

The Effects of a Formal Empowerment and Education Program on Parent's Empowerment and Involvement in Their Child's Education

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BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education

Department of
Education

Educational Administration

**THE EFFECTS OF A FORMAL EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION PROGRAM ON
PARENT'S EMPOWERMENT AND INVOLVEMENT IN THEIR CHILD'S
EDUCATION**

Dissertation
by

MICHELLE SANCHEZ

submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The effects of a formal empowerment and education program on parent's empowerment and involvement in their child's education.

By

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**Dissertation Director
Dr. Irwin Blumer**

Through decades of research and data collecting, the effects of parent involvement in their child's education on a student outcomes has been examined through countless lenses; each with findings indicating its tremendous positive impact with benefits that extend beyond a child doing better in school. This dissertation, through a cross case-analysis of six parents, attempted to determine if parents felt more empowered as a result of participating in an education and empowerment program and in turn if that feeling of empowerment compelled them to be more involved in their child's education.

The study examined changes in parent attitudes and perceptions of empowerment, as well as levels of engagement after participating in the training program that was specially designed to provide them with the skills needed to become better involved in their child's education. The workshops focused on empowering them with knowledge about social and cultural capital as well as different issues related to the development and education of their child such as communicating effectively with your child, creating a homework environment, having powerful

parent teacher meetings, creating valuable two-way lines of communication with the school, as well as understanding child development.

Overall, the project created a very successful parent program that increased parent involvement by providing workshops specifically targeted at educating and empowering parents in order for them to feel more confident in their abilities to be an effective advocate for their child. The study made clear that parent involvement can not just be a statement in your handbook or mission statement; it must be a priority of the school and be embedded into the school culture, with staff buy-in and deliberate parent education about cultural and social capital and its effects on their involvement and must provide them with the resources needed to most effectively navigate the school system.

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TITLE

The Effects of a Formal Empowerment and Education Program on Parent's Empowerment and Involvement in Their Child's Education.

INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement in a child's education is the most consistent indicator of whether or not a child is successful in school (Warner, C., 1997). Therefore, it is of paramount importance that schools serving low-income families, families from different racial and cultural backgrounds, and families that are headed by adults who do not have a high level of education, focus on increasing parent involvement. Higher grades and test scores, better attendance, improved behavior, better social skills and higher graduation rates, are all found to occur in students whose parents are involved in their education (Project for School Innovation, 2003). In addition, the benefits not only help the student, but extend to the family, the school and the community (Cotton & Wikeland, 1989; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Research indicates that getting parents involved affects everyone in a positive way. Having students who remain in school and excel, benefits our entire society not just the individuals involved. The stakes are high and in order to compete in such a competitive global economy, it is in the best interest of everyone to work towards closing our current achievement gap (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003b). The researcher believes that when students do not remain in school, there is a tremendous cost to our nation as a whole, as they too often perpetuate the cycle of poverty with their own children, or end up engaged in our legal system.

The benefits of parent involvement are clear. The question then becomes, how do we get parents more involved in their child's education?

Parent Involvement must be looked at as having a much bigger impact than just helping a child do well in school. Lack of parent involvement in a student's education often leads to a student dropping out of school. "Parents play a crucial role in keeping young people in school" (Horn, 1992). With drop out rates soaring to the highest in 35 years, Communities in Schools has established it as a national crisis, with a serious impact on our entire society (Communities in Schools, 2005). "Almost 1.3 million students didn't graduate from U.S. high schools in 2004, costing the nation more than \$325 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity over their lifetimes" (Alliance for Excellent Education). In addition, having a culture in which children can not read, financially costs the nation a great deal in lost revenue. "If literacy levels in the United States were the same as those in Sweden, the U.S. GDP would rise by approximately \$463 billion and tax revenues would increase by approximately \$162 billion." (Carnevale and Desrochers, 2002). This illustrates that it is not only a problem that needs to be addressed by low-income or minority families, but that it is a national crisis that needs to be addressed by society as a whole.

Focus of the Study

This dissertation presents a research study which focuses on the effect of a parent empowerment program on parents and their participation in their child's education. It will assist in determining if parents feel more empowered as a result of participating in a parent education and empowerment program and in turn, compel them to be more involved in their child's education. The study will take place at the Edward P. Jefferson Middle School, located in the inner city of Boston, MA. The student body consists of 85 students spanning grades 5-8 who are

63% Black (this includes African-Americans and all students from Caribbean and African descent), 35% Latino and 1% Vietnamese, 1% Caucasian. Edward P. Jefferson Middle School is an independent, tuition-free, middle school for children from Boston neighborhoods, whose family income falls below the federal poverty guidelines.

The federal poverty guidelines are established by the Census Bureau for determining poverty status, the term "low-income individual" means an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount (www.ed.gov). For example, a single mother of two children would have to provide an income tax return from 2005 stating that she made less than \$24,900 in order to qualify for the school's lottery. For many of the families in this school, this amount is on the high end. Families who were able to produce tax returns this high, were generally families of five or six individuals.

Each year the school admits 22 students, who are children of diverse faiths, races, cultures, and cognitive profiles through a lottery for about 9-14 students for the incoming class. The remaining slots are reserved for siblings and referrals from the Department of Children and Families, who are students who have been abused or neglected and may or may not still be living with their biological parents. Edward P. Jefferson has small classes, individualized curricula, and a 12-hour school day, eleven months a year, in order to best provide rigorous academic, moral and social instruction. Edward P. Jefferson has been in existence for 10 years and has always strived to work in close partnership with families. Through this partnership, the school and family are working to challenge students to discover and develop the fullness of their individual gifts, and prepare graduates who will contribute intelligently, morally, and actively to the society they will inherit.

The school day runs from 7:30am to 7:30pm, where students eat breakfast, have morning classes, eat lunch, then afternoon classes, sports, dinner and then return to class to do their homework; the structure of the day while creating a safe, nurturing environment for the children, has enabled many parents to take less initiative and be less involved in what is happening to their child. For some, they have used the time to work more hours or take a class, while others have simply seen it as one less thing to worry about.

One of the hazards of providing a 12-hour day and its social service focus where all medical and social needs are addressed by the school, is that it may actually discourage parent involvement. This is not the school's intended goal. It is clear to the researcher that, in order to better assist these students to become self-reliant adults who will be active participants in the society to which they will contribute, they will need the constant support and encouragement from their parents throughout their school years. Theoretically, as a result of this study, parents should develop more confidence in their ability to work in full partnership with the school and will acquire the skills needed to be effective advocates as they strive to help their children achieve success in school. The study will determine if creating a structured program whose goal is to empower and educate parents, has an empowering effect that will lead to increased parental participation. According to Lareau (1987), education with parental involvement then becomes an integration of home and school.

Parent Involvement, as defined by the National PTA, is the participation of parents in every facet of the education and development of children from birth to adulthood, recognizing that parents are the primary influence in their children's lives (National PTA website). Studies have shown that well planned activities and outreach will engage even those families considered hard to reach, such as low-income, minority and single-parent families (Epstein, 2001). The

study will examine changes in parent attitudes and perceptions of empowerment, after participating in a school-based formal, education and training program that was designed to provide them with the skills needed to become better involved in their child's education.

The Project

The researcher who is also the school principal, created several targeted workshops for parents that were designed to increase their knowledge and comfort with effective parenting strategies and teach them specific ways to help their child throughout their education. The focus would be on empowering them with knowledge about social and cultural capital, as well educate them about a variety of issues related to the development and education of their child. In addition to social and cultural capital, through these monthly workshops, parents would be exposed to topics such as communicating effectively with children, creating a learning-conducive homework environment, participating effectively and actively in parent teacher meetings, cultivating valuable two-way lines of communication with the school, and understanding child development.

The school faces many challenges, from both external and internal sources. The major external factor affecting the school is the impoverished, violence-plagued district surrounding the school. Edward P. Jefferson's neighborhood and Boston in general, has seen a disturbing increase in violent crimes in recent years. Our students live in neighborhoods where the sound of gunshots is a common, and where gang violence is prevalent. In addition, tremendous poverty contributes to grinding despair. We must challenge our students to value education as the pathway to success rather than the immediate satisfaction that comes from what they see valued on a daily basis: material possessions, monetary wealth, and status. Internally, many students

come to us with overwhelming needs. They are inadequately prepared academically. Their medical needs are unmet and occasionally acute as they may have never seen a dentist or eye doctor. Their parents struggle with unemployment, housing, illness, and addiction. (J. Reed grant proposal)

A full service school requires communication and understanding between parents, students, and the school. Edward P. Jefferson tries to work with families so that they are in sync with each other and the school, feeling as if together we form a powerful team working towards the same goals through different roles. Edward P. Jefferson understands that as an institution, the school cannot do it alone, and therefore has developed numerous collaborations with different community organizations to help make this possible.

As Edward P. Jefferson strives to educate the children through a rigorous academic program, they are also working with families to assist in delivering any vitally needed medical and social services to students, as they believe that a child will not be able to fully take advantage of the academics being presented to them, if there are more pressing unmet medical or social needs. This includes getting a child to the clinic for immunizations or glasses, providing psychological testing and counseling, and/or ensuring that students are eating three healthy meals a day. It has also included helping families access support from social service agencies, assisting parents who are looking for work or housing, and providing heating assistance or extra help around the holidays.

Edward P. Jefferson requires students, parents, guardians, and other family members to be actively involved in the school: all parent's must commit to providing 2 hours of service to the school each week. Some of these jobs include preparing meals, carpooling, cleaning, tutoring, answering phones, helping in the library, etc. Through this project, the researcher will

use some of those hours to require parents to attend workshops designed to help parents become more empowered as parents in their ability to help their child through the rigors of obtaining an education in a system which is foreign to many of them. In addition to the workshops, a tremendous amount of time and energy is placed in parent outreach. The principal sends weekly memos and phone messages, requires parents to engage with students about school work on weekends, and holds monthly parent meetings. Prior to the initiation of this project, the agenda for these meetings was filled with management issues and special events that were taking place. Once this project began, the focus of the meetings shifted to discussions that would effect change in the attitudes and behaviors of parents around effective parenting.

From the very inception of Edward P. Jefferson, parent involvement has had an integral role in what happens in the school. As this project progressed, the focus of how to get parents involved shifted more directly to how to get parents more effectively involved in their child's education. The mission of the school is to address the overwhelming academics, medical and mental health needs of students, as well as any other family issues, in order to best serve the families in ways that will help them help their child succeed at life. The researcher often finds that families have good intentions, but simply do not know how to support their children in meaningful and effective ways. It is the hope of the researcher that this project will foster in families a feeling of empowerment that will serve as a foundation for their active role in their child's education.

Research Questions

The research questions that will serve as the focus of this study are:

Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program feel more empowered to be involved in their child's education?

Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program change their level of involvement in their child's education?

Theoretical Rationale

Numerous researchers and decades of research have consistently found that children whose parents are involved in their child's education, experience many more personal benefits including overall greater academic success, than those whose parents are not involved (Kelley-Laine, 1998; Kessler- Skler & Baker, 2000). The theoretical framework used for the study are: parent involvement; its importance, its effect on the student, the family and the community and its impediments; the creation of an effective parent empowerment and education program through workshops and outreach; and parent empowerment through a social and cultural capital lens. The research and literature on these strands provide evidence which support the project's goal of empowering parents through activities, education programs, and workshops that will increase their involvement in their child's education.

The first theme of parent involvement: its importance, its effect on the student, family and community, and its impediments, provided an abundance of research supporting its significance. Educational researchers and practitioners agree that parent involvement is an important key to student success. It is recognized that when schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but also throughout life (Project for School Innovation, (PSI), 2003). When parents take an active role in their child's education, students are more likely to earn higher grades, enroll in higher level programs, attend school regularly, be promoted, pass classes, have better social skills, show improved behavior, adapt well to school, graduate, and go on to post-secondary schools (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

The National Educational Longitudinal Study, Keith et. al.(1988), also concluded using a nationally represented sample of students and their parents, that parental involvement has a powerful effect on student achievement in all subject areas. Johnson (1991) found that most parents want to be more involved in their child's education, but do not know how. Many feel inadequate, not literate enough, or do not know how to promote learning. According to research conducted by Kyle, McIntyre, Miller and Moore (2002), all parents care about their children and their education as well as want to do more for their children. Many of these parents see school as a "ticket" to a better life but often do not know how to help, have different goals for their children, have had negative school experiences themselves or may not know how to ask for help. This situation leaves the burden of making the parent-school connection, the duty of the school by recognizing these barriers and finding ways to overcome them.

As noted in the Cotton and Wikeland literature review of parent involvement (1989), many of the different studies compared the relationship between parent involvement and achievement by looking at the effects of parent involvement on student outcomes other than academic achievement. Some of the non-achievement factors included, attitude toward school or toward particular subject areas, self-concept, classroom behavior, time spent on homework, expectations for one's future, absenteeism, motivation, and retention. Many of the findings indicated that the relationship between parent involvement and these affective outcomes are both strong and positive and that parent involvement has positive effects on student attitudes and social behavior (Cotton and Wikeland, 1989). In addition, parents who are more involved in their child's education also became more involved in community activities with increased self-confidence and a more positive self-image. "...not only do parents become more effective as parents, but they become more effective as people...Once they saw they could do something

about their child's education, they saw they could also do something about their housing, their community and their jobs." (Bronfenbrenner, 1986)

Although there is a tremendous amount of literature establishing the importance of and the positive outcome associated with parent involvement, there is little that identifies which strategies have the greatest impact on actually involving parents. In a paper entitled *Parent Involvement: A Key to Student Success*, Lunenburg & Irby (2002) describe several different frameworks that may help develop or evaluate parent involvement programs. In this study seven different types of parent involvement programs and strategies for initiating or restructuring parent involvement programs are presented; several of these strategies were incorporated into the development of this project. Since a majority of the research suggests that what is essential to improving parent involvement in schools are not specific strategies, but rather how the chosen strategies are implemented, the study will be cognizant of how things are implemented when creating the workshops and deciding on the most effective types of outreach.

In *Reaching Out*, by Kyle, McIntyre, Miller and Moore (2002) the authors begin by impressing upon the reader, the importance of building trust through different activities with the families before implementing any programming. They need people who are visible in the community, who treat parents as experts about their children, solicit advice from them and continuously work to engage them in meaningful activities. Those involved in this study felt that family workshops, where a group of parents, students, teachers and school support staff worked together for the betterment of the children and families were the most effective method of connecting with families (Kyle, McIntyre, Miller and Moore, p.49). Using this as a basis of how to set-up the program, workshops will be designed around honoring the parents as the expert.

In 1995, Epstein presented six typologies of parent involvement, parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community, that were later adopted by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) as their standards for parent involvement. These are non-hierarchical types of involvement, which schools may use as a basis to implement activities and goals for student achievement (Lunenburg, p.9). The standards clearly delineate those practices that have been shown to lead to high-quality parent involvement programs. As a practical tool these standards will help promote meaningful parent and family participation (National PTA website). These are the guidelines that will be used to effectively implement the workshops of this project.

A formal empowerment and education program will assist parents by providing opportunities to be involved in their child's education in several different ways in order to create within them a feeling of empowerment and a greater comfort level with their child's school and education. This study will explore the effects of involving parents as partners and helping them develop skills that are meaningful to their child's education. In doing so, parents will work to increase their cultural and social capital.

"Cultural capital" first introduced by Bourdieu is defined as "the instruments... of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed" (1977a, p.488); a form of knowledge, skill, education, or any other advantages a person has which give them a higher status in society (Bourdieu, 1986). Also in "The Forms of Capital" (1986), Bourdieu distinguishes between social capital and cultural capital where social capital is then defined as the resources held by an individual based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support.

Throughout the project the terms are presented to parents as practicing beliefs, behaviors and attitudes that are valued in the dominant culture that are needed in order to successfully integrate into this culture for the benefit of the child. The key to building a community is empowerment and the result of the empowerment process is improved student learning (Cochrane and Dean 1991, Walberg, 1984a and Comer, 1980). The researcher believes that through parent workshops and instruction that explicitly teach parents the hidden curriculum of ‘cultural capital’ and ‘social capital’, many families can develop new skills to practice on a daily basis to build this capital at home. Dimaggio, 1982; Mehan, et al, 1996 believe that social and cultural capital can be acquired if you teach it.

As a school seeking to empower families, there is an underlying desire to provide opportunities to change their current socioeconomic status (economic capital) and increase their social capital. This can be obtained by providing their children with numerous opportunities to advance in life through education, as well as by providing families access to other opportunities such as job training, GED and/or ESL classes. With parents who are motivated to do better for themselves and want more for their children, it becomes easier to keep them invested. From the researchers experience, families who have lived through generations of poverty and who believe that this is how it is, are harder and sometimes unwilling to change. This creates an additional challenge of having to shift their views on the permanence of this cycle.

It is the hope of the researcher that with the school being more involved in the lives of their families, the students may be the one to break the cycle or the families themselves may be able to bring themselves out of poverty. Typically, parents from low socioeconomic status, minority and/or single-parent families are those who are the least involved in their child’s education (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002, Epstein, 1995, Lareau 2000). This project has a goal of

educating and empowering parents by providing them with certain tools that will build in them confidence in the fact that they are the experts on their children and are an extremely valuable asset and resource in their child's education.

Significance of the study

The issue of parent involvement is recognized as important to the success of students by nearly all educational improvement efforts. So much so, that major legislation such as Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and Title 1, No Child Left Behind mandates, have made parent's involvement in their child's education a national priority. But despite all of the legal mandates, schools still find it difficult to effectively engage parents.

Several risk factors have been noted as having a significant influence on student outcomes. The four most commonly used to measure risks to a child's future and socioeconomic outcomes are: having a mother with less than a high school education, living on welfare, living in a single parent home, and being raised in a home where English is not the primary language (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, p. 68). These are the families this study has targeted. "In addition to academic achievement, an important outcome of education is an educated, productive, and engaged citizenry (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, p.113). Since parent involvement is related to these factors, students who lack parent involvement are more likely to dropout of school and are more likely to be unemployed, and earn less than those who completed high school. Hispanics are dropping out at a rate of 28 percent and blacks at 13 percent as compared to whites at 7 percent (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, 2003). For all racial and ethnic groups, the unemployment rate decreases with increased education. In addition, there are several other benefits to society as a whole when students stay in school. With the completion of higher levels

of education comes increased literacy proficiency levels and individuals who are more active civic participants who are more likely to vote (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, 2003).

This project will help create school wide programming that will be used to increase overall parent involvement at the school. The parent population is comprised of low-income, minority, single-parent households who are typically the least involved groups in their child's education. Through the researchers experience, many of our students leave and go on to high schools where parent involvement is crucial to their child's success. Oftentimes, to the detriment of the child's placement at these schools, parents are not prepared to support their children in these ways. As a result of this project, new ongoing programming will occur to help ensure that parents are no longer enabled to avoid direct involvement in the education of their children but instead are empowered to be partners with the school in the education of their children.

The parent empowerment programming is designed to create within parents a feeling of empowerment that will lead to a greater comfort level as well as an increased motivation to be more involved in their child's education. Having parents who feel more empowered and prepared to help their child will translate into the many benefits found to exist among students with engaged parents such as, higher grades and test scores, better attendance, improved behavior, better social skills and higher graduation rates (Henderson, A & Mapp, K., Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002).

There are tremendous incentives to staying in school and this is more likely with parental involvement. To society as a whole, economically, the estimated tax revenue loss from every male between the ages of 25 and 34 years of age who did not complete high school would be approximately \$944 billion, with cost increases to public welfare and crime at \$24 billion (Thorstensen, 2004). Individually, high school graduates, on the average, earn \$9,245 more per

year than high school dropouts (NCES, Employment Policy Foundation, 2002). A woman with a high school diploma earns a salary just above the poverty line for a family of three (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003c). In 2000, the median earnings for black females with a high school diploma and no college was \$20,000 less than the median earnings for black females with a bachelor's degree or higher (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003c). In today's workplace, only 40% of adults who dropped out of high school are employed, compared to 60% of adults who completed high school and 80% for those with a bachelor's degree (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003c).

It also has a profound effect on crime in our country. 75% of America's state prison inmates are high school dropouts (Harlow, 2003). 59% of America's federal prison inmates did not complete high school (Harlow, 2003). High school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetime (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003a). A 1% increase in high school graduation rates would save approximately \$1.4 billion in incarceration costs, or about \$2,100 per each male high school graduate (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003a). A one-year increase in average education levels would reduce arrest rates by 11% (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003a). Its effect on literacy is also profound. The cost to taxpayers of adult illiteracy is \$224 billion per year (National Reading Panel, 1999). U.S. companies lose nearly \$40 billion annually because of illiteracy (National Reading Panel, 1999). In regards to health, teen girls in the bottom 20% of basic reading and math skills are five times more likely to become mothers over a two-year high school period than teen girls in the top 20% (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003b). Male and female students with low academic achievement are twice as likely to become parents by their senior year of high school compared to students with high academic achievement (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003b).

From this research, it is evident that getting parents involved affects everyone. Having students who remain in school and excel in school benefits our entire society not just the individuals directly involved. Although this study will only address the effects the workshops and outreach has on empowering parents, it has the underlying goal of long-term family improvement and student gains.

Design of the Study

A qualitative evaluative case study method with several quantitative measures will be used to determine the effects of a parent empowerment and education program on parental involvement. This qualitative study specifically examines the social phenomenon of parent empowerment and its effects in an effort to understand the situation as part of the context of increased parent involvement (Merriam, p. 6). The researcher will serve as the primary instrument of data collection, using intense fieldwork in order to gain a holistic overview of the context of the study. An attempt will be made to fully understand the situation through research by recognizing themes, developing abstractions, concepts, hypotheses or theories in the analysis in order to create an end product of a richly descriptive qualitative study (Miles and Huberman, p. 6).

Parents were chosen either because they are currently not active participants in their child education and the researcher hopes to affect change in this group or because they will be reliable participants who will provide the additional data needed to complete the study. Information- rich case studies will provide a great deal of information about the central issues important to the purpose of the research (Merriam, p. 61). Further document analysis will provide a mix of description and analysis and this analysis will highlight concepts originally presented in the theoretical framework in order to identify recurring patterns (Merriam p. 11).

The project began with a pilot of researcher generated questionnaires and interviews. These were given to a separate group of parents not involved in the actual study to determine the effectiveness of the instruments. Once the instruments effectiveness was determined, the initial parent meeting was scheduled. The initial parent meeting was an informal informational session for the 6 parents taking part in the study and several others who were interested in the programming totaling around 30 parents. The parents ate a meal together, which helped create and collegial environment and facilitate the informal conversation that took place. This helped in fostering greater trust and comfort levels with the researcher. At this meeting, all parents were notified that participation was voluntary and that they have the option to withdraw at any time. Parents also went over all human subject information and signed the informed consent forms. The researcher ensured that all ethical issues were constantly being evaluated.

At the end of the dinner, parents were given a questionnaire to elicit their initial feelings about each topic in order to determine where they were at the beginning of the study. For example, some of the questions they had to address were about their current understanding of what their child is learning in school, how to help their child with homework, what resources are available to the child, etc. Each had a rating scale that would then be compared with answers derived at the end of the project. The initial parent meeting determined the format and topics for the remainder of the parent workshops. Workshops were presented every other month, during different time slots to accommodate different parents. The workshops began with a large group discussion on a broad topic such as helping with homework, the effect of parenting on children's vocabulary development, social and cultural capital, discussing with your child ways to improve at school, and effective parent-teacher conferences. Any parent who wanted to attend was encouraged to be a part of this workshop. Then the smaller focus group of parents who have

agreed to be part of this study, moved into a discussion on what was covered in the workshop and how they were going to apply this to working with their own child. At the end of the workshop, each parent had to answer a few semi-structured interview questions or a questionnaire.

Before the workshop series began, it was determined that the school needed to increase opportunities for two-way communication; to this point, most of the communication was school-to-home. The school already mandated that parents come to the school five times a year for a beginning of the year Barbeque, an Open House and three progress reports, all which were faculty driven. To begin improving the family to school communication, the school sent home weekly checklists which parents had to complete and sign indicating that they had done their service hours to the school, seen and discussed their child's completed homework and discussed any discipline issues the child had that week, they were also encouraged to write in any questions or comments on the form.

In addition, one of the progress report nights was changed so that it was led by the child. Students would prepare polished presentations to deliver to their parent(s) about what they had done so far in school in each subject. Parents would be given a form to complete, where they were encouraged to find both positive things to say and determine areas they felt the child could improve on. This would begin the conversation about the report cards which parents were then encouraged to discuss in more detail at home. For each report card they would also be required to sit with their child, read the report card together and discuss it. They would be asked to complete a form about things they discussed and sign and return the form to school. Parents would also be called twice a month by their child's advisor, or sometimes by a classroom teacher, and would be

encouraged to come visit classes and to come and talk to the Head of School or Principal at any time.

The workshops began with a four workshop series on helping your child succeed in school, which included topics such as communicating with your child, the parent teacher conference and helping with homework. After each workshop, participants completed surveys on what they were taking away from the workshop and overall sense of empowerment. The next meeting was focused on addressing any concerns with the school and a mini teacher presentation about what is going on in their classes. The sixth workshop was on cultural and social capital, and parent language use. A final meeting provided an opportunity to get parent feedback on workshops and the family-school partnership. The school will also offer an additional workshop series to parents about adolescents and healthy communication about sex and relationships and has presented information on different parent education opportunities such as GED, ESL and computer classes.

All sessions and interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed for similarities, differences and themes. Questionnaires were completed at the beginning of the project, after a parent workshop and/or meeting, and once again at the end of the project. The ultimate goal was to determine if parents felt more empowered and invested after attending workshops focused on empowerment. A final interview took place to answer such questions as: What did they learn from each of the workshops? What was the best thing they were taking away from the workshops? What was their overall feeling about the time spent at these workshops? Have they noticed any changes in the child? What part, if any, should remain a part of the school? Should anything else be provided as a workshop? etc.

In order to triangulate the data and account for internal validity, minimum teacher feedback was solicited to determine if they noticed any change in parents. The instrument that was used was a researcher generated questionnaire to determine what changes they noticed in parents during this programming. These included questions such as: What changes, if any did teachers see in the parents? Were parents more active participants during parent conferences? In addition, the researcher triangulated data by, checking interpretations with participants, keeping constant and regular contact with participants, asking others to review data instruments and interpretations, and by being transparent about any biases and assumptions held (Merriam, 1998).

To determine the effect on participation and increased feelings of empowerment, a comparison of descriptions from the pre and post participation information were made. In the post participation data, changes in the reported rating levels of empowerment and actual involvement in parents were measured. This was done by measuring changes in their responses to open and closed ended questions in parent, teacher and student interviews and questionnaires, as well as in the actual increase in the number of entries into the parent sign in log, the number of times a parent signed the student homework folder and the number of entries into the family correspondence log. Triangulation of all the data collected provided a greater sense of validity. An intense description and analysis of all the information collected was made in order to understand comprehensively the parents and their needs to develop general statements that can be applied about any regularity in social structure and process (Merriam p. 29). It is the hope of the researcher that valuable insights into effective methods of empowering and involving parents will evolve for future educators to implement.

Limitations of the study

There are numerous factors effecting the conclusions of this study. The first being the fact that the school Principal is the primary researcher for the project; this creates an immediate limitation as people may respond to questions in a manner that they feel will please the Principal, rather than what they really believe or the actual truth. The researcher hopes that by clearly articulating this belief and discussing its effect, that participants will in turn be more honest. In addition, the researcher will pay particular attention to researcher bias and ensuring that the findings are accurately presented. This will be addressed in the triangulation of the data and having multiple sources assist with interpretation.

An additional limitation was parent choice. Half of the parents were chosen because they had already proven to be reliable and would follow through on all the pieces of the study. Also, parents were chosen based on their ability to communicate effectively with the researcher in English. Half of the sample were chosen because they had previously proven themselves to be unreliable, therefore affecting their attendance at the workshops as it is this population of parents that the researcher is attempting to create change in. Sample size was a limitation; a small sample was used and the research was done over a short time frame, not allowing for substantial, internalized growth. With all of these limitations it will be difficult to decipher and partial out which variables caused which responses. These limiting factors skew the results because this type of program is best suited for those parents who are not involved for different reasons including language barriers. Parents overall feelings about their own education and comfort with school and administrators may also cause some inconsistency with answering questions honestly as opposed to how they feel the researcher may want them answered.

