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Effects of At-Home Reading Activities and Parental Involvement on Classroom Communication Arts Assessments: Focus on the High School Level

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by

George Edwards

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A dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of the Lindenwood University in partial fulfillment for the degree of

Doctor of Education

School of Education

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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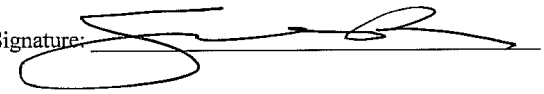
Signature:  Date: 5/13/10

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Dr. John Oldani, Committee Member — Date 5/13/10

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Abstract

This dissertation was written collaboratively by Cynthia Warren, Linetta Carter, and George Edwards with the exception of chapter 4 which is the individual effort of the aforementioned researchers. The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of at-home reading activities and parental involvement on classroom communication arts assessments with a focus on the high school level.

A total of 150 students from two inner city schools and one suburban middle school were chosen for the multi-method research. Students' reading scores were evaluated and their parents were interviewed. A collaborative study involving three investigators was conducted to determine if there was a relationship between at-home reading activities and student success on academic achievement on the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

This study may help educators and administrators understand the importance of developing early and continual reading experiences at home. Identifying the effect that consistent parental involvement has on reading proficiency may also assist school districts with bilingual populations in the development of a variety of programs that would involve parents in reading and language arts in the schools.

There is an increasing level of accountability in the area of reading. The No Child Left Behind ACT of 2001 (NCLB) mandated that school districts achieve an average yearly progress in reading for students 3rd through 8th grade and 11th grade. With that as the primary focus for student achievement, there needs to be a paradigm shift that is inclusive of many facets of parental involvement.

Results that emerged were (a) parents' educational level does not adversely interfere with students' reading performance; (b) parents' support was very important in the child's literacy development; (c) school and home cooperative support impacted classroom reading tests scores; (d) reading to the child at home, regardless the language used, had a measurable impact on the student's literacy; and (e) children who received parental support at home progressed significantly. The key finding was parental involvement, no matter how great or small, had a positive impact on student success.

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Chapter One—Introduction

Background of the Problem

Knowing how to read is essential to succeed in society. The ability to read is not only valued for social advancement but also plays an important role in economic advancement. Nationwide estimates of children in today's schools who do not read well or experience reading difficulties are less familiar with academic success. Parents and teachers know that reading failure creates long-term negative consequences for children (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001). Student success can possibly be linked to how well a student reads in the early academic years. Those students are more likely to graduate. However, students who are considered challenged readers in the early academic grades are more likely not to graduate.

Knowing how to read is very important at school, in the work place, and in daily living. In order to develop reading skills in a child, it is of vital importance for parents to provide a print-rich environment at home. A variety of books and any other forms of print appropriate for the child's age should be accessible to children at home. Children need to be exposed to all types of print beginning in their early developing years and extending throughout their school years.

The purpose of this study was to determine how at-home reading activities impacted reading and reading scores. The researchers examined such activities at three academic levels: elementary, middle, and high school.

At the elementary level, activities that addressed (a) reading for fluency, understanding, and comprehension; (b) the use of graphic organizers to aid

comprehension; (c) identifying main idea and character traits; (d) vocabulary building; and (e) summarizing text were used to support the study.

For the middle school level, activities used to support the study focused on (a) main idea (fiction and non-fiction); (b) the five W's (who, what, when, where, why); (c) writing a summarizing paragraph of a selected passage; (d) practicing getting to the point in writing; and (e) the introduction of the five-paragraph essay.

The high school level activities included (a) articles that encouraged abstract reasoning; (b) vocabulary preparation for college entrance exams; and (c) text that promoted learning that caused answers to be developed based on a set of internalized skills.

Research Problem

Children's home experiences have a profound effect on their academic achievement. Literacy emerges when parents become engaged in their children's activities, literate environment, and daily experiences (Anderson, 2000). Even before children enter school, they need to develop an appreciation for and familiarity with text. Informal reading strategies would be introduced at home through activities such as picture identification and letter sounds which parents use to teach their toddlers language recognition. In fact, children who read well come from homes where there are plenty of books, magazines, and newspapers and in which everyone reads. Children who read well have parents who read aloud to them, talk to them, limit television viewing, and take an interest in their reading progress (Baker, 2000; Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001).

Education research suggests that schooling outcomes are greatly influenced by family background (Coleman, 2001; Kerbow & Bernhardt, 2002; White, 2001). Although that finding is significant, it provides little insight into the mechanisms that connect students' background and home life to their success or failure in school. Efforts to clarify the relationship often have focused on family-and individual-level variables, such as ethnicity, family composition, and socioeconomic status (SES). Although it seems clear that structural factors do affect educational outcomes, the process by which this influence occurs is complex (Coleman, 2001; Kerbow & Bernhardt; Lareau, 1987). One potential link between family background and student achievement is parent involvement in the schooling process (Epstein, 2006; Stevenson & Baker, 2002). Several studies suggest that parent involvement, a factor positively associated with high SES, improves student attitudes toward school, homework habits, school attendance, and overall level of academic achievement (Astone & McLanahan, 2001; Epstein, 2006; Lareau; Stevenson & Baker).

Because of the positive relationship between parent involvement and student achievement, the factors that influence involvement are of considerable interest to policymakers. Thus far, however, studies of parent involvement have not provided a clear understanding of the mechanisms that encourage parents to become engaged in their child's education (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 2002). One reason for that deficiency may stem from researchers' tendency to overemphasize static, individual-level factors like SES, ethnicity, and family structure (Astone & McLanahan, 2001). In some cases, the stability of the factors has led researchers to overly deterministic conclusions concerning the relationship between social class and a student's ability to benefit from education

(Bowles & Gintis, 2006). Although persuasive, those arguments typically do not consider the role of larger social processes in the distribution of student achievement. That omission suggests the need for a new research agenda that moves beyond individual- and family-level factors to school-level factors that may be more easily manipulated by teachers and administrators (Sui-Chu & Willms, 2001).

Carefully defining parent involvement in school is a necessary precondition for identifying the factors that influence it (Epstein, 2002; Keith, 1999). However, developing a clear definition of such a multifaceted concept is not easy. Parent involvement encompasses a broad range of parenting behavior, ranging from discussion with children about homework to attendance at parent–teacher organization (PTO) meetings. According to Dimock, O'Donoghue, and Robb (2001) there are five basic categories of parent involvement.

The first category, school choice, refers to parents' selection of educational institutions and experiences for their children. Although school choice is not yet a widespread practice, this movement seems to be gaining momentum (Murphy, 2006). In the second type of parent involvement, decision making through formal structures, parents sit on school councils or governance groups where they are expected to take part in the collaborative administration of the school. This type of involvement is typically the result of school restructuring efforts that devolve decision-making authority from the central district office to individual schools.

The third category, involvement in teaching and learning, refers to parent involvement in the classroom (when parents volunteer), out of the classroom (when parents converse with teachers), and at home (when parents help with homework and

discuss school-related issues). The fourth category, effect on the physical and material environment, concerns efforts by parents to ensure a safe and comfortable school environment for their children. Finally, Dimock et al. (2001) discussed parents' role in communicating between home and school. The authors suggested that in this category, parents play an important role when they contact the school and when they receive communication about student progress, school rules, and student behavior.

Although those categories provide a useful framework for analyzing various types of parent involvement, they are not specific enough to measure parent activity in a statistically meaningful way. Fortunately, several quantitative measures of parent involvement have been developed. Most of those measures fall into the teaching and learning or communication categories of Dimock et al. (2001). Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, and Ginsburg (2005), for example, focused on issues such as the degree to which parents help with homework, their attendance at parent–teacher conferences, and the relationship between parent behaviors and student achievement. The authors also examined three variables that measure the time children spend on homework, watch television, or read. In another study, Astone and McLanahan (2001) studied measures related to at-home supervision, discussions in the home, observed school progress, and parent aspirations. Findings in both of the studies suggested a positive association between parent involvement and student achievement. That measure included several indicators of parent involvement centered with emphasis on four variables such as: home discussion, home guidance, school communication, and participation (Sussel, Carr, & Hartman, 2000).

According to the variety of definitions presented in the preceding paragraphs and the ways in which they have been used, it may be determined that parent involvement is a

multidimensional construct (Sui-Chu & Willms, 2001). Sui-Chu and Willms found that of the four types of parent involvement they identified, student–parent discussion in the home was the most powerful predictor of student academic achievement. However, they also observed that there was little variation among schools using that construct. The lack of variation led them to conclude that school-level factors have little or no effect on parent behavior in the home. In other words, even though schools differ from one another, their differences do not seem to be related to parent behavior with children outside of school. Parent communication with the school and parent participation in volunteering and PTO membership, on the other hand, were constructs that were more heavily influenced by school characteristics. In those categories, Sui-Chu and Willms' findings were similar to the results of Kerbow and Bernhardt (2002), who used the same data set to report that school factors are responsible for up to 18.5% of the variation in "formal" parent involvement, such as volunteering and PTO membership. Those findings lend credence to the assumption that schools have the ability to improve levels of parent participation in the schooling process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of at-home reading activities and parental involvement on classroom communication arts scores with the main focus on the 11th grade level. The focus of this study was to determine if parent involvement in education leads to better performance by the child in the testing environment. Parents influence children in far-reaching ways including environments in which they are not physically present. Simple parent expectation coupled with the child's desire to please the parent can influence testing success in a way that has little to do with the actual learning

environment. Reynolds and Clements (2005) found that indicators of parent involvement are associated with higher levels of school performance. However, even though the evidence supports their hypothesis, there is little movement in a significant number of schools to support plans that nurture and develop programs that facilitate parent involvement in the upper grades. Parents are essential elements of child development and integral assets to the child's concept of capability and success (Caplan, 2000). Furthermore, children of families who are involved in their education tend to test better, receive higher grades, participate more in extracurricular activities, have better attendance, and exhibit more positive attitudes and behaviors than those children whose parents and families are not involved in their education (Caplan).

Henderson (2002) found that parent involvement in the early years dwindles in the middle and high school years; if involvement fades in the later years, so may the academic success of the student. Moreover, studies have shown that those students considered most at risk have the most to gain when schools facilitate family-involvement programs (Caplan, 2000). However, because of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandate and its reliance on testing as the predominant indicator of student academic success, the need for more research linking parent involvement and testing success in the upper grades is necessary. In order to determine to what extent parental involvement affects student test scores in the high school environment where parents have traditionally taken a more passive role, more research is needed.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study may help educators understand the vital importance of parental support at home in helping with the development of early-reading experiences

among students. Identifying the effect of consistent parental involvement in the students' reading proficiency may also help administrators in school districts with bilingual programs to develop a variety of programs that would involve parents in reading and language arts in the schools.

Perhaps the most widely recognized theory that helps to explain differences in the level of parent involvement is in Bourdieu's (2004) theory of cultural capital. According to that theory, schools represent and reproduce middle-or upper-class values and forms of communication. Schools embody those values because teachers come from predominantly middle-or upper-class backgrounds. The teachers are able to communicate effectively with middle-and upper-class parents who share similar beliefs but have difficulty relating to parents who come from a different cultural frame of reference. That bias toward middle-or upper-class values puts working-class students and parents at a distinct disadvantage because they must adapt to the dominant culture of the school to meet teacher expectations. That process promotes the involvement of middle- and upper-class parents and limits the involvement of those with lower SES. On the basis of that observation, Bourdieu theorized that differences in the level of parent involvement can lead to the reproduction of status associations among groups of students.

Lareau (1987) borrowed Bourdieu's (2004) notion of cultural capital but related it more directly to parent involvement. Lareau (1987) stated that "indicators of cultural capital: (a) the amount of interaction a parent has with other parents, (b) parents' understanding of school processes, (c) amount of contact parents have with school personnel, and (d) parents' communication skills"(pp.70-74). In a qualitative study, Lareau used those indicators to determine the "upper-middle-class parents were more

likely to become involved in school activities, whereas working-class parents were more likely to embrace" a supportive but less involved role (Haghighat, 2005, p. 216). Lareau also found "that teachers gave better evaluations to students whose parents were involved" in the school. Those findings are important because they suggest that cultural capital, brought to life in the form of parent involvement, can influence student achievement.

Although the idea of cultural capital informs many theories related to parent involvement, a similar construct termed social capital also appears frequently in the literature. Developed by Coleman (1988), social capital "refers to social networks available to parents that enhance a student's ability to benefit from educational opportunities" (pp. 95-120). According to Coleman (2001), schools' social structures have an influence on student achievement. However, some schools focus on strong relationships with families (i.e., they possess more social capital) and are therefore able to promote higher levels of achievement. Other factors that influence social capital include the school's understanding of its obligation to students, parents' knowledge of the school system, and the existence of norms that support high student achievement (Coleman, 2001). The similarity between those factors and ones identified by Lareau are striking. Coleman, however, did not tackle the issue of social reproduction directly. From his perspective, social networks are a resource available to all parents and students rather than a mechanism that regulates the distribution of student achievement.

Another theory that helps to explain differences in levels of parent involvement was reported by Bowles and Gintis (2006). Those researchers suggested that there are major structural differences among schools in relation to the social class they serve. From

that perspective, schools in working-class areas have a tendency to be more regimented and controlled by the school administration, whereas those in wealthy areas favor more participatory forms of governance and pedagogy. Bowles and Gintis reported that those differences are related to workplace values and are representative of the varying expectations of teachers and parents from backgrounds of different classes. On the basis of that theory, parents from poor communities, on average, are less involved in their schools than are parents from wealthier communities.

The theories introduced in the preceding paragraphs provide a foundation for empirical exploration because they emphasize several reasons that may help to explain differences in parent involvement both in and across schools. Bourdieu (2004) and Lareau (2002) identified some of the hidden biases in schools that may influence parents' level of involvement; Coleman (2001) noted differences in the social networks available to parents from different types of schools. In addition, Bowles and Gintis (2006) suggested that schools serving different social classes may encourage different levels of parent participation.

Parent involvement in school education has been shown to foster positive learning outcomes (Epstein, 1995). Fan and Chen (2001) suggested that relationships between schools and families must be improved if children's education is to be optimized. In recent years, the Hong Kong government has given increasing attention to home-school co-operation. The Home-School co-operation promotes such efforts in the region. A University of Hong Kong team conducted a territory-wide study to investigate the practices, perceptions, and attitudes of the various actors in the school system. The ensuing Home-School Co-operation Research Report indicated that school–home

communication in local schools was minimal (Pang, 2000, as cited in Fan & Chen, 2001,) and often flowed only in one direction (Hall & Moats, 1999). These stakeholders in the school system agreed that parent involvement should be enhanced in the form of school–home communication rather than school management, as proposed by the U.S. Education Department. Consequently, the Education Department adopted Pang's seven-level model of home-school cooperation, of which home-school communication was treated as the foundation level. The enhancement of communication was also regarded as the major objective in organizing parent–teacher associations (PTAs), the number of which has increased markedly from 133 to 480 in England (Pang, 2000, as cited in Ingels et al., 1990).

Three researchers collaborated on this research study—George Edwards, Linetta Carter, and Cynthia Warren. All researchers contributed equally to answering the research questions and hypothesis. However, George Edwards focused on the secondary level results and discussion, Linetta Carter focused on the middle school level, and Cynthia Warren focused on the elementary school level. All researchers included all results and discussion but with greater focus on their specific area.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study was, Does at-home parental involvement in reading activities increase student classroom communication arts assessments scores?

There were three secondary questions.

1. Does the lack of at-home parental involvement in reading activities decrease classroom communication arts assessments scores?

2. Do students who perceive their parents to be involved achieve higher communication arts assessments scores?
3. Do students who perceive their parents to be uninvolved in their reading activities score lower?

Parents are an essential part of the equation that leads to student success. According to Johnson (2001), there are many influences on student success other than those for which the public school system can be held accountable; those other influences have a greater impact on student achievement than the public school system. Family time far outweighs the impact of school on the development and success of the child (Johnson).

The potential exists for parents to have more input in the educational arena, especially in urban and rural areas where schools suffer due to a lack of funding or a lack of quality educators (Henderson, 2002). Most public schools in America are designed to service children on knowledge benchmarks based on age. Unfortunately, not all children learn at the same rate, and each has unique developmental milestones. Students with disabilities have various educational platforms available to them because of their learning deficiency and skill levels. Due to the fiscal restraints most districts are facing, it is not a feasible practice to afford individual lesson plans for every child.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are stated below:

Null hypothesis. There will not be a significant positive relationship between at-home reading and classroom communication arts assessments.

Alternate hypothesis. There will be a significant positive relationship between at-home reading activities and classroom communication arts assessment.

Rationale

There is a growing body of empirical research related to parent involvement that is linked to the theories discussed in the preceding paragraphs. Most school-effectiveness studies focus on the relationship between school-level factors and student achievement rather than on the relationship between school-level factors and parent involvement. Studies of school-level influences on parent involvement report a variety of factors that are best grouped under three headings: staff characteristics, student characteristics, and school characteristics.

