was always in trouble, but the teacher became frustrated and had stopped contacting the parent. This parent felt that the teacher had given up on trying to help the student. The parent expressed that the school should offer ways to help parents and never lose hope with the kids. Overall, the parents wanted to feel as though their participation was needed, and they wanted teachers to make them feel welcome and include them in making decisions concerning their children.

For Question 9, the interviewer finally asked the interviewees: Give your definition of effective parental involvement in middle schools. The majority of the parents voiced that effective parental involvement is not one specific action, but a culmination of efforts from the parents. Some of the responses were: “It is not forced, it is inviting and not intimidating.” It is
open communication and a warm welcome by both teachers and parents.” “I believe it is when neither parents nor teachers gives up on helping each other or the children.” For example, one parent said, “It is trying everything to see what works best to help the kids succeed; as a parent I might not be available to meet the teacher in person but I will use other methods to be involved.” Overall, the parents agreed that Epstein’s (1993) Six Types of Involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community—equate with parental involvement.

Summary

A qualitative research design was used to analyze the parents’ experiences and perceptions of parental involvement at the middle school level. Epstein’s (1993) survey was used to examine the beliefs and expectations the parents had regarding their current relationship at their children’s middle school. The data revealed that parents’ perceptions based on their participation depended on whether the school’s climate was warm and inviting, with positive teacher attitudes and welcoming behaviors. Over 50% of the parents did express feelings of alienation, especially the parents who spoke a language other than English. The majority of the parents were willing to attend workshops and receive ongoing training to equip them with knowledge on how to establish a homework regime, study time for their children, and manage the teenagers’ sense of autonomy.

Collectively, the parents agreed that effective parental involvement required the effort of the school and families to build equitable, bilateral relationships. The exchange of ideas, knowledge, and strategies is essential to a two-way relationship. Shapley and Case (2004) noted that it is crucial for educators and parents to collaborate and exchange ideas to build productive partnerships. The findings from this study confirmed that parents could have different
perceptions about parent involvement and building partnerships in schools, but they wanted to be a part of the relationship process.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

The reason for families and schools to build and maintain effective, successful relationships is the impact these relationships have on students’ academic achievement. Research has shown that there are numerous benefits from parental involvement for student achievement (Barton & Coley, 2007; Dodd & Konzal, 2002; Sheldon, 2005). According to Tutwiler (2005), parental involvement also helps teachers understand and learn about the different cultural and social challenges their students face. Although there are known benefits of partnering with families, parental involvement continues to be a problem in middle schools. The survey conducted by the Public Agenda (Scales, 2012) reported that the biggest problem public schools face today is the lack of family involvement. There is a dire need to close this significant gap that continues to separate families and schools. School officials and researchers must continue to seek improved and innovative knowledge to bring families and teachers to a level of collaborative productivity (Scales, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of eighth-grade middle school parents and gain an understanding of their definition of parental involvement. The study explored what parents believed hinders or promotes parental involvement. This study also analyzed various ways to create trusting school-family partnerships within middle schools. The data were collected from a total of 45 parents who completed the survey, and 22 parents participated in the interview. The following research questions were used to accomplish the purpose of the study:

1. How do middle school parents define effective parental involvement in support of their children?
2. How can parents assist in creating trusting family-school partnerships within a middle school environment?

This chapter is a summary of the findings and interpretations for the research questions, which lead to implications for further extensive research on parental involvement. Suggestions for further study at the high school level are encouraged.

Summary of the Results

Research question 1. How do middle-school parents define parental involvement in support of their children?

Compared to evidence in the school, the study revealed that there were moderately high levels of parental involvement at home. The data from the surveys showed that 66.67% of the parents never attended PTA meetings and 71.11% never volunteered at the school. Nevertheless, parents seemed to be more involved with assisting their children at home and fostering and building relationships with them. Over 91% of the parents said they talked to their children about school. Over 80% of parents from the surveys stated that they reinforced daily how important school is to their children. Results showed that 55.56% of the parents helped their children with: (a) planning time for homework and chores, and (b) checking to see that their children had completed the homework. The majority of the parents stated that they enjoyed spending quality time with their children, especially talking to and reassuring them that they wanted to be a part of what happens in their academics. The survey reflected that both mothers and fathers enjoyed spending quality time with their children. Although 91% of the parents expressed this connection, however, only 28% had taken their children to special places or events in the community.
One of the questions on the Epstein survey explored the different ways families were involved at home or school. The parents were expected to answer by choosing never, 1-2 times, a few times, or many times. Although 95% of parents agreed that they could find time on weekends to work with their children on projects or homework, only 28% said they took their children to the library frequently. Thus, only a small percentage of the parents who stated they would find time to work with their children took the time to take their children to the library. The results of the survey suggested that although parents preferred working at home with their children, they needed to make an effort to take their children to the library. The data reported 24% of the parents never took their child to a library. However, 37.78% of the surveyed parents said they had taken their children to a library only a few times.

Data from the interviews suggested that parents believed they demonstrated some level of parental involvement when helping their children with homework and discussing the importance of school and educational television shows. The 22 parents interviewed stated that they were willing to partner with the school/teachers and do whatever was needed to help their children academically. The parents also reported their willingness to participate in future parent/school partnership programs. More than 50% of the interviewed parents stated that when they participated at the elementary school level, they were given specific roles to perform, such as “classroom parent” or “field trip parent.” However, as for participation at the middle-school level, parents were not given definitive roles. The parents claimed that not having specific roles created confusion because they did not know what the teachers expected.
**Research question 2.** How can parents assist in creating trusting family-school partnerships within a middle school environment?