Definition of Terms

Low-income- an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount

Parent- this is not limited to the biological parent, many of the children in the study are being raised by a significant caregiver who is not their biological parent.

No Child Left Behind- The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind)* is a landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools. With passage of *No Child Left Behind*, Congress reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*--the principal federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. In amending *ESEA*, the new law represents a sweeping overhaul of federal efforts to support elementary and secondary education in the United States. It is built on four common-sense pillars: accountability for results; an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research; expanded parental options; and expanded local control and flexibility.

Title 1- A section of No Child Left Behind Act whose focus is improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged. Title I, Part A, is intended to help ensure that all children have the opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach proficiency on challenging state academic standards and assessments.

Goals 2000: Elementary and Secondary Schools Act- The Goals 2000: Educate America Act helps states and communities realize the national commitment to improving education and ensuring that *all* children reach high academic standards. It encourages States and districts to plan strategically for and realize school change. By initiating, supporting, and sustaining coordinated school reform planning and implementation, Goals 2000 focuses improvement

efforts on high expectations and achievement results for all students. This results-focused comprehensive effort is known as standards-based education reform. Standards-based reform drives institutional changes toward improved teaching and learning and high student performance by connecting otherwise fragmented systems. Goals 2000, a strong force in the implementation of such aligned reform, supports school improvement efforts designed around three over-arching principles:

- Students learn best when they, their teachers, administrators, and the community share clear and common expectations for education. States, districts, and schools need to agree on challenging content and performance standards that define what children should know and be able to do.
- Student achievement improves in environments that support learning to high expectations. The instructional system must support fulfillment of those expectations. School improvement efforts need to include broad parent and community involvement, school organization, coordinated resources--including educational technology, teacher preparation and professional development, curriculum and instruction, and assessments--all aligned to agreed upon standards.
- Student success stems from concentrating on results. Education systems must be designed to focus and report on progress in meeting the pre-set standards. Education reform needs to be results oriented through reliable and aligned means that answer the critical, bottom-line question; to what extent are students and schools meeting the standards? Continuous improvement requires carefully developed accountability systems for interpreting and responding to results and supporting improved student performance for *all* children.

Overview of the study:

The second chapter, which follows this introduction, will review the body of literature that is relevant to the understanding how schools can help parents to become actively involved in the education of their children and to feel empowered to serve as effective advocates for their children.

The third chapter will provide for the reader the overall research design. This design includes the methods used in gathering the relevant data, reasons for using and treatment of these

data, methods used for analysis of the data elements, sampling techniques, and methodology of data reporting.

Chapter four will then report on the findings discovered from the collected and analyzed data. The summation, discussion, and any recommendations for practice will be concluded in chapter five.

The probable contents:

Chapter 1	Statement of the Problem and its Significance
Chapter 2	Review of the Literature
Chapter 3	Research Methodology
Chapter 4	Findings
Chapter 5	Summery of Findings, Implications of the Research, and Suggestions for Further Stud

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

Introduction

Slavin and Madden (2001) would argue that parent involvement is one of the most crucial pieces needed to raise the achievement level of minority and disadvantaged children. In the context of this study, the researcher hopes to create a parent empowerment and involvement program that will illicit feelings of empowerment that will then lead to greater parental involvement. The project uncovers several important themes, which serve as the basis for this literature review, providing an in depth background on several important bodies of literature as they relate to the topic. The literature examines the impact of effective parent involvement and its role in a child's success.

The chapter is divided into summaries of various bodies of literature on parent involvement which are as follows; the importance of parent involvement, its effect on the student, the family and the community; its impediments; the role of school leadership; and the

creation of an effective parent empowerment and education program through workshops and outreach with a focus on introducing and building social and cultural capital.

The effect and importance of parent involvement on Students, Families, Schools and Communities

“Education of our children is arguably society’s most important task, profoundly shaping the communities in which we all live. Achievement and success in many facets of our culture depend critically on formal education. Education is widely perceived as the only viable weapon against the poverty, drug abuse, crime and teenage pregnancy that derail many citizens, particularly in the inner cities, from realizing their productive human potential. Beyond its value to individuals, education is the cornerstone of societal advancement.” (p. 329, Allen & Hood, 2000). With education serving as the key to success why is there an existing inequality within the educational system lending itself to an achievement gap among schoolchildren based on socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity? (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; De Civita, Pagani, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2004) Addressing this issue must begin with leadership that recognizes the importance of parental involvement.

It has been determined throughout various pieces of research and literature that one avenue which has demonstrated a consistent positive effect on a child’s performance in school is increasing parent involvement (Fan & Chen, 2001 and Jeynes, 2003). In addition, addressing this issue may not only help the child and their educational attainment but may simultaneously effect the current achievement gap by helping to mediate other outside factors that negatively effect a child’s school performance such as the effects that poverty, a parents' educational attainment, race and ethnicity (De Civita et al., 2004; Eamon, 2002).

Parent involvement in a child's education is the most consistent indicator of whether a child is successful in school (Warner, 1997). This section will examine the impact that parent involvement has on the student, parent, school and community. Parent Involvement, as defined by the National PTA on its website (<http://www.pta.org/>), is the participation of parents in every facet of the education and development of children from birth to adulthood, recognizing that parents are the primary influence in their children's lives. As parents have such a strong impact on a child's success, it is interesting to note that the four most commonly used factors to measure risks to a child's future and socioeconomic outcomes are: having a mother with less than a high school education, living on welfare, living in a single parent home, and being raised in a home where English is not the primary language (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, p. 68). These are also the families who are hardest to engage in school involvement. The children who are most at risk for a troubled future with bleak socioeconomic outcomes are those whose parents are the most difficult to engage, thus, they are the most important to engage (Li, G. & Christ, T, 2007, Gilles, V., 2006). This makes for an even bigger challenge for administrators serving these families.

There is a current need, especially in schools that serve low-income families, to find effective ways to get parents more involved. Minority and/or low-income parents are often under-represented among involved parents. This is due to several factors including, work commitments and conditions, child care, personal school experiences and/or sheer intimidation (Heymann & Earle, 2000; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Pena, 2000). Working around these factors becomes necessary, as it has been shown that when parents from these backgrounds get involved, disadvantaged children have the most to gain (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989).

According to Lareau (1987), education with parental involvement then becomes an integration of home and school. In order to better assist students from these families become

self-reliant adults who will be active participants in the society which they will contribute, they will need constant encouragement, high expectations and support from their parents throughout their school years. Epstein (1996, 2001) concluded that children do better academically when they see their parents as having active roles in supporting academic goals that are in line with and supportive of the school.

Halle, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney (1997) determined that an important measure of parent involvement in the home is the parent's encouragement of children completing their homework and having discussions about school with their child. With a sample of 41 families, they were able to determine that there were moderate correlations between the frequency of conversations about school between parents and children and the children's standardized reading test scores. In another study of nearly 25,000 middle school students across the country they found that the factor with the most significant relationship to student achievement was parents and children engaging in discussions about school-related topics at home (Sui-Chi, E. and Williams, J., 1996).

Slavin and Madden (2001) would argue that parent involvement is one of the most crucial pieces needed to raise the achievement level of minority and disadvantaged children. In addition, the benefits do not stop at the student but extend to the family, the school and the community. (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) When parents engage with their child in learning activities at home, provide for their basic needs, and communicate with the school, they can help mitigate the negative impacts of poverty and student drop out (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001).

There has been a tremendous push to recognizing the importance of parent involvement from the legal front as it has consistently found that parent involvement has a crucial impact on

so many factors effecting students. Legal mandates that address parent involvement are Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which mandates promoting parent involvement in school activities, intensifying the parent-school-community partnerships, and having representation on state and local school improvement plans; No Child Left Behind, (NCLB), Title 1 and the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) is a landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America's schools. Parental involvement has always been a centerpiece of Title I, but for the first time in the history of the ESEA, it has a specific statutory definition, giving it more relevance and importance.

The statute defines parental involvement “as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including, ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning, ensuring that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school, ensuring that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child, and that other activities are carried out,” (Parental Involvement). [Section 9101(32), ESEA.]. It is important to note that the term “parent” includes in addition to a natural parent, a legal guardian or other person standing in *loco parentis* (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare) [Section 9101(31), ESEA.].

The call to increase parent involvement has incited a big push for new parent involvement initiatives. James, D.W., Jurich, S., & Estes, S. (2001) identified and analyzed 38 school programs that demonstrated achievement gains, and Carey, N., Lewis, L., & Farris, E. (1998) surveyed 900 schools nationwide to learn about different parent involvement. Both

Congress and Administration believe that the chief objective of increasing parent involvement in Title I is to improve academic performance of the students. With the shared responsibilities for high student performance, parent compacts, Adequate Yearly Progress, highly qualified teachers, and the “right to know” provisions of Title I, parents may begin to apply a great deal more scrutiny to what is going on in the school, but only if they know how. With the many new requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, which include increasing parent involvement in order to better support children, there is a big push for schools to find the most effective way to nurture parent involvement initiatives.

No Child Left Behind supports parent involvement initiatives as research has overwhelmingly demonstrated the positive effect that parent involvement has on children's academic achievement (Comer 1980; Epstein 1983, 1984). The reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title 1, and NCLB mandates have also made parents' involvement in their child's education a national priority. Unfortunately, despite legal mandates and all of the knowledge of its' benefits, there are still many reasons that schools still find it difficult to engage parents. These will be further explored in the impediments to involvement section.

The “lowered presence” of working parents relinquishes control of their children to the schools (Lareau, 1987) which is often viewed by teachers as an educational deficiency of working parents (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Caspe & Lopez, 2006; Chavkin and Williams, 1987). Parents may not realize that even with no training, parents who help their child after school have some effect on a child's school performance, but when they are provided with assistance on how to effectively do this, the children do even better (Epstein, 1987; Heyman and Earle, 2000). This knowledge in turn builds confidence in the parents and helps them engage

with the school with more confidence in their ability to be a more effective advocate for their child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, Finn, 1998; Heyman & Earle, 200; O'Connor, 2001). In addition, when parents are involved they will feel a sense of pride, as parents often use their children's academic success as a measurement of their own accomplishments (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, Finn, 1998; Heyman & Earle, 2000; O'Connor, 2001).

According to Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007), "Partnerships among schools, families, and community groups are not a luxury-they are a necessity" (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies, 2007, p.1). It has been determined that a lack of parent involvement is related to students who are more likely to dropout of school and are more likely to be unemployed, and earn less than those who completed high school (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, 2003; Mapp, K., 2004; Orfield, G., Losen, D. Wald., J. & Swanson, C., 2004). When students do not remain in school there is a tremendous cost to society. They often perpetuate the cycle of poverty with their own children or end up in prison (Hair, Ling, & Cochran, 2003; Harlow, C. W., 2003). Hispanics are dropping out at a rate of 28 percent and blacks at 13 percent as compared to whites at 7 percent (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, 2003). According to Paul Barton in a Policy Information Report, *One Third of A Nation, Rising Drop-out Rates and Declining Opportunity*, (2005) he states that:

"Most of these youth (drop-outs), at best, are headed for a life of sporadic employment and low wages. For them, establishing a stable family and raising children who can make it in our society and economy can be problematic, given the long-term decline in the earnings prospects of dropouts, both in absolute and relative terms... These lost youth will wander without a map on the edges of the economy and could be at risk of falling prey to alternatives to earning a living in the regular economy. They are likely to father and

mother children ill-equipped to do better, thus perpetuating a down-ward cycle of economic or social failure.” (p. 40)

For all racial and ethnic groups, the unemployment rate decreases with increased education. In addition to a more productive, skilled society, there are additional benefits to the society as a whole when students stay in school. With the completion of higher levels of education is increased literacy proficiency levels and individuals who are more active civic participants and are more likely to vote (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, 2003).

With drop out rates soaring to the highest in 35 years, Communities in Schools have declared it a national crisis that has a serious impact on our entire society (Communities in Schools, 2005). The cost is huge. To themselves, dropouts will earn about \$260,000 less over their lifetime than a high school graduate (Rouse, 2005). To the nation the dropouts from the Class of 2007 will cost \$329 billion in lost wages, taxes and productivity over their lifetime (Alliance for Excellent Education 2007) and 17 billion in Medicaid and health care expenses (Alliance for Excellent Education 2006a). Parents play a crucial role in keeping young people in school (Horn & West, 1992). “If literacy levels in the United States were the same as those in Sweden, the U.S. GDP would rise by approximately \$463 billion and tax revenues would increase by approximately \$162 billion.” (Carnevale and Desrochers, 2002). It is clear that this is not only a problem for low-income or minority families and those that it is happening to, but that it is a national problem that needs to be addressed by everyone.

“Certain characteristics of parent and student lives underlie conditions for dropping out of school—including parent income and education, whether a student lives with both parents, and students changing schools frequently. “ (Barton, 2005, p. 43) It is a school’s duty, in particular from the leadership of the school to acknowledge this and do something to minimize its impact.

It is evident that getting parents involved affects everyone not just those you are working with. Having students who remain in school benefits our entire society not just the individuals involved. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003, 2007; Harlow, C. W., 2003; Mapp, K., 2004). The stakes are high and in order to compete in such a competitive global economy it is the researchers belief that schools need to work towards engaging families, keeping kids in school and closing the current achievement gap.

Impediments to Involvement - Why it is Difficult but Important

The need to find ways to get parents more effectively involved is critical, especially in schools that serve low-income families. As noted in the Cotton literature review of parent involvement, there are still many reasons that schools find it difficult to engage parents, some of these include: parents feel unwelcome or intimidated in the school, parents have language barriers, some with an inherent mistrust of the institution, and parents may have inflexible work schedules (Hidalgo et al., 1995, Ogbu, 2003, Sanchez, 2002). Minority and/or low-income parents are often under-represented among involved parents for many reasons, some clear and some unclear. What is clear is that when parents from these backgrounds are involved, it is their “disadvantaged” children who have the most to gain (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989), with these benefits extending to students, families, schools and communities (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). These students are experiencing higher grades and test scores, better attendance, improved behavior, better social skills and higher graduation rates (Project for School Innovation, 2003).

A 1996 National Center for Educational Statistics report (2002) compared white parent

involvement to minority parent involvement and found that the biggest barrier for 87% of minority parents was the lack of time that they had to get involved (NCES, 2000; O'Connor 2001, Chavkin & Williams, 1987). The study found that in schools where most of the students were white, over 60 percent of their parents volunteered and were involved compared to 30 percent in predominantly minority schools. It also reported that in schools that were 95 percent white, only 24 percent reported having difficulty being able to help their child with homework, as opposed to the 65 percent of minority parents from majority minority schools who reported having difficulty.

In another study, Lee & Bowen (2006) looked explicitly at the level and effect of parental involvement on students' academic achievement by ethnicity, poverty, and parental educational attainment. The sample consisted of 415 families, of which, 51% were European American, 34% African American, and 15% Latino, in addition 40% of the participants were receiving free or reduced price lunches (low-income families). The study looked at the effect of several different factors and determined several outcomes. First, it reported that European American children had the highest academic achievement followed by African Americans and then Latinos. It also reported that students whose parents had higher education levels performed better than students whose parents had obtained lower levels of education and that European American parents who were not low income, were more involved in school activities and had more discussions about education with their children more often than African American, Latino and parents of children from low-income households. Lastly, it found that African- Americans, Latinos and parents from low-income households were less involved at school, did not discuss education at home frequently, and had lower educational aspirations for their children; (Lee & Bowen, 2006). This study is not an isolated case but what seems to be the trend at many

different schools.

With this understanding, the key is determining how to translate this knowledge into action and bring about change among those parents who are usually the least involved. When parents engage with their child in learning activities at home, provide for their basic needs, and communicate with the school, they can help mitigate the negative impacts of poverty and student drop out (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). It has been shown that when schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but also throughout life. When parents take an active role in their child's education, students are more likely to earn higher grades, enroll in higher level programs, attend school regularly, be promoted, pass, have better social skills, show improved behavior, adapt well to school and graduate to go on to post-secondary schools (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Numerous researchers and decades of research have consistently found that children whose parents are involved in their child's education, experience many more personal benefits including overall greater academic success, than those whose parents are not involved (Kelley-Laine, 1998 and Kessler- Sklar & Baker, 2000). The National Educational Longitudinal Study, Keith et. al., also concluded with a nationally represented sample of students and their parents, that parental involvement has a powerful effect on student achievement in all subject areas. Johnson (1991) found that most parents want to be more involved in their child's education, but do not know how. Many feel inadequate, not literate enough or do not know how to promote learning.

According to research conducted by Kyle, McIntyre, Miller and Moore, (2002) all parents care about their children and their education as well as want to do more for their children. Many of these parents see school as a "ticket" to a better life but often do not know how to help,

have different goals for their children, have had negative school experiences themselves or may not know how to ask for help. This situation leaves the burden of making the parent-school connection, the duty of the school and its leadership to recognize these barriers and find ways to overcome them.

Leadership Needed to Bring About Parent Involvement

Administrators must recognize the urgency of improving the way parents interact with the school and take immediate action. Parent involvement is a critical piece for student success among all students. Unfortunately, this occurrence does not happen naturally in many settings, in particular at those schools serving families with circumstances such as: a high percentage of low-income families, families from different racial and cultural backgrounds, families that are headed by adults who do not have a high level of education, have low literacy levels, have language barriers and who are often in jobs with inflexible hours (Lopez, et al 2001, Ladson-Billings, 1994, Pena, 2000). In schools serving this population, it is paramount that the administration ensures that a major aspect of what they do involves a commitment and vision which is dedicated to parent involvement.

The school leader plays a crucial role in fostering a successful partnership between families and the school. To build these partnerships, the school leader must provide the vision and tools to create this community. It is often established in trust (Kyle, McIntyre, Miller & Moore, 2002). The importance of parent involvement must be embedded in the school's culture. This can be done by cultivating a student and parent centered community as an everyday work of the entire school, through responsibility within the institutional life of the school (Starratt, 2003, p. xiii). The school leader must ensure that the vision is clear and that those involved are

committed to a learning organization that holds a “shared vision of the future they wish to create” (Senge, 1990, p.9). When the school community, led by the administration, is focused on parent involvement, individuals will act inherently in line with this vision. The creation of this parent involved “learning organization” encompasses communities where people are working to “continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire” (Senge, 1990, p.3); a community where families are working in partnership with the school for the long-term benefit of the children.

A leader dedicated to working in schools with families who have been living in generational poverty, are recent immigrants or who have low levels of educational attainment must walk the extra distance to ensure that these families acquire all the skills they need in order to best help their child succeed school (Lee & Bowen, 2006). The ideal educational leader would be capable of providing intellectual and moral leadership that is “characterized by a blend of human, professional and civic concerns (while) cultivating an environment for learning that is humanly filling and socially responsible” (Starratt, 2004, p.3). This environment would instill in everyone involved a desire to acquire the toolset and skills necessary to provide an education that “intrinsically adds value to students’ lives and prepares them for responsible adulthood” (Starratt, 2004, p.2). An ethical leader would be grounded in a strong sense of responsibility, authenticity and presence and demand the same characteristics in everyone around them especially, their staff, students and families. As presented in Starratt’s book Ethical Leadership, (2004) these ideals would be encapsulated in an ethical school leader with a moral responsibility to three foundational virtues, the virtue of taking responsibility, the virtue of being authentic, and the virtue of being fully present.

It is a leader's duty to all involved to create an environment where "the virtues of this responsibility, authenticity and presence interpenetrate and enrich one another" (Starratt, 2004, p.9) in a method that is in line with their personal value system. As a leader in this environment, the importance of family commitment must be a personal value, and be a responsibility that is upheld and kept in the forefront of daily priorities. Starratt (2004) discusses the human capability to be empathetic and understanding of the conditions and injustices that people face in their daily lives but as a school leader, in particular in school serving an economically disadvantaged population it is a responsibility. As the educational leader you must understand how each piece of the picture: the school, its staff, the student, the family and the community, fit together in order to ensure quality learning for the students.

To be effective, school leaders must be able to tap into peoples' commitment and capacity to learn at all levels. Such leaders are charged with enrollment in this collective vision, "Shared vision is not an idea...rather, a force in people's hearts" (Senge, 1990, p. 206) that binds them together and moves them forward. It is active and powerful and has a visceral feeling that bonds others together. It answers the question, "What do we want to create and where do we want to be at the end of the journey?". Shared vision unifies the community to mobilize in the same direction. When the organization is working in tandem based on a shared vision, real progress can be made. In a school environment, if everyone knows and believes in this vision around the importance of parent involvement, which clearly states; these are the standards, this is what we believe and here is how we will get there, the day to day decisions that are made, will be made with this vision in mind; empowering families (Senge, 1990).

"Schools teach their culture best when they embody purposes, values, norms and obligations in their everyday activities... The heartbeats of leadership and schools are

strengthened when words and deeds are one.” (Sergiovanni, 1992, p.112) As the everyday work of a school leader rarely has easy answers; Heifitz (1998) discusses how adaptive challenges force you to address the gap between beliefs that people hold and the realities that they face (1998, p. 254) in dealing with this difficult challenge of getting disempowered parents involved. In dealing with disempowered parents, very often, how things look on the outside are far from reality and empowering these parents will require adaptive work because there are no easy technical solution.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) state the school principal has the power to be the gatekeeper and the gate-opener for all, with their ability to empower others. Leithwood (2003) also found that it is in the principal’s hands to ensure real change occurs. This can be done when the school leader commits to ensuring several key actions are addressed. The researcher believes that parents need to be taught about social capital and to understand the social capital they bring to the table and see its value as useful and not a deficit; they need to be taught how to acquire more, they need to feel that the school is working to create meaningful partnerships; helping them advocate for equity; and have a diverse staff who also believes in empowering the families (Lareau, 2000). The school must teach parents to demand some of the things that middle class parents understand as their rights as parents. These include: how to help intervene or guide a child’s schooling by making specific requests, provide additional resources at home, request specific programming (such as gifted classes or remedial services), ask for a tutor, complain about performance, or address issues about the school’s academic programming (Lareau, 2000).

The creation of an effective parent empowerment and education program through workshops and outreach

There is no one formula that works for all schools. Often some parent involvement programs set parents up for failure, insult families, treat them as victims or as stereotypical uncaring families creating an even bigger chasm between the school and the families (Lopez et al, 2001). Many schools fail to get parents involved because they have chosen to create systems that build mistrust; they do not acknowledge a parents methods of involvement, or do not welcome the parents and make them feel inadequate (Baker, Denessen, & Brus-Laven, 2007). Schools committed to increasing parent involvement can not ignore certain factors that create barriers to their involvement.

It is not enough to say that parents are welcome; it is the duty of the school's leadership and staff to create events that foster personal connection between the school and its parents so that parents feel comfortable and welcome in their children's schools (Caspé & Lopez, 2006; Resto & Alston, 2006). A school must understand that marginalized parents are often from a low income family, from another country and speak a different language, or have different customs and beliefs; these parents often do not feel confident enough to deal with school personnel or in their ability to help their children (Anderson, K. J. & Minke, K. M. (2007); Auerbach, S. (2007). A school can get more parents involved and help them feel successful by taking small initiatives such as providing translation services, not only for materials sent home, but for meetings and workshops in order to not create another scenario where a parent feels inadequate and cannot help their child (Resto & Alston, 2006). In addition, schools can vary the times of events so that parent who have work commitments with inflexible hours, are not characterized as uncaring parents because they have trouble attending the meetings (Gillies, 2006).

Many of the different studies focused on comparing the relationship between parent involvement and academic achievement (Dearing, E, Kreider, H., Simpkins, S., & Weiss, H.

(2007); Blank, M.J., Berg, A. C., & Melaville, A. (2006), while others look at additional effects of parent involvement, not only on student academic achievement, but also on outcomes such as attitude toward school or toward particular subject areas, self-concept, classroom behavior, time spent on homework, expectations for one's future, absenteeism, motivation, and retention (Jeynes, 2007; Morrow, L., Kuhn, M. and Schwanenflugel, P., 2006). All of these studies indicate that the relationship between parent involvement and these affective outcomes are both strong and positive. Research studies found that parent involvement has positive effects on student attitudes as well as social behavior (Cotton, 1989). Steinberg et al. (1996) found that the type of involvement that most impacted student achievement was physically getting the parents to the schools, and attending school programs.

In a paper entitled *Parent Involvement: A Key to Student Success*, Lunenburg & Irby (2002) describe several different frameworks that may help develop or evaluate parent involvement programs. With descriptions of seven types parent involvement programs and strategies for initiating or restructuring plans around parent involvement, it serves as groundwork to begin implementation of a program. The seven parent involvement models discussed were: Gordon's Systems Approach, the Systems Development Corporation (SDC) study, Berger's Role Categories, Chavkin and Williams' Parent Involvement Roles, Honig's Early childhood Education Model, Jones' Level of Parent Involvement, and Epstein's Typologies.

The Gordon's System Approach was a two-fold study in which Gordon (1979) developed a useful way of describing parent involvement using four levels: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and the macrosystem, In Gordon's social systems view he found that changes at the highest level, the macrosystem (changes in social, economic, and political aspects of the larger society) would make the biggest impact. This study also created categories that could be used to

help parents by determining the role they should play when they interact with schools. Some of these roles are; teach your own child, decision maker, classroom volunteer, etc.

The System Development Corporation (SDC), is a California-based research firm, that conducted a large scale study of parent involvement. They created categories (Lyons, Robbins, & Smith, 1983) to determine how parents were actually involved in schools and found several practices to be most effective. These fell into six categories: home-school relations, home-based instruction, school support, instruction at school, parent education, and advisory groups.

Similar to Gordon's System's Approach (1979), Eugenia Hepworth Berger, in *Parents as Partner's in Education*, described six roles that parents should play in their involvement in their child's education. These are: parents as teachers of their own children, parents as spectators, parents as employed resources, parents as temporary volunteers, parents as volunteer resources, and parents as policymakers.

Nancy Feyl Chavkin and David Williams (1993) surveyed 2,967 parents in order to determine their interest in various school involvement roles by ranking their interest in different roles and concluded that parents were interested in all seven roles, and that their overall interest in parent involvement in schools was high.

Honig's Early Childhood Education Model (Honig, 1990) classified kinds of parent involvement efforts reported in literature into seven categories which include: home visitation; parent group meetings; home visits for interagency linkages; program-articulated home visits; parents as teachers; home follow-up on television viewing; and omnibus programs. She found that the general activity in each of these programs focused on the parent as a learner and had a heavy emphasis on providing opportunities for parents that provided information, knowledge, and skills.

Bruce Jones (1989) in *Jones' Levels of Parent Involvement* described parent involvement in schools in four non-hierarchical levels, which were *Level 1: Traditional* (meetings, fund-raising, etc.), *Level 2: Receives Information* (gets information from school about students, activities, budget, curriculum and instruction, etc.), *Level 3: Involvement at School*. (paid volunteers for tutoring, hall monitors, cafeteria helper, chaperoning, etc.) and *Level 4: Decision Making* (direct participation in hiring faculty and staff, curriculum development, budgeting, and program evaluation).

Joyce Epstein and her colleagues with the Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins University provided insight into what schools might do to encourage more extensive parent involvement (Connors & Epstein, 1994; Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein & Connors, 1994) by creating six non- hierarchical typologies of parent involvement: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community. These will later be explained in more detail.

School's can use these as groundwork for developing a parent education program that best suits its needs, they may use one in its entirety or meld programs together to create a program tailored to suit the needs of the school and its families. There is no one- size-fits-all answer to parent involvement. It is up to the individual schools to understand their specific parent population's and determine what is the most effective program to implement.

In order to get parents involved in their child's education, it is helpful to understand why parents become involved or remain uninvolved in their child's education. Originally published in the Spring 1997 issue of Review of Education Research, authors Kathleen Hoover-Dempsey and Howard Sandler found three major constructs that are central to parents' basic involvement decisions: these were 1) role construction: activities parents felt were important, necessary and

permissible to be involved in with their children as well as expectations and influences of groups with which parents' identify; 2) efficacy: parents' belief that their efforts would make a difference in helping children succeed in school; 3) invitation: a school must provide opportunities and invitations to parents to ensure they feel welcomed to be involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Once parents understand the importance and decide to be involved, the next step is in determining how to actually become involved. Parents must examine within themselves several key factors such as, their perceptions of their own skills, their own interests and abilities, their other demands of their time and energy as well their experiences of specific suggestions and invitations for involvement from children, teachers, and schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

In helping prepare parents for this transition there are several organizations whose main focus is to provide parents, schools, and organizations working with families the training, information, and technical assistance to understand how children develop and what they need to succeed in school. With all the push for increased parent involvement, the National Council of Parent Involvement and Engagement (NCPIE) urges Congress to reinstate the federal dollars desperately needed to operate programs that have proven to be effective and that are making a difference in America's communities by providing parents with the tools, information, and skill-sets they need to successfully support their child's well being and academic achievement (NCPIE website).