Beginning with the teaching staff, characteristics such as age, experience, racial composition, and disposition toward parents may affect teachers' ability to work with parents as well as their interest in doing so. For example, according to Kerbow and Bernhardt (2002), schools with large percentages of African American teachers have higher levels of parent involvement than do similarly situated schools with primarily Caucasian teachers. Even though Kerbow and Bernhardt did not study staff characteristics beyond racial composition, research into factors such as teacher job satisfaction and teacher efficacy suggests that staffs may differ in their ability to engage parents in school activities (Lortie, 2005; Purkey & Smith, 2006).

With regard to student characteristics, factors such as average SES and minority composition seem to play a crucial role in determining the level of parent involvement (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 2002). Using hierarchical linear modeling, Kerbow and Bernhardt and Sui-Chu and Willms (2001) demonstrated that the higher a school's average SES, the

more likely it is for parents to contact the school for academic reasons, to volunteer, and to attend PTO meetings. In addition, Kerbow and Bernhardt found that the minority composition of the student body is important in determining the level of parent participation. In their research, schools with large minority populations had higher levels of parent involvement in the area of academics and PTOs than did schools with similar socioeconomic profiles (Purkey & Smith, 2006).

Finally, Shouse (2001) found that issues associated with the school, including the nature of the setting (rural, suburban, or urban); size; academic focus; climate; and sense of community may influence levels of parent participation. Although those factors merit further investigation, few studies have been conducted in that area. Several researchers, however, have begun to define and measure the constructs. Shouse, for example, used National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 data to explore school academic orientation (or academic press) and school communality in student achievement.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this research. First, the research data used in the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 study addressed support beyond the high school level, inclusive of post-secondary institutions and the workforce, whereas this study concluded within the secondary academic level. Second, conceptual work suggests the importance of parent/family and school process variables in understanding various types of parent involvement in schooling. Available items in National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 student surveys measure these indirectly. The third limitation of this study is limited to student reports of their parent's involvement. Previous research suggests that parent and student reports of school involvement are

comparable (Eccles & Harold, 2001). Steinberg (2001) cautioned that adolescent and parent perceptions should be conceptualized distinctly. Fourth, the timing of these surveys only allows for a coarse assessment of student attitudes about parental involvement over the transition. Finally, the findings generated in this study may well reflect cohort effects that do not generalize to the current experience of high school students.

Despite these limitations, this study underscores the need for future research to closely investigate the within-family and across-school influences on parenting involvement over the transition and through the high school years. Consistent with a recent meta-analysis on the effects of parent involvement on academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001), this study suggests the need for increased attention to the conceptualization and operationalization of the parent-involvement construct for adolescents (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Efforts to triangulate student, parent, and teacher reports will enhance the content literature review. The findings of this study also suggest that, at least from the perspective of students, global measures of parent involvement will likely obscure nuances in associated predictors and outcomes.

Definition of Terms

ACT (American College Testing). The ACT assesses high school student's general education development and their ability to complete college-level work.

Career and technical education. A sequence of courses that provides individuals with the academic and technical knowledge and skills to prepare for further education and for careers in current and emerging employment sectors. Career and Technical Education includes competency-based applied learning that contributes to students'

academic knowledge, higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills, work attitudes, general employability skills, technical skills and occupation-specific skills (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2001).

Ethnographic. The study of different cultural and racial heritage.

Family involvement. Also called parental involvement, family involvement reflects a highly diverse and nontraditional family institution where the actual birth parent may not be the primary caretaker.

Parent. The person who is responsible for the primary physical, emotional, and educational care of the student.

Parent involvement. Parent involvement refers to school activities that are designed to strengthen family–school relationships and improve student achievement. The widely used categories defined by Epstein (1995) include supporting learning through effective parenting, communication, volunteering, participation in decision making, and collaboration with the community.

SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test). This is a globally recognized test that lets the student show colleges what they know and how well they can apply that knowledge.

Student success. A measurement defined by the passing score on the Georgia High School Graduate Test.

Title I program. One of the largest federal programs supporting elementary and secondary education. More than 90% of the school systems in the United States receive some sort of Title I Funding based on the number of low-income families in each district as determined by census data.

Summary

Chapter One has established the background and need for this study. Within the chapter, the purpose, research questions and rational are discussed and supported. While No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates all students to be at the proficient level in math and reading by 2014, it is paramount that schools embrace a paradigm shift that focus on improving student achievement. This research is design to respond to the critical needs that allow all students to perform at their maximum proficiency and provide at-home reading activities that engage parents in the success of students. Chapter Two contains a review of relevant literature and research regarding parental involvement and student reading and testing success. Chapter Three explains the methods and procedures that were used to gather and analyze data. Chapter Four presents the analyses of the gathered data. Chapter Five discusses conclusions, recommendations and implications of this study.

Chapter Two—Literature Review

Introduction

Too many children in today's schools struggle with reading. Both teachers and parents can attest that the ability to read has tremendous long-term consequences for school performance (Armbruster et al., 2001). Millions of adults in the United States have such low levels of literacy that they cannot read a newspaper. It is estimated that 38% of fourth grade children nationally cannot read at grade level (Whitehurst, 2001). In other words, the children cannot read and understand age-appropriate simple prose. In some U.S. school districts, more than 70% of children fall into this category and those with difficulty reading simple passages are not likely to graduate from college. Though there are many factors that may affect a child's reading achievement at grade level, one of the most influential factors is the family background experience that children bring to school and continue to receive throughout their school years (Keith, 1999).

Children's home experiences have a profound effect on academic achievement. Children live in homes that support literacy development to differing degrees. Many home activities have been found to affect reading achievement. Some of these activities include reading to children and frequent verbal interactions around books and other written texts (Teale, 2003).

This chapter presents a review of selected literature in five different parts. The first part focuses on the importance of learning to read well and at grade level. The second part presents the early literacy skills considered necessary to initiate children into the reading process. The third part reviews research on the importance of effective parental support as it relates to the development of reading skills. The fourth part

concentrates on the different programs that have been designed to accelerate the reading process in children. The last part presents different successful reading programs that encourage parental involvement.

The Teaching of Reading

The ability to read has always been highly valued and has become more and more important for social and economic advancement in the last decades (Lareau, 2002). Reading has been influenced by a host of developments. First, at the beginning of the 20th century, the ability to read was examined scientifically and systematically through testing. Second, reading comprehension was implemented in school curricula in the early 1970s (Lightfoot, 2002). As part of the scientism of the 1970s, reading curricula were developed based on identifying the main idea, being able to identify important details, being able to recapitulate the sequence of events, establish cause and effect, compare and contrast, and perform analysis of the material. With the new focus on reading, learning to read stopped being conceptualized as the development of skills to decode and identify meaning of print and became a more complex process that implied analytical thinking and an extensive vocabulary to give meaning to what was being read (Marzano, 2003; Neuman, 2004).

In today's educational system, reading is fundamental to learning, not only in school but also in everyday life. For many children, learning to read in elementary school years is fun and exciting for the children, their parents, and their teachers. However, for those children who cannot make significant progress during the early grades, learning to read becomes a difficult experience. Furthermore, not learning to read well can herald failure (Muller & Kerbow, 2002). The ability to read is critical for a child's future

learning. It opens up the doors to social and economic advancement. Standards for literacy in technological societies such as the United States are continually on the rise. Those who fall short suffer debilitating consequences (Whitehurst, 2001).

During the first third of the century, reading readiness emerged as an important curricular construct. The readiness movement was searching for answers to the questions, What skills or capacities must be in place before reading instruction can begin in earnest? and What skills predict early reading success? National, state, and local efforts were increased to determine how children might be better prepared to start the reading process. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2006) stated that, with the exception of those who are abused, neglected, or disabled, children enter school ready to learn. Yet, not all children will be successful at becoming competent and effective readers. Though schools are responsible for meeting children's needs and for providing necessary services for them to reach their fullest potential, support given to families in their childrearing efforts is critically important to ensure that literacy skills are developed (NAEYC, 2006).

Over the years educators have started to agree that there is no single approach to teaching reading. Definitions of good reading have changed throughout the years (Neuman, 2004). In the 1970s, reading instruction shifted from the traditional view, based on mastery of isolated facts and skills, to visualizing reading and readers through a cognitive psychology perspective. The new goal of reading was now based on the construction of meaning and self-regulated learning. Learners who at that time were receptors of knowledge from external sources were asked to become strategic users and cognitive apprentices (Nunes, 1999). As reading goals changed, the manner of instruction

was also significantly modified. The teaching of reading was no longer viewed as mechanically decoding words and memorizing facts. It took on a more interactive approach among the reader, the text, and the context. (Paige, 2004)

As the cognitive sciences developed, it was believed that most of the knowledge base came from the construction of meaning of what we read or listen to as it relates to concepts already established in our brain. Learning takes place when "linking new information to prior knowledge about the topic, the text structure or genre, and strategies for learning" (Rowley, 2007, ¶ 13). How well readers construct meaning depends on their ability to think about and control the use of strategies for comprehension and thus take responsibility for their own learning (Purkey & Smith, 2006).

As the trend in reading instruction moved from "skills instruction to cognitive-strategy instruction, whole-language approaches and teaching strategies" that incorporated content instruction were emphasized (Rowley, 2007, ¶ 19), integrating reading, writing, and critical thinking as much as possible (Rich, 2000). More organized processes in the instruction of reading were developed. Cycles were established and strategies for each stage were created. The instruction of reading was then organized into three levels (Rich). First, the student went into a stage of preparation where prior knowledge was activated through brainstorming or summarizing previous learning. It then involved interpreting headings and graphics to organize new learning, the prediction of topics, and identification of possible patterns. The identification of the purpose for reading was all based in the appropriate selection of strategies (Nunes, 1999; Malen & Ogawa, 1988).

According to Nunes (1999), having reached the second stage, the student was able to select the important information, monitor comprehension, modify prediction, and compare new ideas with prior knowledge. Students were to use their higher order thinking skills to judge, connect, organize, and summarize text segments. The third stage included thinking, verifying understanding of what was written, adjusting one's world view based on the new learning, evaluating the purpose of learning, identifying disparities in one's learning, and generating questions to increase knowledge (Nunes). Important changes recommended for reading instruction were research-based methods to implement new beliefs and refine new practices. Schools were encouraged "to provide (a) sustained staff development programs, which provide mentoring and coaching and (b) environments that support experimentation and risk-taking" (Rowley, 2007, ¶ 32).

The U.S. Department of Education published A Nation of Readers Report in 1985 (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Parents, policymakers, and community members became aware of the importance of developing literacy skills in children beginning at home and continuing through the preschool level through approximately second or third grade. State education agencies began to be involved in statewide assessment programs. Existing textbooks became obsolete as the textbook industry started making changes in the books they published. They were including literature, longer text, more questions requiring analysis, more integrated skills, and a more advanced vocabulary in every text (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2002; Malen & Ogawa, 1988).

Parental involvement in their child's literacy development. According to Seidman, LaRue, Aber, Mitchell, and Feinman (2005), there are many influences on

student success other than those that can be held accountable by the public school system. Ziegler (1983) elaborated on the assertion that those other influences have a greater impact on student achievement than the public school system. As seen in the models offered by Stone (2003), and Epstein (2001), there is no concrete definition of what parental involvement is and what particular elements define it. Azmitia, Cooper, Garcia, and Dunbar (2001) reviewed research and found that increased parent involvement was associated with increased student achievement. Blazer (2005) and Caplan (2000) found that students typically do better in school when there is support through parent involvement in the school as well as at home. However, according to Desimone (2006), there is not a definite causal relationship between student success and parental involvement. Desimone further argued that there are many factors that may contribute to differences in research outcomes and these differences, such as race, SES, and other multicultural aspects, should be considered when attempting to find a causal relationship between parent involvement and student success. However, when there are too many variables in a research project, it may be difficult to segregate out the actual causal effect of one variable on another.

According to Bell (2001), parental involvement is essential in every child's reading success. In fact, when children start the day with breakfast, they do better at school. Parents who end the day by reading to their children are also developing a good habit that will help each child through life. It is this early literacy development that leads to a road of lifetime success. Although the experiences may vary from household to household, it is possible that children from homes that provide literacy support will have experienced extensive reading prior to entering first grade (Anderson, 2000). Research

findings from the National Reading Panel Report published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (USDHHS, 2000) indicated that reading begins at home. To a greater or lesser degree, children acquire prior knowledge before coming to school. Therefore, the more knowledge children are able to acquire at home, the greater their chance is to become successful readers. A significant activity for strengthening the knowledge necessary for ultimate success in reading is reading aloud to children. The 2000 report also stated that the benefits are the greatest when the child is an active participant in the reading process, engaging in the discussions about the stories, learning to identify letters and words, and talking about the meaning of words (Astone & McLanahan, 2001).

According to Neuman (2004), all early experiences with books have a powerful influence on a child's later success in learning to read. Neuman also supported reading aloud to children and stated that reading aloud, in particular, provides a wonderfully intimate setting for children to learn new words and to see how the story might relate to common experiences in their life.

Parents are the child's first teachers. Fathers, mothers, or other family members begin teaching new babies about language when welcoming them into this new world with smiles and caring words (Stryder, 2003). When parents read to the child, they are encouraging them to listen, speak, read, and write. Therefore when children reach preschool age, they will know much about language, thanks to all the time parents and family have spent with them (Stryder). Research shows that children whose parents read to them become better readers and do better in school (Battiato et al., 2001). Even earlier research indicated that *early readers,* as well as *voluntary readers,* come from homes

where parents read to them, willingly gave them help with reading and writing, and often read themselves (Bourdieu, 2004). These homes were also found to have an ample supply of books, and reading was considered an important activity in the household. Research has also shown that the home environment exerts a strong influence on the child's interest in literature from a very early age (Cardenas & Chahin, 1999).

Competent readers are no more born than athletes (Desimone, 1999). Not one of those players in the National Football League was born already wanting to play football. The desire to want to play that particular sport—or any sport for that matter—has to be planted by someone, usually a relative (Desimone, 1999). The same thing happens with competent readers. The desire to read needs to be developed in children in order to help them become competent readers. As a result of there having been footballs around the home of the child who becomes an athlete, in the same manner, there will have been lots of books on bedroom shelves, even library cards, drawing paper, crayons, pencils, magnetic letters, in the home of competent readers (Desimone).

If children are taught to love to read, they are being given a special gift that will enrich their lives forever. Reading is a part of language, which can be learned the same way children learn to talk. One of the most important things that parents can do to help their children become readers is to read stories and poems aloud to them. The more parents read to them the better (Cullinan, 1999). Having books at home makes young children feel comfortable with print. Reading aloud builds the desire to read, gives children an educational advantage, becomes part of their family heritage, establishes bonds of love, and develops an ability to read independently. Children become better

readers by being read to and by reading themselves. If the adults in the home do not read, the children are more likely to not attain the reading habit (Cullinan).

Children's home experiences definitely have an effect on their academic achievement (Drake, 2000). The kind of activities considered positive experiences that are linked to children's success in learning to read are frequent verbal interactions about books and other written materials, accessibility to a wide range of reading materials, the presence of adults or older siblings who read with them, and listening to other children read. Such activities are positively associated with helping children succeed in learning to read and in constructing meaning from written texts (Drake). Children with such rich experiences end up with a broad background of first-hand experiences that enhance their learning (NAEYC, 1999). These facts, stated almost 40 years ago, are still accepted and reinforced. Educators know that verbal interactions between parents and their young children, especially those that take place around books and toys and initiate conversation, are of vital importance to cognitive development (LaRue & Sethi, 2004).

If parents were to make it a habit to talk to and listen to their children, it would make a consequential difference in their child's language development. By simply conversing with children about experiences of everyday life, language is stimulated and enriched, and the children's understanding of their surrounding world increases (Hall & Moats, 1999).

The interaction of parent and child and presence of books in the home, as well as stimulating toys such as games involving pre-reading shapes, numbers, colors, sizes, and letters, have a significant impact on children's scores on standardized tests and cognitive

development. This seemingly uncomplicated activity of demonstrating the use of a toy or a book establishes the foundation for reading (LaRue & Sethi, 2004).

Parents make vital contribution developing reading skills and in fostering a reading habit in their children (Epstein, 2006). To help foster the desire to read, parents must provide opportunities to introduce their children to a world of print. This helps young children encounter a world of adventure and one that will be satisfying and pleasurable. It will open doors to a different world, which will change their lives forever. When children are introduced to a world of print, known as print awareness, they are taking their first step toward becoming emergent readers (Feuer & Towne, 2002).

As parents help their children develop print awareness in their everyday lives, children become aware that people are actually reading what is in print and not just looking at pictures. Children at this point become aware of the relationship they can have with books by reading them (Hall & Moats, 1999). Another step when beginning to read is when children come into contact with the symbols known as the alphabet. Shortly after children encounter the world of print, they are able to recognize and say the name of all the letters when someone teaches them. As they acquire the knowledge of the alphabet, children come in contact with phonemic awareness, which involves knowing the speech sound corresponding to each letter (Hall & Moats; McNamara, 1999).

Children's home and family life do not simply disappear when they begin school. Henderson (2002) stated that homes put forth a strong influence on children's interest in literature from a very young age, which supports Keith's (1999) findings that children's reading habits develop at an early age. In fact, before a child goes to school, many background characteristics linked to high interest or low interests in literature have

already been established. However, according to Cullinan (1999), the frequency with which a child is read to could very well be the result of the child's already existing interest rather than the cause of that interest.