The survey results noted that overall, parents were not satisfied with how the school involved them in the different types of activities. Over 40% of the participants (parents) said that the school “does not do” or “could do better” in reaching out to the families. For example, 51% of the parents agreed that the school could do a better job in helping parents to understand their children’s stages of development. Additionally, over 45% of the parents who completed the surveys reported that the school could do a better job informing them of how their children were progressing academically and what skills their children needed to learn, including them on the committees, and providing them with information on available community services. Fifty-five percent of the parents stated that the school did a great job at informing them of new events scheduled at the school. The responses from the open-ended questions indicated that parents would prefer to receive communication informing them about their children’s progress and what the children were expected to learn instead of correspondence about the upcoming photo-shoot event.

**Discussion of the Results**

Five hundred questionnaires were distributed, a total of 45 parents completed the survey, and 22 parents agreed to be interviewed. The goal was to have at least 60 parents participate in the study. The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of middle school parents to gain an understanding of their definition of parental involvement. Regardless of the parents’ educational and employment status, they all (100%) expressed a desire to assist their children. The parents’ responses on the survey related more to a lack of trust and poor communication, which is the second type of Epstein’s (2005) parent involvement. During the
interviews, more than 50% of the parents stated that lack of trust was attributed to the poor communication between parents and teachers. Furthermore, it is difficult to share information with the school if there is a breakdown in social and relational trust. Bryk and Schneider (2003) suggested that relationships between parents and educators are often not developed due to a lack of relational trust. One of the parents who was interviewed stated: “It is hard to discuss anything with the teachers or even get involved if I don’t feel comfortable.” Another parent said, “Teachers need to assure parents that they can be trusted if partnerships are to be created with the school.”

Over 80% of the parents who were interviewed and the five parents who answered the open-ended questions on the surveys reported that the school did not welcome partnerships. During the interviews, the majority of the parents reasoned that they did not feel as though they had much to offer the teachers in the classroom. However, over half of the parents expressed a desire to attend workshops provided by the school. On the surveys, the parents indicated that they would like to attend specific workshops that provided answers and strategies to help families cope with topics, such as teenage health problems, discipline in the homes, the maturity of children, and how to understand middle schools. In the past year, none of the parents had ever attended a workshop at the school. However, over 90% of the parents believed that the workshops would be beneficial to them by making them more confident and knowledgeable.

Partnerships between families and schools are viable if both parties are willing to do what it takes to sustain the relationship. In the surveys, over 50% of the parents stated that they wanted to attend workshops to learn how to cope with stress and how to help their children develop their talents in school. The parents would like to see more parent-centered workshops designed by the school. Furthermore, the parents agreed that more workshops would help
improve communication between parents and teachers. The result of the increased communication would lead to more parental volunteers for classroom activities.

Lewis et al. (2011) suggested that volunteering in schools is recognized as an impactful form of parental involvement for teachers. The overall goal in volunteering is to recruit and coordinate parental support for teachers. Forty-five participants took the survey and only 2% of the parent had ever volunteered in the classroom. Seventy-one percent of the parents responded that they had never volunteered, and 27% had only volunteered a few times. The majority of the participants who responded that they had never volunteered, expressed that they would love the opportunity to help out in the classrooms, chaperone field trips, and assist in the office. The parents mainly voiced two reasons why they did not show interest in volunteering at the school: (a) the school never asked the families to help, and (b) the parents did not know in what capacity they could be of assistance. Overall, the families all agreed that they were more involved in learning activities with their children at home.

Learning at home is Epstein’s (2009) fourth type of parental involvement. According to Epstein (2009) learning at home is getting families involved with their children, assisting with homework and other curriculum-related activities. Parents are encouraged to engage with their children by working on homework, projects, and other related activities. During the interview, the interviewees were asked to elaborate on what they meant by spending time with their kids. Ninety-five percent of the parents interviewed expressed that they spend time on weekends assisting their children with projects and homework. The majority of the parents stated that if the teachers kept them informed about what to expect, they would ensure that their children succeed.

During the one-on-one interview, a parent displayed much enthusiasm when she
expressed the joy of working on projects with her daughter. She stated, “working on projects with my daughter, allows me the time to bond and get to know what she likes. Sometimes, I wish I could help more, but I never went to college, so I don’t want to give her the wrong answers, but just knowing I am there makes me feel good.” About 15 other parents in the interview mentioned that they also enjoyed working on activities at home with their children but admitted that they did not feel confident or competent when they are helping. During the interview, the parents were asked if there was anything the schools could do to help in boosting their confidence level.

Most of the parents suggested that the schools can offer classes for the different subject areas, and exciting workshops to help the relationship process between school and home. The parents who spoke Spanish said that they would enjoy taking English classes to become proficient. The families agreed that attending classes, and getting assistance from the schools would build their self-esteem and attitude, which would reflect on how well they engage with their children in at-home activities. They also pointed out that being proficient in the English language would aid in communication between them and the teachers.

Analyzing the data from both surveys and interviews revealed that a lack of communication between teachers and parents. For example, on the open-ended questions on the parents’ survey, the parents stated that they needed to trust the teachers if they are to communicate effectively. The parents were asked to give suggestions for ways to improve communication between families and the school during the interview phase. The majority of the parents being interviewed stated that they would love to see the school offer more activities for parents to participate, more opportunities for parents to be on committees and assist in making decisions, and suggest alternative methods of communication with parents. The parents
explained that if given the opportunity, they would like to hold positions on some of the school committees, where they can make decisions. Over 40% of the parents surveyed noted that the school did not include them on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, or school improvement.

The data from the parents’ survey also showed that over 55% of the parents believed that the school did an excellent job of informing them about the new things happening at the school. However, over 46% of the parents stated that the school could do a better job of informing them about how their children are doing at school. Over 30% of parents appreciate the current system that the school uses to post grades.