Henderson and Mapp (2002) have also made several recommendations in regards to engaging families effectively in order to improve student learning. Of those recommendations, those found most relevant and need to be at the forefront of decisions made about effectively increasing parent involvement: 1.) It is important to strive to include all families, regardless of

income, education, or ethnicity to ensure that they are involved in their children's education and important to understand that they want guidance in their efforts to support their children's learning, 2.) Both in-school and away-from-school initiatives that encourage families to be involved in their children's education should be incorporated, 3.) It is important to acknowledge that families need help in guiding their children's learning from preschool through high school. In addition, teachers need to be trained in order to have the knowledge and skills necessary to relate to and communicate with families in order to better support their children's learning at home.

If you do not effectively prepare teachers on parent involvement, you are in essence creating another barrier. Concrete skills, knowledge and positive attitudes are needed to effectively engage parents (Davies, 1991, Edwards & Jones Young, 1992).

“Schools and school systems seldom offer staff any formal training in collaborating with parents or in understanding the varieties of modern family life. However, both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers are working to make such information and skills widely available... There are myriad ways for families to become more involved in schools, and training can help teachers and other school staff change the traditional images of contacting parents only when a student is in trouble or when the school needs help with a bake sale. Teacher training programs can include general information on the benefits of and barriers to parental involvement, information on awareness of different family backgrounds and lifestyles, techniques for improving two-way communication between home and school, information on ways to involve parents in helping their children learn in school and outside, and ways that schools can help meet families' social, educational, and social service needs.” (Ballen and Moles, 1994).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) offer several recommendations for educators, researchers, and policymakers to influence and improve parent involvement. They include having school staff make an explicit effort to include parents in the school's mission; having parents and school staff work together to define the parent's role; having teachers and parents

spend time together agreeing on mutual expectations for the parent's role; and devising specific ways for parents to offer academically useful help to their children. They also encourage teachers to maintain regular communication with parents about learning goals, activities, and focused suggestions for parental help and, including the parents' perspective throughout the entire process. These recommendations are very much inline with many of the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

In addition, in *Reaching Out*, Kyle, McIntyre, Miller and Moore (2002), begin by impressing upon the reader the importance of building trust through different activities with the families before implementing any programming. Parents and families participated in a study that determined that families need teachers who are open about their own experiences and are aware of all their assumptions and biases that they may hold in regards to the families. This is in line with Sergiovanni's (2001) ideas about the importance of building trust and Senge's ideas about being aware of and understanding all the mental models, (mental assumptions about others that affect decisions) that people hold (1990). Schools need teachers who are visible in the community, who treat parents as experts about their children, who solicit advice from them and continuously work to engage them in meaningful activities. It also concluded that teachers who were involved in this study felt that family workshops, where a group of parents, students, teachers and school support staff worked together for the betterment of the children and families (Kyle, McIntyre, Miller and Moore, 2002, p.49) were the most effective method of connecting with families.

Making it Work

The Project for School Innovation (PSI) in Dorchester, MA, has created a successful exemplary elementary school where parents are engaged in a wide variety of ways, supporting teaching and learning at the school. PSI is a network for public school educators to share success and drive school change by expanding the use of effective practices, promoting teachers quality and leadership and cultivating a culture of innovation among educators. Based on their model, they have created a program at the Patrick O’Hearn Elementary School that boasts a 99% parental involvement rate. Based on these successes, a handbook was created for other schools to modify and implement at their schools entitled *Including Every Parent, A Step-by Step Guide to Engage and Empower Parents at Your School* (PSI, 2003).

There are many different successful programs occurring all over the country but it is important to note that in order for a program to be successful it must fit the needs of the community as one size does not fit all. In a publication entitled, *Family Involvement in Children’s Education, Successful Local Approaches*, (1997) many successful programs are described each tailored to their own individual needs, two are described here. The first is an Elementary School in rural West Virginia with high unemployment and poverty rates where 83 percent of the school's population being eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. They created a program that was very successful in increasing parent involvement. This in turn correlated to increased student standardized test scores. The school first hired a parent coordinator who facilitated the relationship with families, along with the principal. The facilitator handled all programming, met regularly with staff and ran the family center. This family center was a parent hub where meetings and workshops were held, but it also doubled as the teacher’s lounge. This overall program, included a phone tree, mail system, and parent meeting carpool to help

with communication and meeting attendance. It called for regular school home-visits for parents who could not come to the school and provided coverage for teachers to do visits and gave them time in their daily schedule specifically for parent phone calls. The school provided regular parent workshops such as discussing a new math curriculum and for sharing parenting issues. They also trained parents to serve as classroom aids and tutors. Lastly, they placed a parent on all decision-making committees of the school. This new program increased parent involvement from 2000 hours a year to 5000 hours a year. In addition to higher test scores, the school boasts an increase in after-school tutoring, improved student discipline, decreased suspensions and an increase student attendance (Funkhouser, J., Gonzales, M. and Associates, 1997).

The second school is the Phillips Visual and Performing Arts Magnet School in Kansas City, Missouri, whose goal is to empower families and school staff by making them equally responsible for student learning. The staff and principal have an open door policy, and parents are encouraged to visit whenever they can. The school as has a parent-community liaison who coordinates parent involvement largely through getting parent involved in the school's tutoring program and by providing family outreach and support. At Phillips, 79 percent are eligible for free or reduced price lunches, and at least 33 percent come from single-parent families. Trust building is a major goal of Phillips' parent involvement efforts. Many of the families live in poverty and in order to best work with the families they are clear that in order to even get parents to the school you must provide transportation and child care, removing significant obstacles to parent involvement.

The liaison keeps teachers informed about family needs, makes referrals for students with medical or behavioral needs, and helps teachers spread information on school-related issues to all

parents. The liaison also visits parents at home and schedules all school. The liaison also responds to staff concerns when they notice needs such as such as warm clothing, eyeglasses, and dental work for students in need or even haircuts, feeling that students' self-image can often lead to improvement in their self-confidence and ability to concentrate. Phillips offers numerous workshops as well as lengthier parent courses. Phillips actively involves parents in the planning, implementation, and review of the school wide program, they regularly make decisions about curriculum and instruction, parent involvement, and strategies for using resources to maximize student progress. Wendell Phillips operates a parent resource and opens the computer lab to parent when not in use by the students.

Lastly, the school has created a *Wendell Phillips 3000 Gold Club*, which works on point system where parents earn points for parent involvement. They earn points at school for tutoring, chaperoning, attending school programs, serving on committees, going to meetings. They can also earn points for completing home learning activities, such as reading with their child, taking them to the library or helping teachers with forms. The school honors parents who earn points with donated prizes presented at an awards banquet. Several states and cities are tackling it as a major initiative; in Arkansas, a new law requires a "parent facilitator" at each school, in New York City they are spending \$43 million to hire a full-time parent coordinator for every school in the city totaling 1,200 coordinators, plus a support network and in Chicago, parents have a greater voice than in any other urban district in the country as local school council for every school in the city, has the authority to hire the principal and renew his contract, develop an annual school-improvement plan, and set the school's budget, this committee has a parent majority (Funkhouser, J., Gonzales, M. and Associates ,1997, Paulson, 2003).

Under the leadership of Karen Mapp, former Deputy Superintendent for Family and Community Engagement, Boston Public Schools embarked on a campaign focusing on NCLB's emphasis on parent, family, and community involvement (NCPIE Update, 2004). All 139 Boston schools had to submit whole-school improvement plans that included parent and community involvement strategies to address student learning. Each school had a different plan as they are each based on local parent surveys, test data, and other academic indicators. The goal was to have each school with a fully funded family center with a community outreach coordinator, a policy about respecting parents as partners in the education of their children, a good communication systems and strong parent outreach, training for parents, a welcoming environment, an active parent council, and partnerships with local community agencies (Citizens Commission on Academic Success for Boston's Children, 2006). The goal is to create partnerships between parents and schools that are mutually respectful, highly supportive, and substantive, helping parents be really strong advocates for their students, and giving parents the tools to do so even if the school leadership changes (Allen, 2005)

As noted in the Cotton and Wikelund literature review of parent involvement (1989), many of the different studies compared the relationship between parent involvement and achievement by looking at the effects of parent involvement on student outcomes other than academic achievement. Some of the non-achievement factors included, attitude toward school or toward particular subject areas, self-concept, classroom behavior, time spent on homework, expectations for one's future, absenteeism, motivation, and retention. Many of the findings indicated that the relationship between parent involvement and these affective outcomes are both strong and positive and that parent involvement has positive effects on student attitudes and social behavior (Cotton and Wikelund, 1989).

In 1995, Epstein presented six typologies of parent involvement which were then adopted by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) as their standards for parent involvement. These are non-hierarchical types of involvement, which schools may use as a basis to choose to implement activities and goals for student achievement (Lunenburg, 2002, p.9). These are Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community. Parenting: where the school helps all families establish home environments to support children as students; Communicating: the school must design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress; Volunteering: the school must recruit and organize parent help and support; Learning at Home: where the school must provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. Decision Making: where parents are included in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives, and Collaborating with the Community: where the school identifies and integrates resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

James Comer's typology of parent involvement (Comer et al, 1979) includes attendance at Open Houses, parent-teacher conferences and other social events and volunteering for authentic on-site learning activities, which include helping in classrooms or on field trips or with anything else related to academics. With each of these models, there is a positive relationship between parent involvement and increased parent efficacy.

The National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, also concluded with a nationally represented sample of students and their parents, that parental involvement has a powerful effect on student achievement in all subject areas. According to research conducted by Kyle, McIntyre,

Miller and Moore, all parents care about their children and want them to learn and want better for their children. Many of these parents see school as a “ticket” to a better life but often do not know how to help, have different goals for their children, have had negative school experiences themselves, and may not know how to ask for help. This situation leaves the burden of making the parent-school connection the duty of the school by recognizing these barriers and finding ways to overcome them.

Based on research conducted with a sample of 302 middle-school, Caucasian families, from middle class socioeconomic backgrounds, Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) determined that there are three types of parental involvement in a child’s schooling that correlated significantly to better grades for their children. The first was the participation in school activities such as open house or parent/teacher conferences, the second was personal involvement, such as having conversations with your child that demonstrated a sincere concern about what was happening at school and third was a cognitive/intellectual involvement, in which the parent engaged the child in learning activities at home such as reading, or discussions about current events. It is the duty of the school leader to make families realize the importance of their involvement in these three areas (Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994).

Chavkin (1998) listed seven elements needed for the implementation of an effective parent program for marginalized parents; concluding that the school must have: written policies about parent involvement; the resources to run a parent involvement program; training for the program; methods to continuously foster the home-school relationship; frequent communication between the two; collaborations with other organizations and procedures for evaluating what they are doing. Lopez, et al. (2001) found that one important aspect effective parent involvement was creating a form of parent involvement that met the needs of the family. An example may be that

the administrator determines that they need a better way to communicate with *all* families so they offer English as a Second Language classes for their parents with limited English skills (Katz; 1999 and Lopez, 2001).

Successful school leaders made their vision of parent involvement known so that all involved could be enrolled in this vision (Senge, 1990). Leithwood, et al (2004) state that a successful principal must be able to set direction, by providing a vision and motivation to follow the stated vision; to develop people by providing professional development and support and by leading by example; and last must possess the ability to redesign the organization through policy changes and practices that will improve the school.

Parent Empowerment Through a Social and Cultural Capital Lens

In 1977, Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of “cultural capital” which he defined as “the instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed” (1977a, p.488). In this study the term is applied as practicing beliefs, behaviors and attitudes that are valued in the dominant culture and needed for successful integration and will used interchangeably with the term social capital. This study incorporates the belief that providing this knowledge, therefore increasing cultural capital, to parents in the form of empowerment workshops will affect student achievement. Bourdieu (1977a) equates success in schools with the possession of mainstream values that are what make up cultural capital and only those who bring this capital with them will be successful in school (Bourdieu and Passerson, 1977; Lareau, 1987, Mehan, et al, 1996).

“Cultural resources become forms of capital when they facilitate parents’ compliance with dominate standards in school interactions. In particular, cultural capital includes parents’

large vocabularies, sense of entitlement to interact with teachers as equals, time, transportations, and child care arrangements to attend school events during the school day. Social capital includes social networks with other parents in the school community who provide informal information about the teachers” (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p.41)

Cultural capital is linked to economic capital, therefore does not come naturally in situations where there is a lack of economic capital. As it comes more naturally to situations where resources are readily available, it must be a learned behavior for those who are lacking resources and knowledge. Bourdieu states that “instruments” of cultural capital, those qualities of the dominant culture, define what happens in schools. This therefore puts those who are raised without these instruments at an automatic disadvantage when placed in a school system that is created based on having these instruments. “The educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give” (Bourdieu, 1977a, p.494).

Often schools will take this to assume that they must lower their standards for those who do not neatly fit into the dominant culture. This should not be the case. It is the schools responsibility to find ways to get those students and parents to truly understand this concept and its importance in their success. Geneva Gay (2000) points out that minority, low-income and poorly educated individuals are the less likely to manifest cultural behaviors than those who are middle class and educated. This is because they have fewer opportunities to interact with people from different ethnic groups or socioeconomic groups. It is through these interactions where people can learn how to adapt to different norms. Lisa Delpit explains that school’s must be explicit in explaining to parents the rules for gaining social power:

If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier. In my work within and between diverse cultures, I have come to conclude that members of any culture

transmit information implicitly to co- members. However, when implicit codes are attempted across cultures, communication frequently breaks down. Each cultural group is left saying "Why don't those people say what they mean?" as well as "What's wrong with them, why don't they understand?" I have found it unquestionably easier, psychologically and pragmatically, when some kind soul has directly informed me about such matters as appropriate dress, appropriate interaction styles, embedded meanings, and taboo words or actions. I contend that it is much the same for anyone seeking to learn the rules of culture of power. Unless one has the leisure of a lifetime of "immersion" to learn them, explicit presentation makes learning immeasurably easier. (Delpit, 1995, p. 4)

Social capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986) are the resources held by an individual based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support, is gained when a family's values are aligned with the dominate culture and the schools values.

Social capital is determined by the relationship that a person from the non-dominant group has with the dominant groups cultural values. Bourdieu's Theory of Social Capital was developed based on the principal that all behaviors have an expected set of norms and their own system of evaluation (Lareau, A. & Horvat, E. 1999) which have been established by the dominant society members. Therefore, those who are the farthest away from this dominant culture, those from a lower socio-economic class, will be the farthest away from possessing this all important social capital. "Students of color who are most traditional in their communication styles and other aspects of culture and race are likely to encounter more obstacles to school achievement than those who think, behave, and express themselves in ways that approximate school mainstream cultural norms." (Gay, 2000, p. 78)

In order to obtain this social capital parent must work to align their values, with the values of the school, which are reflective of the values of dominant society. This can be very difficult for many parents as their situations have not allowed them to obtain many of the tools needed to conform to these standards such as; the acquisition of the English language in a manner that is consistent with the dominant culture, educational degrees, the financial resources or the sheer knowledge of the power that their involvement has on their child's success. Low-income parents are entering schools at such a disadvantage. O'Conner, 2001, states that opinions and complaints from families from lower classes are not taken seriously by school, nor would they go out of their way to help the child by providing anything but what is required. It is unfortunate that income level has such an impact on school involvement. In 1999, NCES conducted a study, which found that only 21.2% of parents whose income level was under \$10,000 ever worked on a school committee compared to 49.7% of parents whose income fell over \$50,000.

As the lead researcher on *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, James Coleman found not only a statistical relationship between achievement and school facilities, quality of instruction, instructional support and racial make-up but also found that "variations in family background account for more variation in school achievement than so variations in school characteristics" (1966, p. 218). In a later study, Coleman concluded that students achieve more when parents possess social capital meaning the parents' cultural values are in line with the expected norms (Coleman, 1987, p.36).

The key to building a community is empowerment and the result of the empowerment process is improved student learning (Cochran and Dean 1991, Walberg, 1984a and Comer, 1980). Social and cultural capital can be acquired by teaching parents and students about social

and cultural capital, (Dimaggio, 1982; Mehan, et al, 1996). This can be done through parent workshops and instruction that explicitly teaches students the hidden curriculum that families who possess cultural capital teach their children at home. A longitudinal study by Barrueco, López, & Miles (2007) revealed that all children at 9 months demonstrated the same academic potential no matter the background. Yet by kindergarten age, White children were far more prepared for school than children representing diverse populations. The study determined that the families of non-White children were not neglectful or failing to support the intellectual growth of their children, but that they interacted differently with their children than the White families did, creating this difference (Ferguson, C., 2008).

Hart and Risley (1995) wanted to know why. They began a language acquisition research project in 1995, where they examined 42 families with newborn babies. Once a month for three years they visited the home recording all language and interactions with the child. From this study they were able to determine that at a very early age, vocabulary growth differed sharply, that by age 3, children of professional parents had vocabularies of about 1,100 words, children of working class families had about 750 words and children whose parents were on welfare had a vocabulary of about 525 words. They wanted to know why. Then after countless hours of transcribing tapes and watching videos they were able to determine what was causing this huge discrepancy was the number and kind of words infants and toddlers were being exposed to in the home.

They were able to conclude that the size of each child's vocabulary correlated to the number of words the parents spoke to the child. The children in the professional homes heard an average of 2,153 words an hour, the children in the working class homes heard 1,251 words an hour and the children in the welfare homes heard 616 words an hour. But it was not only about

the number of words they heard but also the kind of words they heard. Children from the professional homes heard way more positive statements than children from working class and welfare families. In addition, Hart and Risley (1995) noted that with more words being heard the complexity of that language increased as well. This early language exposure correlated strongly with I.Q. and academic success later on in a child's life whereas hearing fewer words, and a more negative statement, had a negative effect on I.Q.; hearing more words, complex sentences and positive statements, had a positive effect on I.Q. It is clear that with every word they spoke, the professional parents were giving their children an advantage. (Hart and Risley, 1995) Re-tested at nine and ten years of age, the disparity was still evident. (Hart and Risley, 2002) Parents need to know they should constantly be talking to their child using a wide variety of vocabulary, plenty of positive and limited negative statements, rich content, that they should listen and give kids choices. (Hart and Risley, 1995)

Another researcher, an anthropologist named Annette Lareau, in her book *Unequal Childhoods: Race, Class and Family Life*, (2003) investigated the difference in student achievement, through parenting styles from a cultural perspective. The book describes a study that was done over the course of several years. Lareau and her research assistants observed a variety of families from different class backgrounds, basically moving in to each home for three weeks of intensive scrutiny. Lareau was able to determine that the middle-class families she studied basically all followed similar patterns, which she labeled concerted cultivation. These parents engaged their children in conversations as equals, treated them like apprentice adults, and encouraged them to ask questions, challenge assumptions and negotiate rules. Their days were planned out and they scheduled all types of activities to enhance their children's development like music lessons, sports teams and museum trips (Laraeu, 2003).

The working-class and poor families Lareau studied did things differently. Children were given the freedom to fill their free time with activities such as, playing outside with friends and family, inventing games, riding bikes, but were not allowed to talk back, question authority or haggle over rules and consequences. Children were instructed to defer to adults and treat them with respect. Lareau called this an accomplishment of natural growth. The book described the costs and benefits of each approach and concluded each had its own benefits. Working-class and poor children, “learn how to be members of informal peer groups. They learn how to manage their own time. They learn how to strategize.” But outside the family unit, Lareau wrote, the advantages of “natural growth” disappear and that in public life, the qualities that middle-class children develop are consistently valued over the ones that poor and working-class children develop. Middle-class children become used to adults taking their concerns seriously, and so they grow up with a sense of entitlement, which gives them a confidence, in the classroom and elsewhere, that less-wealthy children lack. The cultural differences translate into a distinct advantage for middle-class children in school, on standardized achievement tests and, later in life, in the workplace. (Lareau, 2003)

Another essential key to a child’s success in school, is that parents have and communicate high expectations for their child’s educational aspirations (Murphy, 2007). Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis which incorporated quantitative studies regarding parental involvement and student achievement from 1977 to 1997. The research began with 2,000 studies that reported a relationship between parental involvement and achievement outcomes but were reduced to the 25 with empirical findings, including Pearson correlations relating parental involvement and achievement outcomes. Student achievement was recorded by grade point average and content- area grades. They found an average correlation coefficient of 0.25 between

parental involvement and student achievement, based on 92 coefficients collected from a sample size of 133,577. This was considered having a medium effect with a small effect being a 0.10 and a large effect 0.50, according to Cohen (Fan & Chen, 2001). The strongest relationship between parental involvement and student achievement, with a correlation of $r = 0.40$, was the educational aspiration for children. Educational expectations and value of academic achievement affected student achievement in these 25 studies.

Seymour Sarason states in his book, *Parental Involvement and the Political Principle* (1995) that until parents are empowered in their child's education there will not be significant successes. "The political principle justifying parental involvement is that when decisions are made affecting you or your possessions, you should have a role, a voice in the process of the decision making" (1995, p.19). With the community as our center, Sergiovanni defines this as "repositories of values, sentiments and beliefs that provide the needed cement for bonding people together in a common cause" (1992, p.47).

Issues of power and engagement in education at a variety of levels must be addressed with a focus on strengthening relationships through dialogue:

Parents are more likely to support a school program in which they are partners in decision-making and welcome at times other than when their children are in trouble. Parent interest and support for the school and its staff makes it easier for youngsters to relate to and identify themselves with the goals, values, and personnel of the school, a powerful motivation to tune in and turn on to education. At the same time, parental involvement insures that their cultural values and interests are respected. (Comer, 1980, p. 70)

In building this community focused on the success of the children, it is important to address with families what they can do to help their children including talking about school, engaging in your child's work and living with the acceptance and understanding of delayed gratification. This begins a stated belief in the importance of obtaining an education for success throughout life (Lareau, 1989, p. 90). Comer, 1980 recognized this lack of acceptance of delayed gratification, which is the underlying concept of mainstream formal education, as a major deficit in many inner city families. Comer states that:

Often, low-income parents give their children everything they need for successful participation in school and the world of work except the planning and organizational skills and habit patterns needed to operate in complex settings. Many intelligent and able college students from low-income backgrounds confront these deficits when faced with a heavy assignment load... These patterns are best acquired at an early age and need to be quite well developed by late elementary school or twelve or thirteen years of age. (1980, p.143)

Annette Lareau (1989) using Bourdieu's notion of *cultural capital* learned that social class shapes the interactions between parents. "Working class parents have a relationship of separateness with the school", where the teachers are the professionals who make appropriate decisions while, middle class parents have a relationship of connectedness to the school so that they are able to assert their personal agendas on the schools. They are better able to advocate for their children, creating and shaping the opportunities available to their children by using personal and institutional resources (Turner, L. & West, 2006). Lareau, also believed that, in addition to being advocates for their children, families from upper middle class have varying resources available to support their children's education. These resources, which include educational

competence, relative class position, income and material resources, and social networks, help them advance their children's school careers in ways that are not available to working class families. When working with families who do not have this advantage it is the school's responsibility to teach families how to do so without those resources. The school must address the degree to which the individual family units support learning and how the school can best support the family (Turner, L. & West, 2006, p.412).

It is clear throughout the literature presented that parent involvement is a critically important piece of child education (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; De Civita, Pagani, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2004; Slavin and Madden, 2001). Not only is it crucial to the child's education, the effect that parent involvement has on the student, the family and the community goes way beyond a student doing better in school and has rippling effects to our entire nation (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, 2003; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). Education, often seen as the cornerstone of society and a weapon against poverty, drug abuse, crime and teenage pregnancy (Allen & Hood, 2000) needs to be at the forefront of all parent education (Hair, Ling, & Cochran, 2003; Harlow, C. W., 2003).

Students who do not have parents that are involved in their education are more likely to drop out, as parents play a crucial role in keeping young people in school (Horn & West, 1992). When students drop out their chances of success decline and they are often headed for a future of sporadic employment, lower salaries, may experience difficulties raising a stable family, and often end up as part of our legal system (Barton, P., 2005).

The school and its leadership must acknowledge this and do something to minimize its impact. Children most at risk for a troubled future due to family history and poor socio-economic conditions are those whose parents are often the most difficult to engage (Li, G. &

Christ, T, 2007, Gilles, V., 2006). This creates a bigger challenge to those who are in leadership positions in these schools. Research has found many reasons that parents are not engaged in schools such as, inflexible work commitments and conditions, a lack child care, and their own experiences with schools that leave them feeling unable to advocate for their child due to intimidation or a lack of knowledge about how to do so (Heymann & Earle, 2000; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Pena, 2000). School leaders must work with parents to build trust and develop a relationship where parents believe that they are working to empower parents to be effective advocates for their child. Schools serving this population under the direction of focused and dedicated leadership, can create effective parent empowerment and education programs through workshops and outreach with a focus on introducing and building social and cultural capital to help the families develop long term skills that they will have for a lifetime.

In chapter 3 the researcher will describe how the data was collected and the research methodology used to analyze the data obtained in the creation of the parent empowerment program.

Chapter Three Design of the Study

Introduction

This purpose of this study is to determine the effects of a formal empowerment and education program on parent's feelings of empowerment in regards to their involvement in their child's education. This chapter presents the overall research layout for the study. It contains a description of the research design, research methodology, sample and rationale for the study, the data gathering procedures, data analysis methods, data reporting format, the limitations of the study and the framework for discussing the findings. In order to explore this topic in detail a qualitative evaluative case studies with quantitative measures derived from questionnaires and numbers of conversations of each participant will help elicit a better understanding of the phenomenon of parental involvement in a school designated for economically disadvantaged families.

Data will be obtained by recording and transcribing all meetings, workshops and interviews, in order to investigate the effects that the programming is having on the individuals. The researcher will be the primary instrument of data collection and analysis through the use of fieldwork and analysis of the fieldwork in order to produce richly descriptive findings using several different sources (Merriam, 1998, p.10). In this qualitative study the social phenomenon of parent empowerment and its effects will be studied in an effort to better understand the situation in the context of increasing parent involvement (Merriam, 1998, p. 6).

By using the words of the participants, great meaning is provided and can be much more convincing to a reader (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that when using a qualitative study, there must be a close relationship between the researcher and what is

being studied. With a personal knowledge of the impact effective parent involvement has on a child, it was clear that the best method to ascertain this information would be through a qualitative study. Using a population from a low socio-economic background with many for whom English is not their primary language, it was important to create a study that also fit their needs. By using a qualitative study, Lincoln (1996) suggests that researchers are able to create a more democratic form of inquiry, which welcomes participation and collaboration from those being studied. As the school is open 12 hours a day, 11 months a year, the researcher who is also the school leader, has been able to establish very in depth relationships with the parents who have agreed to be in the study. This has been helpful for discussions that elicit emotional responses as well as helped them deal with issues of how to be a more involved parent.

Research Questions/Hypothesis

This project intends to effect change in parents in regards to their feeling more empowered and better able to be effectively involved in their child's education. This programming will on the most basic level, increase parent visibility in the building with the hopes of effecting change on a much deeper level by creating parents who are knowledgeable of what is going on in the classroom, and will in turn serve as strong lifelong advocates for their young learners. It is evident that in trying to help students become self-reliant adults who will be active participants in the society in which they will contribute, they will need support and encouragement from the primary caregiver in their lives. This study will help school personnel develop a better understanding of how to help parents and students through the education process.

For this study, six parents from grades 5-8 will be participants. The goal is to determine if the implementation of structured parent empowerment and education workshops will have any effect on their level of empowerment and participation in their child's education. The research questions that will serve as the focus of this leadership project will be:

Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program feel more empowered to be involved in their child's education?

Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program change their level of involvement in their child's education?

These research questions will guide the focus of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). They were instrumental in the creation of each questionnaires and interviews that took place throughout the study. It is the hypothesis of the researcher that these workshops will create in parents a feeling of empowerment, and as a result of that, the parents will participate more effectively in their child's education.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative evaluative study involving a cross case analysis of six parents to determine the effect of an empowerment and education program on parental school involvement. The researcher will serve as the primary instrument of data collection, using intense fieldwork in order to gain a holistic overview of the context of the study. Miles and Huberman, 1994 (p. 6) list several descriptors of qualitative inquiry that apply to this study. Much of this study falls under the guise of "naturalist" research. It is research that will be "conducted through an intense and/or prolonged contact with a "field" or life situation... reflective of the everyday life of individuals, groups, societies and organizations." where "the researchers role is to gain a "holistic" overview of the context under study" in this case, parent involvement. The study is

attempting to determine how people, in this setting come to understand, account for, take action in and manage in this situation and then use this information to alter behavior.