Children's early interest in reading is thought to be significantly important to their subsequent literacy development and school success. LaRue and Sethi (2004) proposed that the children who are interested in reading may associate themselves more with literacy-related activities. As a result, they become better readers than those children with less interest. These same students with high interest in books may influence their parent to read to them more often and even for a longer period of time. It is this interest in reading that children acquire that later in life links itself to literacy achievement (Ortiz, Stowe, & Arnold, 2001).

A study conducted by Sénéchal and LeFevre (2000), with three different schools in Ottawa and Ontario, Canada, concluded that there are two different types of literacy experiences that come from the home environment: acquired literacy and learned literacy activities. The primary goal of what is considered acquired literacy is the message conveyed through print. For instance, when a parent reads a bedtime story to his or her child, the parent may expand on the meaning of the story, or the child may ask questions about the story or about the meaning of certain words. This is then considered to be exposure of printed material in an informal manner. On the other hand, if the same parent reads an alphabet book and concentrates on presenting the name and sounds of specific letters, then the exposure to print is considered a learned literacy activity. Consequently, parents can most definitely influence their children's reading interest and provide a vital

intervention point for increasing academic engagement and success (Sénéchal & LeFevre).

Initiatives and programs on reading. National legislation has encouraged the development of reading since the passage of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. That every child must read well by the end of the third grade has been a goal of the different reauthorizations of the act. The most recent version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was signed into law on January 8, 2002. NCLB added two important reading programs to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act: Early Reading First and Reading First (USDE, 2002). Early Reading First addresses the growing concern that many of our nation's children begin kindergarten without the necessary foundation to fully benefit from formal school instruction and are more likely to become struggling readers with high possibilities of being in the at-risk category. The intention of the Early Reading First initiative was to prepare young children to begin school with linguistic, cognitive, and early reading skills to ensure that they will succeed in school (USDE, 2001).

Reading First is an initiative built on a solid foundation of research. The program is designed to provide professional development for teachers using scientifically-based reading programs and to ensure accountability through ongoing, valid, and reliable screening, diagnostic, and classroom-based assessment (USDE, 2002). The research supporting the foundations of the Reading Initiative was stated in the report of the National Reading Panel (USDHHS, 2000). The panel was composed of 14 individuals and included scientists in reading research, reading specialists, administrators of colleges of education, and parents. The panel, sponsored by the National Institute of Child Health

and Human Services in 2006, was placed in charge of conducting research and providing a report on the effectiveness of various approaches to teach children to read. The objective of the report was to disseminate information that would facilitate reading instruction in schools (USDHHS).

The National Reading Panel (USDHHS, 2000) concluded that to achieve effective reading levels, it is necessary to develop pre-literacy skills in children. For children to be prepared to start the process of learning to read, they need to develop phonemic awareness skills and learn phonics. Once they have these foundations, instruction should focus on vocabulary, fluency, and text comprehension. The panel recommended that parents become active teachers of their children in laying the foundation for learning to read. Parents were encouraged to take their children to libraries, promote reading as a free-time activity, and assist their children with their homework (USDHHS). The panel also recommended the use of phonics strategies and interesting, comprehensible, and instructive reading materials at school. The reading lesson should stress understanding and appreciation of content of the selection (USDHHS).

Since reading is a complex process, different programs and initiatives have been established nationwide. Most of the states have developed specific strategies to help every child become a successful, fluent reader before the end of third grade. Through the U.S. Department of Education and state education agencies, different programs have been developed to help children read at grade level and be academically successful. Among the most commonly used programs are Reading Academies, Accelerated Reader, Early Reading First, Reading Recovery, and Success Maker. Schools and school districts can select the program that best accommodates their student population (USDE, 2002).

In January of 1996, Governor George W. Bush announced his reading initiative for the state of Texas. Through this initiative, the governor challenged every local school system in the state to focus on and achieve the goal of teaching children to read (Lightfoot, 2002). He also stated that in his administration nothing would take higher priority than to make sure every child would be taught to read. According to Governor Bush, "reading is to the mind what food is to the body. Nothing is more basic or essential" (Bush, as cited in Denton, 2000, ¶ 1). He set a very clear goal for the state of Texas: every child in Texas must learn to read (Lightfoot).

The governor declared the fact that one of every four Texas school children is unable to pass the state's basic reading test was unacceptable.

> The unequivocal goal he has set for the state is that all students should be able to read on grade level or higher by the end of third grade and continue to read on grade level or higher throughout their schooling. (Denton, 2000, ¶ 3)

Educators were then told that the state would not dictate how they should teach, but that the state would take the responsibility of measuring the children's progress very seriously. The state expected reading scores to show continued improvement toward the initiative's goal (Denton; Milne et al., 2005).

Bush's initiative included (a) increased awareness of students' reading skill level starting with kindergarten, (b) promotion of reading programs through the state's Academics 2000 program, (c) a request to the 1997 Texas Legislature to fund and support intensive statewide reading programs, (d) identification and showcasing of successful reading programs in Texas schools, (e) support of technology-based programs in the public schools through the Fund Board of the Telecommunications Infrastructure, (f) a

request for support from the State Board of Educator Certification to train teachers on effective reading instruction, (g) motivation of school districts to develop innovative reading programs, and (h) support for family literacy programs in Texas through private-sector initiatives (Denton, 2000).

The new law established a program to improve children's education by providing them, especially those from low-income families, with pre-reading in second-language skills (USDE, 2002). Early Reading First, established by NCLB, was designed to provide the necessary tools needed for all students to be reading by the end of third grade. Early Reading First is meant to help implement effective practices for classroom reading instruction and improve student achievement (USDE, 2002).

The Early Reading First program laid the "ground work for student reading success in the elementary grades by providing young children, particularly children from low-income families, with high-quality instruction in language, cognitive skills, and early reading" (Whitehurst, 2001). The objectives of the program include the alignment of the preschool reading curriculum with the state content and performance standards, assessment of children to identify which students may experience reading failure, and assurance they are able to read proficiently when they start school (USDE, 2002).

The Early Reading First program was based on practices and assessments that have been successful. The reading programs must use classroom-based student assessment to evaluate their effectiveness (Slavin & Madden, 2001). The above two reading initiatives are available to all states. At the same time, each state education agency is allowed to conduct its own sub-grant competitions, primarily targeting their neediest and most underperforming districts and schools in accordance with legislative

guidelines. Statewide professional development, technical assistance, and other program-administration activities are funded by the states, which retain up to 20% of their total awards. States are required to spend at least 60% of these funds on professional development for teachers in research-based methods of reading instruction (USDE, 2002).

Teacher Reading Academies represent another initiative that focuses on improving reading skills. This initiative is intended to provide professional development in comprehensive reading instruction. It consists of six major components proven to be successful: "leadership development, diagnostic assessment, comprehensive curriculum (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills), immediate intervention, ongoing progress monitoring, and end-of-year student performance analysis" (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 1999, ¶ 3).

The Reading Academies began in the fall of 1999 with teachers of kindergarten children. More than 17,385 teachers were trained in the Reading Academies the first two years. In 2000, the Texas Reading Initiative implemented the First Grade Reading Academies. It trained 16,586 first-grade teachers in the first year. In summer 2001, 20,710 second-grade teachers and an additional 2,600 first-grade teachers were also trained. The training consisted of four-day interactive and participatory sessions. The Office of Statewide Initiatives claims it has trained approximately 58,781 teachers, including all three grade levels of the Texas Teacher Reading Academies. Each academy focused on current information, which consisted of research-based practices developed in the areas of "bilingualism and language diversity, features of effective instruction,

identification of dyslexia, phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, word study, spelling, fluency, comprehension, and written expression" (TEA, 1999, ¶ 16).

Another program designed to improve literacy skills is the Reading Recovery Program. This is an early intervention program originally designed to provide 30 minutes of intensive, individualized instructional sessions daily for first grade students (Criscuola, 1999). Reading Recovery was originally started and developed in Ohio but is now implemented in other states. The short-term goal of this particular program is to speed up first grade students' progress in learning to read. The long-term goal of Reading Recovery is for these children to continue improving their reading skills through their regular classroom instruction and independent reading. Implementing this type of program, which depends on specially trained teachers using intensive individualized instruction, is of great value (Knuth & Jones, 1991).

Another effective reading program that helps students learn to read better is a computerized reading management system known as Accelerated Reader, a program used in schools with children ranging from 8–18 years of age. This program is also part of a larger program known as Reading Renaissance. The students who participate in this program read books using the computer. The program is based on research conducted by LaRue and Sethi (2004). The books are categorized by level of difficulty and the student selects one reading from their best reading level. On completing each selected book, the student takes a multiple choice, computer-based comprehension exam. There are over 13,000 titles from which the student may select. The test designed for each title in the Accelerated Reader library is given a point value. Once students take the test, the computer scores the test, summarizes the results, and keeps records. The teacher can then

measure and interpret the accumulated points, how much reading students have accomplished, and how well they can retain what has been read. Studies conducted on this program indicate that the longer the program is in schools, the more likely that the Accelerated Reader schools will outperform non-Accelerated Reader schools in reading achievement tests (Knuth & Jones, 1991; Murphy, 2006).

Successful reading programs integrating parental involvement. Every school, especially those classified as Title I, is encouraged to implement an intervention reading program. In most cases, school administrators use a combination of different models to accomplish their goal of improving their students' reading achievement (Madigan, 2005). Additionally, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers have insisted continuously on the importance of parent involvement in the success of reading. The experiences children receive through parent involvement have a direct impact on their academic achievement at school (Henderson & Berla, 2000; Olmstead & Rubin, 1999).

Several models have been developed to get parents involved in their child's education in a sustained and positive form. One such model is the Parent–Child Home Program, developed by Levenstein. The program is based on the premise that the most effective way to reduce academic failure is to work with parents and children before the children enter school (Olmstead & Rubin, 1999). The program provides toys and books to foster a parent–child network that is both intellectually and emotionally supportive of the child. The program is verbally oriented by having parents and children interact as they play and work together. Parents, especially mothers, gain parenting skills and self-esteem when participating in the program.

The first pilot program was implemented in New York in 1971, focusing only on the mother's participation. It was then named Mother–Child Home Program and consisted of specific activities that mothers were asked to do on a daily basis with their children (Picciano, 2005). From the short-term cognitive gains from participation in the program, Dr. Levenstein started focusing on developing a small number of replications to duplicate the model program's result. By 1975, there were four replications, and in 1978, the program switched from only considering the mother's participation to inviting fathers to participate. The program changed its name to the Parent–Child Home Program to reflect that it now applied to both parents (Picciano).

The Parent-Child Home Program entails home visits for families with 2 and 3 year olds whose educational opportunities have been limited. Participating families are visited twice a week for two years by trained Home Visitors. These Home Visitors demonstrate parenting techniques in play sessions with the parent and the child together. The Home Visitor program encourages verbal interaction and learning by choosing books and toys that can be used in play. The concept is that this sort of parent-child interaction will strengthen families and prepare children to succeed in school (Picciano, 2005). The aim is to have children develop the verbal and language skills necessary to be successful students.

The program reaches isolated families who in many cases do not have access to center-based services because of transportation difficulties, language barriers, or other obstacles. Visits are scheduled at the parents' convenience. There is no direct teaching; instead, behavior and interactions are modeled with the goal in mind that they might be adopted and adapted by the parents. There are no specific tasks for the parent or the child

other than participating in the home sessions. These home sessions focus on the development of verbal interaction and learning through play. The program provides books and toys used as curriculum materials, and Home Visitors are trained in ethical standards and respect for diverse heritages (National Center for the Parent-Child Home Program, 2000).

Currently, there are 136 replications of the Parent–Child Home Program model in 11 different states. South Carolina has 38 projects and Massachusetts and Pennsylvania each have 28 established programs. These are the states where most of the projects have been established. Because of the low cost per child (approximately $2,000 per year), schools, school districts, public libraries, social-services, agencies, and community-based organizations are all willing to sponsor the programs to provide opportunities to at-risk children. A study conducted for the first 20 years by Sarason (1996) published the following results demonstrating the benefits of the Parent-Child Home Program. Of the 72 participating students, graduates from low-income families had reading scores of 54 in the second and fifth grades and of 51 in seventh grade, above the national norm of 50 on the California Achievement Test. These students had math results of 52 in second grade, 51 in fifth grade, and of 55 in seventh grade. All the scores were above the national norm of 50 on the CAT. The study found that the low-income children who had completed the program graduated from high school at higher rates than similarly situated children who had not been in the program and at rates equal to those of middle-class students (Sarason). This program, according to the U. S. Department of Education, National Center of Communication, is considered one of the most successful programs to involve parents in preparing their children for school.

Programs involving parents and community in the education of children have always been beneficial for students. Another such program that has demonstrated great benefit to students in the area of reading is Helping One Student To Succeed (HOSTS). This is a nationally recognized volunteer mentoring program, pairing students who need reading help with a community member who is willing to make a difference in the child's life. The children acquire attention and encouragement, become better readers, and are more likely to succeed in school. Students who, for a number of reasons, have fallen behind their peers in reading skills need more individual attention than is possible in a classroom setting. The program helps children learn faster since they are taught one-on-one. As students improve self-esteem while succeeding at school, they also develop a relationship with adults who become their role models (Cardenas & Chahin, 1999).

Any person who cares for children and wishes them to succeed in school can be a HOSTS mentor. Community and business organizations that participate in the HOSTS program give employees time off during their work day to mentor students while promoting HOSTS in the community. Student absenteeism and discipline referrals have decreased because of the positive impact of the HOSTS program in different school districts (Cardenas & Chahin, 1999).

One of the main goals of HOSTS is to break the cycle of student failure by targeting children who need assistance in reading, writing, thinking, and study skills. The program usually offers services in both English and Spanish through structured mentoring programs in mathematics and language arts (Schunk, 2000). Volunteers attend an orientation session for information and training and continuing guidance throughout the year. Many schools even appoint HOSTS coordinators who are available at all times

if help is needed. Each mentor decides how much time to spend with the student. Most of the volunteers give one hour a week in either one or two sessions. HOSTS works to arrange schedules with volunteers so that they can help regularly, thus permitting mentors to establish an ongoing relationship with the students they are mentoring (Shouse, 2001). HOSTS has been recognized as being one of the most successful programs to help students succeed (Shouse).

In 1999, HOSTS evaluated several programs in Texas, California, Michigan, and Florida (Cardenas & Chahin, 1999). Six sites were identified as representatives of HOSTS nationwide. This study evaluated 213 students in Grades 1 through 7. After less than a year in the program, students at each of the six sites showed an average reading gain of more than one grade level, and all sites averaged between 1.3 and 1.5 years' gain. Marked differences in the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) scores pre-intervention and post-intervention also were found. Four of the six sites showed average gains of more than 5 NCE points, and among those, two showed average gains of more than 10 points. At one site in Michigan, the school provided comparative attendance data for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade HOSTS students, non-HOSTS students, and general-education students. HOSTS students had far lower rates of absenteeism than did either of the other two groups. At another site in Michigan, at Fair Plain East Elementary in Benton, HOSTS students in Grades 2 and 3 showed an average of more than two years' gain in reading levels for their year of participation in HOSTS. Average gains among fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students were greater than three levels (Spring, 2005).

Gallegos (1995) evaluated the program in the Pasadena Independent School District in Texas in 1994–1995. This researcher examined students from 17 schools in

Grades 1 through 5 who were reading below grade level and participated in HOSTS reading programs. By the end of the school year, students had achieved reading gains that ranged from 1.4 to 3.1 grade levels. Another site in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, was the Belair Math/Science Magnet School. Sixth-grade HOSTS mathematics students showed an average gain of 10 points in their National Percentile Ranking for mathematics on the SAT-9. Students in Grades 4 and 5 showed gains of 3 and 7 points, respectively. One hundred percent of the HOSTS students demonstrated improved attitudes toward mathematics, and the school reported a lower rate of discipline referrals for HOSTS students than for students at large.

Another site reporting benefits from the HOSTS program was Cathedral City Elementary in Palm Springs, California. The school compared the average NCE reading gains of third- and fourth-grade HOSTS students for the school year 1991–1992. The findings showed an average gain of 10 to 13 NCE points (approximately half a standard deviation). For both grades, HOSTS students' average gains were 2 to 4.5 times higher than state and national average gains (Cathedral City Elementary, 1992).

In 1997, the Indiana State Department of Education ([ISDE], 2000) began implementing the Early Literacy Intervention Grant Program (ELIGP). The program not only focused on professional development for teachers but also encouraged and trained parents to read to their children at home. The ELIGP was designed to increase the literacy skills of students in Grades K–3 who are at-risk for school failure (Manset, 1997). With the great influx of students identified as limited-English proficient arriving at Indiana public schools, the numbers of children doing poorly increased dramatically. ELIGP provided funds for projects to support schools in their efforts to develop early literacy

programs that meet the needs of these students. Based on a survey of projects implemented by school corporations (Indiana divides schools into corporations instead of districts), the State Department of Education decided that there was a need for improving early reading (ISDE, 2000).