During the interview, some of the other parents expressed concerns about the current regime that the school uses. They stressed that the system does not encourage dialog between parents and teachers about the progress of their children. The parents also expressed that they were not sufficiently knowledgeable regarding setting up the computer system that the school used; however, they preferred to use more social networking platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram on their cellphones. The majority of the parents in the interview process expressed that they did not own a personal computer, but all of the parents owned a cell phone. Most of the parents who participated in both parts of the study are termed as millennials, and they enjoy the immediate connection and the excitement of being “in-the-know” that came with social media.

The bond that holds the success of building pivotal and productive partnerships in schools is, first, to establish that initial relationship with the parents because both sides can learn and benefit from each other (Epstein, 2010). Parents want to hear something positive on that initial phone call they receive from a teacher. Maintaining consistent communication will
certainly bring about pleasant and positive feelings with the parents, which eventually leads to the pathway for developing partnerships.

**Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

The overarching conclusions from this study are that all, 100% of the parents agreed that building positive, effective working partnerships has a significant effect on student academic achievement (Henderson, 1988; LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Dodd and Konzal (2002) argued that active parental involvement is a more reasonable predictor of student achievement than indicators such as family income or educational level. Parents have an overwhelming desire to be involved but certainly need the school’s assistance (Dodd & Konzal, 2002). In a survey conducted by Public Agenda (Scales, 2012), 65% of parents said they wished they could do more when it comes to involvement in their child’s education, and 34% were satisfied with the way things were. The results from the present study clearly indicated that 100% of the parents expressed that they wanted to become more involved, and they looked forward to working with the school if a partnership program is implemented. School leaders and noted political leaders all over the nation continue to urge parents to become and stay involved; however, the onus of the responsibility to get the initiatives started lies with the schools (Sergiovanni, 2001). In 2010, in his speech to parents, the then Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, “It is well-documented—and plain common sense—that parental involvement in a child’s education boosts student learning and improves both behavior and attendance” (Paulynice, 2011, p. 1).

A finding of this study pertinent to low parental involvement suggested that the participating school in this study lacks adequate strategies to keep parents engaged in their children’s education. Thirty-five percent of the parents said that the school involved them less
this year than they did last year. However, only 2% of the parents agreed that the school had involved the parents more this year than last year.

Fan and Chen (2001) analyzed two large-scale surveys completed in public schools and suggested that schools and families are not in agreement when it comes to acknowledging the efforts the schools make when implementing outreach programs for the parents. The second observation noted related to parent-teacher involvement was interpersonal skills. The surveyed parents voiced that the teachers lacked the necessary interpersonal skills required to engage the families. Eighty percent of the parents who were interviewed spoke Spanish. These parents expressed that they had difficulty communicating with the teachers at the targeted school. Ogbu (1999, as stated in Jeynes, 2005) emphasized immigrant parents’ fears about speaking in English, which leads to limited communication between immigrant parents and teachers. Dodd and Konzal (2002) noted that language barriers create problems as it relates to parent-teacher communication within schools.

Due to the different racial and ethnic backgrounds in families and schools, understanding each other and building relationships can be a gradual process. Over 60% of the parents who participated in the interviews mentioned that sometimes communicating with the teachers was a challenge because of the language barrier. Ogbu (1999, as stated in Jeynes, 2005) recommended that teachers should avoid using jargon and use easier to understand vocabulary when corresponding with the families. Communication and collaboration are a priority in building effective partnerships. Parents want teachers to extend their hands first to open the lines of communication. Therefore, middle schools should institute parent contact programs to build stronger relational ties between parents and teachers.

Over 60% of the surveyed parents expressed trust issues with the teachers. Social trust is
a critical predictor of parental and school improvement, and measures the quality of relationships between families and schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Payne & Kaba, 2001). Developing trust is the beginning of healthy and thriving partnerships between families and schools. Trust makes the communicative process easier for all the stakeholders. It creates a warm, inviting, and respectful environment that encourages parents to play an integral role in what transpires within the schools (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Payne & Kaba, 2001).

Eighty-two percent of the parents who completed the survey and participated in the interview stated that they were frustrated because most of the phone calls received from the school were to report negative behavior. Rice (2006) stressed that the communication between the parents and teachers must begin as early as possible and always on a positive note. The first call can be one where the teachers introduce themselves to the families, and not a call to complain about student misbehavior or missing assignments. Upon examining the literature, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) believed that when teachers initiated communication with parents, there is a positive impact on the parent-teacher relationship that affects the parents’ involvement in their child’s academic success. McEwan (2004) argued that parents crave real communication from the schools, to inform them of their children’s academic success or failures and to offer practical suggestions on how to assist their children at home.

Seventy percent of the parents who were interviewed expressed that they did not feel welcomed in the classroom, and felt they were more of a bother. Forty-nine percent of parents in the survey acknowledged that they had never visited their children's classroom. Over 90% of the parents in the study indicated that communication was missing in the school, and the utilization of different modes of communication is necessary. Hargreaves (2003) stated that many teachers find parents to be troublesome: “The major reason that teachers have negative feelings about
parents was that parents questioned their expertise, judgment, status, and purpose” (p. 129). It is important that schools create a warm, caring, and inviting environment for the parents. Epstein et al. (2004) suggested that schools should have a designated space where families can collaborate and share resources. Parents will not volunteer in any capacity if they feel unwanted (Epstein et al., 2004). When parents participate in educating their children, it is considered a form of impactful parental involvement. Parent-teacher partnerships thrive when families are made to feel comfortable volunteering, and teachers are not judgmental (Lewis et al., 2011). Good two-way communication between parents and teachers improves parental confidence and creates an inviting environment. However, it is imperative for teachers to determine what level of communication is needed to foster lasting relationships with parents (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

All the parents in the study agreed that face-to-face communication is great; however, 80% of the parents preferred to be interviewed via telephone. Those parents who were interviewed via telephone urged the school to be innovative and create multiple two-way methods of communication to reach parents. Newsletters, report cards, automated calls, and school newspapers are methods of one-way communication. Although these are informative, they are not engaging and fail to elicit parent-teacher interaction. According to Decker and Decker (2003), two-way communication creates an environment that lessens misconceptions and allows meaningful conversation between families and teachers. Berger (2003) deemed two-way communication as the ultimate goal of family-school relationships.