The researcher recognizes that no standardized instruments are being used and that everything is researcher generated. In addition, the researcher was the main analyst, using such methods as affixing codes to field notes drawn from observations and interviews, noting reflections after interactions, identifying similarities, relationships, patterns, themes, sequences and differences, isolating patterns and processes, commonalities and differences, and taking them out into the field for the activity, with the gradual elaboration from a small set of generalizations using data and research to back it up (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.9). The use of qualitative data will also be helpful in validating, and reinterpreting the quantitative data that will be collected during the study. “Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people’s “lived experience” are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives: their “perceptions, assumptions, prejudgements, presuppositions” (Van Manen, M., 1997), and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them.” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10).

According to Merriam, (1998, p.19), case studies help us to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and provide meaning for those involved. They provide intense descriptions and analysis of a program, event or group. This evaluative case study is attempting to determine if the education program does in fact, create in parents an overall feeling of empowerment and in turn, increase their involvement in their child’s education. According to Yin (2003), when you are trying to answer “how” and “what” questions, the case study is the appropriate method to use. This method was chosen by Mapp (2002) as it made possible the explorations of parent involvement in an in-depth and intimate manner. The use of a case study

will help the researcher attempt to observe subjects as they go through a learning process rather than just describe an end picture. This will help further develop a better understanding and up close feeling for what has gone into the process. As case studies have the potential to influence educational policy and practice (Merriam, 1998) this study will serve as a foundation for parent involvement practices at the school. In addition to the qualitative approach used for this study several quantitative pieces such as the number of parent log entries, parent signatures for meeting attendance and signed returned weekend forms, and survey data will be incorporated.

In the article entitled *Qualitative Approach to Evaluation: Models and Methods* by Pitman and Maxwell (1992) they discuss Guba and Lincoln's approach as having 4 major requirements in addition to the dialectic process. These are called the Fourth Generation Evaluation (4GE) and include: a natural setting, an inductive approach, the use of qualitative methods and the incorporation and use of the tacit knowledge of the evaluator; each of these are facets of this study.

Using a constructivist and phenomenologist perspective (Miles and Huberman, 1994 p.8) the study will attempt to develop a deep understanding of how people in a situation construct meaning from what is going on. This type of qualitative research draws from the philosophy of phenomenology in its emphasis on experience and interpretation. This will be useful to determine how parents interpret the new information presented to them in the workshops. The data will be generated from the information collected during each of the activities through: researcher notes and reflections from all of the workshops meetings and interviews, all the questionnaires and surveys that will be given out in the beginning, middle and end of the project and student records of homework folder signatures, the parent correspondence log and the parent job log. An intense description and analysis of all the information collected will be made in

order develop a comprehensive understanding of the parents and their needs in order to further delve into the development of general statements that can be applied to the group (Merriam, 1998, p. 29) and possibly into new programming. This can further be described as a descriptive case study because “the end product of a case study is a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study.” (Merriam, 1998, p.29).

Using Guba and Lincoln’s constructivist and phenomenologist approach to understanding how people in a situation construct meaning from what is going on and Miles and Huberman’s empirical approach to collecting data, a broad in-depth picture will be created. This type of qualitative research draws from the philosophy of phenomenology through its emphasis on experience and interpretation and is in line with Miles and Huberman’s approach to using an empirical and scientific method of data collection. The data collection will focus the object, the facts and what data are involved in order to determine the reality that is to be understood using an evidence-based evaluation. These methods will serve as the foundation of the study.

There are numerous strengths and few limitations to using the different types of case studies and methods mentioned above. “The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. As they are anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insight and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences.” (Merriam, 1998, p. 41) They play a large role in furthering a field’s knowledge base. “Educational process, problems and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that can in turn affect change and improve practice.” (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). In this study using the case study format will help evaluate an educational program in order to inform policy.

As a limitation, case studies are often very time-consuming and the product may be too long, too detailed or too involved. Guba and Lincoln (1989) note that case studies often oversimplify or exaggerate a situation leading the reader to make an incorrect conclusion based on the information presented. Because they provide such an in-depth descriptive picture, case studies may seem as if they are presenting the whole story when in essence they are only portraying a piece of the big picture. This portrayal is heavily influenced and biased by the investigator and may have issues with reliability, validity and generalization (Merriam, 1998, p.42-43).

Research Questions

This study will attempt to explore the effect on parent involvement that a school-based, formal, empowerment and education training program has on helping parents become better involved in their child's education. The study will examine the changes in parent knowledge base, attitudes and feelings about their involvement in their child's education. The study will further attempt to determine if there is an overall sense of empowerment instilled in parents and an increased desire to be more involved in their child's education. The research questions that will serve as the focus of this project are:

Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program feel more empowered to be involved in their child's education?

Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program change their level of involvement in their child's education?

In this study the commonly accepted definition of parent involvement as steps taken by parents in support of their children's education at home and in the school building (Epstein et al, 2002) will be used.

Sample and Rationale for Sample

The school is a tuition-free private, middle school for students from Boston, whose family income falls below the federal poverty guidelines. The school does lottery admissions each year for about 9-14 students. Each class has 22 students, 20% of whom are referrals from the Department of Children and Families. Siblings receive automatic acceptance and the remaining students are selected through a lottery system. School runs from 7:30am to 7:30pm. This project will include six parents of student in grades 5-8. The six parents were chosen for two reasons. Three of them have failed to fulfill their service hours to the school (there is a parent requirement of 2 service hours per week) and the basic parent requirements, and the remaining are parents who have agreed to participate in the programming because the researcher and parent feel they could benefit from the programming as they are parents who would like to be involved but have they themselves indicated that they are not really comfortable in doing so and would like additional guidance on getting involved more effectively. In addition, they would be reliable participants as they have proven to be willing to do whatever they can to help their child and the school and have agreed to see the project through to its completion.

Choosing this many participants will be time consuming but will provide a more complete sample to collect data from, as well as incorporate different perspectives on the issue. Six parents were chosen with the hopes that all parents would follow through and at least this many are needed to ensure that the sample size would generate enough data. The use of “multiple-case sampling adds confidence to the findings. By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding...strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 29)

Of the two types of sampling, probability and non-probability, this study will use non-probability sampling. Although there will be some form of generalization made from the results of the project from the sample to the population which it was drawn, generalization is not a goal of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Looking for a way to solve a qualitative problem, the use of purposive or purposeful sampling would best serve this project. As purposeful sampling attempts to discover, understand and gain insight, a sample from which the most can be learned must be selected. By choosing information-rich cases, a great deal can be learned about the most critical issues important to the purpose of the research (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). The criteria used in selecting the sample were parents at the school were twofold, one set of 3-5 parents who would show up and wanted to become better advocates for their child and one set of 3-5 parents who not currently involved in their child's education and were given the opportunity to take part in the study as part hours.

Employing a typical purposeful sample, the sample will reflect the average person, situation, or instance of parents at the school. Patton (1990) states, that "When the typical site strategy sample is used, the site is specifically selected because it is not in any way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual (p.173)" (Merriam, p. 63). Each participant will take part in meetings, as well as complete pre and post questionnaires and interviews that will be both open-ended and close-ended. Although a majority of the parents are involved in some way because of the school's 2 hour service commitment, they are often involved in superficial ways such as carpooling or cleaning. Therefore, the sample will be similar to the overall characteristics of any parent at the school.

Pilot

Data collection for this study will consist of interviews, questionnaires, observations and document analysis to create findings with a mix of description and analysis - an analysis that uses concepts from the theoretical framework to identify recurring patterns (Merriam p. 11). A pilot questionnaire and interview began the process. The pilot questionnaire and sample interview was given to three people who are not going to be part of the study. They answered all the questions and then provided the researcher with honest feedback on the validity and effectiveness of each question. Questions were then asked about each question to determine if they were clear and ascertained the answers that the researcher was trying to get. The researcher then determined if the questions asked elicited the appropriate answers and if not, determine how they need to be changed in order to be more effective questions. Several questions were changed as they elicited yes or no answers where the researcher was looking for more information. In addition several questions were split into two or three different questions in order to get more specific answers as well as all questions addressed.

Data Gathering Procedures

The first meeting was scheduled after making changes to the questionnaires and interview questions. This parent meeting was an informal informational session for the six parents taking part in the study and other parents who were interested in what was happening. They ate and had informal conversation in an environment that began to foster greater comfort levels with the researcher. As the researcher is the school leader and has been involved with the school since its inception, there was a sense of comfort and trust already in place. At this meeting all

participants were carefully informed of all the Human Subject consideration guidelines. They were notified of the researchers understanding of the fact that as the primary collector of information, the dual role of researcher and principal could be skew their answers. They were also informed that their answers to questions will have no bearing outside of the study and the researcher's role as principal should be removed from the situation as much as possible. In addition, they were all informed that there are no negative consequences to participating in this series of workshops and that they may refrain from any part of the project or drop out at anytime. They were given the consent form to go over together and sign if they agree to participate. The researcher paid close attention to ensure all ethical procedures were followed.

At the end of the dinner, parents were given a questionnaire to elicit their current feelings about each topic the study will be addressing. For example, some of the statements that they responded to were: I feel like I know what my child is learning in school, I feel like I know how to help my child with their homework, my child has the appropriate resources and space to effectively do their homework, books are available in my house, reading occurs on a regular basis at home, I feel prepared at parent meetings, I know what questions to ask at a parent meeting, I understand some of the issues my child is dealing with at school and in class, I feel like an effective advocate for my child, I had a good experience in school myself, etc. These will have rating scales and will be compared to answers derived at the end of the project.

The initial parent meeting determined the format and topics for the remainder of the parent workshops. Workshops were presented every other month, during different time slots to accommodate small groups of 2-4 parents from each grade (5-8). The workshops began with a discussion on some topic such as setting up a homework station, helping your child with their homework, the effects of what happens at home on a child's education, discussing with your

child ways to improve at school, or questions to ask the teacher at a parent meeting. Then the small groups moved into discussing the meeting and what was covered in each of the student's classes over the past month, what they will be covering over the next month and then a quick individual meeting to answer interview questions using semi-structured questions (Merriam, 1998, p. 72).

Interviews were conducted in a private, neutral location. It is understood by the researcher that interviews, for many reasons, can be flawed based on the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent. Interviews inherently contain a power dynamic that may affect a person's answers. Some people find it harder to respond in face to face interview, are intimidated by being tape recorded, or may be preoccupied by some other outside dynamic. Others also feel that interviews do not allow room for thought and can be difficult to schedule. Each participant will be treated with respect and as an expert with important knowledge to share (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) through interviews seen as "purposeful conversations" (p. 19)

All sessions were tape recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed for similarities, differences and themes. Questionnaires were completed at the beginning of the project, after a parent teacher workshop and/or meeting, and once again at the end of the project. The ultimate goal being to determine if they felt more empowered and invested due to attending workshops focused on helping their child and learning more about the importance of their involvement. A final interview will take place to answer such questions as: What did they learn from each of the workshops? What was the best thing they were taking away from the workshops? What was their overall feeling about the time spent at these workshops? Have they noticed any changes in the child? What part, if any, should remain a part of the school? Should anything else be

provided as a workshop? etc. The interviews will be recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed for patterns and themes.

In order to increase validity and reliability of the research several procedures were incorporated in the study. This included triangulation of the data, thorough descriptions of the procedures used, and several different forms of data collection. In order to triangulate the data, teacher feedback will be solicited to determine if the teachers noticed any change in students or parents. The instrument that will be used will be a researcher generated questionnaire to determine what changes, if any, they noticed in parents during this programming. These will include questions such as: What changes, if any, did teachers see in the parents? Were parents more active participants during parent conferences? Describe any specific behavior changes you noticed.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) recommend that to ensure more accurate research results, data should be obtained in more than one form. This study implements the use of multiple sources of information, including meetings, interviews, questionnaires and observations. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that triangulation demonstrates support for a finding by providing an agreement from an additional source. To create a more reliable study, it is crucial to clearly outline all of the steps and procedures used including in the data collection and analysis (Yin, 2003).

In the initial phase of the data collection, in order to establish a baseline measurement the following pre-participation information will be collected: all participating parents, several teachers and the students whose parents are taking part in the program will be interviewed and given a questionnaire with responses comprised of both open and closed ended questions, all tape recorded meeting notes from pre-participation parent-teacher conferences, all reflective

notes from informal parent-teacher meetings and conversations, the number of entries in the returned parent communication log, the parent sign in book and the frequency of parent signatures on the child's homework folder before the programming began. In addition throughout the entire process the researcher will keep a reflection log in which all reflections will be recorded.

To determine the effect on participation and increased feelings of empowerment, a comparison of descriptions from the pre and post participation information will be made. In the post participation data, changes in the reported rating levels of empowerment and actual involvement in parents will be measured. This will be measured by changes in their responses to open and closed ended questions in interviews and questionnaires, as well as in the actual increase in the number of entries into the parent sign in log, the number of times a parent signed the student homework folder and the number of entries into the family correspondence log. Document analysis will be done to create findings with a mix of description and analysis, this analysis will use concepts from the theoretical framework in order to identify recurring patterns (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). Triangulation of all the data collected will provide a greater sense of validity. An intense description and analysis of all the information collected will be made in order to understand comprehensively the parents and their needs to develop general statements that can be applied about any regularity in social structure and process (Merriam, 1998, p. 29).

Data Analysis Procedures and Formats for Reporting the Data

To determine the effect on the workshops had on increased participation and increased feelings of empowerment, a comparison of descriptions from the pre and post participation information were made. In the post participation data, changes in the reported rating levels of

empowerment and involvement in parents were measured by analyzing responses for changes in the open and closed ended questions from parent, teacher and student interviews and questionnaires. In addition, any change in the number of entries into the parent sign in log, signing of students homework folder and family correspondence log were determined. Also any change in reporting of feelings of empowerment and involvement were determined by looking at the content of any new self-reported strategies listed in questionnaire responses and generated from open-ended interviews with parents.

After each workshop and interview, all impressions, questions and reactions were transcribed and coded, to determine which event fit with which theme of the main research questions. Also any patterns, repetitions, contradictions, confusions or poor understanding, were extracted. Using qualitative analysis the researcher was able to identify mechanisms going beyond sheer association, while dealing locally with a complex network of events and processes in a situation. Dimensions were sorted out and recorded in a method that allowed the researcher to go back and forth between variables and process (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.147).

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe the importance of coding information. Codes are a way to categorize the chunks of information so that the researcher can quickly find, pull out or cluster information under the appropriate research question, theme or hypothesis in order to make better conclusions. A “start list” of codes was developed and as themes emerged, they were added to the list. For example, when a parent stated that they asked better questions at the parent teacher meeting the code was +?S-PM, when they noted that they felt a lot of their conversation at home was negative it was coded –TALK. Tables and matrices were created from all the coded information in order to determine what themes, similarities and difference emerged in order to create a rich descriptive picture. The matrices involved the different level of feelings

expressed by parents before and after the study. When a theme repeatedly arose it was incorporated into the findings to develop tentative conclusions based on the data collection.

Limitations of the study

There are many threats to experimental, internal validity which occur over the duration of the project. The history may be altered due to any unanticipated events that may occur while the study is in process. To account for this and its potential affect on the outcomes, questions will be asked at each meeting to determine if there are any changes in the families, such as new people in the home, any traumatic events occur, or anything else that may cause changes in the participants. The effect of using the same pre and post survey may influence how the final survey is completed especially if families want to answer the questions to show improvement knowing that is what the researcher is trying to ascertain. There may also be a threat to instrumentation if there is inconsistent use of the measuring instruments, to avoid this, the researcher will conduct all interviews and meetings to ensure consistency. Mortality may be avoided because subjects may drop out mid-way through the project.

As noted earlier, there are numerous strengths and a few limitations to using the different types of case studies. Case studies are often very time consuming and the product may be too long too detailed or too involved. Guba and Lincoln also note that case studies may oversimplify or exaggerate a situation leading reader to an incorrect conclusion and may seem to present the whole story when it is actually only a piece of the big picture. Case Studies are heavily influenced and biased by the investigator (Merriam, p.42).

There are numerous other factors effecting the conclusions of this project, the first being that a sample of convenience was chosen to participant. Reliable parents were chosen because

they would follow through on all the pieces of the project. Parents with whom communication was not an issue were chosen, 5 English speaking and 1 non-English speaking family. Due to lack of time, a small sample of only 6 parents were used. The length of time in which the study took place was also short therefore, only provided a short timeframe to notice changes in behavior. The focus was only in one setting. These limiting factors could skew the results because this type of program may best be suited for those parents who are not involved for different reasons including language barriers. Parents overall feelings about their own education and comfort with school and administrators may cause some to answer in the manner of which they feel was the desired answer the researcher was looking for, as opposed to an honest answer. With all of these factors affecting the results, it would be impossible to make any generalizations, but the findings will provide some useful insight about increasing parent involvement at this school.

Framework for Discussion & Implications of Findings

In order to address the ongoing concerns of parental involvement and its effect on a child's education, the research questions will be used to discuss what implications can be concluded from the research and the project. The data that was collected will be coded for themes and patterns to be discussed in chapter 4 where the findings will be presented in regards to implications for practice, policy and further research. These findings will be the groundwork for the creation of systematized parent empowerment workshops grounded in the findings from the project and its study, the theoretical rationale and research conducted.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study of a formal parent empowerment and education program designed to provide parents with the knowledge and skills to empower them to become better involved in the education of their children. This chapter will briefly describe the study, the project, the site, the participants, and the outcomes of the outreach activities, each workshop, meeting, interview and questionnaire that pertained to the study. The data from each event will be presented and summarized in relation to the project research questions. Two research questions served as the focus of the study, these were:

Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program feel more empowered to be involved in their child's education?

Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program change their level of involvement in their child's education?

The chapter will be organized as follows:

1. The project and study - the project will be described in relation to the study
2. The site – the school where the project took place will be described
3. The participants- the six project participants whose information was used for the study will be described
4. The workshops and participants- each workshop will be described along with how each participant responded to the workshop and their development through the project.

In Chapter 5 the researcher will interpret the findings from chapter 4, determine the implications of the findings on parent empowerment and involvement programs, and provide a reflection on leadership and how these views were impacted by this study.

Multiple data sources “strengthen reliability as well as internal validity” (Merriam, p. 207), which also provides information to help triangulate data collection. Therefore the

researcher employed several data collecting methods to enrich the descriptive case studies. The data collected came from several sources including participant questionnaires, participant interviews, notes and observations from workshops, a reflective journal and teacher questionnaires. The researcher is an administrator at the school and has different types of relationships with the participants. Some have been involved with the school for many years and have called on the administrator for different needs, many of which are beyond the realm of what a typical school staff member would be called to do such as help with a gas bill or help find a place to live; because of this not all interactions and conversations were recorded.

The project

The project was a parent empowerment and involvement program which consisted of a series of workshops and a number of outreach activities. Each part of the program was created with the goal of determining if participating in this programming had any affect on parent empowerment and involvement.

The study

The study was designed to determine if parents who were involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program felt more empowered to be involved in their child's education and if parents who were involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program changed their level of involvement in their child's education.

The site

The study took place at the Edward P. Jefferson Middle School (EPJ), located in the inner city of Boston, MA. The school is a tuition-free, independent middle school whose mission is to serve children from economically disadvantaged families from Boston neighborhoods. The

students are admitted through a lottery or by referral from the Department of Children and Families. The school has children of diverse faiths, races, cultures, and cognitive profiles. It has small classes, individualized curricula, and extended school days in order to provide rigorous academic, moral and social instruction. A part of the mission is to work in close partnership with families in order to help students thrive and prepare graduates who will contribute intelligently, morally, and actively to the society they will inherit.

The student body consists of 85 students spanning grades 5-8 who are 63% Black (this includes African-Americans and all students from Caribbean and African descent), 35% Latino and 1% Vietnamese, 1% Caucasian. Edward P. Jefferson Middle School is an independent, tuition-free, middle school for children from Boston neighborhoods, whose family income falls below the federal poverty guidelines. Each year the school admits 22 students in the fifth grade. The number of students admitted through the lottery varies based on the number of automatically accepted siblings and referrals from Department of Children and Families. Edward P. Jefferson has small classes, individualized curricula, a 12-hour school day, is in session eleven months a year and has been in existence for 10 years. The school day runs from 7:30am to 7:30pm, where students eat breakfast, have morning classes, eat lunch, then afternoon classes, sports, dinner and then return to class to do their homework.

Table 4.1 School Facts. This table provides a brief overall description of the demographics of the school.

Number of Students enrolled	Grades	Percent qualifying as low-income	Percent living in Boston	Percent of students on Individualized Learning Plans
85	5-8	88%	97%	19%

Table 4.2 Student Racial Breakdown- This table provides a racial breakdown of the students at the school.

Race	Percent
Black (this includes African-Americans, Cape Verdeans, Jamaicans, Haitians, Ethiopians)	63%
Latino (this includes Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Ecuadorians, Costa Ricans, Panamanians)	35%
Vietnamese	1%
Caucasian	1%

The participants

The school where the project took place serves a diverse range of parents. The diversity of the participants lies less in race and more in family structure. The mission of the school is to serve economically disadvantaged families therefore most of the families lack financial resources. Most of the families are Black and Latino, which encompasses African-Americans and a large number of other ethnic backgrounds such as Puerto Rican, Dominican, Costa Rican, Ecuadorian, Panamanian, Cape Verdean, Haitian, Jamaican, and Trinidadian. Most of the households that the students live in are run by single mothers, with the exception of about fifteen percent of the households that have two parents. Less than half of the parents surveyed graduated high school or received their GED. Around thirty-five percent of the families have or have had the Department of Children and Families (DCF) involved in their lives at some point.

In order to generalize parent participation, the researcher developed categories and placed parents at the site into one of the following three categories, very involved, involved or not involved.

Very Involved- If a parent was placed in the *Very Involved* category, which only a handful of the parents fell into, they were great advocates for their child, were heavily involved

in the school, and worked hard to ensure their child had access to all the services and opportunities available to them. These parents are readily available by phone or email, are knowledgeable of their child's strengths and weaknesses, attend school events, parent meetings, call to talk to teachers and administrators, request meetings when they feel necessary and question many of the decisions made by the school.

Involved- Parents who fell into the *Involved* category were the majority of the parents, these parents are reachable by phone, attend mandatory events and a few parent meetings, and really trust the school to educate and care for their child but do little else.

Not Involved- The last category of *Not Involved*, had another small percentage of parents. These parents are almost impossible to engage, for different reasons such as young children at home, inflexible work schedules, language and cultural barriers; are difficult to reach, often changing phone numbers and not notifying the school or very often not having phone service do not attend any parent meetings or school performances and often miss even mandatory events.

For this study, parents were chosen from each of the three categories. With parents chosen from the involved and not involved categories, the researcher hoped to affect change by getting them more involved in their child's education. For those chosen from the very involved category, this was to ensure that the study would have reliable participants who would attend all the meetings and provide the data needed to complete the project. Each parent was assigned a number from one to six and given false names for identification purposes. The parents chosen for the project were as follows:

Parent Number One- Nancy

Nancy came to EPJ as a Department of Children and Families referral. She has a daughter Shayna in sixth grade at EPJ, an older child who is in another Boston middle school and three younger children at home; in addition, she has two older sons who had already been removed from the home many years ago. She is a single parent, African-American female, who is unemployed. Her child has significant learning disabilities and has had many behavioral problems. From the very first meeting with Nancy it was clear that she was someone who had been through a lot with school and social service systems as her daughter arrived with an extensive Individualized Educational Plan.

Nancy had already been at EPJ for a year, and although she had a rough start initially with relationship building, as the year progressed, Nancy was able to develop trust in the school as we worked with her child. Nancy was a mother who always presented as wanting to help her child but lacked the skill set to do so. At the initial meeting, Nancy did not say too much but expressed a lot of gratitude for the school. “I am so happy that my social worker recommended this school to me. It has really been a blessing for Shayna.” The researcher feels that it is also important to note that Nancy also has benefited from many of the outreach services that the school provides and has received assistance around the holidays in the form of store gift cards and with some assistance paying utility bills.

In her initial survey, Nancy said she felt *very empowered* by the school, but noted that she only sometimes talks to her child about school and is only sometimes able to help her with her homework. She also stated that although she feels comfortable at the school, she rarely drops in to check on Shayna. She admitted that she only sometimes feels as if she knows what the school expects from Shayna but had a good understanding of her academic strengths and

weaknesses. She noted that she only somewhat felt like a partner with the school and that she is very comfortable at parent meetings but didn't really know what her role was at these meetings. She felt as if Shanyna did not have the best environment to complete homework in at home and was grateful for the extended day. In regards to her own schooling she admitted that school was hard for her academically and she dropped out at an early age due to pregnancy and her inability to get along well with teachers (questionnaire response).

Parent Number Two- Isabel

Isabel came to EPJ as a referral from a family member. She has only the one child who attends EPJ, but she cares for elderly parents in her home. She is a single parent, in her early forties, of Cape Verdean descent, who works as a hotel housekeeper. She has been in the country for less than 10 years and has limited English skills. Her child has difficulty with school and behavior, but no diagnosed learning disabilities.

At the initial meeting, Isabel did not say much, but expressed significant gratitude for the school. "I have a hard time with my son Michael, but everyone here always helps me." In her initial survey, Isabel said she felt very empowered by the school, but noted that she only sometimes talks to her son about school as he often does not want to talk to her. She also stated that she is only sometimes able to help him with his homework due to her limited English. She noted feeling comfortable at the school because she feels as if the school has been very supportive in helping her with her son, and she regularly drops in to talk to staff and check in on her son. When at the school, she always does some type of parent job so it doesn't seem to Michael that she is spying on him. She admitted that she only sometimes feels as if she knows what the school expects from her son, but had a very good understanding of his academic strengths and weaknesses as she has always been involved in his schooling.

She noted that she completely felt like a partner with the school and although, she was comfortable at parent meetings she never really know what to say or felt comfortable enough to speak in the big groups because of her limited English skills. When asked about a homework space at home, she stated that she felt as if her son did have the best environment to complete homework at home, as it was just her and elderly parents at home. However, she acknowledged that he would rarely sit and do it, and therefore, she was grateful for the extended day that forced him to complete it. In regards to her own schooling, she went to school in another country and only completed school up to the sixth grade, but noted that when she was in school she did well and worked hard and wished she could have done more schooling. We discussed making that happen.

Parent Number Three- Melissa

Melissa came to as a referral from a family member. She has only the one child who is a student at the school but lives with her sister and niece (who is also a student at the school). She is a single parent, Cape Verdean female in her mid thirties, who works in a box making factory. She has been in the country for 7 years and has limited English skills. Her child does not have academic difficulty with school but does have some behavioral issues.

At the initial meeting Melissa was very hesitant to speak up. She has a lot of interactions with staff at the school in regards to her son's behavior. Since being at EPJ she stated that she feels very empowered to be involved in her child's education. She sometimes talks to her child Robert about school and his work. Due to English being her second language, she is only sometimes able to help her son with his homework. She noted often feeling comfortable when at the school, but not having time to drop in. She too only went to school up to the sixth grade in

another country, but did not have problems academically or behaviorally. She is only somewhat aware of Robert's academic and behavioral strengths and weaknesses. She very much feels like a partner in educating her child but will not speak at parent meetings in big groups or one-on-one with the teacher. Her home is quiet and she has the resources available for Robert to do his homework except for when he needs extra help.

Parent Number Four- Linda

Linda has been a part of our community since the school opened 10 years ago and has had two children already graduate from EPJ. She began the school as a single parent but has since been married and gotten a job as a secretary in a doctor's office and is no longer in the low-income bracket. She is Cape Verdean but is fluent in English and her child Steven has neither learning disabilities nor any major behavioral issues.

In the initial questionnaire, Linda noted that at she very much feels empowered by the school to be involved in her child's education. She is a very involved parent who notes talking to her child every night about his school day and school work. Unlike most of the other parents in the study, when her son has difficulty with his homework most times she was able to help. She is very comfortable at group and one-on-one teacher parent meetings. She noted that she never drops in to check on her child. When she was in school she had a positive experience both academically and behaviorally, but notes being a behavioral challenge to her parent's. She has a solid understanding of her child's academic strengths and weaknesses and very much feels like a partner in educating her child. Although not always quiet, she feels like most nights she's able to

provide a quiet workspace for her son to get his work done at home when his older siblings are not bothering him.