The program consisted of using independent reading and small groups almost daily as organizational strategies for teaching early reading. Small groups allowed for systematic instruction, while independent reading built on students' interest. This combination provided a balance that met the learning needs of diverse learning styles. Second, the ELIGP, based on the principles of Reading Recovery, emphasized the parent-involvement component. Parents of children participating in the program signed a contract that committed them to read to the children for 20 minutes every day. This was done sometimes in the school setting and other times at home. Parents were given training on how to read a book. Trade books and big books were provided (West, Noden, & David, 2000). Each week children would take home a backpack with five different books that had to be read during the week. When the children returned the books, they were given coupons that could be used to buy small goodies and candies in the "classroom store." ELIGP funding served to support parental involvement in school programs and maximized student learning potential by supporting literacy practices at home (ISDE, 2000).

The Indiana Education Policy Center conducted surveys and case-studies to comprehensively understand the impact of the ELIGP in its first funding year. They used the framework of the program as a guide. Principals were asked to complete the Early Literacy Intervention Survey developed by the Center Team. The survey queried the

philosophy of the school's early-literacy programs. It also included the identification of students who were retained or referred for special-education assessment. The Center Team also developed three case studies to understand different ways the ELIGP program supported literacy improvement. Those schools that were successful implementing the model were selected (ISDE, 2000).

A thorough analysis of the data collected from these sources determined the impact on educational outcomes. The number of students completing the Reading Recovery program successfully was (70%). The schools in the ELIGP project lowered referrals for special-education assessment by more than 20%. Schools where the program was implemented had the lowest rate of grade retention in the state with only 0.5%. In just one year of funding, the ELIGP contributed to enriched literacy environments, parent involvement, and professional development. This intervention not only benefited students' achievement but also resulted in direct cost savings to the state. Students identified for special education as well as those students retained in early primary grades have ongoing annual costs of approximately $4,387. When compared to the regular student's cost of $2,577, the state is saving approximately $2,000 per student every year. As a result of the program, fewer students are being retained or referred to special education (ISDE, 2000).

Early Intervention in Reading has spread nationwide during the last two decades. Programs involving parents helping their children in the development of literacy skills before and after they start school have proven to be successful (Whitehurst, 2001). An example of the benefits of such practice is the program reported by West et al. (2000) from the College of Education at the University of Minnesota.

> Early Intervention in Reading was developed for use by the classroom teacher. . . . Procedures are similar to those used in Reading Recovery, but the first-grade teacher, not a tutor, provides an additional 20 minutes of daily reading instruction to a group of 6 or 7 of the lowest readers in the class. Generally, students work on one story for 3 days. Reading material for the first 4 months consists of shortened versions of picture books. The original books are first read aloud. Later the actual picture books are used as the reading material. (Taylor, Short, Frye, & Shearer, 1992, ¶ 2)

Copies of the shortened books are given to the parents so they can also practice with their children at home. The use of shortened books has been helpful for children to gain success with interesting stories that are too long in the original version. Shortened stories used during the early school months are 40–60 words long, while the ones used after November are 60–90 words long. On the first 2 days, children read the shortened story on a chart. Then, using a similar chart, parents are asked to repeat that practice at home (Taylor et al., 1992).

On the first day reading a story, children write three or four words from the story as a group, letter by letter.

> Words are printed in a series of boxes with one per box. The teacher provides help as needed and develops different activities that involve children using the boxes. Shortened stories are reproduced in booklet form on half-page sheets of paper and the children illustrate their booklets at home. (Taylor et al., 1992, ¶ 6)

In addition, parents are invited to become a reading partner for an individual child. Once a week the reading partner rereads the story with the child, providing clues when needed,

but the goal for the child is to try to read as much on their own as possible. Throughout the process, the teacher emphasizes strategies that they can use to decode unknown words when they are reading on their own. After the third day, running records are begun on selected stories to assess student progress. Children in the program are administered benchmarks that need to be mastered with at least 92% of accuracy. Once they master one level, they continue working into the second and third levels. By the end of the third level, the child is reading at grade level. Studies conducted in a school in Minnesota found that 94% of the 124 first-grade children in the program from different schools have continued reading at grade level in second and third grade (Taylor et al., 1992).

Another successful program is known as AVANCE. This family support and education program was started in San Antonio, Texas, in 1973. The purpose of the program has been to help serve family members in high-crime communities survive, develop, and become responsible, productive, and contributing members of society (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory [NCREL], 2004).

The program's key reason for success has been the manner in which parents are recruited door-to-door throughout the neighborhood. Then, following the first visit, staff members perform four follow-up visits to show parents that they are important. Another key issue for the program's success is that transportation is provided to parents and their children. A van picks them up, and staff helps with whatever is necessary to get parents and their children to the center where they are taught parenting skills (NCREL, 2004).

AVANCE is a parenting program that helps parents become their child's first teacher. This program has shown long-term impact. The year 2003 marked the 30th anniversary of AVANCE (NCREL, 2004). One of the program's main goals is to ensure

that No Child is Left Behind especially in the poor Latino communities. Overall, the program exists to help parents prepare their children to be successful in school. The program serves over 13,000 parents and children annually with parenting and adult-literacy skills. AVANCE programs provide services to people in communities in cities like Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, Del Rio, Eagle Pass, EI Paso, Houston, Laredo, Pasadena, San Antonio, Waco, the Rio Grande Valley from McAllen to Brownsville, and Los Angeles (NCREL).

It was reported in 2002 that 100% of AVANCE parents in EI Paso, 89% in Dallas, and 88% in Austin were reported to have read at least three times a week to their children. During the same year, 94% of AVANCE parents also demonstrated an increase in their knowledge about child growth and development. This reinforces what research in the past 10 years has indicated: when parents are involved with their children, no matter what their income or background, those children will most likely do better and have a better chance at succeeding in school (NCREL, 2004).

In the Corpus Christi area, there are three local schools involved in the AVANCE program. Parents attend meetings on a weekly basis. Childcare is provided for children under the age of four during the mornings to allow parents to attend classes. The parents have a choice of attending English as a Second Language, Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED), or computer training classes. At other times parents are taught how to make toys using household items, as well as other crafts to help teach their preschool-age children at home. This is just an example of how AVANCE works successfully in this area.

Correlation between parent involvement and student success. Research has indicated that there is a strong correlation between parent involvement and student success (Epstein, 2001; Karther & Lowden, 1999; Sussel et al., 2000). Epstein (2001) found that there were three conclusions that could be drawn about parental involvement. The first is that parental involvement tends to decline as children move from elementary school into the upper grades. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors that may be interrelated or independent, such as that children in higher grades may want less involvement and more independence from their parents and other adults. Parents may feel too challenged by the more demanding subject matter of the upper grades and therefore tend to shy away from overtly helping their children grasp the information. Parents may feel inclined to rejoin the workforce once their children are old enough to handle the responsibilities of staying home alone. The second conclusion drawn by Epstein (2001) was that SES does appear to have a direct effect on parental involvement in that more affluent, better educated families tend to be more involved in school more often and in more positive ways than do families of lower economic or educational status. Finally, Epstein recognized that the fractured status of the family tends to keep families from being active in the school community. Single parents, parents who live long distances from the school, employed parents, and non-custodial parents tend to be less familiar and, therefore, less likely to participate in school-related activities and avenues of input. Epstein (2001) also found that families who tend to support learning throughout the life of the child tend to have successful children.

In earlier research, Henderson et al. (2002) reviewed 66 studies and found that when parents are involved at school, their children tend to go farther in school and

perform better. Earlier still, Keith (1999) studied a nationally representative sample of eighth-grade students and found that "parental involvement has a powerful effect on eighth graders' achievement" (pp. 125-141). Others found that although its effect was slightly stronger in math and social studies, it was a powerful influence on student success in all subject areas (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Furthermore, research conducted by Walberg (2001) on over 2,500 families found there appeared to be 29 commonalities that he referred to as "curriculum of the home" that have an effect on achievement that is three times as large as family SES (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). This "curriculum of the home" includes conversations between parent and child about their day, encouraging and discussing leisure reading, monitoring and analysis of television programs for viewing, deferring gratification in favor of long-range goals, expressing affection, and maintaining interest in the academic and personal growth of the child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In other words, parent interest has more impact on student achievement than does SES.

Rich (2000) found that when parents expect more from their children, the children tend to rise to the expectations as long as the expectations are reasonable and expressed in an appropriate and clear manner (Rich). This form of parent involvement tends to span across the educational lifetime of the child. Sociologists have long linked the family as the centrifugal force at the center of adulthood. What is given importance in the family unit tends to remain important throughout life. However, it is important to note that negative endorsement of an idea can be just as strong as positive endorsement of the same idea. This accentuates the importance of not only speaking about a way of being, but of actually living that way of being. A child that hears "get your homework done so

we can do something desired" may interpret that to mean that the homework is less important than that which is desired. Thus, it is essential that parents and schools work together to create a positive flow all along the student-learning continuum. Schools must develop programs that include families who would otherwise not become involved on their own volition.

Daniels, Bizarre, and Zemelman (2001) found that parental involvement was essential in the success of their school. These authors as practitioners created a high school based on best educational practices. One important element threaded through the entire implementation of the school was the significance of parent and student involvement in the decision-making process of the school environment. Parent nights, during which parents came to the school and participated in meetings, school planning, and workshops, helped parents who would otherwise be disinclined to attend school functions feel welcome and valued by the school on such occasions. Student–parent nights were evenings in which students shared learning experiences, projects, and classroom stories, and in which the student, not the administration or staff, took the lead role in making the parent feel welcome and valued in the school setting. This event also emphasized the importance of the parent in the learning schema of the child. Integrating parents into the school community was suggested as early as 1962 by Vygotsky, and the concept has been supported throughout research since, yet schools are typically resistant in integrating parents or simply lack the understanding as to how to do so.

Perhaps parents feel incompetent as teachers yet could feel more comfortable as facilitators or interpreters of difficult secondary learning concepts. If this is the case, then the schools are much more prepared to initiate parental involvement and support it

through workshops, newsletters, and other avenues of home–school communication. If parents know that their efforts, regardless of what the efforts are, will be significant in their child's educational success, then they would most likely be willing to engage in that effort. If schools could show them data that would support such an endeavor, then perhaps that would be the incentive that some reluctant parents would need to become involved in the school at large and with their child specifically. Research indicated that the more directly parents are involved in high school activities such as parent nights, programs, extracurricular activities, and parent volunteer programs, the more likely is student achievement improved (Carter, 2002; Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000; Simon, 2001). Kreider (2002) endorsed parent involvement and stressed its importance as a significant contributor to achievement among students. Henderson (2002) stated that student improvement is tied to four key roles that parents play in the development of a child: teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision makers. Each of these roles is essential for total child development.

A parent as coach and decision maker creates a setting at home that promotes learning and reinforces classroom learning. When parents assist their children with homework and make it a main concern, this generally tends to produce higher achieving students. When parents exercise this level of involvement, they become advocates who emphasize the importance of education by attending school meetings, serving on school task committees, and being active members of the PTO who support the school's mission and vision.

Furthermore, Henderson (2002) found that there were characteristics common to families with children who excel. These characteristics include

1. Establishing daily family routines;
2. Monitoring out-of-school activities;
3. Modeling the value of learning;
4. Working hard and having self-discipline;
5. Having high and achievable expectations;
6. Following-up with positive reinforcement of accomplishments and failures;
7 Encouraging all aspects of appropriate developmental learning; and
8. Encouraging communication that is meaningful, insightful, and shared

(pp. 12-14)

Listening, guiding, and loving are all essential elements of wholesome development. In other words, Henderson (2002) found that children who came from positive, active families had the propensity to feel valuable and viable as well as essential to the family and school community. The crucial element of whole-family involvement in the educational process of children for academic success is further supported by Rich (2000). In the book *Beyond the Classroom*, Rich discussed how parents can influence their child's education through three different parental components: resources, involvement, and support. Parental resources refer to income and educational level of the parents; involvement refers to the level of participation a parent dedicates to school activities, both academic and extracurricular; and, support refers to the interest the parent shows in the child's progress at school and in the future of the child's educational endeavors. All three of these components are essential elements needed for the raising of a child, yet no two families have all of the same circumstances, nor do they have the same amounts of any of these components. It is then left to the school to equalize

opportunity for all students so that each may have an equal chance at success, regardless of the amount of each component that Rich discussed. The first component may be currently beyond the control of the parent and even beyond the control of the school or the community at large. However, the school and the community, in order to facilitate and support student success, can manipulate the second and third components.

It is here that research on student achievement based on parental involvement begins. Schools are currently expected to drive curriculum and education based on data, which is the milieu of research; thus, the future of student success must be guided by valid and reliable inquiry in the schools themselves. However, other components must be considered outside of the school. For instance, how parents support homework, school, and other activities, both academic and athletic, does have an affect on how students perform in those activities. The literature indicates that what parents do at home is ultimately more important than what parents do at school. While parent involvement in school is beneficial for the total development of the successful student, what happens at home has the most impact (Carter, 2002).

If parents talk to their children about school and community events and are genuinely interested in the response and reaction shared, a sense of value and importance becomes part of the persona of the child (Carter, 2002; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). If parents communicate with children, they tend to have a better understanding of the individual wants and needs of their children. Parents who get to know the strengths and weaknesses of their children have an insight as to how to assist in developing the strengths and in strengthening the weaknesses. As parents participate in the total development of the child, the child does better in school and in life (Rich, 2000).

Unfortunately, homework can become a problem for parents as the child moves from elementary school into the middle and upper grades (Epstein, 2006; Gallegos, 1995). Parents are often intimidated by the work that is sent home in upper grades. This can have a negative effect on student success, for if the parent cannot solve a problem, then how can they expect the student to do so? Anderson (2000) found that if there is little positive support at home, and little positive interaction with parents, the likelihood for student failure increases as the urge to please the parent decreases. Research indicates that parent education is indicative of student success; however, it is interesting to note that it is the mothers' level of education that appears to have the most substantial affect on student success and achievement (West et al., 2000).

West (2002) found that when used as an indicator for expected success, the mothers' level of education is a better indicator of involvement and expected achievement than SES or ethnic origin. This could be because the family structure is changing in our society, but it could also be that typically the mother has more contact with the children than does the father. While this is a basic premise found in this research, a child's educational success is not solely dependent on any one individual but must have the support of all stakeholders, the school, community, and home, that will support the holistic child and provide a greater chance to excel academically.

Because families are such complex, unique, and dynamic facets of society, and because societies vary from culture to culture, there may never be a single solution for raising student achievement. Finding a causal connection between parental involvement and student achievement is challenging at best and impossible at worst simply because there are so many variables that can be attributed to parental involvement. The parental

impact on student achievement is not concrete and is difficult to measure because much of parental influence is not obvious either to the child or to the researcher.

The degree of parental involvement and the nature of parental involvement in student achievement is debated in the literature. Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of the literature and found that the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement was fairly general in determining which subjects students would do well in based on parent involvement. However, they did find that parental expectation was the most influential factor in connecting parental involvement with student achievement. It is known that students who have highly educated parents, and whose parents support the school in some way, tend to do better in school than their peers who come from families of lesser education and lesser prosperity (Whitehurst, 2001).

School Performance

According to Henderson and Berla (2000), schools perform significantly better when parents are involved. Henderson and Berla (2000) found that parent involvement affects many aspects of school culture that can be seen through more positive effects in teacher moral, student–teacher relations, higher student performance, and improved community–school interaction and interdependence, which has long been a fundamental element in rural school success. Johnson (2001) reported that student achievement was directly related to parental involvement and as the later element increased in intensity, the former occurred in proportion. Trusty (1999) found that if students perceive that their parents are involved, they tend to do better in school. Again, this leans strongly on reasonable and clear expectation. The foundations of current educational programs geared toward the demands of achievement, such as Learning Focus, are rooted in the

concept that the learning experience must be embraced, not only in the classroom environment but also extended in a meaningful way outside of the classroom. Lessons designed to extend beyond the classroom and to weave the objective into real and applicable knowledge are known to enhance and seat the new knowledge in the mind in a permanent and significant way.

Fan and Chen (2001) indicated that parental involvement in the learning experience can extend comprehension in a way that will assist in solidifying the material for the student so that retention and meaning are brought to the experience. Parents who, according to Fan and Chen, actively monitor and organize time for school-focused home activities, promote homework either by assisting or clarifying, or by simply discussing school-related topics, tend to have children who perform higher in school. Finn (2002) advocated for a "home curriculum" in which parents actively engage students in communications about school and school-related issues. In this "home curriculum" scenario, parents support the school learning experience by providing homework areas, time management directed at school-related activities, and again, by managing and assisting with homework. Finn found that students who had this type of support at home tended to be higher achievers at school.

According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), studies of parental involvement with student achievement tend to fall into three categories: the impact of community and family involvement on student success; strategies used to integrate schools, community, and families in a single effort; and efforts to improve schools by parents and community members. They also found that most studies focus on either elementary or middle school learning environments and not on high school learners. However, Carter (2002) and

Simon (2001) both studied the upper grades and concurred that although many learning attitudes and strategies, as well as educational values, are set by the time the learner attains high school standing, parents are still influential enough to influence achievement.