Technology has opened a pathway to closing the gap in parental involvement and schools. Nevertheless, advanced technology does have some unintended consequences. While it allows fast and constant interaction, it is not a cheap method of communication, and not all
families can afford it. Epstein (1995) advised schools not to become entirely reliant on emails, websites, and student information systems as their sole means of communicating. During the interview, the researcher noticed that the millennial parents were more vocal about the new age platform in technology, such as social media.

The parents in the interviews suggested that the schools become more present on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms. According to Penuel et al. (2002), these new programs are enhancing communication, to provide parents with daily information on schools and student progress. Because millennials have shifted to this new age of communication, they are expecting the schools to follow this contemporary way of life to connect with the parents. One interviewed parent said, “I can easily follow my son’s school if it was on Instagram, and check in daily because I’m constantly on social media.” Another parent during the interview noted that she probably would not miss any important events at school, especially parent conferences, if the school had social media.

In today’s era, this innovative communicative platform seems to have an unprecedented number of consumers. Regardless of socioeconomic status, education level, race or religion, the fundamental pitch is that everyone appears to be embracing, enjoying and responding to social media. Electronic communication can reach millions in a brief amount of time, and it is beneficial to all stakeholders. According to Net Day (2004, as cited in Lei, 2010), people are technology-savvy and dependent upon technology as an essential and preferred component of every aspect of their lives.

Research showed that children excel when their parents are given the opportunities to participate in activities (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). It is fundamental that school officials find alternative ways to engage parents in relevant activities that continue to challenge children
both at home and school (Brough & Irvin, 2001). In (2002), Epstein et al. developed Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS). This program allows teachers to create interactive homework assignments that encourage middle-school students and parents to discuss and share what the students are learning in school. Research has shown that when parents work closely and directly with their children at home on school activities, it improves their academic achievement. Epstein et al. (2002) expressed that educators view this parent-child interaction as a dynamic form of parental involvement.

Limitations

Researcher bias in research studies is a challenge for researchers on many levels (DeCoster et al., 2015). However, the researcher in this study made a conscious effort to keep personal biases, feelings, and opinions of the various forms of data retrieved in this qualitative research study at a minimum. No relatives, acquaintances, friends, or coworkers participated in this study. A total of 500 surveys were distributed. The goal was to receive at least 40 participants or a maximum of 60. The overall response rate was 45 participants who submitted surveys; 22 of those participants agreed to be interviewed. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the parents. The surveys were also sent home by the students whose parents were unable to attend the meet-and-greet. The parents also received a letter explaining the importance of their participation, confidentiality agreement, and methodology of the study. Future studies of this kind may achieve greater parent-response rates by offering participation incentives.

Although there were five optional open-ended questions at the end of the survey, some parents chose not to respond. These questions elicited responses from a parent’s perspective about ideas for a topic on parenting skills, parental involvement, and what parents can do to
assist the school. Another limitation noted here could be that some parents might not possess the written skills to respond clearly to the open-ended questions. The survey was distributed in English; however, the parents had a choice to request one in Spanish if needed. In the future, the survey could be offered in other native languages, and this should be noted on the informational letter sent to parents.

About 10 parents while conducting the interview, voiced concerns about their hesitation with completing the survey because they felt that some of the questions were too intrusive. They also mentioned that they were uncertain as to how the results would be used. The parents stated that they did not want their responses to affect how the school treated their children because they had similar experiences in the past. The final limitation of the study was the exclusion of elementary and secondary parents. The study focused on parents who currently have children in the eighth grade. It is recommended that future studies of this type include parents who have children in Grades 9.

**Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

The journey through middle school can be termed as the transition period in a student’s life. During this transition period, the school, parents, and community should work together to assist the middle-school students in managing adolescent changes and developing their identity (Jackson & Davis, 2000). The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of middle school parents to gain an understanding of their definition of parental involvement. Anderson and Minke (2007) recommended that schools provide consistent and relevant professional development to help teachers foster and maintain positive relationships with parents. The schools also need to devise an effective, comprehensive parent program that will genuinely benefit all stakeholders.
It is imperative that middle schools review current parent involvement initiatives and evaluate the effectiveness of the programs. The number of parents does not define the success of a partnership program; however, the interconnectedness derived from the constructiveness of the relationships does. If the parental involvement is going to thrive in middle schools, families and schools must have shared responsibility and contribute to a reciprocal process. Hallowell (2011) noted that from a general perspective, people are desperately looking for connections and building relationships. Middle schools need to evaluate which deciding factors affect how best the schools can implement and sustain the connections made between families and schools. Hallowell (2011) maintained that people are more willing to venture into the unconventional if they connect with each other. “Using the tool, you know best -yourself- to connect with others and help others also connect, you can bring out the best in the people” (p. 98). Hence, implementing rigorous and practical program initiatives can foster better partnerships with families and schools. This research revealed that the targeted school in this study is in need of establishing more direct approaches to aid with parental involvement. Over 50% of the parents made it clear that the school could do a better job of helping them understand their children’s stage of development. Almost half of the participants listed that the school could do a better job in the following areas: provide them with information on community services, inform them of the skills their children need to learn each year and report how their children are progressing in school. Over 55% of the parents noted that the school did not ask them to volunteer.
Strategies to Improve Parent-Teacher Communication

The use of technology today can easily lure individuals away from maintaining viable relationships (Kaupila et al. 2011). However, maintaining human contact and face-to-face interaction should be a priority for families and schools. Hislop (2013) ranked face-to-face interaction as being the richest communication level primarily because of the social cues. With face-to-face interactions, there is also more synchronous communication and sharing of knowledge. Hislop (2013) examined the previous research studies of Jarvenpaa and Majchrzak (2008) and Kaupila et al. (2011) about two-way communication and concluded that face-to-face communication is the best form of communication for building parent-teacher relationships. Based on the parents’ surveys, interviews, and research literature, it is the suggestion of the researcher that schools implement some of the strategies below.