Parent Number Five- Tammy

Tammy came to as a referral from a school counselor. The child she has at EPJ is the oldest of four. She is a single parent, African- American female in her early thirties, who is unemployed. Her child does not have any learning disabilities or major discipline issues at school but has a huge truancy problem and major discipline issues at home.

Tammy was chosen because she is a parent the researcher feels would benefit from the programming. In the initial survey, she noted that she only somewhat felt empowered by the school, to be involved in her child's education. She noted sometimes talking to her child about his school day but said she is never able to help him with his homework, and then noted that he never asks for help anyways. She stated that she is comfortable when she is at the school, but that she rarely has stopped in to check on him because she does not have time, for her school was academically and behaviorally a challenge and she dropped out early due to pregnancy. She noted that she is “getting pay back” for how she was as a child.

Tammy also noted that she has a very solid understanding of her child's behavioral strengths and weaknesses but that she is only somewhat aware of his academic strengths and weaknesses. She said that she feels very much feels like a partner with the school but that she is very uncomfortable at parent meetings and is unclear about what to ask or say during these meetings. She noted that once her son gets home, it is almost impossible for him to get any work done, as his younger siblings did not leave him alone.

Parent Number Six- Florida

Florida came to as a referral from a previous teacher at her son's elementary school. She has a son currently in the 8th grade and a younger daughter who will be coming to EPJ next year. She works part-time and her husband works full time but they still fall into the low-income bracket. She has been in the country over 15 years and speaks functional English, but her husband does not speak or understand much English. Her child does not have any behavioral problems or learning disabilities and does really well academically.

Florida notes feeling very empowered by the school to be involved in their children's education. She has been a parent who takes advantage of all opportunities given to her. She talks to her kids every night about their school day and their school work. Even though she has limited English skills, she sits down each night with her son and daughter and looks over their schoolwork. In her country, Ecuador, she did well in school and never had any behavioral issues.

Because she talks to teachers so often and comes to every parent meeting she has a very good understanding of her child's strengths and weaknesses and completely feels like a partner with the school. Although she is sometimes embarrassed by her limited English speaking skills, she does not let that stop her from being involved in her children's education or stop her from being an active participant at the meetings. She always makes sure that they have all the materials they need to do homework and sets aside a quiet time to get everything done.

Table 4.3 The Participants

This table demonstrates that the parents in this study represent a range of parents across grades 5-8, are from different races, employment and marital status. Only one completed high school and their children represent varying academic and behavioral issues.

Parent	Grade	Single Parent	Race	High School Grad	Low-Income	Child with Learning Disability	Child with Behavioral Issues	Currently Employed
1 Nancy	5	X	African-American		X	X	X	
2 Isabel	8	X	Cape Verdean		X	X	X	X
3 Melissa	6	X	Cape Verdean		X		X	X
4 Linda	5		Cape Verdean	X				X
5 Tammy	6	X	African American		X			
6 Florida	7		Latina		X			X

Table 4.4 Pre-Project Parent Involvement Levels

This table demonstrates how parents were chosen and whether or not they were active parents before the project began. Each parent ultimately received all the information from the meetings but often it was not during the initial workshop. Those who did not attend the meeting, but were given the information at a later meeting time, are marked with a single asterisk.

Parent	Chosen based on expected completion	Active Parent at beginning of study	Attended all meetings
Nancy			X*
Isabel	X	X**	X*
Melissa	X	X**	X
Linda	X	X	X
Tammy			X*
Florida	X	X**	X

*Had to do special recap meetings at separate times

**When work schedule allowed for it

This graph shows how each parent who participated in the project, even if they did not attend the actual meeting, were all exposed to content of each workshop. This was important in order to document change.

The Outreach Activities, Workshops, Meetings, Interviews and Questionnaires

In reviewing the conditions which existed prior to the project taking place, the researcher noted that there were several systems in place but there were no accountability protocols to document and ensure parent activity. Teacher and parent conversations were haphazard, and parent meetings were merely for routine information sharing. Parents were only required to come to progress report meetings and no other event with no consequences for not attending. In the planning of the project it was decided that several things needed to be addressed in order to effectively create a parent involvement program that really empowered parents to be more involved. First, it was important to get staff engaged and excited about the importance of parent involvement; then a plan needed to be made about how to best get parents involved.

Teacher Buy-in

Each year, a week before school begins all staff is required to take part in a teacher orientation. During this teacher orientation, several segments were dedicated to parent relationships, ensuring that the staff understands the importance of the family-school relationship. It is important for the school leader to build a shared vision that becomes more than an idea and serves as a force in people's heart (Senge, p. 206) that binds them together and moves them forward as they move forward through this journey of the shared vision. This included creating, communicating, and enforcing expectations around respectful relationship building with parents, making parents feel welcome when they are at the school, communicating with parents as a teacher and advisor, ways to help parent become better advocates for their child and helping them become more knowledgeable of their child's academic strengths and weakness. Parent communication became a mandated expectation of the school where teachers must report

weekly on having spoken to their advisee's parents on a weekly meeting form and are expected to share important information with other teachers during the grade meetings.

Mandatory Events

Several outreach activities were put in place to help boost family participation in their child's education. First, to help build relationships, all parents are required to attend five mandatory school events: a beginning of the year Barbeque, an Open House and three progress reports.

Opening Barbeque

The first event was a beginning of the year BBQ. This BBQ is held at the school and it is a way for parents to talk to each other as well as staff. This may be the first time parents are meeting new staff members and talking to their child's advisor. The BBQ is set up so that parents arrive at 4pm and must stay and mingle for the first hour and then towards the end of the event parents must hear a short formal introduction of staff with a few important announcements, complete a few forms, get a handbook and calendar and are then free to stay around longer or leave.

Open House

The Open House began as an un-mandated event but based on staff and parent feedback it became a mandatory event. This event gives parents the opportunity to watch five condensed classes. The teacher explains their class expectations and grading procedures and then teaches a mini-lesson to the class while the parents observe and engage in the class with the students. This proved to be a huge success based on teacher and parent feedback.

Progress Report Nights

The first two progress report nights are set up so parents schedule a 20 minute block of time to meet with the child's advisor to review the student's progress so far. At this meeting parents are given a progress report which list strengths and areas for improvement. These often include things parents can do with their child to help them improve. The last progress report which was added as a part of the project, is a student led progress report. Parents schedule a time just as they do for the first two progress reports but, for the last progress report the students prepare a 20 minute presentation of what they are learning in class, along with examples of good and not so good work they have handed in. Parent are required to complete a form which lists things they are proud of and things they would like to see improve, as well as list any questions they have. Once the child has presented, the parent shares their comments and questions. This sets up a parent-student dialogue around school; then parents were required to take the actual progress report home with some 'homework' to continue the discussion. After the discussion, both parent and child were required to write (in their own language if necessary) about things they discussed and goals they set.

Two-way communication

To help two-way communication there was an increase in the school-to-family communication but more importantly, family-to-school communication. Family-to-school communication was increased in several ways. First the format of the weekly parent memo was changed to include a place where parents needed to complete and sign a checklist indicating that they had done their service hours to the school, seen and discussed their child's completed

homework and discussed any discipline issues the child had that week. They are also able to write in any questions or comments on the form.

In addition to changing a progress report night so that it was student led, for each report card sent home a new form was created that required that they sit down with their child, read the report card together and discuss it. They must then complete a form about things they discussed, sign it and return the form to school after discussing it with their child. Also, parents are called twice a month by their child's advisor, and sometimes by a classroom teacher as well. Parents are also regularly encouraged to visit classes and can come and talk to the Head of School or Principal at any time or schedule meetings with individual teachers. They can also make an appointment to attend a grade meeting where they can sit at a table with all their child's teachers present.

The Parent Workshops

A total of six workshops and meetings took place, each was tape recorded, transcribed and coded. The initial parent meeting workshop was a trust building, collegial, informal, informational session where parents ate a meal together, were given details of the programming, including all human subjects information, completed consent forms and an initial questionnaire. Then subsequent workshops were presented every other month. The workshops began with a large group discussion on a broad topic where any parent who wanted to attend was encouraged to be a part of this workshop, then the smaller focus group of parents who have agreed to be part of this study would meet afterward to discuss what was covered in the workshop and how they were going to apply this to working with their own child. Each parent then had to answer a few semi-structured interview questions or a complete a questionnaire.

Table 4.5 Non-meeting, Parent Involvement before project began

Demonstrates how parents responded to parent involvement activities, before the project began. A total closer to 4 would indicate a very involved parent and a total closer to 12 would indicate an uninvolved parent.

- 1- Most Times,
- 2- Sometimes,
- 3- Rarely

	Parent One	Parent Two	Parent Three	Parent Four	Parent Five	Parent Six
Weekly folder signed	2	2	1	2	3	1
Talked to advisor regularly	2	1	1	1	3	1
Initiates advisor communication	2	2	3	1	3	3
Did weekly service hours	2	1	1	2	3	2
Total	8	6	6	6	12	7

This table shows that most of the parents averaged in the ‘Sometimes’ to ‘Rarely’ range in regards to non-meeting activities. One goal of the project was to move parents closer to ‘Most Times’.

Table 4.6 Parent Participation in Project and Meeting Activities

Table 4.6 Demonstrates how parents responded to parent involvement activities, during the project. A number closer to 13 would indicate that they attended and took advantage of all the opportunities presented a number closer to 26 would indicate that they did not attend or take advantage of what the project had to offer and had to get the information at a later time.

- 1- Yes they attended
- 2- No they did not attend

	Parent One	Parent Two	Parent Three	Parent Four	Parent Five	Parent Six
Attended Open House	1	1	1	1	2	1
Attended BBQ	1	1	1	1	1	1
Progress Report Night 1	1	1	1	1	2	1
Progress Report Night 2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Informal dinner	1	1	1	1	1	1
Workshop 1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Workshop 2	1	1	1	1	2	1
Workshop 3	1	1	1	2	1	1
Workshop 4	1	1	1	1	1	1
Workshop 5	1	1	1	1	2	1
Workshop 6	1	1	1	1	2	1
Random visit	2	2	2	2	2	2
Took advantage of parent opportunity	2	1	2	2	2	1
Total	15	14	14	16	20	14

This table demonstrated how involved parents were in the school. Parent number five had to get a great deal of the information presented to them individually during a separate meeting time. Although this was necessary for the project, it is unrealistic that a school will be able to do this for all parents. What is possible is that when a school is aware of parents who are known to not participate, they must do a great deal of outreach, call often, provide multiple reminders, offer babysitting and provide alternative times when possible.

Trust building, the informal dinner

One of the benefits of being such a small close-knit school is that the researcher, who is the principal of the school, already had developed good relationships with the parents. An additional finding that really affected the study was the comfort that the researcher felt in dealing with the parents. As someone who has come from the same background as the families that the school serves, it made trusting building and communicating much easier. The researcher was able to talk to the parents as someone who is informed about school related issues in a manner that was never condescending or belittling and could do it in a manner that the parents understood and were comfortable with.

This initial meeting was well attended and was to make the parents aware of the project and the study and to go over all the logistical information that was needed for the human subjects review. Once this was all complete the researcher and parents had informal discussions about different topics. At this meeting the parents were extremely excited about the partnership and being able to help the school find the best ways to communicate with parents. The conversations were mainly about the kids and the school. Some of the comments made were, “I am so happy that my social worker recommended this school to me, it has really been a blessing for (my daughter) Shayna.”, “I like how much the teachers call me for things”, “I don’t like how often

my child gets detention”, “The parking lot at night is crazy, you all need to do something about it.” These comments show the broad range of topics that were brought up at a meeting with no real formal agenda. The main purpose was relationship building and to get that closeness that comes with eating a meal together. The meal was set up family style as to model a positive dinner environment, something the kids do every night at school. Studies show that the more often families eat together, the less likely kids are to smoke, drink, do drugs, get depressed, develop eating disorders and consider suicide, and the more likely they are to do well in school, delay having sex, eat their vegetables, learn big words and know which fork to use (Gibbs, N., 2006), this research was informally discussed with families as they sat around talking and eating with the researcher.

The parents committed to attending the meetings and were excited about some of the possibilities that were presented. At the end of this meeting parents completed a questionnaire that they would take again at the end of the school year. The questionnaire had several questions to determine if there was any change in how they felt before the programming to how they felt after. It also had questions to help determine a starting point for different aspects of things that were going to be presented throughout the workshops. The first question which was the basis of the project asked parents if they felt empowered by the school to be involved in their child’s education. The answers ranged from somewhat to very much with one parent leaving it blank.

It has been the researchers experience that the first parent meeting of the school year was always well attended then attendance usually tapers off as the year progresses. Therefore the first meeting must capture parents and make them want to come to other meetings. Also during the school year, parents were called personally by their child’s advisor and invited to dinner, then to join us for a meeting at which babysitting was provided.

Table 4.7 Initial Parent Questionnaire upon beginning the project

Demonstrates how parents responded to the initial questionnaire they took in the beginning of the project to determine how they felt about issues that will be addressed in the project.

- 1-Never,**
- 2-Rarely,**
- 3-Somewhat/Sometimes,**
- 4-Very Much/Often,**
- 5-Completely/Always**

	Parent 1	Parent 2	Parent 3	Parent 4	Parent 5	Parent 6
I feel empowered by the school to be involved in my child’s education.	3	4	3	4	3	4
I talk to my child nightly about their school day and school work.	2	2	3	4	2	4
I feel able to help my child with their school work.	2	2	2	4	2	2
I feel comfortable when I am at the school	2	3	2	5	2	3
I drop into school to check on my child.	1	2	2	2	1	1
I have a solid understanding of what is expected of my child from the school.	2	2	2	4	1	3
I have a solid understanding of my child’s academic strengths and weaknesses.	3	2	2	4	1	3
I have a solid understanding of my child’s behavioral strengths and weaknesses.	3	2	2	4	3	4
I feel like a partner with the school in educating my child.	2	4	4	4	2	4

I feel comfortable at parent meetings.	3	2	2	4	2	3
I know what I should be looking for and asking about at parent meetings.	2	2	2	4	2	3
My child has the appropriate resources available to get their work completed at home.	2	4	2	4	2	4

Upon an initial surface examination of this data, the researcher noticed patterns of responses given by those parents who were chosen because the researcher felt they were not living up to their parent responsibilities, those who were chosen because the researcher felt they could benefit most from the programming due to previous lack of commitment and those who were active parents.

Workshop One, Communicating, knowing and setting expectations

This workshop engaged parents in dialogue around having strong relationships based in two-way communication where kids feel comfortable enough to talk about all kinds of topics, but ultimately know that the parent is the decision maker. The workshop discussed monitoring all computer and cell phone activity, knowing who the child is spending time with and setting clear rules and expectations, one of which should be the clearly stated expectation of continued education to college.

This workshop started with an activity centered around learning what parents knew about their child. Parents were asked questions and had to stand up if the answer was yes. Some of questions were, I know who my child’s friends are, my child has a bedtime that is before 10pm, I monitor my child’s computer time, my child has a cell phone, my child has the ability to text on their cell phones, I always know where my child is, I ask my child about everything, my child tells me everything, my child is my best friend, my child is allowed to debate a decision I have

made, my child knows that I expect them to go to college. After each question, parents were engaged in dialogue around the issue.

The researcher noticed the effect that watching other parents had on how parents responded. When asked the question, "I have a good relationship with my child", every parent stood up, even though the researcher knew differently. Every parent stood when asked, "I know my child's friends". This again was not accurate, based on private conversations the researcher had with some of these parents about their child's friend choice. As a result, the researcher determined that the questions as stated seemed to have a clearly expected right or wrong answer that would make the parent feel like a bad parents for answering truthfully. By changing the remaining questions, the researcher was immediately able to see that many of that parents who were responding dishonestly, began to answer more honestly when the questions did not seem to be attached to their parenting. For example, the question, "I monitor my child's computer time" was changed to, "I know how to use the history function on my home computer". This then would lead to questions like, where is the computer in your home and then to a lesson on the history function, which was followed by discussions of parents talking to their children about the dangers of the internet. "I monitor my child's phone use" was changed to "I am aware that you can review all calls and text messages on the phone and on the phone bill". This created a more collegial and trusting atmosphere and made them more comfortable. The researcher noted that it was important that all activities in these workshops be empowering and non-judgmental in order to be effective.

Moving onto the next activity, parents were asked to volunteer to share a time when they sat with their child and made a decision together. We had many great stories but the best one was when a parent discussed how her oldest son, John, had been accepted to a boarding school in

a different state. She had been worried about the direction he was headed if he stayed in Boston. She knew he did not want to leave but she really wanted him to go. They had many conversations about it, some were good and others were not as good.

As she described the conversations with her son, many parents began nodding as a gesture that indicated that they understood what this parent was saying. She said initially that she drove the conversation by saying things like:, "I don't like your friends, your grades are beginning to slip, and you're going to boarding school." That led to major conflict with John ultimately saying he was not going to go to the boarding school. She left the conversation and cried all night. She discussed coming to the realization that making the decision for him would not work and she sought the assistance of a family member. The following Saturday she took her son on a trip to the school accompanied by an uncle who as a teenager spent time in jail but is now living a productive life. The researcher noticed that other parents in the group began to let down their guard as they listened to the story. The trip with his uncle softened John up and his strong opposition to attending the boarding school became a maybe. She then said that she knew she had to approach this differently as she had learned in a previous meeting with a high school placement director that she needed to make sure that he felt like he had some input into making the decision even though she knew it was her decision, i.e., what she wanted. She then told the group how ultimately, he decided to go and is doing well in his third year.

The group used this story as a spring board into a discussion about decision making with an empowered parent who was not part of the study, leading the discourse. The process that took place in that discussion, helped parents apply it to their own issues. This parent had come a long way in learning how to talk to her child and demonstrated that she has become an effective advocate for her child and his needs. After the meeting, she discussed with the researcher how

she had become more empowered by her meetings with different staff members and she agreed to share this story of how she became empowered to help her child make an important life decision at the meeting held for 7th and 8th grade parents about the high school process.

This led to many comments, which were dealt with as a group, "I am the parent, I make the decisions. That is the problem with kids today, people want to give them too much input into decisions.", "Me and my daughter talk about everything, when she has a hard decision to make, I give her advice which she follows." "If my child thinks they can debate the decision with me it's a problem." These comments brought the researcher to talk with the parents about why they all should work to include their children in the decision making process and look to other trusted adults for assistance when needed as this approach can often lead to decisions made in the best interest of the child and parent.

Nancy, parent number one, asked the group for advice. She stated that she is having a very difficult time with her child. At that point, other parents began giving advice as well as sharing similar problems. This was a clear example of empowered parents working together to help each other. Many of the topics were tabled for the next meeting. We then revisited some of the topics from the initial questionnaire with a focus on parents getting more involved in all things kids are doing instead of waiting to be included in by their child. As the administrator, the researcher shared stories about students who come to school barely able to keep their eyes open because they were up late at night on cell phones, texting, on computers, watching TV, and doing many other things at hours that they should be sleeping. The group discussed limit setting on the use of these things and taking them away when necessary.

"At 9 PM, I take my daughter's phone." said parent number six, "After that she goes to her room and reads." "I am not home to see what happens because I work nights, and my oldest

son watches the kids", said another. The group discussed different options that parents could take with children who were not sleeping at night. The discussion then moved to the need for parent to explicitly create and enforce household expectations, and family beliefs. The group made a list of some of these things such as: make your bed, wash the dishes, help with your sister, do well in school, do all your homework, and the list goes on. The researcher then challenged them to think longer term and move away from daily household expectations to create expectations centered around the belief of graduating high school and going to college. One parent who was a very involved parent stated that when talking about the future, her mother always preferenced comments with the statement, "After you graduate from college..." so it was clearly an expectation.

The meeting ended with some takeaways, where parents had to decide what is important for them and their child and an assignment to go home and share those expectations with their child. The parents then generated a list of things they had learned from the meeting, which included:

- set time every day to talk to your child,
- ask about their school day,
- ask about what is going on with their friends,
- always remind them that nothing should get in the way of them furthering their education in order to lead productive adult lives

Each parent then completed a short survey on if they felt the meeting had any impact on making them feel more empowered as a parent and what they felt was the most useful thing they would be taking away from the meeting.

The researcher met briefly (as the big meeting went longer than planned) with each parent that was part of the study. A finding from this meeting was that the researcher, discovered that every parent responded that they felt more empowered after attending the meeting and felt that they could hopefully use some of what was discussed in the meeting in order to be better able to help their child. Nancy, parent number one, was full of excitement, "as soon as I get home, I'm going to sit down with all my kids and really talk to them about college and what we'll do to get there." Isabel, parent number two, was less excited as she felt like she had already been trying to do many of the things discussed but things were still not going well with her son. Melissa, parent number three was also very excited to go home and talk to her son. Linda, parent number four, felt like although she does talk to her son often, this gave her some new direction for her conversations. Tammy, parent number five, simply stated that everything was good and she would talk to her son. Florida, parent number six, stated that she felt the meeting was very helpful and that all she wants is to help her son "have a good life and get a good education because she was unable to get one for herself." She was very grateful for everything the school was providing for her son.

Workshop Two, Creating a Space for Academic Success

This workshop focused on helping parents help their child create a quiet space in the home to read and do homework. Upon entering the second workshop, parents were asked to complete a brief questionnaire which included a description of the setting when their child is doing homework. The workshop then started with an opening activity where parents found a parent that they did not already have a relationship with to talk to for 2 minutes. During this time they were to introduce themselves and describe their child, then tell an interesting tidbit about their child to the other parent. At the end of the 2 minutes they would introduce each other to the

group. As many parents come late to these meetings, introductory activities provide a time for parents to talk to each other, get to know each other and at the same time allow the stragglers time to not miss important information.

The workshop began with a few parents sharing how their child studied at home; for many it was in front of the TV, or with the radio blaring, or it was getting it done while they were being disturbed by a younger sibling or family member. For a few it was in their bedroom with the door closed and for one it was during a quiet time in the house while the parent sat right next to her son reading and ready to answer questions. This response elicited a few negative comments from other parents who felt most parents don't have the time to do things like that.

The workshop then presented information on creating a home environment that will help the child succeed in completing homework. As a door prize, each parent was given a homework help kit, which included supplies that the student may need to do homework including paper, pens, index cards, a dictionary, etc. In addition, we discussed the importance of home libraries and the school's commitment to make it happen in every home, by putting out free books after each meeting.

The researcher read through some responses as parents talked and chose a few quotes from the initial survey: "My house is way too noisy, I have two little ones, who when my daughter gets home from school, I need her to help me with." "I don't like how my son is in school 12 hours a day and still has to do work when he gets home." "All my son wants to do is talk on the phone and sit on the computer." The quotes were shared anonymously with the entire group to solicit responses. The researcher asked for helpful responses and here are the answers that other parents provided:

In response to "My house is way too noisy, I have two little ones who when my daughter gets home from school, I need her to help me with."

"Carve out some time for your child to lock herself in a room and complete her homework. You should keep the two little ones from disturbing your child while this is happening. Once your child is done, then she can help. Her job is school and you should make that clear to her."

Another parent added, "Make a schedule, have her help you for an hour, put the little ones to bed, then she will have a quiet space to do work, where you are free to help."

The second quote the researcher chose to address was: "I don't like how my son is in school 12 hours a day and still has to do work when he gets home" many parents were in agreement with this response. Still others felt as if it was a good thing as the school was trying to help prepare their child to go to good high schools.

One parent responded that she should "work with your son on time management so that he can get more done in school during evening study and have less to do at home."

The response that generated the greatest reaction was, "All my son wants to do is talk on the phone and sit on the computer." Even though the researcher knew many of the parents struggled with the same issue, they all had similar responses. "You're the parent, you need to take away the phone and computer." Each of these comments generated discussions that represented to the researcher empowered parents helping one another. At the end of the meeting the group discussed takeaways. Each parent had to bring home the materials and find a place in the house that is quiet and set up a homework station and schedule if necessary. The findings from this workshop were that parents who took part in the workshop, were given information

that they were able to implement at home therefore leaving more educated and informed. Every parent indicated feeling more empowered with new information to help their child do homework.

The six parents who were took part in the study then remained to briefly discuss outcomes of the meeting and answered a brief questionnaire on setting expectations and talking to your child. The questionnaire asked if they felt like they were going to be able to set up a quiet space for homework and get their child to do homework more consistently.

The findings from the participants indicated some hesitancy in actually being able to implement change but that they felt more empowered and like they knew what to do. Parent number one, Nancy felt like it was going to be impossible to get her house quite enough but she would try. Parent number two Isabel, said she was going to go home and cancel the Internet service and take her son's phone until he gets his grades up. Parent number three, Melissa felt like her problem was that she didn't know how to help her son do the homework or didn't know if things were getting done as she has a limited grasp on the English language but, agreed that she would make him do his homework at the kitchen table instead of in his room. Parent number four, Linda said she did not understand why her son never completes his homework because he always tells her he is done so she decided that she would call the teachers and ask if they can send her some way to better check if he is really getting things done, a suggestion made by another parent. In the meeting recap, parent number five, said she never sees her son doing homework as he says he finishes it off at school but that is not what the teachers are saying. The researcher suggested that she call his advisor and develop plan to help her son. Parent number six, Florida, stated that even though her son is extremely hard-working she always feels bad that she cannot help him because of her limited English skills.

Workshop Three, The Parent-Teacher Conference

As the parent-teacher conference was approaching, the researcher felt the need to have this workshop with the goal to empower parents to be prepared for an effective parent-teacher conference. One of the yearly faculty trainings is to prepare staff for the different types of parent meetings they will encounter and how to turn the conference around and make it more effective when it was going off track. In the faculty training the staff discussed the different types of parent conferences teachers may encounter. These were described and ways to address each parent type was presented.

The nodding parent- a parent who will just smile and agree with everything the teacher says with very little conversation coming from the parent

*The negative parent-*a parent who will get stuck on one or two negative comments in an overall good progress report,

The off-task parent- a parent who will come in with some other issue that they are ready to tackle and don't really listen to what the teacher has to say,

The I don't want to be here parent- the parent who is there looking at their watch every other minute, clearly wishing they were somewhere else.

This year the researcher decided to prepare the parents to enter the meeting with information and questions they could and should be asking the teacher. Upon entering the workshop, everyone was given a pre-survey that asked the following and responded as follows.

Table 4.8 Initial All Parent Response to Parent-Teacher Conference Workshop

This table demonstrates how parents responded an initial questionnaire before a workshop on the Parent- Teacher Conference. It is clear that parents do not feel prepared to handle the meetings effectively. The numbers in the boxes indicate the number of parents who circled the corresponding responses.

	Not At All	Somewhat	Very Much	Completely
I feel prepared for the next parent meeting on my child.	3	18	5	1
I know what I should be looking for and asking about at parent meetings.	5	16	5	1
I feel comfortable when at parent conferences.	5	15	5	2
I understand the format of the report.	12	5	10	0

When parents first completed the questionnaire a majority of the responses fell in the 'Not at All' to 'Somewhat' category. When asked if they felt prepared for then next parent meeting, 21 of the 27 parents responded negatively. When ask if they felt they knew what they should be talking about in the parent meeting, 21 of the 27 parents responded negatively. When asked if they felt comfortable at parent meetings 20 of 27 responded negatively and when asked if they understood the format of the report card 17 of 27 responded negatively. It was clear that an intervention was needed to make parents feel more prepared for the parent-teacher meeting.

The parent meeting began by describing the teacher training on how to deal with the different parent types and situations described earlier, at parent conferences. The discussion began with the researcher stating that the goal was to have every parent walk into the parent teacher conference confident, armed with questions and ready to have a successful dialogue with their child's advisor. The researcher began by presenting the overall school curriculum and the things that students had done in each grade. Parents took note of what their child was currently studying in order know what to ask the advisor. Parents were then asked to share a few projects or activities they could remember their child having done over their time at the school. The meeting continued with mock parent teacher conferences and parents sharing stories of past parent conferences that went either really well or really bad. Several parents shared what some of their past parent meetings looked and felt like.

"I went into the meeting really mad at a specific teacher, I had already felt like this teacher was picking my child and then when I saw a D- I got really angry. Nothing the teacher said to me mattered all I wanted to do was give to the teacher who gave my child a D-, a piece of my mind. I don't remember one thing the teacher said to me."