An earlier study by Sanders and Epstein (2000) pointed out that students at the high school level are facing career decisions in which they need support from significant adults, while adults find it increasingly difficult to keep communication barriers in check as students go through the natural maturation stages that occur during the high school years. It appears that as students strive for independence, they may very well be pushing their chances of success away as they tend to avoid adult contact rather than seek it. If high school students are to make the transition from dependent child to interdependent young adult to independent adult, adults must provide support throughout the process. Schools, therefore, must being willing and able to facilitate positive relationships, which will assist with a smooth transition through this difficult time. Epstein (2001) found that parent volunteers stimulate student response and growth, and that interaction between adults and students can and does create motivation for success and understanding through modeling and communication of education appreciation. The underlying message is that students can be motivated to achieve academic success by observing others who have given value and meaning to the education that is being offered in the classroom setting.

A New Way of Learning

Epstein (2001) found that there are many ways parents can become involved in student achievement and success and further suggested that a list published by the National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA, 2006) should be referenced when schools are considering involvement strategies and planning parent-involvement programs to

fulfill NCLB mandates. Of course, it would be expected that schools pursue parent compacts and involvement positions through a genuine desire to encourage and develop student success and achievement for the good of society and the individual and not just along financial dictates and requirements. According to the NPTA in 2002, a Parent Involvement School of Excellence Certification was launched to promote and recognize schools committed to fostering parent involvement as an integral part of education. As indicated by Henderson and Mapp, the (2002) research review concluded that there is a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or parents' level of education. To put it another way, when families are involved in their children's learning both at home and at school, their children do better in school. The report also points to specific types of involvement as being especially beneficial to children's academic success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Several examples would include family night academic activities, attending parent-teacher conferences, participating in family workshops, and awareness of school operations and fund raising activities that would help fund quality after school programs.

Liontos (2002) found significant barriers to parent involvement that originated in both the family and the school. Some barriers exist through a lack of resources and others by preconceived concepts, beliefs, and attitudes of school personnel and family members. The most typical barriers include a lack of teacher time, lack of parental comfort at school, communication gaps between teachers and family members, limited family resources, difficulties in involvement in upper grades, and tension between teachers and parents as advocates of the student. All of these barriers can be overcome, however, according to Drake (2000), though it is often difficult. Drake suggested that schools must

be prepared to assist in breaking barriers, and if they are not, they may create more barriers that will be even more difficult to traverse. Clearly, proper planning and training for an increase in parent involvement is necessary. Too often educators use a quick solution for an intricate problem. Often, time constraints on teachers and administrators prohibit a genuine attempt to include parents as essential elements of student success. Educators needing to retain power and control of the school environment are another barrier that may prohibit success in parent-involvement programs. Finally, parents may be reluctant to participate in the school community out of fear that retribution for parental action would fall to the child.

Feuer and Towne (2002) suggested some essential steps schools must take when attempting to overcome barriers to successful parent involvement. First, schools must conduct a needs assessment and include parents in doing so. It is essential for schools that want to improve student success and achievement to include parents in the needs assessment and to get input on the vision to which the needs assessment will lead. Schools should tailor their parent involvement program to the specific needs of the school and the community. Next, clear guidelines and expectations must be expressed between school and parents in order to establish and nurture mutual trust and respect. Schools must initiate and maintain meaningful and consistent communication between the home and the school while maintaining an atmosphere that welcomes and encourages parental input and involvement. Finally, schools must take cautious and thoughtful steps when implementing a program for student success that includes, as an essential element, parent involvement.

Parent involvement is difficult to maintain during the elementary, middle, and high school years. Baker (2000) found that parents feel isolated by their children because as children move into middle and upper grades they tend to want more freedom, less supervision, and consider themselves less dependent on parents and more dependent on peers. Children during the teen years naturally begin to negotiate their own autonomy and to stretch the parameters of parental authority. This potentially contentious time at home combined with the parents' lack of expertise with the more demanding core curriculum can be overwhelming, thus discouraging the parent from participation at a time when their presence is warranted and essential. There is little doubt that the adolescent years are difficult for teens, and it is equally clear that many parents are ill equipped to rise to the challenge. According to Henderson and Berla (1994), there are several predictors in student success, and the family is core to at least three: the home environment must be learner friendly; parental expectations should be high, positive, reasonable, and expressed; and finally, parents must become involved in their children's education. This last predictor is the focus of this study.

Research has repeatedly shown that parental involvement leads to higher student achievement (Anderson, 2000; Carter, 2002; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Rich, 2000). However, current research does not show a specific link between increasing test scores and parental involvement. According to the National Education Association, the number of schools failing for two more years has almost doubled. Because increased test scores are the fundamental indicator of whether schools succeed or fail, it appears necessary to determine if parents can be instrumental in assisting students, and therefore schools, in meeting this mandate.

Potential Impact of Parent Involvement

Becker and Epstein (1982) found that the positive impact of involving parents in education not only improves student performance but also improves teacher, school, and district performance. Parents can be an essential catalyst for school success but should not be thought of as the sole solution to poor student or school performance. Rather, parents should be included as one of several essential elements that make up the total picture of a successful educational institution. Bell (2001) warned education experts against seeking quick and easy solutions for problems that are linked to other problems. Christenson and Sheridan (2001) suggested that schools and families should create positive connections to nurture both individual student success and the success of the whole school. In their study, these authors broadened the definition for parent involvement to include the whole family. Christenson and Sheridan reached some important conclusions in that they found that home environment influences academic achievement and school performance. The authors also found that the actions of parents are significantly more important and have greater impact than who the families are. Walberg (2001) called these family actions the "curriculum of the home."

Christenson and Sheridan (2001) found that other influences, such as extracurricular activities, friends, peers, and community connections, have an impact on student success. In other words, it is important to look at the whole child when seeking solutions for low test scores. Finally, the analysis found that in order for the students and school to be successful, the family is a vital element (Christenson & Sheridan) for student and school success. Moreover, the authors make the assertion that partnerships based on respect, home/school interdependence, and community involvement are essential

elements for student and school success. Because many high schools are failing to fulfill NCLB mandates, it would appear that the focus should not only include intervention and remediation of the student for testing success, but inclusion of the family and community as well.

Epstein (2001) found that partnerships between the family and the school tend to decline as the student is promoted from year to year, with the least involvement occurring in the upper grades. Epstein also found that schools that were more impoverished tended to have more contact with families, and while this appears to be a good phenomenon, the contact is mostly negative, rather than the positive contact that is necessary for a mutually respectful partnership that provides the foundation for student achievement. Again, West et al. (2000) found that parental involvement makes a difference in student achievement as long as it includes three elements: parental assistance with time management; parental assistance with homework; and parental facilitation of conversation with students about school issues. Interestingly, Finn found no significant relationship between parental involvement in school-related activities, such as parent visitation, parent volunteering, and attending school programs, with student achievement and success. Educators may interpret the NCLB edict of parental involvement as those activities that Finn found had no, or little, bearing on student success. More research is needed to ascertain if there is a correlation between any type of parent involvement, or if the involvement is of a specific type.

Henderson and Berla (2000) found that families did, in fact, make “critical contributions” to student achievement. The contributions that appeared to have the most impact are those that are consistent throughout the formal education of the child, both at

school and at home. Furthermore, these authors found that parental involvement not only affected the success of the related child but of other children as well. Henderson and Berla (2000) found the same evidence, which later was asserted in Christenson and Sheridan's (2001) research that the greatest student achievement is founded in the cooperative and respectful collaboration between family, school, and community. In other words, the old African adage that it takes a village to raise a child is applicable here.

Stryder (2003), in his research on discipline and student motivation, reviewed 26 studies and found parent involvement effective for student achievement when parents are trained to help their children. This study found that when parents receive training on the achievement, attitudes, and behaviors of secondary students, the results are higher student achievement. Dimock et al. (2001) studied high schools in the San Francisco Bay Area and found that parents who were actively engaged in school-related activities had children who consistently performed at a higher achievement level than those students whose parents participated minimally or not at all. In an earlier study conducted by Driscoll (1999), intelligence was linked to parent training and involvement.

In the above three studies, the schools took an active role in training parents to assist students at home to compliment the learning experience at school. These three research projects found that this type of intervention raised student performance and success. Bridging the gap between learning at school and extending the learning experience at home appears to be an essential step in creating a student who is academically successful. Several factors are common among many of the studies examined during this research: parents are trained to assist with student success at home

to support the learning experience at school; parents are trained to assist with homework which may involve tutoring the student; and, parents that act as volunteers in the classroom offer more than just support for their own children. This last element appears to have the greatest impact on the group as a whole, in contrast to individual success. It is interesting to note that schools are taking an active role in training the very people they may have educated two to three generations ago.

Parent involvement models. Certainly, there is evidence that parent or family involvement contributes to student achievement. It is also a reasonable assumption that parent involvement does affect the success of the child. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires that parental involvement be an essential component of school planning (USDE, 2001). NCLB also includes parental involvement as a component. Neither act clearly defines parental involvement, nor does either act contain language indicating which specific type of parental involvement is mandated.

There is a lack of consensus between educators as to what type of parental involvement is beneficial to schools, in what capacity should parents be involved, and how best to extract or promote parental involvement. Parents participate in education in many different ways: (a) in a position as simple taxpayers and parents; (b) in a less involved position as support without overt involvement within the school itself; (c) slightly more involved as support for homework and communication prompted by the school only; (d) as involved parents who interact with the child in all aspects of formal education including but not limited to homework assistance, extracurricular support, and student advocacy for school policy and decision making; and (e) as a fully immersed parent who participates in most aspects of the child's education, not only as a parent but

also as a friend. The definition that most accurately defines parental participation of interest in this study is (d). The parent who is not involved with the child at all and the parent who is totally immersed are parents in the extreme and are not the focus of this research. The literature indicated that parents do tend to be involved in student success in some form or another, and what is of interest here is if this involvement can be used to successfully raise test scores.

There is a lack of evidence as to whether parent involvement actually increases test results. The literature indicated that parent involvement is essential for the success of the child as well as the success of the school. Involvement programs or models are one way in which schools attempt to give parents an active and supportive role in the success of their children. Gallegos (1995) cited parents as teachers as contributing to the success of students. He also said that parents as paraprofessionals and as volunteers could contribute positively to the learning environment. Parents in the adult learning community, in the capacity as learners or as educators, were also viable contributors to school and student success. The final role included parents as decision makers. This model is echoed in the NCLB mandates.

In 1982, Cervone and O'Leary created a framework for parent involvement that included four forms of parent activity: reporting activity, special events, parent education, and parents teaching at home and in school. Reporting activity is focused on parents exchanging information with schools, participation in special events, participation in parent-education programs, and parents as teachers. The last two forms of parental involvement focus on the parent in a formal teaching or learning capacity and therefore support the supposition that parental action is an important factor in student success.

Research has long linked student success with parental educational levels. Today not only do colleges inquire as to parental educational level, but so do student-loan vendors, indicating that current thought supports historical thought: parent educational level is a predictor of student success.

This ideology was supported when Madigan (2005) identified four key characteristics for home–school partnerships. Several of these echo previously mentioned authors and lay more support to the current research foundation of parental involvement. Moles (2002) found that there were certain school-facilitated program characteristics that led to student success. These included, but were not limited to, the following: parent–school cooperatives through learning resources provided by the school to the community and to the home, parent–teacher conferencing, parent education and support from the school, and channels of communication provided from the school. It is interesting that Moles moved the focus of parental involvement from parent to school-initiated contact and responsibility. This assertion is clearly carried forth in the NCLB mandate.

Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) provided guidelines for developing programs for parental involvement. Several of the elements suggested by this team of researchers have been supported and facilitated throughout the country and through other research initiatives. With the urgency to achieve success, schools are implementing these strategies and finding positive results. The strategies include, but are not limited to, (a) informing parents of their rights and responsibilities in the school community and initiating communication between the school and the home; (b) educating parents about how to deal with school and social challenges that their children may face, as well as those they may face themselves including formal training in various areas such as time

management, tutoring, school expectations, and student achievement; (c) involving parents in all facets of the school community such as school councils, school practices, mentoring, volunteering, tutoring, and after-school-program initiatives; (d) supporting parents through family services, parent centers, home schooling, day care, crisis response and the like; and (e) empowering parents through reports and reviews by making them accessible and understandable, access to teacher-improvement plans, school-improvement plans and accountability mandates and including parents as members of site-based management strategies. Parent advocacy in the community combined with the promotion of community involvement and input further leads to school success. Hall and Moats (1999) suggested that schools must partner with parents and the community in order for student achievement to be optimal. This concept has been endorsed repeatedly throughout research findings since then.

Other recommended strategies to encourage parent involvement include (a) a method of assessing parent interests and needs prior to mainstreaming so that specific concerns can be addressed, (b) a variety of options for parent involvement with specific activities listed for teachers to use as a guide for sharing with parents, and (c) an active teacher-training program to acquaint teachers with the model for parent involvement (Epstein, 2001). Furthermore, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) suggested there are elements to enforce this model. In an effort to support student success, schools should implement strategies that include positive student attitudes about learning and about accountability for learning; personal investment in success and the paths that lead to individual and school success; persistence in facing challenges; and management of emotional situations that can cause a decline in success. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler

contended that if parents learn how to help their children cope with and overcome these challenges, student performance will increase. Moreover, if just a few families learn these strategies, they will initiate the sought after responses in others who are not directly participating in the motivational strategies. In other words, the school community is a sharing community, and an effective way to infect that community with success is to expose a few who will have contact with the many. Tennies (2003) earlier research supported this assertion in finding that the average grade point average increased with parental involvement.

Finally, the National Standards Commission has set up a group of standards as a model for schools. These standards include:

1. Communicating-Communication between home and school is regular, two way, and meaningful.
2. Parenting-Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
3. Student learning-Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
4. Volunteering-Parents are welcome in school, and their support and assistance are sought.
5. School decision making and advocacy-Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
6. Collaborating and community-Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning. (National Parent Teacher Association [NPTA], 2003)

The rationale for having national standards is to create a set of common standards for the whole nation. If each school system uses the national standards as a guideline for student success, then the goal should be understood and attainable nationwide.

Three groups that are essential for the success of schools should be positively affected by these standards: students, teachers, and parents. Students will be positively affected, according to the NPTA, with higher grades and test scores, better attendance, higher self-esteem, increased motivation, fewer discipline problems, decreased drug and alcohol abuse, fewer incidents of violent response to adverse stimuli, and a greater motivation to participate in continuing education. According to the NPTA, teacher self-esteem and group morale will increase if the national standards are met in a challenged school. Teaching efficiency and productivity will be enhanced as job satisfaction and stability increase. Communication and support throughout the school and community will increase as student confidence, achievement, and success increase. Parental communication with their children and with the school will be positively affected. Parental self-esteem, attitude, and confidence will improve. If training exists and is ongoing, then parental educational level will increase and should stimulate economic growth and stability in the community. As parental attitude about school changes, so should there be a significant shift in the importance of the school as a leading facility and guiding institution in the community itself. This type of integration should necessarily improve test scores as students, teachers, and parents gain the confidence and self-esteem that is essential for successful test-taking strategies.

There are peripheral benefits as well: as parents become more confident in their ability to participate in the school community, so should they enjoy increased confidence

in the social, political, and economic community. As with any skill, the more it is used, the more proficient it becomes. In the education community, as activity and involvement increase, apathy should decrease, an apathy that appears to be the bane of many school systems. As noted earlier, research concurs that parental involvement is essential for the success of the student academically. Research also indicates that students tend to excel when parents guide student-oriented activities at home and set rules for homework and extracurricular activities. The question still remains, What kind of parental involvement is most beneficial for students to achieve, and does specific involvement actually affect test scores?

Forms of parent involvement. Parent organizations and educational facilities across the nation are advised by the NPTA to support and nurture parent involvement in the school community. Since its inception in 1897, the focus of this organization has been to better the lives of children in and out of the school environment. In those early years, the founders realized and began to acknowledge that the education of the child does not remain within the confines of the school walls (NPTA, 2006). The element of parental involvement is the foundation on which the organization has built a national program for the betterment of school communities throughout the nation. It is through charter PTAs that parents often find the inspiration and support that is necessary to enable them to assist in their own child's success and to become active and valued in the school community. However, research does not indicate that there is one particular activity that parents can perform that will ensure outstanding achievement on a regular basis. Many factors can influence achievement, and an equal number can influence failure.

Many elements outside the school environment can affect student performance. Catastrophic events in the environment, in the family unit itself, or in the community as a whole are a few things that affect student performance. Physical ailments, whether self-inflicted or gained by infection, can significantly affect student performance. However, many of these can be overcome with time and patience and the resilient student should and can recuperate. Educators and parents alike must find ways to support academic success in all children through all situations under the mandates of NCLB. Herein lies the problem as to what kind of parental involvement is beneficial to student achievement that actually affects communication arts assessments scores. If testing is to be the way in which academic success is determined, then many factors must be examined to determine the best practices available by all variables that may affect student success such as environment both in and out of school, nutrition, economic status of the community, the family and the school, teacher certification, leadership skills in the school and public community, and parental involvement. Certainly there are exponential factors involved in student success that are too numerous to mention in this short research endeavor, although many were mentioned above. However, parental involvement does have an affect on student performance and success (White, 2001). Parental support is a factor in student success in the long run, as well as in the short run (Epstein, 2001). Family, and what phenomena are happening in the family unit, directly affects student performance on a daily, monthly, and annual basis (Carter, 2002). The impact of parental or family involvement in student success has been documented in studies that focus on reading success (Anderson, 2000; Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Epstein, 2001).