Promote more face-to-face interaction. The researcher proposes to invite families to an orientation to learn about the expectations for students transitioning to the next grade. The staff should ensure that translators are there to represent the different ethnicities at all functions and meetings. It is suggested that parent-teacher conferences should be held at least twice a year using interdisciplinary teams to meet with parents. Because the parents mentioned the issue of time constraints, evening and weekend hours can be made available to the parents. The interdisciplinary teams in middle schools could serve as a resource for the parents. The teams can consolidate their experiences and discuss instructional methods to assist both students and families. One of the central purposes of middle school interdisciplinary teams is to communicate and collaborate with parents to develop and implement curriculum based on an adolescents’ developmental and academic needs (Conley, Fauske, & Pounder, 2004).
Implementing a mandatory report pick-up twice during the school year will give parents options. Parents will be expected to pick up the report card and discuss any issues with the teachers at the appointed time. Pick-up times should be available for parents before, during, and after school. Schools should conduct workshops monthly and offer to teach the English language to non-English-speaking families. School officials can plan to have open houses at the beginning of each school year, as this would allow parents to meet with administration and teachers. This meeting sets the tone and gives the parents an overall idea of the school’s policies and expectations. Schools can also offer technical training workshops to teach parents how to navigate the school websites to access all necessary information.

It is best to develop test preparation workshops by the second quarter for parents and students to prepare families and students for standardized testing. The schools can provide workshops to educate parents on how to read their children’s report cards, attendance, assessments, and other data. Offering the parents an opportunity to follow their children’s schedule for a day allow the parents to be informed about their children’s schedules. For example, parents will become familiar with the times their children are supposed to be in class, along with the school’s expectations and procedures. It is also suggested that opportunities are created for parents to mentor, tutor, and volunteer. The teachers can ask parents to create “get-to-know-you bio-cards” which can be completed during the first week of school. This exercise gives the parents an opportunity to check their preferences and availability.

School officials should consider hosting a family night/concert once a year. Teachers and staff can share their talents with the families through song, poetry, and dance at this event. The families will be given the opportunity to display their culture through song, dance, and food. The school can schedule a parent appreciation dinner at the end of the school year and invite
community representatives. If there is difficulty reaching parents or parents who are physically challenged, the schools might want to appoint a school representative to conduct home visits.

The idea of implementing Parent Centers in the schools to serve as a welcoming space and a vehicle to facilitate parents’ involvement in their children’s education is another way to make parents feel welcome. The Parent Centers aid in communication and trust among parents and school personnel. It allows the parents a safe space to discuss any emotional, academic or social concerns. Nevi (1983) explained that Parent Centers housed in schools could be used as a vehicle to serve as a site for ongoing projects that are both school- and community-related and provide a source of support for parents.

All schools might want to consolidate a handbook for parents, which include information regarding the ESSA requirements, grade-to-grade expectations, and the high school/college readiness process. The guidance counselors can oversee that progress reports of failing or struggling students are mailed or emailed to parents in the families’ home language. The school officials might want to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of using multiple modes of communication, such as newsletters, flyers, school calendars, social media, and house visits within their population. Schools should also partner with businesses in the community to post flyers and any pertinent information about school activities. Another suggestion is to plan a happy hour or social evenings once a month at a local lounge or restaurant for staff and parents who are interested to build camaraderie among all the stakeholders.

Electronic technology. The use of technology is modern and a collaborative strategy to enhance teacher-parent communications. Decker and Decker (2003) posited that with modern day technology such as email, school websites, cell phones, and student information systems can provide the necessary tools to assist in enhancing communication in schools. Offering different
Internet-based programs (e.g., Classdojo and Google Classroom) allow families and teachers to communicate irrespective of their geographic location. Steininger et al. (2010, as cited in Hislop, 2013) maintained that technology facilitates communication and allows those who choose to use it to develop a sense of community and a shared identity, which would eventually lead to a sharing of knowledge.

Schools can launch sites to post important school information that benefits parents and students. Computer training sessions will be offered to parents as needed to instruct them on how to set up parent accounts to monitor grades, tardiness, and homework. The teachers’ email addresses will be made available to parents on the school’s website. To increase parent awareness schools can advertise school events and programs via local television channels and on radio stations. The schools and districts should continue using the automated telephone system to record personal mass messages to families. Finally, schools should look into establishing various social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter to get the millennial parents involved. According to Penuel et al. (2002), the Internet has numerous programs to keep families and schools connected.

Finding ways to have families and teachers communicate can be challenging, and many teachers are uncertain of how to establish and maintain honest communication. Educators must take the necessary steps to ensure that they are consistent and persistent in communicating with the families. Hislop (2013) described extensive and ongoing collaboration and communication require more than one type of communication medium.
**Recommendations for Further Research**

The overall goal of the study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of middle school parents to gain an understanding of their definition of parental involvement. From the results, the researcher developed several strategies that middle schools could use to increase parental involvement. It is imperative that schools establish comprehensive partnership programs to guide and improve how families and schools will work together. Developing and maintaining partnership programs should also be a priority on the school’s yearly agenda. It is recommended that a larger sample size be used in future research as this could also lessen the sample bias. The researcher proposes that a similar study be done in a different community to determine if socioeconomics can influence the parents’ perceptions. A future study examining the teachers’ perspectives of parental involvement and comparing them to the parents’ views can provide insight from both sides. Finally, a study is recommended to examine whether parents’ perceptions of parental participation change as students enter ninth grade in high school.