Another parent talked about a time when she had to wait 30 minutes after her scheduled time to see the teacher and at that point just wanted to leave. The groups also discussed the tendency of parents to just look at the letter grade and not pay attention to all the narrative information on report card and how important all the other information can be.

The researcher described how an effective parent meeting must be a dialogue between the teacher and parent, especially as they know their child much better than anyone else. The group looked at sample progress reports and did a few mock parent teacher conferences. They were given some information about what they should be looking for and asking about, were provided with handouts and worksheets of questions they should bring to the meeting. After the parent meeting took place, parents took the questionnaire again.

The findings indicated that every parent felt as if they understood what to expect and were prepared to have an effective parent teacher conference.

Before this workshop those parents in the study responded to a questionnaire about parent-teacher conferences , parent number one, Nancy, felt like before the meeting she never had anything positive to say in these parent teacher conferences. She felt that because her child had such learning disabilities that she always knew the meetings would be bad. In the discussion after the meeting she decided that she would go to the meeting with a positive mindset and would focus on soliciting information from teachers what she could do to help her child. Before this workshop, parent number two, Isabel, stated that she felt like she could never really say

anything in those meetings because she did not know enough about school nor did she feel comfortable questioning teachers, because of her own limited education. She stated that she felt that she could not say much because she knew her son was such a behavior problem. In the discussion after the meeting she stated that she now felt like she could go into the meeting and question why her child was doing so poorly and what she and the school could do to make things better.

Before this workshop, parent number three, Melissa, discussed how her limited grasp on the English language made those meetings very difficult and that all she could do was say yes, because often she did not understand what the teacher was saying to her. After attending the meeting she realized that she should not be embarrassed by her limited English skills and that she could ask the school for a translator if she could not bring her own. She seemed very excited about having someone there with her.

Before this meeting, parent number four, Linda, in a re-cap meeting, stated that she had never had a problem at parent teacher conferences but sometimes did not know what her son was learning. She stated that the information provided her with a good understanding of what the school expects of her son and that she now felt a bit more knowledgeable of what her son was learning. Before this meeting, also in a meeting recap, parent number five, said that parent teacher conferences always made her uncomfortable because she knew her son did not try in school and that was a constant behavior problem. We discussed different things that she could do with her son and she left feeling like she had a few more things to try with her son. Before the workshop, parent number six, Florida, also stated that in the past meetings had been hard for her because of her limited English skills but she is always happy because her daughter does well. She is also looking forward to having the parent-teacher conference translated for her.

In looking at changes from the pre and post questionnaires and meetings, it was noted that every parent felt more prepared for the upcoming parent teacher conference. It was also noted that, parents who responded in the pre-survey, to “I feel prepared for the next meeting on my child” with a *not at all*, or *somewhat* improved their ratings and moved into the *very much* or *completely* category on the post-survey. When asked on the pre-survey, “I know what I should be looking for and asking about at parent meetings” parents who marked *not at all* or *somewhat*, improved their ratings and moved into the *very much* or *completely* category on the post-survey. The researcher noticed that parents who initially responded *not at all* or *not very much* when asked “I feel comfortable at parent conferences” on the pre-survey, improved their ratings and moved to *somewhat*, *very much* or even it to the *completely* category on the post-survey. In addition, on the post survey every parent responded with *completely* when asked if they “understand the format of the report card.” as it was a major part of the workshop.

Table 4.9 All Parent-Post Workshop response to Parent-Teacher Conference Workshop
Demonstrates how parents responded to the same questionnaire after attending a workshop on the Parent- Teacher Conference. It is clear that parents feel much more prepared to handle the meetings effectively.

	Not at all	Somewhat	Very Much	Completely
I feel prepared for the next parent meeting on my child.	0	2	11	14
I know what I should be looking for and asking about at parent meetings.	0	0	8	19
I feel comfortable when at parent conferences.	0	8	11	8
I understand the format of the report.	0	0	4	23

When parents first completed the questionnaire a majority of the responses fell in the ‘Not at All’ to ‘Somewhat’ category, after attending the workshop there were no ‘Not At All’ and a few ‘Somewhat’ responses, but a majority of the parents moved to the ‘Very Much’ or ‘Completely’ category.

Table 4.10 All parent Pre and Post Parent Meeting Workshop Questionnaire Compared
This graph demonstrates how parents responded to the questionnaire before and after attending the workshop. Every parent responded feeling more informed and prepared after attending the workshop.

	Not at all		Somewhat		Very Much		Completely	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
I feel prepared for the next parent meeting on my child.	3	0	18	2	5	11	1	14
I know what I should be looking for and asking about at parent meetings.	5	0	16	0	5	8	1	19
I feel comfortable when at parent conferences.	5	0	15	8	5	11	2	8
I understand the format of the report.	12	0	5	0	10	4	0	23

After attending the meeting, parents who attended the entire workshop completed the questionnaire. Every parent had responses that demonstrated feeling more prepared for the upcoming parent meeting after attending the workshop. The final questionnaire demonstrated that, a majority of the responses to each question, fell in the ‘Very Much’ to ‘Completely’ category. When asked if they felt prepared for then next parent meeting, where initially only 7 felt ‘Very Much’ or ‘Completely’ prepared before the workshop, 25 of 27 felt ‘Very Much’ or ‘Completely’ prepared after the workshop. When ask if they felt they knew what they should be talking about in the parent meeting, where initially only 6 felt ‘Very Much’ or ‘Completely’ prepared before the workshop, all 27 felt ‘Very Much’ or ‘Completely’ prepared after the workshop. When asked if they felt comfortable at parent meetings where initially only 7 felt ‘Very Much’ or ‘Completely’ prepared before the workshop, 19 felt ‘Very Much’ or ‘Completely’ prepared after the workshop. When asked if they understood the format of the report card where initially only 10 felt ‘Very Much’ or ‘Completely’ prepared before the workshop, all 27 felt ‘Very Much’ or ‘Completely’ prepared after the workshop.

Table 4.11 Project participants Pre and Post Parent Meeting Workshop Questionnaire Compared

- 1-Not at all,**
- 2- Somewhat,**

**3-Very Much,
4- Completely**

	Parent 1		Parent 2		Parent 3		Parent 4		Parent 5		Parent 6	
	Pre-Test	Post-Test										
I feel prepared for the next parent meeting on my child.	1	4	1	3	2	4	3	4	1	4	2	4
I know what I should be looking for and asking about at parent meetings.	1	3	1	3	2	4	3	4	1	3	2	4
I feel comfortable when at parent conferences.	2	4	1	3	2	4	3	4	1	3	2	4
I understand the format of the report.	2	4	2	3	2	4	3	4	2	4	2	4

This graph demonstrates how project participants responded to the questionnaire before and after attending the workshop. This shows that every parent responded feeling more informed and prepared after attending the workshop.

Workshop Four, Empowerment and parent concerns

Oftentimes, during other parent meetings off topics concerns were brought up and put in on a parking lot list of to be dealt with at a later meeting. With limited time available for the workshops, we could not address many of the topics parents want to discuss at each meeting. Therefore workshop number four was provided to give parents a forum to discuss school issues that they wanted heard by the school community. The meeting began with a recap of the things discussed in the first three parent workshops. This was useful for the researcher to again see the takeaways and for new parents to hear about some of the things they missed. It was clear that parents were benefiting, from the workshops based on questionnaire responses and the comments being made by parents in particular the six parents who are part of the study.- Much of the meeting focused on the school's discipline policy. As an independent school, students are

suspended for reasons such as disrespecting teachers, violating others' personal space, and not completing homework. Some of the comments we addressed were:

"I completely disagree with the school's policy to suspend kids when they don't do their homework."

"Why do I need to do my parent job if every parent is not required to do it."

"How come I only found out my child was failing a class on her progress report and no one called me to let me know."

Although the meeting at times did not feel particularly useful as it became parents agreeing and disagreeing with each other about their feelings around school policy, it was important to demonstrate to parents that their opinions and ideas are valued and listened to by the school.

Another finding of the project was that the researcher noted how parents who were part of the study often responded to other parents with information obtained in previous workshops. Some of these comments were, "If you have a problem with your child being suspended for not doing homework, you should create a space at home and check it to make sure the homework gets done."

"It's important to ask your child what is happening to them that is making them get so many conduct detentions, ask them every day when they get home what happened at school today?"

"If you're having problems with a teacher, you should talk to the principal, they are really trying to help build better parent relationships."

Each of these comments substantiated the finding that parents were benefiting from previous workshops. They were sharing information that they had obtained in previous workshops and came from parents who are not usually vocal at parent meetings.

After the big group meeting, the individual parents who were part of the study met briefly to discuss how parent meetings had gone and their comments during the evening's meeting. Nancy, noticed that in the past, parent-teacher meetings always made her very angry because she always heard the same bad news. At this meeting, she spoke with excitement about her last parent-teacher conference and how she went in expecting to hear the same things about her child but was surprised to hear that her child was progressing. She said that this was the first meeting that she had ever gone to and left happy because she felt like for the first time her child was making progress and that she went into it more prepared, she really felt like things were going to get better for her daughter. She was very happy that her daughter was finally learning and that it was clear to her that teachers were working hard to make it happen. She then she said how angry she was at how negative many of the parents were being at the meeting and felt like, especially for those who were not at other meetings "they shouldn't talk, because the school is really trying."

Parent number two Isabel, did not cancel the Internet service or take her son's phone as she had stated in the last meeting. She said he had a bad Progress Report and she ended up crying all night about it. She stated that even though she went in feeling more prepared and positive, it did not change the bad news she received. She did not have a comment about the parent meeting except that she felt it was not good for parents to be so mad. Parent number three, Melissa, said she brought a translator which helped her better understand what the teacher was saying but, that she still was not happy about the meeting because although her son is smart, he still gets in trouble a lot and his grades are not that good. She worries that something is wrong with her son that everyone is missing. She has requested help to get him evaluated because she does not know what else to do as she tried hard as a mother to help him. She felt the

parent meeting was “good”. Parent number four, Linda said that she was surprised at how poorly her son had done and felt like there was not enough communication with her beforehand, she also again brought up her anger and frustration around the schools suspension policy. As she felt that it did not help her son and only helped to make things worse.

Parent number five, Tammy said her parent meeting went badly because her son is not doing his work and she continues to have a hard time getting him up in the morning and motivated to come to school. She also felt like the meeting was just a few parents with a lot of negative things to say trying to ruin the meeting. Parent number six, Florida, stated that her meeting went very well and it was great that the teacher spoke to her in Spanish, she felt like the school was great for her and her son.

Overall, each parent went into the parent meeting feeling more prepared and empowered based on questionnaires and interviews. However, for those whose children, before did not do well academically, being more prepared did not make them feel better about the outcome of the parent meeting.

Workshop Five, Social and Cultural Capital, and the Importance of Language

This workshop was presented to help parents understand the effects of language in the home on child development and to present information on Social and Cultural Capital. Now that parents are familiar with the format and structure of the workshops and meetings, the researcher felt as if parents were ready for the parent meeting on social and cultural capital. The meeting began with a question that was printed on an easel. How many words do you think children under three are exposed to in the home where people are on government assistance compared to middle class families compared to wealthy families? Each parent wrote down there responses

and the parent who came closest in each category, won a prize and this jumpstarted the discussion. When the parents heard the differences they were shocked. The researcher then began discussing how important that time was in a young child's life and that even though they were all parents of middle school kids it was not too late to begin building social and cultural capital and talking to them more in a more positive manner. The group talked about the definition and importance of having social and cultural capital. The discussion then led to all the ways that the school tried to provide some of these opportunities but that if it is not happening in the home with the parents as well, then the child will always remain at a disadvantage. The group discussed how important it was for parents to be involved in different ways at home that are not tied to school or school work.

The excitement at the meeting was one that was never experienced in a parent meeting before. This meeting was intentionally planned right before a school vacation. The researcher set out a challenge. A booklet was created by the researcher with numerous free, discounted or school assisted activities that the parents could do with their child over the vacation or on weekends. These included art, history or science museum trips, theatrical performances, musical performances and nature oriented outdoor activities; each parent was to pick one and do it with their children. Then they were to go home and discuss the trip and what they took away from it. We discussed making this the first of many where they worked on consciously building on social and cultural capital even though they have limited resources to do so. They were given the tools to find ways to build this capital without the financial capital. The group discussed creating journals around these activities purposely exposing their children to things they would normally not be exposed to. Parents left this meeting planning to do some the trips together.

A finding of this workshop was that after the meeting, every project participant who was there indicated that they felt more empowered by learning about what social and cultural capital is and committed to taking a trip with their child over vacation and to have them journal about the activity. Parent one, Nancy said that she was going first thing to get all of her children a library card and then they were going to go to a museum that she saw was free on Tuesdays from 11 to 3pm. Parent number two Isabel, said she was working double shifts for someone on vacation next week and could not commit to the trip because she was having her son stay with a family member so he would not be home all day by himself. Parent number three, Melissa said she would ask her son what he would like to do it and try to do it on the weekend. Parent number four, Lori says that she spends a lot of time with her son but never doing any of the valuable activities discussed at the meeting. She also said she never really thought about social and cultural capital and its effect on kids growing up in this world and that she would put a lot more attention to making sure he is exposed to a lot more cultural activities. Parent number five, Tammy did not attend the meeting and in the recap said she would try to take her son somewhere, but that she doubted he would go but that she would talk more to her younger babies at home. Parent number six, Florida was very excited about the opportunities available to her and could not wait to take her son and daughter on some of these trips.

Workshop six, feedback on partnership

The final workshop was to gather feedback on how parents felt the partnership had evolved over the course of the school year and began with an overview of the opportunities presented over the course of the year. Overall the project created parents, who felt more informed and empowered to be involved in their child's education. Some of the feedback that demonstrated this was:

“I like how the school listens to my concerns”

“I enjoyed the first meeting where we all brought food, sat and talked. This made me feel like we were in this together and I had people going through the same thing I was.”

"The meeting on communication and setting expectations was probably the most helpful for me. My daughter and I seem to be better able to communicate now that I've been working on giving her a voice in making decisions, even though sometimes it drives me crazy”

“I now don't feel bad about checking the history and the Internet and going into my son's text messaging. He knows I do it and it keeps me aware of what's going on with him one step ahead of him. He also knows that we will have a problem if things are getting deleted.”

“When my son gets home at 7:30pm if he still has homework, he knows to go right to the living room and get it done before turning on his TV.”

“I've taken the TV out of my son's room, he seems like a new person now that he's getting sleep”

“I never liked parent teacher conferences because I felt like they were always the same thing, this time I went in with questions for the teacher it made me feel better about the meeting”

“I think the best thing I am taking away from all these meetings is to be more positive with my children, I feel like everything I say is negative especially because I am someone who is always yelling. This is something I am still trying to work on.”

“I don't like coming to parent meetings to hear parents complain but I guess some parents feel like it has to be done in front of all parents, I liked parent meetings with a focus much better, that's why I stopped coming last year.”

These quotes illustrate how parents benefited from attending the parent meetings and were able to apply some of the things they learned to help their children, substantiating that they are more knowledgeable and more empowered due to the new information.

What became clear was that most parents really enjoyed the workshop on social and cultural capital. One parent said she wished she, “knew how important all those things were when she first had a baby and that you could do a lot of these things, even without a lot money.”

Another parent said that she herself had never been to most of the places she was looking forward to going to with her child. “If you can believe it, I had never been to an art museum. I didn't really know much about what we were looking at, but I knew I was doing something good for my child. I can't wait to go somewhere else.”

Overall this meeting was useful in confirming that parents felt more empowered and knowledgeable, determining a new order for the workshops as well as what needed to be added to the workshops and what should be removed. Once the small group met, every parent then completed the initial questionnaire once again to determine growth and then met with the researcher for a final interview.

The findings were as follows:

- Every parent responded that they felt completely empowered by the school to be involved in their child's education. Tammy parent number five, stated that even though she missed meetings and was not very reliable she felt as if it was her fault and that the school really tried.
- Every parent noted that they had increased the amount of times that they asked their child about school most stated that it is just part of their daily conversations. Parent number one, Nancy stated that as soon as her child sees her after school she begins telling about her day without even being asked.
- Every parent's response to the prompt, I feel able to help my child with their schoolwork moved closer to always but for many of the parent's who took part in this study, although, language still remained an issue in being able to help a child with schoolwork.

- Every parent who took part in this project said they now always feel comfortable when in the school. Only one parent, Nancy was able to increase the amount of times she dropped into the school since she was not working and moved right around the corner from the school.
- Every parent discussed trying to be more aware of how their child was doing and what their child was doing in school by looking at the work they bring home and talking to teachers often.
- Every parent stated they really felt like a partner with the school in educating their child and that they felt completely comfortable and knowledgeable at parent meetings. Parent number six, Florida said it was great to do practice parent meetings because it helped her with her English and how to do the parent meeting more effectively.

Overall, every parent who took part in the project felt it was a valuable experience.

Table 4.13 Pre and Post Project Questionnaire Results

This graph demonstrates how parents responded to the same questionnaire they took in the beginning of the project. Overall, parent noted feel much more empowered, knowledgeable and better able to help their children.

- 1-Never**
- 2-Rarely**
- 3-Somewhat/Sometimes**
- 4-Very Much/Often**
- 5-Completely/Always**

	Parent 1		Parent 2		Parent 3		Parent 4		Parent 5		Parent 6	
	Pre	Post										
I feel empowered by the school to be involved in my child’s education.	3	5	4	5	3	5	4	5	3	5	4	5
I talk to my child nightly about their school day and school work.	2	5	2	4	3	5	4	5	2	4	4	5
I feel able to help my child with their school work.	2	4	2	2	2	2	4	4	2	4	2	3
I feel comfortable when I am at the school	2	5	3	4	2	3	5	5	2	4	3	5
I drop into school to check on my child.	1	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
I have a solid understanding of what is expected of my child from the school.	2	5	2	5	2	4	4	5	1	3	3	5
I have a solid understanding of my child’s academic strengths and weaknesses.	3	5	2	3	2	4	4	4	1	3	3	5
I have a solid understanding of my child’s behavioral strengths and weaknesses.	3	5	2	4	2	4	4	4	3	5	4	5
I feel like a partner with the school in educating my child.	2	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	2	5	4	5
I feel comfortable at parent meetings.	3	5	2	4	2	4	4	5	2	4	3	5
I know what I should be looking for and asking about at parent meetings.	2	4	2	3	2	4	4	5	2	4	3	5
My child has the appropriate resources available to get their work completed at home.	2	3	4	5	2	5	4	5	2	4	4	5

Table 4.14 Non-meeting, Parent Involvement before and after project

This table demonstrates how parents responded to parent involvement activities, before the project began and the change in their actions after participating in the project. A total closer to 4 would indicate a very involved parent and a total closer to 12 would indicate an uninvolved parent. Every parent moved closer to a 4 demonstrating improved involvement.

- 1- Most Times,
- 2- Sometimes,
- 3- Rarely

	Parent One		Parent Two		Parent Three		Parent Four		Parent Five		Parent Six	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Weekly folder signed	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	3	1	1	1
Talked to advisor regularly	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1
Initiates advisor communication	2	2	2	2	3	2	1	1	3	2	3	2
Did weekly service hours	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	1	2	1
Total	8	5	6	5	6	5	6	4	12	5	7	5

This table shows that every parent who was part of the study, while part of the study signed the weekly folder most times, talked to their child’s advisor regularly, initiated communication with the advisor and did their parent hours. Every parent improved in these areas and moved closer to most times responses. The biggest gains were made with the parent who was the least involved before the program began.

Teacher feedback

In order for this project to be successful it was clear that teachers need to be a part of making it work and clearly understood its importance to the school. For this relationship to develop, many additional requirements were imposed on teachers; such as having to prepare and teach lessons for a family attended open house, and having to speak to parents at least twice a month. In addition, they had to ensure parents were on top of the grades their children were

getting in classes. They had to be prepared for parents armed with new information and questions when coming to parent-teacher conferences.

A finding based on teacher feedback was that the teachers felt that parent relationships were improving. One teacher noted:

“I think the parent contact has greatly improved over the year. The mandatory advisor communication to parents has been a lot of extra work but very important. We talk on the phone, e-mail and meet and I feel like I really know my advisees and families well. I feel because we talk so much, they trust me and the decisions and recommendations I make about their child, and that I will listen to their feedback and concerns. “

“I am the advisor of a parent who took part in the project, and over her four years here, I've never seen her in the building as much as I have recently. In the past, I could never even reach her by phone. Now, she sits at the front desk and answers the phone. It's great for her son to see her here and feel that she is invested in his education, I also know I can go right down to talk to her if I need to.”

“I understand the positive effect of that having an involved parent can have on a child's education but it is exhausting when you have non-cooperative parents and is very hard to keep up with all the expected communication and logging of conversations.”

Summary

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study of a formal parent empowerment and education program designed to provide parents with the knowledge and skills to empower them to become better involved in the education of their children based on two research questions.

Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program feel more empowered to be involved in their child's education?

Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program change their level of involvement in their child's education?

The project was a parent empowerment and involvement program which consisted of a series of workshops and a number of outreach activities. Each part of the program was created with the goal of determining if participating in this programming had any affect on parent empowerment and involvement. With time spent on teacher buy-in through meetings and communication requirements, the school was effectively able to increase the amount of communication between home and school and changed the format of many of the school events to better serve the families. Based on feedback obtained, teachers and parents felt that the changes in the Opening Barbeque, Open House and Progress Report nights were effective in helping with trust building and provided a way for parents, teachers and students to have important dialogue about what is happening in school.

A total of six workshops and meetings took place. The initial parent meeting workshop was a trust building, collegial, informal, informational session where parents ate a meal together, were given details of the programming, including all human subjects information, completed consent forms and an initial questionnaire. Each parent then had to answer a few semi-structured interview questions or complete a questionnaire. It was noted that most of the parents had some level (Somewhat to Very Much) of feeling empowered by the school but that could be better and indicated improvement could be made in different areas that would help parents feel more empowered. The workshops were developed to help in those areas.

Workshop One, Communicating, knowing and setting expectations, engaged parents in dialogue around having strong relationships based in two-way communication where the parent is the decision maker. The workshop also discussed monitoring your child's actions and setting clear rules and expectations, one of which should be the clearly stated expectation of continued education. After attending the workshop, every parent responded that they felt more empowered and were able to use some of what was discussed in the meeting in order to be better able to help their child.

Workshop Two, Creating a Space for Academic Success, focused on helping parents help their child create a quiet space in the home to read and do homework. Each of the participants stated that they were able to make a physical space in the house to do homework and felt more informed about some things to do to help their child and more empowered to do so. *Workshop Three, The Parent-Teacher Conference* was to prepare parents for an effective parent-teacher conference. After the workshop, every parent felt more prepared for the upcoming parent teacher conference. Teachers also noted that parents seemed more prepared for the parent meeting as some of them came in with questions about how to help their child and specific requests for regular feedback, while others had a translator present and one parent even requested a meeting with all of her child's teachers. Overall, each parent went into the parent meeting feeling more prepared and empowered based on questionnaires and interview responses. However, for those whose children did not do well academically, being more prepared did not make them feel better about the outcome of the parent meeting.

Workshop Four, Empowerment and parent concerns, was provided to give parents a forum to discuss school issues that they wanted heard by the school community. Based on parent feedback it was determined that this meeting made parents feel as if their voice was being

heard. *Workshop Five, Social and Cultural Capital, and the Importance of Language*, was presented to help parents understand the effects of language in the home on child development and to present information on Social and Cultural Capital. Although every project participant who was there, indicated that they felt more empowered by learning about what social and cultural capital is and committed to taking a trip with their child over vacation and to have them journal about the activity, only three of the parents followed through, with none of them journaling about the activity. In order for this to be more successful in regards to actually taking the trips the school will need to do more to orchestrate the family trips.

Workshop six, feedback on partnership was to gather feedback on how parents felt the partnership had evolved over the course of the school year. Overall the project created parents, who felt more informed and empowered to be involved in their child's education. Every parent responded that they felt completely empowered by the school to be involved in their child's education and every parent noted that they had increased the amount of times that they asked their child about school. Most stated that it had just become part of their daily conversations. Every parent's response to the prompt, 'I feel able to help my child with their schoolwork' moved closer to 'always'. Every parent who took part in this project said they now always feel comfortable when in the school. Every parent discussed trying to be more aware of how their child was doing and what their child was doing in school by looking at the work they bring home and talking to teachers often. Every parent stated they really felt like a partner with the school in educating their child and that they felt completely comfortable and knowledgeable at parent meetings. Overall, every parent who took part in the project felt it was a valuable experience

In order for this project to be successful it was clear that teachers needed to be a part of making it work and clearly understood its importance to the school. For this relationship to

develop, many additional requirements were imposed on teachers; such as having to prepare and teach lessons for a family attended open house, and having to speak to parents at least twice a month. Based on teacher feedback, although they stated that it has been more work for them, they saw changes in parents who took part in the study and felt that overall, parent relationships were improving and that the work was worth it.

Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, the researcher will interpret the findings from chapter 4, determine the implications of the findings on parent empowerment and involvement programs, lay out what the curriculum for the most effective parent workshop series would be and provide a reflection on leadership and how these views were impacted by this study.

Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, Implications and Reflection

In this final chapter, the researcher will summarize the findings of the project specifically in relation to the literature review presented in Chapter 2. This summary will comment on the findings in relation to the importance of parent involvement, its effect on the student, the family and the community; its impediments; the most effective method of creating a parent empowerment and education program through workshops and outreach; and the importance of introducing and building social and cultural capital. This chapter will also discuss the implications of the findings as they relate to empowering and educating parents in order to get them more involved in their child's education. Lastly, it will discuss the researcher's reflections on leadership and its role in developing an effective parent education and empowerment program.

Summary of the Findings

This qualitative case study investigated the effect of creating a parent involvement program that focused on providing meaningful opportunities to educate and empower parents so that they would feel better able to be involved in their child's education. Based on the countless models uncovered in the research, many of which did not address the specific needs of the school where the project took place, the researcher decided that what would be most helpful to the institution would be to create a program that was tailored to the school, which combined several different theories and targeted the specific needs of the school. This began with an evaluation of the existing program using the ideas from Joyce Epstein's six typologies of parent involvement (Epstein, 1995), James Comer's typology of parent involvement (Comer et al, 1979) which involves attendance at open houses, parent-teacher conferences, other social events and

volunteering, Steinberg's (1996) finding that the type of involvement that most impacted student achievement was physically getting the parents to the schools, and attending school programs, and Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) ideas on cultural capital. Once the strengths and areas in need of improvement around parent involvement were determined, through analysis of what the school currently had in place for parent involvement, parent survey responses and from information gathered from school staff administration based on the theories mentioned above, the researcher decided what changes needed to be made and created a parent involvement program that incorporated these changes. The changes were incorporated over time and were continuously assessed and refined throughout the year and will need continuous evaluation.

Once the program was designed and implemented, data was collected after each change. The researcher analyzed all parent feedback from the workshops, interviews, call logs and the questionnaires to determine if the changes actually had an empowering effect. The researcher also looked at quantitative information that demonstrated an increased number of times that parents spoke to advisors, attended meetings, completed Week-End forms and did their parent job. In addition, the researcher obtained feedback from the teachers who were working closely with the parents.

The findings that emerged from the data collected, demonstrated that the creation of a program which combined increasing two-way communication with parents, training teachers on the importance of parent relationships, creating multiple opportunities for parents to be effectively involved in their child's education and the creation of a series of educational and empowering workshops, resulted in a group of parents who felt more empowered to be more fully involved in their child's education. The research questions that guided the focus of this study were:

1. Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program feel more empowered to be involved in their child's education?
2. Will parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program change their level of involvement in their child's education?

The findings will be divided into three sections: Program Evaluation, Development and Delivery, Parent Feelings of Empowerment Based on Programming, and Parent Levels of Involvement.

Program Evaluation, Development and Delivery

In order to determine what changes needed to be made to the school in order to increase parent involvement, a program evaluation and needs assessment was done. The researcher used the evaluation tool that was created using several theories uncovered in the literature review. As mentioned above, these included: Epstein's (1995) six typologies of parent involvement, James Comer's typology of parent involvement (Comer et al, 1979) which involves attendance at open houses, parent-teacher conferences and other social events and volunteering, Steinberg's (1996) finding that the type of involvement that most impacted student achievement was physically getting the parents to the schools, and attending school programs, and Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) ideas on cultural capital. The evaluation tool used to specifically measure what was being done was Epstein's (1995) six typologies of parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. By examining the school through these lenses and soliciting parent and staff feedback the researcher was able to determine which areas needed improvement and which areas could remain

unchanged. The National PTA has delineated Epstein's six typologies are tools that have been shown to promote and lead to high-quality parent involvement programs and promote meaningful parent and family participation (National PTA website). Parents were also surveyed on the partnership.