As previously stated, parental involvement can take many forms, and all forms can have an effect on student performance. The NPTA (2006) as well as many educational systems such as the San Diego County School District, the Michigan Department of Education, the Georgia Department of Education, and the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory all recommend parental involvement when pursuing student achievement. It is clear that there are certain types of involvement that appear to have a more positive effect than other forms. For instance, Epstein (2001) found that parental encouragement and support was essential for student achievement. Cotton and Wikelund (2001) found that the earlier parents become involved in their child's education and the longer they stay involved, the higher the chance for success in the child and later in an adult. Cotton and Wikelund also found that the more interaction the parent had with the child doing home activities that supported the school curriculum, the better the child performed at school.

In a Gallup poll conducted in 1997, the public indicated a consensus that parental involvement is the most important way to improve schools. Furthermore, the poll found that lack of parent involvement is the greatest problem that schools face. The NPTA (2002) indicated that the outcomes when parents are involved included higher grades, higher test scores, and higher graduation rates. The NPTA also indicated that attendance and motivation increase, and discipline, drug use, and violent behavior decrease with parental involvement. Moreover, there is evidence that parental involvement has much greater impact than does SES (Walberg, 2001). West et al. (2000) found that the more families participated in all facets of the school community, the more successful the school community became and the greater the achievement by the students in such a community.

Again, Epstein's (2006) six types of parent involvement appear to be the key to laying a foundation of student achievement in public schools.

Henderson (2002) further supported Epstein's findings and recommendations by elaborating on characteristics of academically successful students: establishing a routine for studying and homework; monitoring out-of-school activities; modeling the importance and priority of education; establishing expectations that are reasonable, conveyed, and supported; encouraging and recognizing success and assistance to cope appropriately with failure; and finally, facilitating communication in the family unit about school, community, and the world at large. Epstein (2006) found that a significant number of students desired family involvement on some level, and that when students perceived that parents wanted to be involved, and those parents counted on their children to lubricate communication between home and school, students would be willing to participate as a medium. Epstein (2006) further found that as children get older and move up the educational ladder, parent involvement typically becomes less. Epstein (2006) also found that there is virtually no substantial indication that SES dictates the willingness or ability of parents to want to be involved in their child's success. Contrary to popular assertion, Epstein (2006) found that poor parents have no less expectation for their children's success than do parents in higher income brackets.

Epstein's (2006) findings are echoed and reinforced throughout much of the research, but what still remain controversial among researchers is what exactly parental involvement truly is and what part of student success it most positively affects. Epstein (2006) identified six types of parental involvement, which have been the basis for the national standards discussed above. While all of these types of involvement support

student achievement, it has not been proven that any one of them, or whether all of them, must be used together to improve student test scores. Certainly it could be surmised that a school that actively supports and facilitates home-to-school communication and inclusion would necessarily have higher achieving students, and if this is the case, then schools should be actively pursuing parental involvement in their quest to meet NCLB requirements rather than simply focusing on remediation and intervention based on data from test scores.

Contrasting viewpoint. The literature clearly indicated that parental involvement is essential for student achievement and success (Anderson, 2002; Baker, 2000; Henderson & Berla, 2000; USDE, 2001). Furthermore, some of the elements that are fundamental for student achievement have been established by researchers such as Epstein (2001), Carter (2002), Henderson and Mapp (2002), and Rich (2000), and these include parental expectation, a home environment conducive to learning, and parent participation in education. More research is needed as we move toward the final years leading up to full implementation of NCLB, as schools struggle to raise test scores each year to meet the benchmarks established by each state.

Currently there is no research that clearly links parental involvement with testing success. Many schools provide intense intervention and remediation programs in an effort to succeed, still falling short of the mark, as the mark increases each year. Many schools have implemented parent-involvement programs, yet there is a lack of research to indicate that this implementation has increased, or had any effect at all, on test-score improvement. There is the indication that parent involvement leads to individual student success and can have a positive effect on school rating by the community and schools of

excellence programs. However, while meeting rigorous standards, some schools may fail according to the Schools of Excellence programs, which might indicate that some significant piece is missing. Perhaps parent involvement does improve test scores, and it is not known. It would be neglectful to have a valuable resource available and not take advantage of it as educators pursue the quest for all students to be successful.

Barker et al. (2002) and Fan and Chen (2001) found in their studies that parent involvement with homework and parent-initiated school contact were negatively related to student success. However, in much survey and interview research, the responses are subject to liberal interpretation, or perceptions of word meanings have not been clearly defined. Caldwell and Spinks (2006) in their study of 13,500 families found that certain forms of involvement were associated with lower, not higher, levels of student achievement. When Catsambis (2001) controlled for problem behavior, these negative effects disappeared. The implication is that there are many factors in the study of parental involvement that oftentimes are overlooked, ignored, or not considered so that a conclusive answer may not be found.

Fan and Chen (2001) found similar phenomena in their analysis of data from 25 studies. They found that involvement from parents is related to student attitude toward school but that it is negatively related to student test scores. They also found that students who are having difficulty academically or behaviorally tend to have parents who impose greater controls and therefore appear to be more involved than students who do not have problems at or with school. These studies suggest that students who are performing poorly would necessarily have more parental interaction because the schools make the effort to contact the parent in an attempt to correct the problem. In cases such as these,

parents are drawn into the school to support the school's efforts and this may or may not have a positive effect on student test scores. It is interesting to note that the factors some researchers identified as significantly supporting student achievement, other researchers found insignificant.

In 1997 Baker and Soden examined parental involvement as an intervention tool for student success. They asserted that to understand and fully document parent involvement, researchers should separate parent involvement effects from related variables and from the impact of other adults. To do this they suggested that the type and level of involvement be separated from other components of intervention, and furthermore, the assessment of the intervention program itself should be evaluated for the differential influences of the program. However, it can be argued that separating parent involvement is impossible because what parents influence may or may not be known, simply because we cannot know what factors of parent involvement are in play at any given time during student testing.

Simon (2001) studied family and community connections with high schools and the effects on student achievement through outreach programs offered by those high schools. Simon found that families and communities do participate in a wide range of activities, and that parental involvement does increase when schools reach out and make parents feel essential and valuable. Moreover, Simon found that parent involvement increases with support from the school just as Epstein found that student success increases with support from the parents. Simon also found that when schools include parents in workshops, as volunteers, and as decision makers, they will talk with their children more about school and thus school becomes an important part of the family

focus. The literature indicates that parental involvement does have an effect on student success and achievement. However, current research does not clearly indicate, and therefore it is not known, if parent involvement leads to increased scores on the Georgia High School Graduation Test. While there appears to be a plethora of research linking student success in many aspects of education, there is a lack of research that attempts to answer the question: Can student test scores be increased by parent involvement? And if so, what involvement is best suited for student testing success?

Finally, NCLB mandates that all students achieve competence in core subject areas and requires that proof of this competency be tested on an annual basis so that schools can be accountable for student progress. Increased parent and family involvement is a key element in the accountability mechanism written in the law and tied to Title I funding. A review of literature indicated that parents are instrumental in the success of schools and the students that attend them, and NCLB (2002) mandates that they be included as part of the educational community.

In order for schools to receive Title I funding, they must include parents and families in the beginning of the planning stage. The plan includes helping the school develop a written and agreed upon parent-school compact that explains all of Title I's governing rules for total participation and the school's vision and mission. The compact will include what the funds can be used for, who use them, explicit types of activities that are focused on student transportation, professional development for staff and parents, student field experiences, and provide funding for after school programs. Under the Title I guidelines, provisions are made, informing parents of their child's eligibility for supplemental services. Schools failing to make adequate yearly progress must provide

alternative academic support, which will ensure students are successful and that schools are performing in accordance to federal mandates.

There are several obvious drawbacks to this law. For one, the money that is required to implement such a far-reaching law is not sufficiently covered by Title I funding, nor is the burden of accountability shared evenly with all stakeholders. Schools are faced with increasing demands on student success in increments as they move toward the 100% measurements for proficiency of all students in the year 2014. Schools and researchers alike agree that parent involvement is beneficial and essential for the success of the school and for student achievement. However, the literature does not yet exist that links parental involvement with student testing success on the Georgia High School Graduation Test. Nor is there significant evidence that parental involvement of a specific nature actually contributes to or detracts from high school grades or test scores. School size may be a factor, socioeconomic diversity of the school may be a factor, and the school's geographical location in the United States may be a factor. Certainly there is much research which indicates a positive link between parental involvement and student achievement.

Summary

The literature clearly indicates that parental involvement is essential for student achievement and success (Baker, 2000; Henderson & Berla, 2000; Anderson, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Furthermore, elements that are fundamental for student achievement have been established by researchers such as Epstein (2001), Carter (2002), Henderson and Mapp (2002), and Rich (2000) and these include parental expectation, a home environment conducive to learning, and parent participation in education, to name

but a few. More research is needed as we move toward the final years leading up to full implementation of NCLB as schools struggle to raise test scores each year to meet the benchmarks established by each state. However, currently there is no research that clearly links parental involvement with testing success.

Many schools provide intense interventions and remediation programs in an effort to succeed while falling short of the mark. But, the mark increases each year, which leaves school grasping for ways to hedge the numbers toward the mark. Many schools have implemented parent involvement programs, yet there is a lack of research to indicate that this implementation has increased, or had any effect at all, on test score improvement. There is the indication that parent involvement leads to individual student success and can have a positive effect on school rating by the community and schools of excellence programs. However, the notion that some schools that fail, while meeting the rigors of the schools of excellence programs, leave educators wondering if some significant piece is missing. Perhaps parent involvement does improve test scores and educators are not aware of it. It would be unforgivable and certainly neglectful to have a valuable resource available and not take advantage of as we pursue the quest for all students to be successful. West

Barker et al. (2002) and Fan and Chen (2001) found in their studies that parent involvement with homework and parent initiated school contact were negatively related to student success. However, much of what is done in research has been through surveys and interviews where the responses are subject to liberal interpretation of those answering the questions, or through perceptions of meanings of words that researchers have not clearly defined. Caldwell and Spinks (2006) in their study of 13,500 families found that

certain forms of involvement were associated with lower, not higher, levels of student achievement. When Catsambis (2001) controlled for problem behavior these negative effects disappeared. The implication is that there are many factors within the study of parental involvement that often times are overlooked, ignored or not even considered so that a conclusive answer may not be found.

Fan and Chen (2001) found similar phenomena in their analysis of data from 25 studies. They found that involvement from parents is related to student attitude toward school, but it is negatively related to student test scores. They also found that students who are having difficulty academically or behaviorally tend to have parents who impose greater controls and therefore appear to be more involved than students who do not have problems at or with school. These studies suggest that students who are performing poorly would necessarily have more parental interaction because the schools make the effort to contact the parent in an attempt to correct the problem. In cases such as these, parents are drawn into the school to support the schools efforts and this may or may not have a positive effect on student test scores. It is interesting to note that factors some researchers found significant in support of student achievement, other researchers found insignificant.

In 1997 Baker and Soden examined parental involvement as an intervention tool for student success. They asserted that in order to truly understand and document the full impact of parent involvement, researchers should separate parent involvement effects from related effects and from the impact of other adults. To do this, Baker and Soden suggested that the type and level of involvement be separated from other components of intervention, and furthermore, the assessment of the intervention program itself be

evaluated for the differential influences of the program. However, it can be argued that separating parent involvement is impossible, because what parents influence may or may not be known simply because we cannot know what factors of parent involvement are in play at any given time during student testing.

Simon (2001) studied family and community connections with high schools and the effects on student achievement through outreach programs. Simon found that families and communities participate in a wide range of activities and that parental involvement increases when schools reach out and make parents feel essential and valuable. Moreover, Simon found that parent involvement increases with support from the school just as Epstein (2001) found that student success increases with support from the parents. Simon also found that when schools include parents in workshops as volunteers or as decision makers they will talk with their children more about school and thus school becomes an important part of the family focus. The literature indicated that parental involvement does have an effect on student success and achievement. While there appears to be a plethora of research linking student success in many aspects of education, there appears to be a lack of research that attempts to address whether student communication arts scores are incresed by parent involvement.

Finally, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) mandates that all students achieve competence in core subject areas and requires that proof of this competency should be annually through testing so that schools can be accountable for student progress. Increased parent and family involvement is a key element in the accountability mechanism written within the law and tied to Title 1 funding. Research indicated that parents are instrumental in the success of schools and the students who attend them.

NCLB mandates that they be included as part of the educational community. However, there are several obvious drawbacks to this law. For one, the money that is required to implement such a far reaching law is not sufficiently covered within the Title 1 funding, nor is the burden of accountability shared evenly with all stakeholders.

Schools are faced with increasing demands on student success in increments as they move toward the 100% measurements for proficiency of all students in the year 2014. Schools and researchers alike agree that parent involvement is beneficial and essential for the success of the school and for student achievement. However, there is no significant evidence that parental involvement of a specific nature actually contributes to or detracts from grades or test scores. Factors that may contribute to or detract from test scores are (a) school size, (b) socioeconomic diversity and (c) geograhic location. There is an abundance of research, reviewed in this chapter, which indicates a positive link between parental involvement and student achievement.

Chapter Three-Research Methodology

Overview

Research methodology refers to the research process, the procedural framework within which the research is conducted. This methodology is defined by Leedy (1989, as cited by Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Swartz, 1998) as "an operational framework within which the facts are placed so that their meaning may be seen more clearly" (p. 28).

Some methods provide quantitative data and some methods are qualitative. Quantitative methods focus on numbers and frequencies rather than on meaning and experience. Quantitative methods—experiments, questionnaires, and psychometric tests—gather information that is reliably analyzed statistically. Quantitative methods are associated with the scientific and experimental approach and are criticized for not providing a comprehensive description. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and case studies, collect data to describe meaning. They are less reliable but more valid because they are more comprehensive and include rich description.

This research approached data gathering using the multimethod strategy, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative approach pursues facts and is employed when researchers desire to acquire statistical truth. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), quantitative research assumes there is objective reality, constant across time and setting, in the social environment. While qualitative studies assumes people construct their own reality, discerning meanings and interpretations, and these constructions of reality depend on the situation and the period in which they occur.

The main methodology in the quantitative approach is to discern and explicate features of the objective reality through the collection of statistical data on participants'

observable behavior and analyzing the data statistically. According to Smith (1983), "neutral, scientific language" (p. 9) is used in quantitative research to pursue exact facts. This means that the research itself must be expressed by universally acceptable digits. In this approach, in order to become generalizable, neutral scientific language is used in an attempt to demonstrate objectivity. On the other hand, the qualitative approach aims to discern meaning and interpretation by intensively studying specific cases in their natural settings and by using analytic induction to analysis the resulting data (Gall et al. 2007).

In Creswell's (2002) explanation, quantitative studies are based on postpositivist claims for developing knowledge, use experiments and surveys, and collect data on predetermined instruments that yield statistical data. In contrast, qualitative studies use constructivist perspectives or advocacy/participatory perspectives, or both, and use narratives, phenomenologies, grounded-theory studies, or case studies as strategies of inquiry. In this approach, research facts and the researcher's value judgments or interpretations are inseparable. Thus the researcher becomes an insider to the research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

One of the major benefits of employing a quantitative-research approach points to generalizability: because the research results are derived by discovering exact facts, the same research methods and the results can be generalized. In short, such an approach is applicable to many other situations because of its objectivity and is not value laden. One of the major benefits of the qualitative-research approach is that it highlights the researcher's viewpoint in the research process as well as in its results. Moreover, qualitative studies encompass interpersonal, social, and cultural contexts of project management more fully than the quantitative-research approach. Because the researcher's

viewpoint takes a central role in the research process, the researcher provides a much richer and wider-ranging description compared to what the quantitative-research approach provides.

While the two research approaches and their respective modes of inquiry provide enormous benefits to researchers who use them, there are several limitations that must be considered. One criticism of the quantitative research approach is that the researcher's perspective is not considered in the explanation of the research. Clearly, statistical presentations are limited in their ability to explain complex human behavior in that it is difficult to express the problem when dealing with the psychological dimensions of human beings. Ultimately, even though the quantitative method seeks objective value, the complexity of society, its evolutionary changes, and its great cultural diversity make it difficult for any research to remain value neutral.

While the quantitative research approach provides generalizability, it is difficult in the qualitative-research approach to generalize to other research settings mainly because it is limited by the researcher's unique viewpoint. In other words, the theoretical model developed for one research project is difficult to generalize to other research projects. Along this line, Eisner and Peshkin (1990) asked whether it is possible to present research values in the unique situation of the qualitative-research approach; how can research knowledge be accumulated if there are no generalizations on the research? Moreover, the qualitative-research approach is limited by its nature in that the researcher controls the research.