Establishing partnerships in an educational setting is feasible when families, schools, and the community make a commitment to work cohesively and in a productive way (Epstein, 2005). Regardless of the results, all schools should make a conscious effort to reinforce and maintain parental involvement initiatives because students exhibit academic success based on parents’ governance, encouragement, and support (Comer, 2005). After careful analysis of the results, it is the researcher's recommendation that partnership programs and parent initiatives be implemented in the school to foster and maintain effective relationships with the parents. Although 90% of the parents stated in the survey that they had never attended a workshop, they later expressed interest in attending specific workshops on their interests as well as any formal training if offered by the school. Therefore, it is imperative that schools invest in providing
training for both parents and teachers. Parents raised concerns about the time constraints surrounding the parent conferences. They stated that 5-10 minute increments are not enough time for parents to discuss any relevant matters about their children.

**Conclusion**

Based on the qualitative results, the onus of the problem lies with both the parents and the school. The responses confirmed that there needs to be better communication between schools and families. The respondents in the study disclosed that they have high and positive expectations when parental involvement initiatives are implemented in the school. Nonetheless, there is a desperate need to enhance family-school partnerships to witness the incredible impact they have on academic achievement (Trask-Tate & Cunningham, 2010). Although there were several limitations, the study is a segue to conduct further exploratory research to improve parental involvement in middle schools. It is imperative that schools encourage parents to become involved and implement partnership programs to promote and maintain effective communication between parents and the school. As complex and controversial a topic as parental involvement in middle schools tends to be, school officials must continue the quest to bridge the defining gap between families and schools.
References


Epstein, J. L. (2005). School-initiated family and community partnerships. In *This we believe in action: Implementing successful middle level schools* (pp. 77–96). Westerville, OH: Association for Middle Level Education.


Newport, F. (2001). Americans say the family is the starting point for preventing another Columbine. Retrieved from www.gallup.com


Appendix A: Keys to Successful Partnerships: Six Types of Involvement

Appendix B: Institutional Permission Letter

August 26, 2016

Dear Mr. [Redacted],

I’m a doctoral student at Concordia University-Portland, and I am preparing to write my dissertation. I’m formally requesting permission to conduct my research study at your school. The title of my dissertation is “Building Effective Parental Involvement in Middle Schools: The Parents’ Perceptions.” The objective of this study is to examine the attitudes and the perceptions of middle school parents to gain an understanding of their definition of parental involvement. The study will explore what hinders and promotes parental involvement and also analyze various ways to create trusting school-family partnerships in middle schools.

The research requires the participation of the parents. Seeing that I am a sixth-grade-reading teacher, I would like to focus on the eighth-grade parents to avoid any conflict of interest. There will be two methods of data collection: surveys and interviews. The surveys will be sent home, and the interviews will be scheduled at a time convenient for the parents. I am hoping, with your permission to post the flyer about the study at the eighth-grade Back-to-School night and also send the flyer home with the students.

The research study will be reviewed by the Concordia University Institutional Review Board (CU IRB) in a few weeks. After the CU IRB’s approval, I can provide you with the IRB application and a copy of the approval. I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss further with you and to answer any questions you may have regarding the research process. Please note that with your joint effort and contribution towards the research, I am confident that it will be successful. I am also hopeful that the final result will provide strategies and ideas to assist in building lasting and effective parental involvement in the school.

Kind Regards,

Mrs. Tracy Oates
Appendix C: Parent Interview Questions

(1) How does the school ask you to be involved? Explain how it works or doesn’t work for your family?

(2) As parents, how can you get involved?

(3) How can parents and teachers work together?

(4) Why are respect and trust major factors in creating partnerships with school officials?

(5) Why is it important to create partnerships in schools?

(6) How do you and your child benefit from being an involved parent?

(7) How can parents sustain meaningful relationships?

(8) How do you expect teachers to build effective and strong partnerships?

(9) What is your definition of effective parental involvement in middle school?
Appendix D: Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

I am a doctoral student at Concordia University, Portland, Oregon in the program of Transformational Leadership. One of the requirements to complete the doctoral program is to conduct research on a particular topic. I have chosen to focus on parental involvement but from the perceptions of the parents. I would appreciate your participation in this study. Data will be collected using surveys and through interviews. For those parents willing to participate in the thirty-minute interview instead of completing the survey, please contact me by email at [researcher’s email] or my cell [researcher’s phone number].

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You may decide to withdraw from the study at any time. By completing the survey, you are indicating that you understand what the research entails and that you are willing to participate. Surveys will be completely anonymous and confidential. Interviews will also be scheduled at your convenience.

Please take your time to read carefully and choose the best response to each question. You may send the completed survey with your child to school or place it in the self-addressed envelope. There is a labeled box in each classroom for all of the completed surveys. Due to the time constraints, please return the surveys by the date stamped on the survey. You taking the time to participate in this research is critical to the success of this study! I appreciate your time and your willingness to take part in this survey! If you have any questions, you may contact me at [researcher’s phone number].

Sincerely,

Mrs. Tracy Oates

Doctoral Student
Concordia University
Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter

DATE: September 27, 2016
TO: Tracy Oates
FROM: Concordia University - Portland IRB (CU IRB)
PROJECT TITLE: [957056-1] Building Parental Involvement in Middle Schools: The Parents’ Perceptions
REFERENCE #: EDO-20160907-Jimenez-Oates-Expedited
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: September 27, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE: September 27, 2017
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Concordia University - Portland IRB (CU IRB) has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

There is a condition of approval. Your project includes research that will be conducted within an institution that is not Concordia University. As such, you need to have that institution’s approval to conduct research. You are responsible for contacting and following the procedures and policies of Concordia University and any other institution where you conduct research. You cannot begin recruitment or collection of data until you receive approval from that institution.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulations.