There were several facets of parent involvement that already existed in the school community which demonstrated a belief that parents are an important piece of a child's education. The school already had in existence a key piece, which was a weekly two-hour family service commitment and a mission to work in partnership with parents. It also had bimonthly parent meetings, several mandatory progress report nights, parent representatives on the board of trustees and school memos that went home periodically. All of this was examined to determine what was being done well and was effective and what needed to change. The evaluation determined the course of action needed for school improvement.

Evaluation Tool

The evaluation tool used was Adapted from Module 4: Empowering Families through Parent I Project, CESA 5 and Dane County Parent Council the Yearly 4K Family Involvement Evaluation by Joyce Epstein. This consisted of the six areas Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making and Collaborating with the Community. The findings and changes needed were as follows:

Parenting: where the school helps all families establish home environments to support children as students. It was determined that the school needed to do more in regards to helping families establish home environments that were in line with and supportive of the school.

Change: with respect to helping families with this standard the school decided to create several workshops and different opportunities where parents acquired resources and information

on how to establish home environments that supported children as students and learners.

Communicating; where the school has effective means of both school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. The researcher examined the forms used to facilitate home-school communication and determined that the forms were effective in facilitating school-to-home communication but needed to be more consistent. In addition, the review determined that the school forms were not effectively encouraging home-to-school communication. Parents also responded that the school could be better about communication. It was determined that the school needed minor adjustments to how it conducted school to home communication but needed to increase home to school communication.

Change: with respect to the communication standard the school decided to boost its school-to-home communication by employing a phone voice notification system and ensuring that memos went home every Friday. In addition it was determined that the school needed to create new methods of home-to-school communications.

Volunteering: the recruitment and organization of help and support for parents. Since the school already has a mandatory parent service requirement the researcher determined that the school did not need to do much in regards to this standard as every parent is already required to do two hours of service to the school. However, there was one recommendation that the school find ways to get parents involved in more meaningful volunteer opportunities as many were carpooling other students home as a parent job which does not afford them the added benefits of spending time in the building.

Change: with respect to the volunteer standard the only change the school decided to make was to allow parents to count time spent at workshops as their required two hours of

service to the school thus making it a more meaningful experience.

Learning at Home: the school must provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. It was determined that the school needed to do more to help families with the learning at home standard.

Change: with respect to the learning at home, the school decided to create several workshops and different opportunities where parents acquired resources such as free books and homework help kits and information on how to establish home environments that supported learning at home through workshops and presentations.

Decision Making: where parents are included in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives. It was determined that the school was doing an effective job at including parents as decision-makers as the school has two slots on its board of trustees reserved for parents and actively encourage parents to take on roles as parent leaders.

Change: with respect to decision-making it was decided nothing would be changed as parents already had two seats on our board of trustees.

Collaborating with the Community: where the school identifies and integrates resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. It was determined that the school was doing an effective job collaborating with the community as there were numerous partnerships that benefit the students and families.

Change: with respect to the collaborating with the community standard the school decided that it should be better about informing parents of different opportunities available to them in the community.

From all of this information the researcher created and delivered a program which targeted the needs of the school, including increasing several outreach activities and creating parent education workshops. In determining what works for this school, it became evident to the researcher that this was an important finding for implementing a program. In order for a school to effectively increase its parent involvement it should not merely rely on what another school is doing but should evaluate its current system and create a plan that will ensure the successful implementation of an empowering parent involvement program into their school community.

Parent Feelings of Empowerment

Question one of this parent empowerment and involvement study asked, if parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program would feel more empowered to be involved in their child's education? To address this issue the school created and implemented a program which had an underlying goal of empowering parents. It created opportunities for parents to ensure they were knowledgeable about what was going on with their child, their learning and of different activities at the school. It ensured that parents had several means of communicating with the school and that they were given a tool set of information that would empower them to be more effective at helping their children be better students.

One example of this was the workshop about the parent-teacher conference. First teachers were trained on how to engage different types of parents in effective dialogue about their child's academics and school life. Then parents were presented a workshop on how to go into a parent-teacher conference armed with a tool-set of questions, a knowledge of what is happening in the classroom and a stated greater sense of empowerment (survey responses). After the workshop, both parents and teachers reported having more effective meetings where

the dialogue centered on the parent and teacher working in partnership to better assist the child.

The findings of this study indicated that when parents are provided with the appropriate information and resources they will feel more empowered in their ability to help their child be a more successful student. After each workshop, parents responded to questionnaires and stated that information presented made them feel more knowledgeable and empowered. The findings also indicated that teachers felt that parents involved in the study were more knowledgeable and presented as much more empowered, often referring to information presented in the workshops.

Parent Involvement

Question two of the parent empowerment and involvement study asked, if parents who are involved in a formal parent education and empowerment program would change their level of involvement in their child's education? The findings from the study indicated that every parent increased their level of involvement in the school. They were regularly attending parent workshops, completing Week-end forms consistently, doing their parent job more frequently and regularly keeping in contact with the school.

Discussion of Findings

The importance of parent involvement, its effect on the student, the family and the community

“Education of our children is arguably society's most important task, profoundly shaping the communities in which we all live. Achievement and success in many facets of our culture depend critically on formal education. Education is widely perceived as the only viable weapon against the poverty, drug abuse, crime and teenage pregnancy that derail many citizens, particularly in the inner cities, from realizing their productive human potential. Beyond its value

to individuals, education is the cornerstone of societal advancement.” (p. 329, Allen & Hood, 2000). At EPJ, the community has seen first hand what the lack of parent involvement can do. We have placed students who lack supportive parents into great high schools that require parent engagement. In almost every case, those students did not make it at those schools. Even more telling, is the fact that some of those students who clearly had the potential as they were admitted to these great high schools ended up in situations that a good education helps many avoid such as imprisonment, pregnancy at an early age and/or never completing high school rendering themselves very limited in regards to employment opportunities.

When parents are involved, students are experiencing higher grades and test scores, better attendance, improved behavior, better social skills and higher graduation rates (Project for School Innovation, 2003). These are benefits that do not stop at the student but extend to students, families, schools and communities (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). As parents become are more involved in their child’s education this may lead to them becoming more involved in community activities with increased self-confidence and a more positive self-image, “...not only do parents become more effective as parents, but they become more effective as people...Once they saw they could do something about their child’s education, they saw they could also do something about their housing, their community and their jobs.” (Bronfenbrenner, National PTA, Carter 2002, p.10). Not only is parent involvement crucial to the child’s education, the effect that it has on the student, the family and the community goes way beyond a student doing better in school and has rippling effects to our entire nation (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, 2003; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001).

There is a positive relationship between parent involvement and increased parent efficacy. Parent efficacy leads to increased parental involvement in a child’s schooling which in

turn, correlates significantly to better grades for their children (Epstein 1995, Comer, et al, 1979, Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994 and Steinberg ,et al., 1996). The program implemented at EPJ, with the specific goal of explicitly teaching parents about how big an impact their involvement has in their child's education, and how to most effectively be involved, created parents who felt they were more empowered and better able to help their children.

Impediments

There are a myriad at of reasons why parents don't get involved at their children's school. Such as, parents who feel unwelcome or intimidated in the school, parents who speak a different language and can't communicate with the staff, inherent mistrust of the institution, and inflexible job schedules (Hidalgo et al., 1995, Ogbu, 2003, Sanchez, 2002). If the school is truly committed to getting all parents involved, it is the school's responsibility to ensure parents always feel welcomed, trust the institution and do not feel intimidated when it the school building. This is done by setting the expectation with staff that parents are to be happily greeted every time they are in the building and that the school does intentional relationship building through outreach with families and through events and regular communication.

For many minority parents, the lack of time that they had to get involved (NCES, 2000; O'Connor 2001, Chavkin & Williams, 1987) was cited as the main reason for not getting involved. To address this EPJ polled parents to determine what would be the most convenient days and time to do the workshops, and as evenings were not possible for all participants, the researcher did several morning re-cap meetings. Another finding of this study was that a school needs to be flexible in the time that it offers programming in order to get all parents involved,

even offering weekend programming as an option. A Saturday Open House had almost perfect family participation.

Many minority families and families from low income households do not discuss education at home and have lower educational aspirations for their children; (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Johnson (1991) found that most parents want to be more involved in their child's education, but do not know how. Many feel inadequate, not literate enough or do not know how to promote learning. When parents engage with their child in learning activities at home, provide for their basic needs, and communicate with the school, they can help mitigate the negative impacts of poverty and student drop out (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). A finding of this study was that simply providing families with the information of how important their involvement was to their child's education and that their involvement could be improved with simple changes that often required minimal time, created more involved parents.

To address these impediments the researcher began building on established trust with the families to explicitly address these areas that have been noted as reasons that parents gave for not being involved in their child's education. The school created a culture that ensures that parents are greeted warmly and always feel welcome in the school building. When possible, the researcher addressed language issues by having other parents translate workshops and on occasion offered information that was sent home in different languages. Additional findings indicate that offering childcare, food and other incentives such as free books, homework help kits and gift card raffles increased attendance at meetings.

The Creation of an Effective Parent Empowerment and Education Program Through Workshops and Outreach with a Focus on Introducing and Building Social and Cultural Capital.

One of the easiest changes that had a major impact on parent involvement was the creation of the Week-end form. The study revealed that while communication was getting into the homes, there was no easy way for parents to communicate with the school. A finding of the study was that the school needed to have ways that parents could easily communicate with the school.

To begin improving the family to school communication, a weekly checklist was created in which teachers could write small notes to parents on a form which parents expected every Friday in a weekend envelope which each child brought home filled with homework, family memos, detention forms and the Week-End form to complete and sign. On this Week-End form parents would read any notes written to them by the teacher and they would then check off individual boxes indicating that they had done their service hours to the school, seen and discussed their child's completed homework and discussed any discipline issues the child had that week. They were also able to write in any questions or comments on the form, and they knew that teachers would be expecting this form on Monday, just as the parents were expecting it on Friday. Once the teacher collected and responded to the questions, the forms were then turned into the principal to review and follow up where needed. This created an intact circle of information exchange that included, teacher communicating to parent about the child's week, parent communicating with child about their school week, confirmation of a parent fulfilling their school responsibilities, parent communicating with teacher about concerns, and finally, the principal reviewing the communication and following up when necessary. This form had an additional benefit of creating opportunities for parents to communicate with their child each week about school. Although this is an effective method of ensuring two-way communication teachers have noted that when parents do not complete the form the follow-up required is often

time consuming. When a form is not returned the teacher must continue to ask for the form from the child and call the parent when the form does not get brought back to school. For some students, this is a regular occurrence, adding yet another responsibility to a teachers already full plate.

The program illustrated several findings that proved effective in empowering and involving parents in their child's education. Steinberg et al. (1996) found that the type of involvement that most impacted student achievement was physically getting the parents to the schools, and attending school programs. Therefore, the findings indicated that schools may need to mandate attendance at a few important events in order to ensure parent involvement and build momentum for their involvement. Another finding, was that schools need to create numerous opportunities for families to engage in dialogue outside of the school, such as report card reflection forms that need to be done together and returned to the school. Also, the addition of mandated conversations that must happen twice a month between the parent and their child's advisor created parents who felt informed and empowered by the school. It is noted that although this is an extremely effective approach to increasing parent participation, it is a large addition to a teacher's responsibilities and is only effective if the school has a way for teachers to document these conversations and where administrators can review the logs of these conversations.

There were several findings of the project that did not prove as successful. The project on several occasions encouraged parents to randomly visit the school, sit in on classes, or come and have dinner with their child. Throughout the entire project, this only happened only twice. If the school really believes in the importance of this, it would need to create a schedule, along with guidelines for behavior and mandate that it happen at least once over the child's time at the school with the hope that mandating it once would get them to do it more often. In addition, it

would be important to get teacher buy-in as not all teachers were comfortable with parents showing up unannounced in their classroom.

In addition, the project was unsuccessful at encouraging parents to take advantage of any of the opportunities presented to them that were for their own personal growth, such as English as a second language classes, financial planning workshops and job training workshops. In order to really make that piece of the program successful, there would need to be a parent coordinator whose job would be to develop with each parent a personal development plan that would determine their personal goals, look at their schedules and other responsibilities and assist them in developing a realistic plan of action with a list appropriate resources available to them.

The Workshops

The component of the project which proved to be a major success was the change in the parent meeting format. The parent meetings began as the principal standing and presenting school information to the parents, often spending the entire meetings in parent debates. The meetings were changed to workshops designed to create more empowered parents who were expected to participate in the workshops. The workshops consisted of topics including helping your child succeed in school, communicating with your child, helping with homework, parent-teacher conferences, cultural and social capital, and parent language use. After each workshop, participants completed questionnaires on what they were taking away from the workshop and their overall sense of empowerment. The findings revealed that every parent who took part in these workshops stated that they felt more empowered to be better involved in their child's education and responded in more empowered ways. In addition, the parents involved in this project all increased their level of involvement in their child's education.

Social and Cultural Capital

One of the most powerful workshops presented was the workshop on cultural capital. In 1977, Pierre Bourdieu introduced the concept of “cultural capital” which he defined as “the instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed” (1977a, p.488). In this study the term is defined as practicing beliefs, behaviors and attitudes that are valued in the dominant culture and needed for successful integration and was used interchangeably with the term social capital. This study incorporates the belief that by explicitly teaching parents about cultural capital you can help them increase their own cultural capital which in turn will affect student achievement. This was done with parents in the form of empowerment workshops. Bourdieu (1977a) equates success in schools with the possession of mainstream values make up cultural capital and that only those who bring this capital with them will be successful in school (Bourdieu and Passerson, 1977; Lareau, 1987, Mehan, et al, 1966).

The researcher believes that parents need to be taught about social capital and to understand the social capital they bring to the table and see its value as useful and not a deficit. They need to be taught how to acquire more social capital. They need to feel that the school is working to create meaningful partnerships; helping them advocate for equity; and has a diverse staff who also believes in empowering the families (Lareau, 2000). The school must teach parents to demand some of the things that middle class parents understand as their rights as parents. These include: how to help intervene or guide a child’s schooling by making specific requests, provide additional resources at home, request specific programming (such as gifted

classes or remedial services), ask for a tutor, complain about performance or address issues about the school's academic programming (Lareau, 2000).

It is important that this workshop be handled with extreme sensitivity because it can be offensive to parents if they feel that you are saying that they lack culture or that something is wrong with their culture. This could be difficult for someone who does not come from the same background or truly understand this background. The workshop must teach parents that, "Cultural resources become forms of capital when they facilitate parents' compliance with dominate standards in school interactions. In particular, cultural capital includes parents' large vocabularies, sense of entitlement to interact with teachers as equals, time, transportations, and child care arrangements to attend school events during the school day." (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p.41). The information must be presented in a way that ensures parents feel the school is trying to help them build on their current strengths and gifts. The workshop presented the concept of cultural capital, and then focused on terms "compliance with dominate standards in school interactions", "large vocabularies" and "sense of entitlement to interact with teachers as equals" We also discussed how cultural capital was generally linked to economic capital, therefore does not come naturally in situations where there is a lack of economic capital. The researcher discussed with parent how they could begin to build their own cultural capital to help them better negotiate the world and in particular future institutions where their children may attend school.

The researcher used Lisa Delpit's approach and felt that it was the school's duty to explicitly explain to parents the rules for gaining social power by discussing openly the culture of power and what the dominate culture sees as proper behavior such as appropriate dress, appropriate interaction styles, embedded meanings, and taboo words or actions. In order to build on the culture of power, parents need to immerse themselves in situations where they must

conform to the standards while opening their minds and world to so much more (Delpit, 1995, p. 4).

In discussing social capital, as defined by Bourdieu (1986), i.e., the resources held by an individual based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and support, that is gained when a family's values are aligned with the dominate culture and the schools values, the group discussed what that meant and what it looked and felt like. One part of the discussion started with the quote, "Students of color who are most traditional in their communication styles and other aspects of culture and race are likely to encounter more obstacles to school achievement than those who think, behave, and express themselves in ways that approximate school mainstream cultural norms." (Gay, 2000, p. 78). This was dissected and quickly evolved into an active debate as some parents took that to mean that we were asking them to make their children "act white" and deny who they. Through the discussion, we were able to come to the point that parents as well as their children need to develop what the researcher called "chameleon skills". They must always embrace who they are and where they are from, but they must learn the skills needed to be successful in environments unlike their own, such as a workplace or a school. This workshop on social capital should not be one workshop; it should be present in several different workshops or as a theme that is presented over the course of the entire year as it is a topic that needs to be re-visited and reinforced with activities in the larger community. Much of this topic and some other topics were not effectively explored as time was very limited.

The key to building a community is empowerment and the result of the empowerment process is improved student learning (Cochran and Dean 1991, Walberg, 1984a and Comer, 1980). Seymour Sarason states in his book, *Parental Involvement and the Political Principle* (1995) that until parents are empowered in their child's education there will not be significant

successes. “The political principle justifying parental involvement is that when decisions are made affecting you or your possessions, you should have a role, a voice in the process of the decision making” (Sarason, 1995, p.19). School must acknowledge that:

“parents are more likely to support a school program in which they are partners in decision-making and welcome at times other than when their children are in trouble. Parent interest and support for the school and its staff makes it easier for youngsters to relate to and identify themselves with the goals, values, and personnel of the school, a powerful motivation to tune in and turn on to education. At the same time, parental involvement ensures that their cultural values and interests are respected.” (Comer, 1980, p. 70)

In building a community focused on the success of the children, it is important to address with families what they can do to help their children including talking about school, engaging in your child’s work and living with the acceptance and understanding of delayed gratification. This begins with a stated belief in the importance of obtaining an education for success throughout life (Lareau, 1989, p. 90). Annette Lareau (1989), using Bourdieu's notion of *cultural capital* stated that social class often shapes the interactions between parents and the school. These interactions must help parents build a relationship of connectedness with the school so that they are better able to advocate for their children and create and shape the opportunities available to their children by knowing about and using personal and institutional resources available to them (Turner, L. & West, 2006) even without extensive resources available to them.

Different studies concluded that there are several important measures of parental involvement. One such measure was the presence of discussions about homework and school

related topics (Halle, Kurtz-Costes, and Mahoney, 1997 and Sui-Chi, E. and Williams, J., 1996). Along with the addition of the Week-End forms, the report card review forms and the student led progress report night, a workshop on communication brought it all together. The workshop presented information on engaging in healthy dialogue with your child about every aspect of their lives with a big emphasis on education and setting the expectation of continued schooling in their family. Every parent in this study noted that after consciously adding this to their evening and weekend routine with their child, it helped them have a better understanding of what was going on with their child. For some, it provided a way to begin these conversations and also gave them things to talk about with teachers.

When parents are provided with assistance on how to effectively be engaged in their child's education, the children do better (Epstein, 1987; Heyman and Earle, 2000). Overall, the project created a very successful program that worked to increase parent involvement by creating a thorough program specifically targeted at educating an empowering parents.

Limitations

There are numerous limitations and factors effecting the conclusions of this study. The first being, the school Principal is the primary researcher for the project; this creates an immediate limitation as people may respond to questions in a manner that they feel will please the Principal due to the institutional authority, rather than what they really believe or the actual truth. The researcher tried to be aware of when this was happening and reminded parents that in order for the project to effective, they needed to respond truthfully. The researcher was also cognizant of the "Hawthorne effect" (Suter, 1998) which may have caused parents, to respond in

inauthentic ways because they were aware of their role as active participants in a research project.

Second, the researcher had to ensure that the findings were not affected by researcher bias and that the findings were accurately presented. Coding the answers and looking for themes helped minimize this affect. Third, all of the data instruments used including questionnaires and interview questions were researcher generated.

Fourth, the participants reflected a purposeful sample who were chosen either because they had already proven to be reliable and would follow through on all the pieces of the study, or because they needed the intervention, as they had previously proven themselves to be uninvolved, unreliable parents. In addition, parents were chosen based on their ability to communicate effectively with the researcher in English or Cape Verdean Creole. Fifth, sample size and time were also limitations; a small sample was used and the research was done over a short time frame, not allowing for substantial, internalized growth.

With all of these limitations it will be difficult to decipher and partial out which variables caused which responses. These limiting factors skew the results, because this type of program is best suited for those parents who are not involved for different reasons including language barriers. Parents' overall feelings about their own education and comfort with school and administrators may also cause some inconsistency with answering questions honestly, as opposed to how they feel the researcher may want them answered.

To help with validity, the use of triangulation was implemented. Triangulation is the "process of using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings" (Merriam, 1998, p.204). To this end the researcher included teacher

feedback, and quantitative information such changes in numbers of parent teacher conversations, numbers parents at workshops and numbers of returned forms.

Implications for practice and policy

A great deal was learned about practice and policy from the project and study. The findings confirmed that when parents are involved children will do better in school. If this is the case then why can't schools just get parents involved. It is not that simple. For many parents there are many factors which negatively affect their involvement in their child's education. It is the school's responsibility to help parents work through all of the obstacles that negatively affect their involvement in their child's education. Whether it is their own education levels and comfort with the school or a lack of time the school must work to get parents to understand and believe in the positive and powerful impact that they have in their child's education whether or not they were well educated.

There were two findings of this study that the researcher believes truly have a major impact on getting parents and empowered and involved. The first is that the school must understand the role of social and cultural capital and its impact on parent involvement in the school. The school must be able to effectively teach families about social and cultural capital in a way that empowers them and helps them understand its value. This must be done with extreme sensitivity and should be done by someone who truly has an understanding of how to do so without offending parents and by someone who can relate to the families. Similar to meeting student needs as learners, the school must truly understand the consequences, long and short-term effects and burdens that families endure living in poverty. Without this understanding and sensitivity the workshop should not be attempted. On the other hand, if these workshops are done

effectively they can serve as a springboard for helping parents to improve their current situations by helping them realize that there is a different world outside their sheltered boxes which can be attained by understanding and increasing their social and cultural capital which will open their world to new ideas and opportunities. In doing so, they are becoming more involved in their child's education and opening up their world and their families world to new opportunities once believed to be available only to others.

The second major finding of this project and study was the need for the school to create an internal culture shift with the staff at the school. The mission of the school reflected the belief that the school works in partnership with families. However, since time and experience dictated much of what happened at the school, decisions were driven primarily by school personnel. As the school leader became more engaged in ensuring that families would be effectively engaged in decision-making it became more of the culture of the school. As the school leader you must ensure that teachers are in constant communication with parents and that all major decisions regarding a child's education are discussed with parents and that their input valued and respected.

Based upon the findings of this case study along with the literature research presented in Chapter 2, several implications for practice and policy follow. The implications for practice and policy on creating an effective parent involvement program must include a program evaluation and needs assessment of what the school is already doing or not doing, a program design that explicitly addresses the needs determined by the evaluation, program implementation and program reevaluation.

Program evaluation and needs assessment

The evaluation tool used was Epstein's (1995) six typologies of parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. By examining the school through these lenses a school should be able to determine which areas need improvement and which areas can remain unchanged. As these areas clearly delineate those practices that have been shown to lead to high-quality parent involvement programs, it is important that each one is being addressed to help schools promote meaningful parent and family participation (National PTA website).

Program design based on needs assessment evaluation

Once you have determined which areas need to be addressed, the school must develop a program which effectively targets these needs. Looking at the school through the lenses of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community, the school must then create programming based on this evaluation. This should include creating workshops around empowering parents to be more informed advocates for their child through explicitly teaching them about what is crucial to their child's growth and development of social and cultural capital. It should also include numerous ways to get parent involved and engaged in activities centered around their child's learning.

Program implementation

Once you have designed the program you must find the most effective methods to present the information to parents and get them involved. This should be done through several different outlets that address parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making

and collaborating with the community and can be done through notices, resources, and providing opportunities. Each workshop should have a very specific goal of empowering parents by means of educating them with pertinent information. In addition for implementation to be successful you must have a staff who believes in the importance of parent empowerment who will do the extra work required to get them effectively engaged.

Program evaluation and reevaluation

Regular and consistent parent and teacher feedback should be solicited throughout the school year and beyond. This should be done after workshops and major school events. Information learned should be used to modify the program when necessary.

Implications for further research

The findings of this study generated several questions and concerns leading to implications for further research and project development.

First, how much more effective would it be to design a study that required families to attend specific targeted workshops and then followed them over time for years after this study?

Second, could a school effectively create a program that spanned the amount of time that students were in a school building, i.e., grades 5- 8, so that parents could have a curriculum of workshops that they attended which would not be repeated year after year? For example, a parent in the fifth grade would attend a specific series of workshops for fifth grade parents, then in sixth grade they would attend a different series of workshops and so on. Therefore, workshops would have to be presented by grade and repeated for each new grade entering but would ensure that parents were exposed to all the necessary workshops over their time at the school and did

not end up attending the same workshop twice. What often happened was that parents would feel as if they do not have to attend a meeting, because it is a topic that they had already attended a meeting about.

Third, could an organization not directly tied to any school in particular, work with families, specifically low-income families, (possibly becoming a requirement for government assistance) that would require parents who receive any assistance to get engaged in workshops. This could begin as soon as a child was born and these workshops would engage parents in all aspects of child rearing and in ways they could help their child be more successful in school. The topics would be age specific and address issues to help the parent throughout the child's entire grade school years. These children from the same environment and socio-economic status could be compared to children whose parents who did not take part in this program to determine if they do better in school.

Finally, another area for further researcher is determining the most effective format and method of teaching parents about cultural and social capital, and the best way to help them build it. This would need to be a longer term project that was embedded in the school culture.

Reflections on Leadership

Throughout the project and coursework several key leadership theories were studied and implemented in order to create the professional learning community needed for the success of the study. As the school leader I had to create a culture that embodied the changes that I desired, empowering the parents and getting staff buy-in. I knew it was my duty to ensure that students and families understood the power of a getting an education and that getting a good education should be seen as a weapon against poverty, drug abuse, crime and teenage pregnancy that

should be used to help them get ahead in society (p. 329, Allen & Hood, 2000). One of the reasons that this project was successful was because as the school leader I already knew the importance of and worked hard to develop trust in the school from the families (Sergiovanni, 2001, Kyle, McIntyre, Miller & Moore, 2002). This was done through the creation of trust building activities among the families and the staff through social events, regular parent interaction and solicitation of parent feedback and teacher training.

I have learned that when working with children from historically disempowered families, due to socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, a school leader must view educating the student body as a job that extends beyond your school building, and into the family homes. This is necessary in order to best provide my students and their families with the tools that they will need to become successful not only while they are a student in my building but for life beyond. I know that I must work to help families create a ‘toolkit’ and skill set that will serve as a foundation for a future filled with academic and life long success.

In creating this community focused on the success of the children; the school and families must engage in building in children the acceptance and understanding of delayed gratification. As the school leader, I must clearly state my belief in the importance of obtaining an education for success throughout life (Lareau, 1989, p. 90) to the children and their families. Children do better academically when they see their parents as having active roles in supporting them in a way that is in line with and supportive of the school (Epstein ,1996, 2001). This is one of the reasons that as the school leader I must work with the families to ensure that they are in sync with the school. This was done through outreach activities and several parent workshops held at the school.

In order for these changes to be successful as the school leader in this project, I knew that

it could not be a successful learning organization without buy-in from the staff and that in order for this project to be successful I would need to get the staff to buy into this vision of empowering parents (Senge, 1990).

As the school leader, I knew that I needed to help the staff uncover and deal with their own biased mental models in order to effectively deal with parents. When the project first began the staff participated in an exercise on mental models in order to help them most effectively engage with families (Senge, 1990 p. 8).

With teacher training around parent relationships, mandated teacher-parent communication and so many other pieces that involve parent input, the importance of parent involvement has become embedded in the school's culture. This can only work when the school leader has consciously cultivated a student and parent centered community which is part of the everyday work of the entire school. (Starratt, 2003, p. xiii). I learned that as the school leader, I needed to ensure that the vision was clear and that those involved were committed to a learning organization that holds a "shared vision" about parent involvement. (Senge, p.9)

Throughout this project, I was able to look at the issue through many lenses. As the school leader I was able to create the vision of the importance of family involvement in the student's education. I was able to address certain topics with ease because I was able to talk to parents as someone who could identify with them, as someone who grew up in a family with all the risk factors noted as having a significant influence on a child's future and socioeconomic outcomes: having a mother with less than a high school education, living on welfare, living in a single parent home, and being raised in a home where English is not the primary language (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, p. 68). I felt comfortable with the belief that these issues do not have to be issues that stop their children from succeeding.