Considering the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative approaches, the researchers used the principles of both quantitative– and qualitative–

research approaches. Central to the discussion of the rationale behind the mixed-methods strategy is the fact that knowledge is accumulated from a variety of sources in a variety of ways; thus, methodological diversity (Fiske & Shweder, 1986) is needed. The mixed-methods approach proposes those traditional scientific approaches (usually quantitative, often experimental) and their alternatives (e.g., qualitative, narrative, post-modern) all have their place and are all to be valued.

In the words of Barker et al. (2002),

> No single approach to research is best overall; rather, what is important is that the methods be appropriate for the questions under investigation. No single research method is inherently superior to any other: all methods have their relative advantages and disadvantages. (p. 245)

Instead of clashing one approach against another, it is more productive to follow a strategy of fitting the method to the research question. The primary benefit is that using such an approach results in pluralism, which can occur in an integrative way. This closes the gap between the quantitative and the qualitative approaches.

Rationale for the Method

In reviewing the literature, there are only a few criticisms of the mixed-method research approach, and these criticisms point mainly to the question of standards. In their commentary on issues in participatory action research, Reyes, Gillock, and Kobus (1994) posed the question, “Whose standards are used to evaluate research quality, and what are those standards?” (p. 237). The second part of the question seems to underlie criticism of the mixed-methods approach. As a result, the practical issue of how to make judgments about the quality of diverse styles of research is constantly faced by researchers

advocating this approach. Critics claim that researchers are unable to maintain standards across different genres of research, such as between ethnography and randomized experimentation, and it is the absence of comprehensive standards that makes the mixed-methods approach equivalent to anarchy.

The primary research question for this study was, Does at-home parental involvement in reading activities increase student classroom communication arts assessment scores?

There were three secondary questions:

1. Does the lack of at-home reading activities and parental involvement decrease classroom reading scores?
2. Do students who perceive their parents to be involved achieve higher reading scores?
3. Do students who perceive their parents to be uninvolved in their reading score lower?

Instrumentation

A survey-questionnaire instrument was created and developed by the three researchers to gain an understanding of the concept of at-home reading influence on the classroom reading test scores of the students in Grades 4 and 8 and also the communication arts assessments for Grade 11. This instrument was checked for content validity by an instructional curriculum specialist, an educational officer, and the chair of the dissertation committee.

The survey-questionnaire method was deemed more appropriate for the quantitative approach of this study as compared to other methods. A questionnaire is

essentially a data-capture instrument. It lists all the questions for which the researcher wants the respondents to answer, and it records the response of participants. There are two main purposes of questionnaires: (a) to draw accurate information from the respondent; and (b) to provide a standard format on which facts, comments, and attitudes can be recorded.

> Survey research is the method of gathering data from respondents thought to be representative of some population, using an instrument composed of closed structure or open-ended items. This is perhaps the dominant forms of data collection in the social sciences, providing for efficient collection of data over broad populations, amenable to administration, in person, by telephone, and over the Internet. (Garson, 2009, ¶ 1)

There are many advantages that have been identified in the use of the survey method. According to Babbie (2001), these advantages include that (a) one can collect a large amount of data in a fairly short time; (b) surveys are easier and less expensive than other forms of data collection; (c) questionnaires can be used to research almost any aspect of human perceptions regarding the variables under study; and (d) they can be easily used in field settings. To this end, the survey-questionnaire was selected as the most viable and reliable tool for this study.

Survery-questionnaires are a useful research tool when a large sample or even a population needs to be surveyed. This is because each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions, providing an efficient way of collecting responses from a large sample. Other advantages of survey-questionnaires are that they require less skill and sensitivity to administer than interviews, and they reduce the possibility of interviewer

bias. The survey instruments also consist of different formats of questions (open, closed, dichotomous, and multiple-choice questions). Open-format questions ask the participant to answer as they wish without structure imposed by the researcher for unprompted opinions.

There are two broad groups of closed questions: dichotomous and multiple choice. Dichotomous questions allow only two possible answers, for example, yes/no or true/false. This is the simplest of all closed questions. Finally, multiple-choice questions present a list of possible responses from which the respondent may choose. Multiple-choice questions must be designed carefully to incorporate all possible answers. By offering an "other, please specify" category that can be collected that was not originally conceived, responses may not fit into the imposed structure. According to Bernhardt (2004), whatever type of questionnaire used for data gathering, the questionnaire must be based upon an underlying assumption that the respondents will give truthful answers. The questionnaire must be treated as a scientific instrument used to bring the idea of perception into tangible quantitative data. To this end, these questions were considered (a) valid, (b) reliable, (c) understandable, (d) quick to complete, (e) able to get the first response from the respondent, and (f) able to get what is desired in the end.

The types of questions that were used in this instrument were a mixture of both open and closed questions. The majority of the questions were closed-ended questions because closed-format questions offer many advantages in both time and money. By restricting the answer set, it is easy to calculate percentages and other quantitative data over the whole group or over any subgroup of participants. Closed-format questions also make it easier to track opinions over time by administering the same questionnaire to

different but similar participant groups at regular intervals. Finally, closed-format questions allow the researcher to filter out useless or extreme answers that might be presented in an open-format question.

Sampling and Data Collection

The data were collected through the various reading scores of the students, and the telephonic survey-questionnaires with the parents of the children studying in Schools A, B, and C. A data set of 150 parents was used: 100 from an inner city school district and 50 from a suburban school district. A telephone interview was conducted with 150 parents of students, 50 from each of Grades 4, 8, and 11.

For the purpose of the study, purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, was used. As explained by Trochim (2001), in purposive sampling, the researcher samples with a purpose in mind from one or more specific and predefined groups, believed to be representative of the larger population of interest. Trochim noted that one of the benefits of purposive sampling is that it can be very useful for situations in which the researcher wants to reach a targeted group that otherwise might not be readily available. Purposeful sampling was used for questionnaire data from the participants (Creswell, 2002).

The dependent variable for the quantitative piece in this study was the student test score and the independent variable was parental involvement for the qualitative portion, parents' and teachers' perceptions, attitudinal changes, and changes in instructional practices were measured using survey-questionnaires. The data helped in evaluating whether parent involvement had increased and what impact the involvement had on the classroom reading scores of the students.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was to collect and analyze data. The researcher was the primary collector and disseminator of the data. On completion of data analysis, the researcher is able to provide insights, suggestions, and recommendations to the school for the purpose of attempting to raise scores.

The first researcher, Cynthia Warren, worked in an urban elementary school as a principal. The second researcher, George Edwards was a retired principal working with an urban high school, and the third researcher, Linetta Carter, was a resource instructor of special needs students working with in an suburban middle school.

Procedure

In the fall of 2008, consent forms were sent home through the students to the parent for participation in the research. All parents who signed the consent form were considered for participation. The parents were contacted to inform them about the study and invited to take part in a project that may help their children with reading and literacy habits. The researchers conducted the survey-questionnaire over the telephone with the parents and recorded their responses on individual paper forms. The parents responded to each statement using the Likert rating scale of 1 through 5, with a value of strongly disagree to strongly agree, respectively. Teachers were provided with at-home activities by the researchers that are designed to support in-class reading programs. The at-home activities used at the elementary level were those which: supported reading for fluency, understanding and comprehension; used graphic organizers as intervention tools to aid in reading comprehension and the compare-contrast reading strategy; help to recognize

main idea within text and character traits; and cloze activities to build vocabulary skills (spelling).

At the middle school level, the at-home activities given to support the classroom reading program were: fiction and non-fiction text for analysis to determine main idea; passages of short news articles to identify the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, why) to increase decoding and comprehension skills; writing a summary in response to a piece of writing after synthesizing; and 5 paragraph essay writing incorporating strong topic sentence structure and transitional words.

Communication arts in the classroom at the high school level were supported by activities which; used chosen passages to develop the abstract reasoning process, access The Princeton Review vocabulary list to enhance and increase preparation for Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Testing (ACT) college assessments, and analyze character education case studies to increase comprehension with the use of internalized thinking skills.

The pre-test scores collected at the beginning of the study and the post-test scores collected at the end of the study were analyzed using the f-test to check for difference in variances and the t-test which checked for difference in means.

Participants and Data Sample

For the purpose of the research, the parents of 150 students from three schools with 50 each from Grades 4, 8, and 11 were selected to take part in this project to investigate if the study may help improve their children's reading skills. Their parents were also selected for the purpose of the telephonic interview.

Description of Schools

School A. School A is located on the north side of Saint Louis City in Missouri. The school is composed of three buildings. The main building was erected in 1911 (Saint Louis Public School District, 2009) This building houses second through fifth grade classrooms, two resource classrooms, and two special education classes. Two buildings were added in the early 1960s to accommodate the migration of upward mobile black families into the area (Saint Louis Public School District). As a result, the school's enrollment peaked at 1700 students. The second building (the branch) is near the main building and it houses four kindergarten rooms and two preschool classes. The third building of the complex was built on the south end of the main building's playground. It houses the districts alternative education classrooms**.**

School B. Middle School B is a leading school in the provision of special education services to students with disabilities and whose mission is to collaborate with partner districts so that each student's unique needs are accommodated successfully to ensure that the student is able to be successful and become a contributing member of the community. The district operates two technical high schools that provide many career and technical education programs to their students (Special School District, 2009).

School C. High School C opened its doors on February 2, 1925, as a neighborhood school that served the predominately German population of the south side of the city. High School C continued operating as a neighborhood school until 1981 when it came under a desegregation order. It is 1 of 12 high schools in this urban city. It is 1 of 4 non-magnet or comprehensive high schools and is the only non-magnet high school that is considered naturally integrated (Saint Louis Public School District, 2009).

Effectiveness of Interview and Questionnaire

Owing to the limitation of survey methods, structured interviews provide a richer source of data for understanding peoples' views, experiences, and perceptions (Morgan, 1997). As one of the research inquiries is "explanation," the use of structured interviews is viewed as the right approach for this type of inquiry and fits well in the realism paradigm used in this study. In addition, the use of structured interviews in this research explored and explained themes that will emerge from the questionnaires. In this research, interviews were conducted with the persons who were primarily responsible for the support, guidance, and implementation of key educational programs and learning strategies in relation to the at-home reading activities.

Again, there are some limitations. First, as the quality of information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer (Patton, 1990), the researcher must be skillful, experienced, and knowledgeable about the topic and be able to relate to the participants in terms of their language (Bryman, 1998; Mason, 2002). In addition, evidence suggests that respondents are relatively likely to provide certain kinds of answers when an interviewer is present, because they believe such responses are more "socially desirable" (Saunders et al., 2003). Furthermore, interviewing may lead researchers to become over involved or to get too close to subjects, and thus objectivity may suffer and experimenter bias may be introduced (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983).

Layder (1995) endorsed the semi-structured interview process.

> In structured interviews the interviewer has a list of topics that he or she wants to cover, although this list will be flexibly adhered to according to the emergent demands of the interview situation, by contrast the semi-structured interview is

> geared to allowing people the freedom to respond in any way they choose. In this manner, the individual's own interpretations and meanings are allowed to surface in the interview data. (p. 41)

Data Analysis

The questionnaire was a very human effort designed and developed by the researchers building upon Epstein's (2002) parental involvement strategies and those strategies of attending school events and fundraising developed by the National Network of Partnership Schools at John Hopkins University (National Network of Partnership School, 2008). The questions were based on Epstein's strategies that were pertinent to the development of questions that would yield information that supported important concepts relevant to student success. The questions on the questionnaire were aligned to these strategies in order to evaluate which strategies were considered significant to parents in regard to their students' success (see Table 1).

All answers to the questionnaire (including open-ended questions) were entered into a structured database (Excel 2003) and ultimately examined by respondent category. A common coding method of letters and numbers was selected and used to convert information in the qualitative and quantitative analysis whereby the investigator circles or marks relevant portions of the responses and then categorizes them thematically (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006).

Table 1

Research Questions Relating to Epstein's Parent Involvement Strategies

Categories from Epstein's parent involvement strategies	Statements on the participant surveys at the elementary, middle, and high school levels
Communication	1. My child likes coming to school. 2. The school staff communicates well with me. 3. I contact the school often about my child's progress. 11. I talk with my child about post high school plans. 17. The teacher keeps me informed about my child's progress.
Helping at home	6. I feel homework is important. 8. The homework supports classroom learning. 10. I have designated study time at home for my child. 13. I feel that I have enough education to help my child with homework. 16. Our family discusses rules about how many hours of television will be watched on school days.
Attending school events	9. I attend parent-teacher organization meetings. 19. I belong to the parent teacher organization. 20. The school has an active PTO, PTA, or other parent organization which helps in developing parent leaders and representatives.
Building parenting skills	7. My child often talks with me about school experiences. 14. My child has literacy time set aside at home for reading and writing interactions. 15. The school helps me establish a home environment that supports learning. 18. The school assists me in helping my child set academic goals.
Volunteering	5. I contact the school regularly to volunteer in my child's class.
Fundraising	This parental research strategy was not significant in regard to improving student reading scores.
Participating in decision making	4. The school work is challenging to my child. 12. Our family discusses rules about maintaining grade average. 22. I talk with my child regularly about high school plans.
Leveraging community resources	21. The school encourages families in the community to be involved.

Data analysis began immediately after the questionnaires were returned. The results were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics. The questionnaires were conducted by interviews over the telephone and by letters sent home with the students. Sixty questionnaires were distributed with a 83% return rate. Summary measures were based on the Likert scale scores reported by those who completed the questionnaire.

Validity

The questionnaire instrument should have validity and reliability. The validity of a test or assessment refers to whether it provides the type of information desired. Validity can be enhanced by asking direct and appropriate questions. The reliability of a test or assessment relates to the consistency with which knowledge is measured (Bernhardt, 2004).

This questionnaire instrument measured what it claimed to be measuring thus providing a consistent measure, indicating that the survey instrument was a valid and reliable tool as determined by the instructional curriculum specialist, educational officer, and chair of the dissertation committee.

In evaluating studies, several methodological concerns emerge. Perhaps most important are reliability and validity. Reliability assessment is a core component of social and marketing research and can be incorporated easily into direct observations for determining optimal levels of performance. However, only 48% of the studies (excluding those using computerized assessment) reported reliability measures on the comparison assessment. Results were worse for assessing the social importance of the effects (28% reporting reliability), the social significance of the goals (4% reporting reliability), and validation of the appropriateness of procedures (8% reporting reliability). Several

procedures have been used that can provide reliability of the questionnaire measurement methods, including test–retest, odd–even, Kendall's coefficient, Pearson *r* coefficient, and the equivalent-forms method. Social validation procedures are valid as long as they measure what they claim to measure. It is critical that good internal and external validity be established for social-validation procedures. The external validity of the assessment procedures reviewed here is questionable. The dimensions researchers believe they are measuring may have little relation to what is actually being measured, and the face validity is inadequate as the sole criterion for evaluating the validity of assessment devices (McClintock, 2005, pp. 13-33).

One way to assess validity would be to have a panel of uninvolved experts develop or review the social-validation assessment. Another method would be to have a social-validation assessment of the social-validation instrument. For instance, after filling out a questionnaire, raters respond to a second questionnaire that asks them to rate the ability of the first questionnaire to meet its purpose. In addition, researchers need to be aware of halo effects, biases toward leniency or severity, central-tendency responses, and position or proximity biases of raters, which may artificially enhance the reliability of measurement without improving response accuracy or validity.

A study can be reliable but not valid, and it cannot be valid without first being reliable. Validity cannot be assumed regardless of the reliability of the measurements. There are many different threats to validity, but an important early consideration is to ensure internal validity. This means that the researcher is using the most appropriate research design for what is being studied (experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, qualitative, or historical), and it also means that the researcher has screened out spurious

variables and thought through the possible contamination of other variables in the study. Anything done to standardize or clarify the measurement instrument to reduce user error will add to reliability. There are four good methods of estimating validity: face, content, criterion, construct (Austin Peay State University, 2006).

When this researcher conducted questionnaires, the goal was to analyze the responsibilities of how involved parents were in their children's education. It was important to try to do that in a way that allowed the researcher to make statements about the respondents and provide confidentiality to all. For validation purposes, a sample questionnaire was submitted to the panel of "experts," the instructional curriculum specialist, educational officer, and chair of the dissertation committee, none of whom were involved directly in the research.

Ethical Issues

The principal researcher understood the pertinent ethical issues and took responsibility for all procedures of the project. The integrity of the research project was kept intact, and negative after-effects were avoided, thus upholding the quality of the research and its ability to be used as a basis for future research. The choice of research topic was based on the judgment of the researcher and an assessment of the possible benefit for participants and society in general as it relates to participants risk. This study was related to an important intellectual issue.

Informed consent. Informed consent is the foundation of ethical research. Authorization can be thought of as an agreement in which the participant consents to allow investigational actions that may include an array of emotions such as boredom, deception, and discomfort for the good of science, while the researcher assures the safety

and well-being of the participant. For the purpose of the research, consent forms were signed by respondents (Faraone, Tsuang, & Tsuang, 1999).

Anonymity. Only the researcher knew the identity of the participants in the preliminary phase of the research. Participation letters were sent out to parents of students in Grades 4, 8, and 11, of which, the first 50 affirmative responses received from each grade level were accepted for the study. Because there would be cross-referencing of student test scores, parental involvement, and student perceptions of parental involvement, it was necessary to know the identity of the participants in the initial phase of the research. Once correlations were made, the identity of the participants would no longer be essential and would remain undisclosed. The results of the study would be analyzed in a quantitative manner in which percentages would support the findings.