Attached is a stamped copy of the approved consent form. You must use this stamped consent form.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. The form needed to request a revision is called a Modification Request Form, which is available at www.cu-portland.edu/IRB/forms.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please email the CU IRB Director directly, at obranch@cu-portland.edu, if you have an unanticipated problem or other such urgent question or report.
All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of September 27, 2017.

You must submit a close-out report at the expiration of your project or upon completion of your project. The Close-out Report Form is available at www.cu-portland.edu/IRB/Forms.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Oral Lee Branch at 503-493-6390 or irb@cu-portland.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Concordia University - Portland IRB (CU IRB)'s records. September 27, 2016
CONSENT FORM

Research Study Title: BUILDING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL: THE PARENTS PERCEPTIONS
Principle Investigator: Mrs. Tracy Oates
Research Institution: Concordia University
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mark Jimenez

Purpose and what you will be doing:
The purpose of this survey is to examine the parents’ perceptions of what determines parental involvement, and how to develop strategies that can improve parent-teacher relationships at Middle School.
We expect approximately 60 volunteers. No one will be paid for participation in the study; however, to encourage the students to take home the consent form there is an incentive for the classrooms that have at least 20 consent forms. These classes will enjoy a pizza celebration. We will begin enrollment on 10/24/2016 and end enrollment on 12/13/2016. To be in the study, sixty parents will participate in a thirty-minute interview and will also complete a short questionnaire (Epstein). The questionnaire will be sent home with the child and returned upon completion. The interviews will be recorded to facilitate analysis. The interview should take about thirty minutes.

Risks:
There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the researcher’s personal laptop. When we or any of our investigators look at the data none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

Benefits:
Information provided will assist school officials to understand the parents’ concerns and their beliefs surrounding what it takes to create and sustain meaningful relationships. You could benefit from this by being completely honest and forthcoming in your responses.

Confidentiality:
This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.
Concordia University – Portland Institutional Review Board
Approved: September 27, 2016; will Expire: September 27, 2017

Right to Withdraw:
Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a bad emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:
You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principle investigator, Mrs. Tracy Oates at email: [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email: obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

Participant Name

Date

Participant Signature

Date

Investigator Name

Date

Investigator Signature

Date

Mailing Address:
Tracy Oates
c/o: Faculty Chair Dr. Mark Jimenez
2811 NE Holman St
Portland, OR 97221
Appendix G: Parent Involvement Poster

Hello 8th Grade Parents
Your concerns and ideas MATTER

All interested parents are invited to participate in a research study on
“Building Effective Parental Involvement in Middle School:
The Parents’ Perceptions”

The study will entail a brief questionnaire and interview. All interviews will be scheduled
at a time most convenient for you.

Please note that your identity will remain ANONYMOUS. The data collected will be
aggregated and specific strategies will be proposed to assist in improving parental
involvement in middle schools.

The most critical key to your child’s academic success is Parental Involvement.

For any additional information or questions, please contact Mrs. Tracy Oates

Your participation is greatly appreciated and the class with the highest parent participation will receive a PIZZA PARTY – Let’s get started!!!!
A. This booklet should be answered by the PARENT or GUARDIAN who has the MOST CONTACT with this school about your child.

Who is filling in the booklet?  PLEASE CHECK IF YOU ARE . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) mother</th>
<th>(5) aunt</th>
<th>(9) guardian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) father</td>
<td>(6) uncle</td>
<td>(10) other relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) stepmother</td>
<td>(7) grandmother</td>
<td>(11) other (describe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) stepfather</td>
<td>(8) grandfather</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. HOW MANY CHILDREN in your family go to this school THIS YEAR? (Circle how many.)

1  2  3  4  5 or more

C. What GRADES are they in? CIRCLE ALL of the grades of your children in this school.

PreK  Kindergarten  Grade 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  Other

If you have more than one child at this school, please answer the questions in the booklet about your OLDEST CHILD at this school.

D. Is your oldest child a: ____ boy  or  ____ girl?
Q-1. We would like to know how you feel about this school right NOW. This will help us plan for the future. Please CIRCLE one choice for each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>Means you AGREE STRONGLY with the statement.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Means you AGREE A LITTLE with the statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>Means you DISAGREE A LITTLE with the statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Means you DISAGREE STRONGLY with the statement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THESE?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. This is a very good school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The teachers care about my child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I feel welcome at the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. This school has an active parent organization (e.g., PTA/PTO).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. My child talks about school at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. My child should get more homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Many parents I know help out at the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. The school and I have different goals for my child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. I feel I can help my child in reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. I feel I can help my child in math.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. I could help my child more if the teacher gave me more ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. My child is learning as much as he/she can at this school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Parents at this school get involved more in the younger grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. This school is known for trying new programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. This school views parents as important partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. The community supports this school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. This school is one of the best schools for students and for parents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q-2. Some families want more information about what their children are learning in each subject. CHECK which SUBJECTS you want to know more about to help your child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(a) Math skills</th>
<th>(c) Social studies</th>
<th>(e) Science</th>
<th>(i) Current events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(b) Reading skills</td>
<td>(f) Reading skills</td>
<td>(g) Handwriting</td>
<td>(j) Study skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Writing stories</td>
<td>(h) Writing stories</td>
<td>(i) Speaking skills</td>
<td>(k) Other (describe)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q-3. Families get involved in different ways at school or at home. Which of the following have you done this year with the OLDEST CHILD you have at this school? Please CIRCLE one choice for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NEVER</th>
<th>1 - 2 TIMES</th>
<th>FEW TIMES</th>
<th>MANY TIMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Talk to my child about school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Visit my child's classroom.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Read to my child.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Listen to my child read.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Listen to a story my child wrote.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Help my child with homework.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Practice spelling or other skills before a test.</td>
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<tr>
<td>h. Talk with my child about a TV show.</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Help my child plan time for homework and chores.</td>
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<tr>
<td>j. Talk with my child's teacher at school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>k. Talk to my child's teacher on the phone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>l. Go to PTA/PTO meetings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>m. Check to see that my child has done his/her homework.</td>
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<tr>
<td>n. Volunteer at school or in my child's classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>o. Go to special events at school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>p. Take my child to a library.</td>
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<tr>
<td>q. Take my child to special places or events in the community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>r. Tell my child how important school is.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Q-4. Schools contact families in different ways. CIRCLE one choice to tell if the school has done these things THIS YEAR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOES NOT DO</th>
<th>COULD DO BETTER</th>
<th>DOES WELL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>means the school DOES NOT DO this</td>
<td>means the school DOES this but COULD DO BETTER</td>
<td>means the school DOES this VERY WELL now</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>THIS SCHOOL...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Help me understand my child’s stage of development.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Tell me how my child is doing in school.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Tell me what skills my child needs to learn each year.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Have a parent-teacher conference with me.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Explain how to check my child’s homework.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Send home news about things happening at school.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Give me information about how report card grades are earned.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Assign homework that requires my child to talk with me about things learned in class.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Send home clear notices that I can read easily.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Contact me if my child is having problems.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Invite me to programs at the school.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Contact me if my child does something well or improves.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Ask me to volunteer at the school.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. Invite me to PTA/PTO meetings.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. Ask me to help with fund raising.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. Include parents on school committees such as curriculum, budgets, and school improvement.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. Provide information on community services that I may want to use.</td>
<td>DOES NOT DO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q-5. Some families want to attend WORKSHOPS on topics they want to hear more about. CHECK THE ONES that interest you . . . or suggest a few . . . .