As the school leader the greatest lesson that I learned was that no change happens without a strong commitment from the administration. This commitment cannot only be in words written in a mission statement, they must be reflected in your actions, your everyday actions. You must make the adaptive changes (Heiftz & Linsky, 2002) that are woven throughout your staff and family interactions and expectations. You must know how each of your staff members feel about the work needed to be done, meet them where they are and bring them to where you need them to be.

You must then do the same with your parents to get them engaged. Find out why they are not involved, find out what you need to do to get them involved and do it. You must constantly reflect on your actions and what you are expecting your staff to do and you must follow up. You must get on the balcony (Heiftz & Linsky, 2002) and reflect on whether these expectations are realistic and engage the families in the work required to live into this mission. As the school leader, I learned that the work of engaging families requires a commitment to working with staff to ensure that they believe in what you are doing and do the work needed to empower and engage families even when the work is uncomfortable. This does not come easy as at times parents may be unresponsive or even resist being engaged.

As an administrator, you must work closely with the staff to help them overcome discomfort and resistance to find ways to get uninvolved parents engaged. You must ensure that all conversations and interactions are empowering and never belittling or condescending. You must help parents understand that they bring many gifts to the table that are valuable tools to help their child succeed and you can not do it effectively without them. You must get them to live into this and commit to the work that needs to be done on building their own levels of social

and cultural capital. This is not easy and will not happen without a great deal of time and effort from the school leader, the staff , the families and the students.

Conclusion

Student success is tied to parent involvement as parent involvement is a critically important piece of child education (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; De Civita, Pagani, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2004; Slavin and Madden, 2001). Parent involvement affects the student, the family, the school and the community and does a lot more than help a student do better in school. Such involvement has rippling effects on our entire nation (Hoffman, Llagas and Snyder, 2003; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). Education, often seen as the cornerstone of society and a weapon against poverty, drug abuse, crime and teenage pregnancy (Allen & Hood, 2000) needs to be at the forefront of all parent education (Hair, Ling, & Cochran, 2003; Harlow, C. W., 2003).

Students who do not have parents that are involved in their education are more likely to drop out, as parents play a crucial role in keeping young people in school (Horn & West, 1992). When students drop out, their chances of success decline and they are often headed for a future of sporadic employment, lower salaries, may experience difficulties raising a stable family, and often end up as part of our legal system (Barton, P., 2005).

Dedicated leadership, can create effective parent empowerment and education programs through workshops and outreach with a focus on introducing and building social and cultural capital to help the families develop skills that they will have for a lifetime.

This case study assessed the effectiveness of one school's attempt to implement a parent involvement program that focused on educating and empowering parents. The parent involvement program: *Parent Involvement Through Education and Empowerment* found that

several things need to be present to create and run an effective program. Parent involvement must be a priority of the school and be embedded in its culture. Parents need to be effectively taught about social and cultural capital and how it plays into their child's education; schools and staff members must be willing to in teach parent's about all aspects of being effectively engaged in their child education. The evidence from the case studies showed that the programming was effectively able to help parents feel more empowered, educated, and better able to be involved. This knowledge in turn builds confidence in the parents and helps them engage with the school with more confidence in their ability to be a more effective advocate for their child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, Finn, 1998; Heyman & Earle, 200; O'Connor, 2001).

Schools should examine their current levels of parent involvement and develop a plan that best addresses the needs of the students and families. They must embrace the idea that creating meaningful opportunities for parents to feel empowered and be more involved in their child's lives will have long-term benefits that extend beyond a child's progress in school and benefit society as a whole. The positive effects of addressing parent involvement in school is well-known and well-documented. There is a positive connection between parental involvement and student achievement, and when schools do the work needed to include families in the process, children are more likely to experience success in life.

APPENDIX I
Project Announcement

Dear Families:

It has been demonstrated that family engagement in a child's education increases their overall learning and success. When families and schools work together to support a child's learning children are more likely to earn higher test scores and grades, attend school more regularly, enroll in higher level programs, have better social skills and behavior, graduate and go on to higher education.

Epiphany is re-committing to increase family engagement with programs that will build trusting and respectful relationships between the school and families with the goal of fostering higher student achievement. The more families can support their child's progress the better they will do in school.

Several parents will be chosen to pilot a new program over the remainder of the school year, if you are interested in helping with the pilot please contact me immediately.

Sincerely,

Michelle Gomes Sanchez

APPENDIX II

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To: Families

From: Michelle Gomes, Principal

Re: Dissertation Project

As an Epiphany parent, you are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by me under the supervision of Dr. Irwin Blumer, chairperson of the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. This study will provide data for my dissertation titled “The effects of a formal empowerment and education program on parents’ empowerment and involvement in their child’s education.” As you are aware, we are heavily invested in getting families involved in ways that empower them to be actively involved in their child’s education.

You are being invited to participate because, as an Epiphany parent you are integrally involved in the day to day challenge of helping your child succeed at school. Additionally, you represent a cross-section of our parents. Your dedication, experience, and honesty contribute to the reality base of this research.

I, _____, agree to participate in the above titled study by consenting to complete three questionnaires, participation in on-going workshops and two interviews conducted by the researcher. The interview format will be developed using information from the questionnaire. Each interview session will take approximately 20 minutes to complete, each workshop will last about an hour. The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreeable time and setting.

I understand that the interview will be audio taped and transcribed by Michelle Gomes and that all comments will be kept confidential. These tapes will be kept under lock and key in the researcher’s home office when not being used by the researcher and will be erased after transcription and review. My name or any features that could be used to identify me will not be used at any time in any written materials the researcher maintains. In addition, if the researcher were to use any material from this study in future publications or presentations, my identity will be protected.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may choose to withdraw at any time and/or refuse to answer any question I do not wish to respond to. Likewise, I may choose to ask any question during or after my participation.

I do not anticipate that participation in this research project will put any participant at risk. You may skip any question with which they are uncomfortable and end your participation at any time. If at any time you express discomfort or look uncomfortable, the interview will be ended. I do

recognize that my participation may assist the researcher to better understand how implementing various school-wide strategies to better assist family involvement. This may provide our school and others with suggestions for organizing professional development and school improvement initiatives.

I further understand that observations of workshops will be recorded using a field note format. Again, anonymity will be protected by the use of a coding system. No reference will be made to the identity of individuals in the presentation of written materials connected with this research.

I also understand that documents including recording logs and journals, will be collected and analyzed. Participant identities will again be protected in any presentation of these materials.

I understand that the researcher will make a copy of the findings and conclusions available at the completion of the study.

Signature of Participant

Researcher – Michelle Gomes Sanchez

Date

Date

APPENDIX III

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To: Epiphany Teachers

From: Michelle Gomes

Re: Dissertation Project

As an Epiphany teacher of a parent who is involved in this project, you are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by me under the supervision of Dr. Irwin Blumer, chairperson of the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. This study will provide data for my dissertation titled "The effects of a formal empowerment and education program on parents' empowerment and involvement in their child's education." As you are aware, we are heavily invested in getting families involved in ways that empower them to be actively involved in their child's education.

You are being invited to participate because, as an Epiphany teacher you are integrally involved in the day to day challenge of helping our children succeed at school. Your dedication, experience, and honesty contribute to the reality base of this research.

I, _____, agree to participate in the above titled study by consenting to complete two questionnaires and brief conversations with the researcher. Each session will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The session will be conducted at a mutually agreeable time and setting.

I understand that the interview will be audio taped and transcribed by Michelle Gomes and that all comments will be kept confidential. These tapes will be kept under lock and key in the researcher's home office when not being used by the researcher and will be erased after transcription and review. My name or any features that could be used to identify me will not be used at any time in any written materials the researcher maintains. In addition, if the researcher were to use any material from this study in future publications or presentations, my identity will be protected.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may choose to withdraw at any time and/or refuse to answer any question I do not wish to respond to. Likewise, I may choose to ask any question during or after my participation. I understand that in no way will any of this information affect my position at Epiphany and that my participation is optional.

I do not anticipate that participation in this research project will put any participant at risk. You may skip any question with which they are uncomfortable and end your participation at any time. If at any time you express discomfort or look uncomfortable, the interview will be ended. I do recognize that my participation may assist the researcher to better understand how implementing various school-wide strategies to better assist family involvement. This may provide our school

and others with suggestions for organizing professional development and school improvement initiatives.

I understand that participant identities will be protected in any presentation of these materials and that that the researcher will make a copy of the findings and conclusions available at the completion of the study.

Signature of Participant

Researcher – Michelle Gomes Sanchez

Date

Date

APPENDIX IV

Initial Parent Questionnaire (Given out to parents as a general survey)

Name: _____ Child's Name: _____

1. Academically, school is hard for my student

Yes Not really Not at all

2. Behaviorally, school is hard for my student

Yes Not really Not at all

3. I consider myself:

____ Very involved in what goes on at school
____ Somewhat involved in what goes on at school
____ Not involved enough about what goes on at school

4. I know what questions I should ask the teacher during the parent conference

Yes Not really

5. I am comfortable helping my child with homework

Very comfortable Comfortable A little comfortable

6. I would attend meetings that will help me learn new ways to help and be involved

Yes No

7. I ask my child to tell me what they learned in school

Every night Sometimes Rarely

8. I am at Epiphany

once a week for my job every night at pick up randomly when I can

9. Of the 9 parent meetings last year, I attended _____

10. I would like Epiphany to offer workshops on:

___ Helping with homework ___ Talking to your child about sex
___ Job Training ___ Talking to your child about drugs

APPENDIX V
Pre and post questionnaire

I feel empowered by the school to be involved in my child's education.	Not at all	Rarely	Somewhat	Very much	Completely
I talk to my child nightly about their school day and school work.	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Every Night
I feel able to help my child with their school work.	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Most times	Always
I feel comfortable when I am at the school	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I drop into school to check on my child.		Rarely	Sometimes	Often	
When I was in school my personal school experience was a positive one. (circle all that apply	Academically school was difficult	Academically school was not difficult	Behaviorally school was difficult	Behaviorally school was not difficult	
I have a solid understanding of what is expected of my child from the school.	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Most times	Always
I have a solid understanding of my child's academic strengths and weaknesses.	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much	Completely	
I have a solid understanding of my child's behavioral strengths and weaknesses.	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much	Completely	
I feel like a partner with the school in educating my child.	Not at all	Rarely	Somewhat	Very much	Completely
I feel comfortable at parent meetings.	Not at all	Rarely	Somewhat	Very much	Completely
I know what I should be looking for and asking about at parent meetings.	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much	Completely	
My child has the appropriate resources available to get their work completed at home.	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much	Completely	

APPENDIX VI
Homework Setting

The first semi-structured opened-ended interview consisted of the following questions:

Name: _____

1. Explain the setting in which your child does their homework.
2. What are the options available to your child if they are having trouble with their homework?
3. What materials does your child often need to complete homework assignments?
4. Are these materials readily available?
5. What do you need in the home to better help your child with their school work?
6. On average how much time is allotted for homework?
7. Which subjects does your child have the most difficulty with?
8. What are your feelings on helping your child with school work?
9. How knowledgeable are you about how what your child is doing in school?
10. How often do you talk about school with your child?

APPENDIX VII
Parent Meeting
Second Meeting Questionnaire

Participant Number: _____ (Pre Workshop)

I feel prepared for the next parent meeting on my child.	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	Completely
I know what I should be looking for and asking about at parent meetings.	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much	Completely	
In the past, at parent meetings the reports on my child have been:	Very bad	Bad	Not very Good	Good	Very Good
I feel comfortable when at parent conferences.	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very much	Completely
I understand the format of the report.	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	Completely

Last year I attended ____ parent meetings (at Epiphany or at another school)

This year I plan on attending more parent meetings:

- October 4, 2006- Informal informational
- November 19, 2006- Parent Teacher Conference
- January 10, 2007- Your Role at Home
- February 28, 2007 – Looking at the Curriculum
- March 21, 2007- Benchmark exams, Stanford 10 and your child
- May 2, 2007 – Overall Empowerment

Topics I would like to discuss in future meetings:

Participant Number: _____ (Post Workshop)

I feel prepared for the next parent meeting on my child.	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	Completely
I know what I should be looking for and asking about at parent meetings.	Not at all	Somewhat	Very much	Completely	
In the past, at parent meetings the reports on my child have been:	Very bad	Bad	Not very Good	Good	Very Good
I feel comfortable when at parent conferences.	Not at all	Not Very Much	Somewhat	Very much	Completely
I understand the format of the report.	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Very much	Completely

APPENDIX VIII
Post Workshop Questionnaire

After attending the workshop, do you feel more empowered?

Yes or No

What are the things that you are taking away from this meeting?

What would you like more information on?

APPENDIX IX
Second Meeting Interview Questions after Parent Conference

1. Do you think the Report Card or Progress Report is informative?
2. Do you feel that information was presented to you clearly and appropriately?
3. Did it feel like a two-way conversation?
4. What is your overall feeling about what your child is doing in school?
5. Do you feel they are being challenged enough or that the work is too hard?
6. Were there any surprises?
7. Do you feel like you have a good relationship with your child's advisor? Any other teacher in the building?

APPENDIX X

Participation information that will be collected from each parent:

Number of entries in parent correspondence log:

Pre:	Post:
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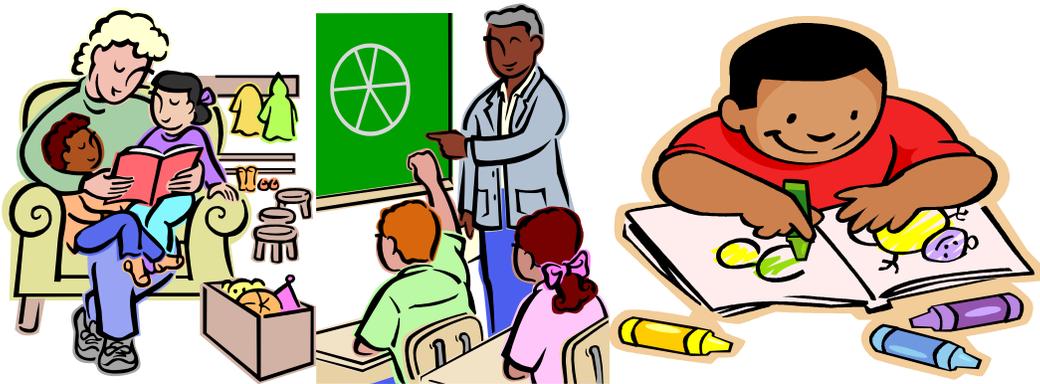
Number of entries in parent sign-in log:

Pre:	Post:
------	-------

Number of times homework folder signed:

Pre:	Post:
------	-------

Increasing Parent Involvement Through Education and Empowerment



EPJ's Parent Involvement Program

Parent involvement in a child's education is the most consistent indicator of whether or not a child is successful in school (Warner, C., 1997).

Parent Involvement, as defined by the National PTA, is the participation of parents in every facet of the education and development of children from birth to adulthood, recognizing that parents are the primary influence in their children's lives (National PTA website).

Parent Involvement as defined by Title 1- defines parental involvement “as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including, ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning, ensuring that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school, ensuring that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child, and that other activities are carried out,” (Parental Involvement). **[Section 9101(32), ESEA.]**

Parent- includes in addition to a natural parent, a legal guardian or other person standing in *loco parentis* (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare) **[Section 9101(31), ESEA.]**

When parents take an active role in their child's education, students are more likely to:

- **earn higher grades**
 - **enroll in higher level programs**
 - **attend school regularly**
 - **be promoted**
 - **pass classes**
 - **have better social skills**
 - **show improved behavior**
 - **adapt well to school**
 - **graduate and go on to post-secondary schools**
- (Henderson & Berla, 1994)**

THE SIX TYPOLOGIES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

In 1995, Epstein presented six typologies of parent involvement, which included parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community, that were later adopted by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) as their standards for parent involvement. As there is no one size fits all answer to getting parents involved. We must evaluate what is currently happening at the school and determine ways to improve and increase parent involvement. This evaluation included looking at how we were living into each of the typologies:

- **Parenting: how does the school help families establish home environments to support children as students**
- **Communicating: does the have an effective form of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress**
- **Volunteering: does the school recruit and organize parent help and support**
- **Learning at Home: how does the school provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.**
- **Decision Making: Are parents included in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives?**
- **Collaborating with the Community: Does the school help identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.**

Over the last five years we have looked at these areas and determined which areas we were doing well in and which areas need improvements. It was determined that we could improve in all areas some minor and some more extensively and different changes and additions were made to the school.

Teacher Buy-in

It is important to have the staff believe in the importance of effective parent involvement and in order to do so you must prepare them for it. If you do not effectively prepare teachers on parent involvement, you are in essence creating another barrier. Concrete skills, knowledge and positive attitudes are needed to effectively engage parents (Davies, 1991, Edwards & Jones Young, 1992).

Teacher training programs can include general information on the benefits of and barriers to parental involvement, information on awareness of different family backgrounds and lifestyles, techniques for improving two-way communication between home and school, information on ways to involve parents in helping their children learn in school and outside, and ways that schools can help meet families' social, educational, and social service needs." (Ballen and Moles, 1994)

Teacher Training-Creating the Culture

The school leaders must set the expectation of creating a welcoming environment- every teacher is expected to happily greet every parent each time they are in building.

Parent Communication Expectation

Teachers are expected to talk to parents in respectful tone at all times, if the parent is not being respectful, teachers should end the conversation respectfully.

Each teacher has 4 or 5 advisees that they meet with daily. A big part of this relationship is relationship building with their parents. Advisors are expected to build this relationship by speaking to the parents every other week about any issues the child or family is facing. They then document the conversation and connect the family to other individuals if the need arises, i.e., the advisor finds out that the family's electricity has been cut off he would let the Outreach Coordinator know so that we could help

Helping teachers understand our parents

Teachers are provided with an overview of the 3 parent types, Involved, Very Involved and Not Involved:

Very Involved these parents are great advocates for their child, are heavily involved, work hard to ensure their child have access to all the services and opportunities available to them. These parents are readily available by phone or email, are knowledgeable of their child's strengths and weaknesses, attend school events, parent meetings, call to talk to teachers and administrators, request meetings when they feel necessary and question many of the decisions made by the school.

Involved these are parents who are reachable by phone, attend mandatory events and a few parent meetings, they basically really trust the school to educate and care for their child but do little else.

Not Involved These parents are almost impossible to engage, are difficult to reach, do not attend any parent meetings or school performances and often miss even mandatory events.

Teachers are then educated on how try and help move parents along the continuum in order to be the best advocates for their children by getting them to the very involved category through regular communication. We also discuss family backgrounds and how they affect these classifications.

The Parent Teacher Conference

In order to have the most effective meetings with the parents it is crucial to have established trust with the parents. Parents want to be treated with respect and as experts about their children. To build this trust it will be helpful to solicit advice from them and continuously work to engage them in meaningful activities.

***Reaching Out*, by Kyle, McIntyre, Miller and Moore (2002)**

Teachers are given specific type of ‘parent at a meeting’ to practice doing mock parent teacher meetings. The goal of this is to help teachers effectively talk to parents and at the same time help parents by giving them tools to have the most effective parent-teacher conferences. Teachers are taught to treat the parent as the expert, ask for advice, share stories that show you truly care and know the student, set goals together and find ways to engage them in meaningful dialogue. Some examples of practice conferences include: handling a parent who nods and smiles at everything you say, handling the parent who wants to cut it short and leave, handling the angry parent who is only looking at and harping the bad?

The Student Led Progress Report

This is a progress report where the student present all the information was changed so that it was led by the child while the parent watched the presentation of what they had done so far in school. Parents are given a form to complete, where they were encouraged to find both positive things to say and determine areas they felt the child could improve on. This would begin the conversation about the report cards which parents are then encouraged to discuss in more detail at home

Opening BBQ

The school year begins with a mandatory family BBQ, this has changed from a time when we collected paperwork to a time to meet and talk to families as well as to review school year expectations.

Open House

Each year the school holds an Open House which is mandatory for parents to attend where they sit through a shortened day of classes with their child. This gives them a better understanding of the classes and the expectations set forth by each teacher. This also happens at a Family Day during the Groton Summer Intensive.

Communication

It is important for the school to provide regular communication to parents and provide opportunities for parent to communicate with the school.

Parent Involvement- is the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities (Title 1)

Advisor phone calls – Advisors call parents twice a month

Every teacher has a voicemail box and email that is given to parents to communicate with the teachers.

Presence- parents are notified that every morning the Head of School and Principal are available to discuss anything. Both the Head of School and Principal have an open door policy and if no other meeting is scheduled they are usually available to parents throughout the day.

AlertNow- this is a voicemail service in which messages can be recorded and sent to all parent phones and voicemails, this is done regularly to keep parents informed of important information.

Weekly Memo- every week a Principal's memo is sent home with important information about the school week.

Week-end Folder- a folder is sent home with the memo, homework, any behavioral issue forms from the week and a week-end form.

Week-end form- Each week the parents must complete the week-end form indicating they checked to make sure all the homework was complete, that they did their parent service hours, that they went over all discipline forms and that they read any teacher notes sent to them. They are also given a place to write in anything they would like and this form is signed and returned to school where the homeroom teacher and principal look it over and respond when needed.

Student led Progress Report Night- The second report card was changed to get parents and students engaged in academic dialogue about what the child had been doing in school. The meeting was to serve as a spring board for further discussion.

Report Card Review- for each report card sent home a new form was created that required that they sit down with their child, read the report card together and discuss it. They must then complete a form about things they talked about, sign it and return the form to school after discussing it with their child.

Volunteering

The school has always had a mandatory parent volunteer component that requires parents to do two hours of service each week. This ensures that parents are participating in some way with the school. Although it improves each year, we are still working on determining the best way to get all involved in meaningful ways.

Decision Making

Historically parents have been included in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives as we have created two seats on the board of trustees for parents. In addition, parents are given a voice at parent meetings of which school topics are discussed and voted on. For example, parents wanted to change the uniform. The decision was made to discuss it at a parent meeting, parents were notified and those who expressed an interest came to voice their opinion and vote, and the uniform changed to khaki pants and navy blue tops.

Collaborating with the Community

As a full-service school, the school has historically helped families identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. Each year a list of organizations that we work with is published in Annual Report. Some of those that have directly worked with families are STRIVE, Career Collaborative, Mother Caroline's Adult Education, local health centers, Cradles to Crayons, Dorchester House, Families First, and Planned Parenthood.

Parenting and Learning at Home

Parenting: how the school helps families establish home environments to support children as students.

Learning at Home: how the school provides information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

Many of the changes made to the school structure incorporate these typologies into them such as the Week-End Folder which engages the parent and child in conversations about their behavior during the week, has parents look over their homework and gives them a place to write in anything they would like to the teacher and principal. The Student Led Progress Report Night gets parents and students engaged in academic dialogue about what the child has been doing in school and it is expected that they continue the conversation at home. The Report Card Review Form, which is sent with each report card requires that parents sit down with their child, read the report card together and discuss it. Then they must then complete a form about things they talked about, sign it and return the form to school after discussing it with their child.

Free Books

At one of the parent meetings we discussed the importance of reading with children and having books in your home. To help parents create

home libraries, after each parent meeting the free bookshelf is loaded with books for them to take home. All remaining books are left out for kids and families to take when they would like. These books are obtained from various donations to the school.

In addition, the format of the monthly parent meeting was changed to a parent workshop that was geared toward providing parents with information on different topics to help them be more informed and empowered about issues they will face with their child. We incorporated many new workshops some presented by the Principal and some presented by Families First. The workshops presented (or to be presented) were as follows:

Communicating, knowing and setting expectations

This workshop engaged parents in dialogue around having strong relationships based in two-way communication where kids feel comfortable enough to talk about all kinds of topics, but ultimately know that the parent is the decision maker. The workshop discussed monitoring all computer and cell phone activity, knowing who the child is spending time with and setting clear rules and expectations, one of which should be the clearly stated expectation of continued education to college.

Creating a Space for Academic Success

This workshop focused on helping parents better be able to help their child with homework by ensuring they have a quiet space in the home to read and do homework. Every parent left the meeting with a homework help kit.

The Parent-Teacher Conference

As the parent-teacher conference was approaching, a workshop was created with the goal of empowering parents to be prepared for an effective parent-teacher conference. As one of the yearly faculty trainings is to prepare staff for the different types of parent meetings they will encounter and how to turn them around into becoming more effective meetings when they were going off track we also needed to prepare the parents. We went over curriculum and they were provided with numerous questions they should be asking teachers during workshops.

The Importance of Language Use in the home
Social and Cultural Capital

This workshop was presented to help parents understand the effects of language in the home on child development and to teach them about the concepts of Social and Cultural Capital. Cultural capital is linked to economic capital, therefore does not come naturally in situations where there is a lack of economic capital. We discussed ways the school tries to open the student's worlds up and expose them to numerous opportunities but that it is most effective if they work on building this with their children. Every parent left with a booklet created that listed activities they could do to build this and when and where to do it for free or next to free.

THE PRE-TEEN AND EARLY TEEN YEARS: WHEN ALMOST EVERYTHING YOU DO IS WRONG!

Adolescence—that charged word that causes many parents to roll their eyes and share that ‘knowing’ look. Some kids sail through this stage with relative ease, while others seem determined to make everyone’s life as difficult as possible, including their own. Parents often comment that it seems as though a different person has moved into their home, someone vastly different from the innocent, obedient, and affectionate younger child they had known. Adolescents may prefer not to be seen with their parents; they may retreat to

their rooms as soon as they come home; they may spend hours on the phone or computer or listening to loud music; they may be extremely critical, but unable to take criticism they may have shocking standards of dress and general appearance; they may be overly concerned with every facial blemish, as if the whole world is judging them; they tend to be idealistic about social and political issues and can argue with parents about almost anything like champion debaters! This 4 part series gives parents an understanding of the developmental turbulence that is so typical of this stage. This series helps parents modify their communication styles and set limits when necessary, choosing issues sparingly and carefully.

This was done in a 4 part workshop series presented by Families First:

**Laying the Foundation: Who Are They? Who Are We?
Let's Talk About It: Keeping Communication Open
Areas of Disagreement & Conflict: Setting Limits
Conveying Values and Letting Go**

Bullies Targets and Bystanders

Bullying is a common experience in schools. Parents are frequently concerned that their children will be or are being bullied by other children, or may be bullying others themselves. Certainly all children are witness to some form of bullying during their school years. This two-part series focuses on what parents can do to keep their children from becoming (or help them overcome being) either a bully or a target of bullying. Developing specific social and emotional skills in our children helps them to build and project a strong self-image and avoid getting caught in the cycle of bullying and also helps give them skills to diffuse bullying when they are bystanders.

Toxic Tongues and Cold Shoulders: Unmasking Relational Aggression in Boys and Girls

Concerns about bullying often revolve around the physical and verbal forms, but there is a third type of bullying that is just as insidious as the taunting and shoving that plagues school children. Relational Aggression is a more subtle and indirect form of bullying, and it is a serious problem that affects countless children every day. A relational bully purposely tries to cause social harm by attempting to damage or manipulate another child's relationships within a social circle through such behaviors as excluding, ignoring, gossiping, or eye-rolling to name just a few. Unfortunately, many teachers and parents are either oblivious to it or consider it a "normal" part of growing up. To the children affected by relational aggression, from the targets, to the perpetrators and bystanders, the consequences are enormous. It is up to parents and teachers to work with children to help put an end to this kind of bullying.

This workshop focuses on what parents can do to keep their children from becoming or overcome being either an aggressor or a target of relational aggression. This session will first define relational aggression and allow parents to share their concerns and experiences. During the workshop, the warning signs that may point to a child being a target of relational aggression will be examined, along with, what parent can do to help their struggling child. Participants will explore the roles of the relational bully and bystanders and how to assist their child to avoid these troubling behaviors through teaching them friendship and empathy skills. The workshop helps parents develop the ability to assess, prevent, intervene, advocate, and problem solve with their child in order to reduce or stop the impact of relational aggression.

EPJ will continue to find ways to increase what we offer to parents and will keep the parent relationship as a priority.

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