(a) How children grow and develop at my child's age
(b) How to discipline children
(c) Solving school problems and preventing dropping out
(d) Preventing health problems
(e) How to deal with stress
(f) Raising children as a single parent
(g) How to help my child develop her/his talents
(h) Helping children take tests
(i) Understanding middle schools
(j) How to serve on a school committee or council
(k) Other topics you want? __________________________

(1) In the past year, did you attend a workshop at the school?
   No    Yes On what topic? __________________________

Q-6. Over the past two years, how much has the school involved you at school and at home?

(1) School involved me less this year than last
(2) School involved me about the same in both years
(3) School involved me more this year than last
(4) My child did not attend this school last year

Q-7. All communities have information that would help families. Which services in your community would you like to know more about? CHECK the information you want.

(a) Health care for children and families
(b) Family counseling
(c) Job training for parents/adults
(d) Adult education
(e) Parenting classes
(f) Child care
(g) After-school tutoring
(h) After-school sports activities
(i) Other after-school clubs or lessons to develop talents
(j) Community service that children can do
(k) Summer programs for children
(l) Information on museums, shows, and events in the community
(m) Other (describe the community information you need) __________________________
Q-8. ABOUT HOMEWORK
a. About how much time does your child spend doing homework on most school days?
   Minutes my child does homework on most school days: (Circle one.)
   none  5-10  25-30  35-45  50-60  over 1 hour

b. How much time do you spend helping your child with homework on an average night?
   Minutes of my time:  none  5-10  15-20  25-30  35-45  50-60  over 1 hour

c. How much time could you spend working with your child if the teacher showed you what to do?
   Minutes I could spend:  none  5-10  15-20  25-30  35-45  50-60  over 1 hour

d. Do you have time on weekends to work with your child on projects or homework for school?
   Yes _____  No _____

Q-9. ABOUT YOUR CHILD AND FAMILY
a. How is your oldest child at this school doing in schoolwork?
   (1) TOP student  (2) GOOD student  (3) OK, AVERAGE student  (4) FAIR student  (5) POOR student

b. How does your oldest child at this school like school this year?
   (1) Likes school a lot  (2) Likes school a little  (3) Does not like school much  (4) Does not like school at all

c. How often does your oldest child at this school promptly deliver notices home?
   (1) Always  (2) Usually  (3) Once in a while  (4) Never

d. How often does your oldest child at this school complete all homework on time?
   (1) Always  (2) Usually  (3) Once in a while  (4) Never

e. WHEN can you attend conferences, meetings, or workshops at the school? Check all that apply.
   Morning  Afternoon  Evening  Cannot ever attend

f. How many adults live at home?   Adults (include yourself)

g. How many children live at home?   Children

h. What is your highest education?
   CHECK ONE.
   (1) Did not complete high school  (2) Completed high school  (3) Some college or training  (4) College degree

i. Are you employed now?
   CHECK ONE.
   (1) Employed full-time  (2) Employed part-time  (3) Not employed now
Q-10. WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOUR IDEAS . . .

a. What is your greatest concern as a parent?

b. What school practice to involve parents has helped you most, and why?

c. What is one thing that you or your family could do to help this school?

d. What is the best thing that this school could do next year to help you with your

e. Any other ideas or suggestions?
August 31, 2016

To Concordia University:

Mrs. Tracy Oates has my permission to conduct her Parental Involvement Survey with the 8th grade parents at our school during the 2016 – 2017 school year. The proposal sounds excellent and appears that it will be beneficial to our students and staff. I look forward to her conducting the research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Principal
Appendix J: Consent to Use Questionnaires

Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships

October 3, 2016

To: Tracy Oates

From: Joyce L. Epstein & Steven B. Sheldon

Re: Permission to use:


This letter grants you permission to use, adapt, translate, or reprint the survey(s) noted above in your dissertation study.

We ask only that you include appropriate references to the survey(s) and authors in the text and bibliography of your reports and publications.

Best of luck with your project.
Appendix K: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

• Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
• Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
• Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
• Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.
I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*. **Statement of Original Work**

I attest that:

2. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

3. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

________________________
Digital Signature

Mrs. Tracy Oates

________________________
Name (Typed)

06.28.2017

________________________
Date