The researcher is aware of potential harmful effects. The project was conducted in the best tradition of objective science, without bias. Research personnel were trained and qualified to use the procedures employed in the research. The research is carried out in full compliance with, and awareness of, local customs, standards, laws, and regulations. The researcher is familiar with and respected the host culture.

The principal investigators clarified their values to participants, allowing transparent collaborations with others. Researchers took care to void undue intrusion into the lives of the participants or their communities. Researchers maintained the view that the welfare of the informants was the highest priority, and was careful to protect their privacy and interest. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Potential participants were made cognizant of the purpose, nature, methods, procedures, and sponsors of the research. Participants were given contact information for each member of

the research team. Participants were told that they had the right to refuse to answer questions and to withdraw at any time during the research. Potential participants were informed of any potential consequences of their participation (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2003).

Confidentiality. Full confidentiality of all information and the anonymity of participants were maintained. Participants were informed of any potential limitations to the confidentiality of any information supplied. Procedures were put in place to protect the confidentiality of information and the anonymity of the participants in all research materials. The researcher provided adequate information in all publications and to colleagues to permit their methods and findings to be properly assessed. Limits of reliability and applicability were made clear. The researcher was responsible for properly acknowledging the unpublished as well as published work of other scholars. Finally, all research materials were preserved in a manner that respected the agreements made with participants. It was reassured that the identity of all participants would remain confidential as well as the data sets. After the conclusion of the research, the material related to the respondents were destroyed.

Summary

This chapter established the research design and procedures for data gathering and analysis. It was established in the chapter that the research of the present study was a mixed-method study. The three schools were chosen to carry out the research, and a sample of 150 parents of the children of the selected schools was chosen to interview. The consent forms were sent to the parents for their participation in the research. All parents that signed the consent form were selected to participate. The parents were

contacted to inform them about the study and invited to take part in a project that may help their children with reading and literacy habits. Parents were asked the questions from the questionnaire on the telephone. Teachers were provided with at-home activities by the researchers that were designed to support in-class reading programs.

Chapter Four—Results and Findings

In this chapter the findings of the data obtained through the test scores and the telephone interview with the parents are presented. The variables other than the students' perception, the parents' perception, and the student test scores were not considered in this study when calculating the statistical relationship between parental involvement and student testing success. Gender, ethnicity, age, and other traditionally researchable variables were not considered; only student test scores were considered at the eleventh grade level.

Presentation and Analysis of the Findings

The surveys were written specifically for this study, therefore validity and reliability were evaluated at face value by a panel of experts. The survey questionnaire was administered to the parents of the students of the three schools in the study who had students studying in the 11th grade. The program used to analyze the statistical data was Excel 2003 for Windows. Once the information was logged into the Excel 2003 program, it became apparent that a factor analysis should be done to determine whether many variables could be described by fewer factors. The analysis of the parental questionnaire is given below.

Grade of children. *T*his collaborative study had 150 students and 150 parent participants (see Figure 1). At the 11 grade level, 37 parents had a male child, while 13 parents had a female child.

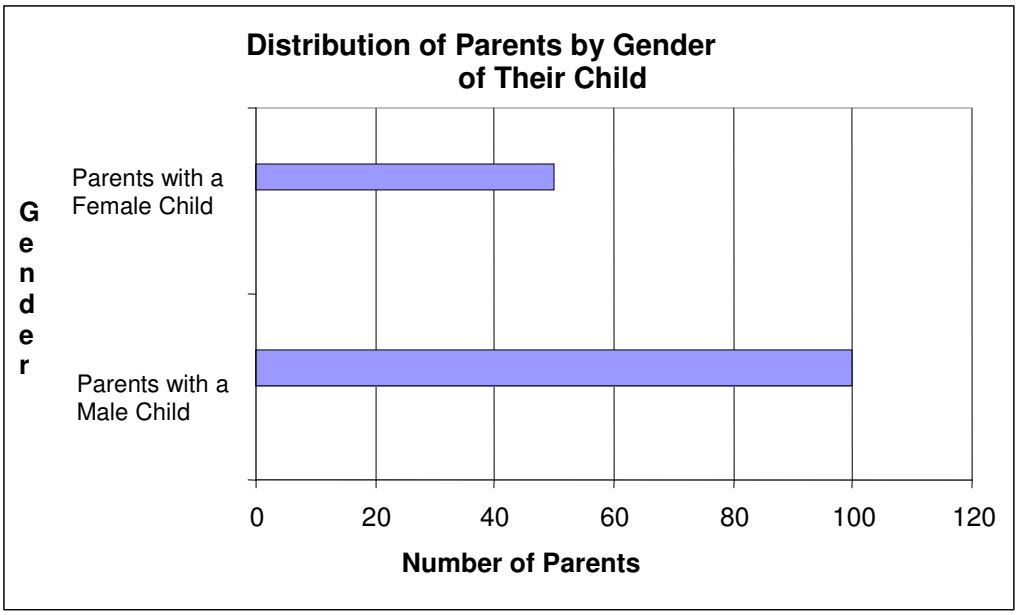

Figure 1. Distribution of parents by gender of their child.

Highest education level completed. Most parents in the study completed a level of education that was beyond their child's current year in school. One parent had an education level of 8th grade while two had an educational background of 11th grade. However, 47 parents of high school students had an educational background beyond 11th grade (see Figure 2).

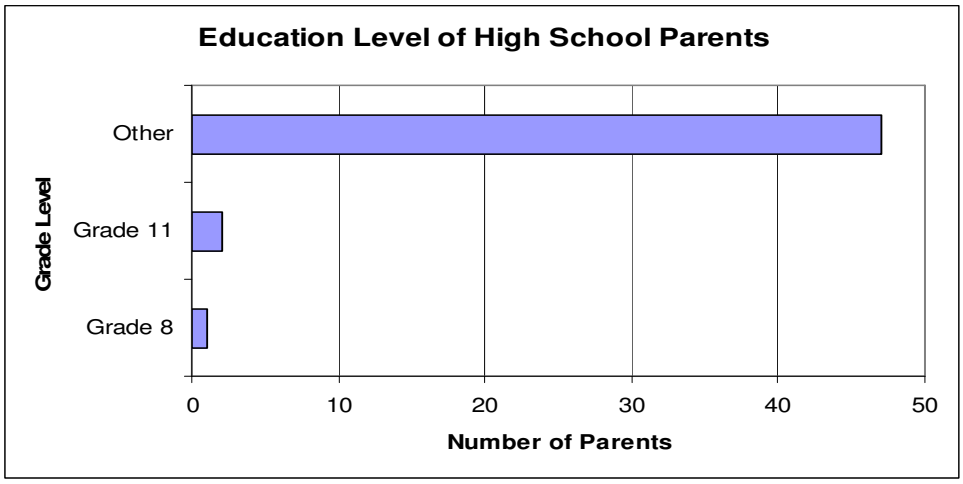

Figure 2. Highest education level completed by parents.

Parental Questionnaire Results

Response to Statement 1: My child likes coming to school.

In response to the question regarding how much the children like coming to school, 29% agreed and 5% strongly disagreed that their child likes going to the school. At the high school level, 36% of the respondents disagreed and 16% strongly disagreed that their child likes going to the school. From these percentages it can be said that most of the high school students do not like coming to the school (see Figure 3).

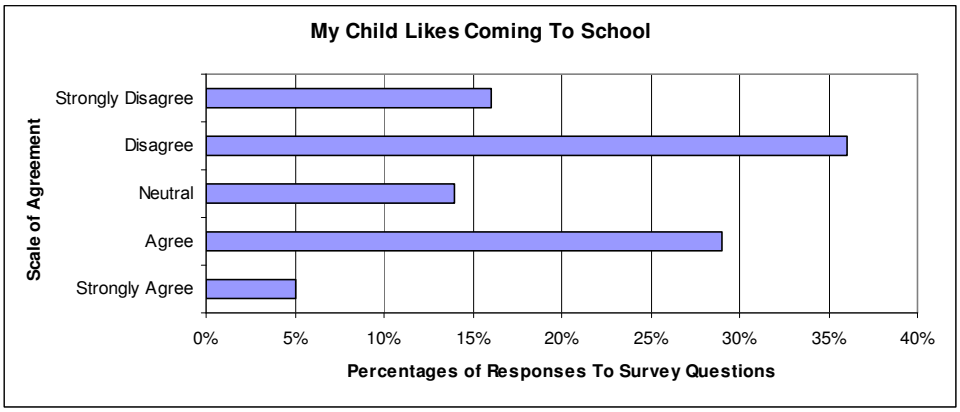

Figure 3. High school children like coming to school.

Response to Statement 2: The school staff communicates well with me.

In response to the question regarding how much the children like going to school, 32% agreed or strongly agreed that their child likes going to the school. At the high school level, 44% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that their child likes going to the school. From these percentages it can be said that most of the high school students do not feel that the school staff communicates well (see Figure 4).

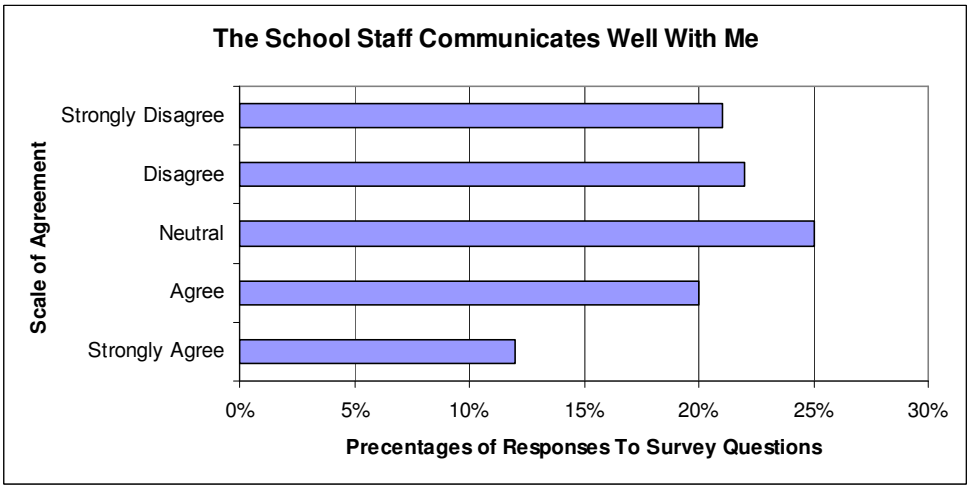

Figure 4. High school children who feel the staff communicates well.

Response to Statement 3: I contact the school often.

When asked about how often parents communicate with the school, it was found that most parents do not contact the schools often about their child's progress. Figure 5 illustrates that only 25% of high school parents contact the schools to find out about their child's progress.

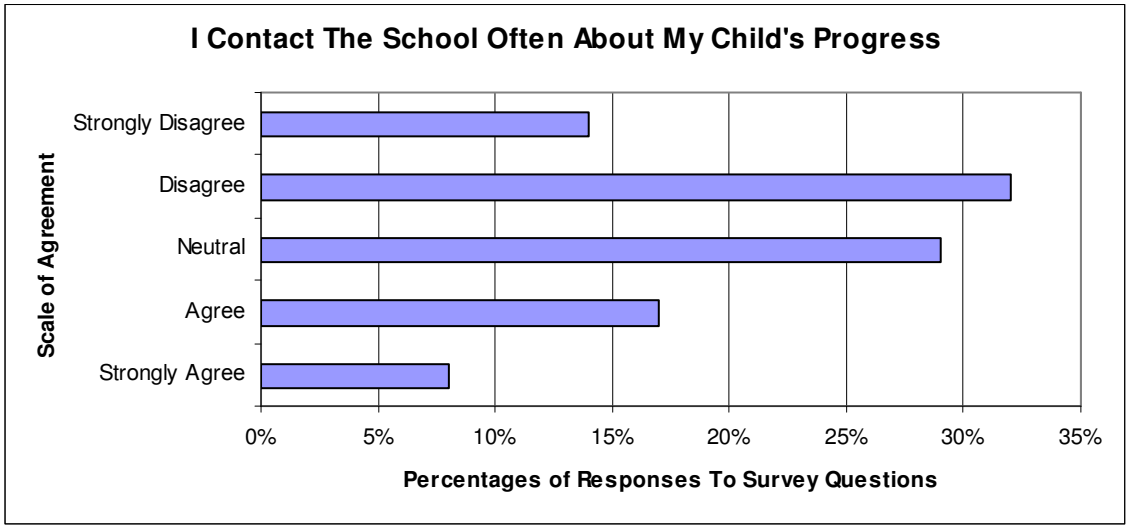

Figure 5. High School children's parents who contact the school often.

Response to Statement 4: The school work is challenging to my child.

There was a strong agreement regarding the school work being challenging for the children. While 70% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the question regarding the challenge of school work, 15% of the respondents were in disagreement with the question regarding the challenge of the school work (see Figure 6).

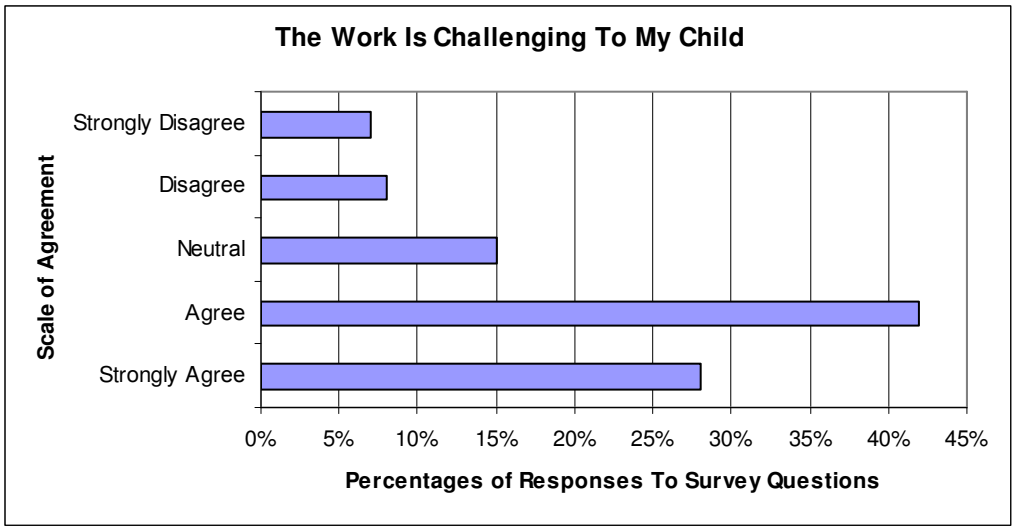

Figure 6. High school students' parents who believe the work challenges their child.

Response to Statement 5: I contact the school regularly to volunteer in my child's class.

Figure 7 indicates that most parents do not contact the school regularly to volunteer in their child's class. It is evident that 57% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they contact the school to volunteer. This high percentage is evident at the high school level.

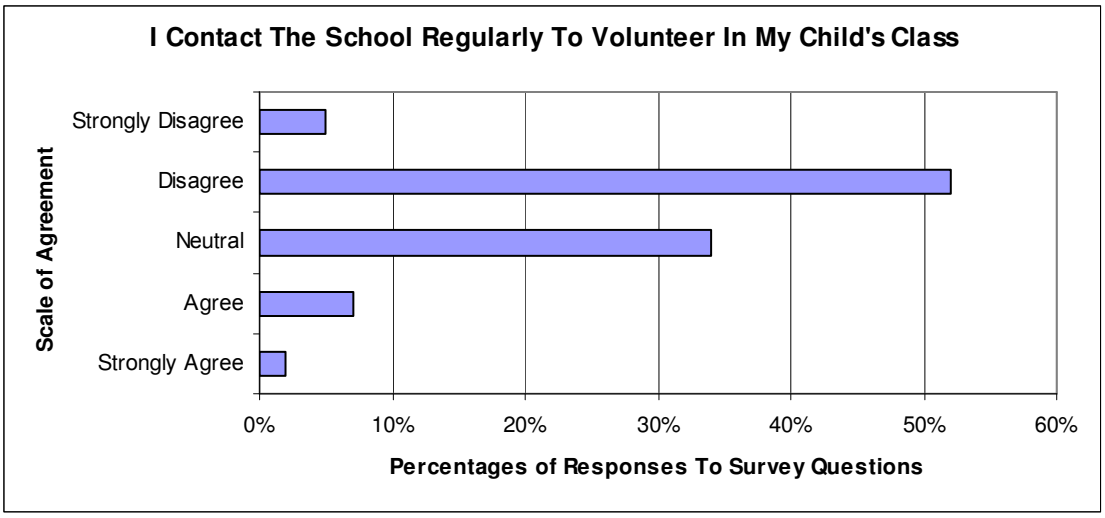

Figure 7. High School parents who volunteer regularly.

Response to Statement 6: I feel homework is important.

The opinion of the parents indicate the importance of homework as shown with the percentages in Figure 8. While 72% of the respondents in the survey agreed or strongly agreed that homework is important for their child, 19% of the respondents disagreed with the importance of the homework.

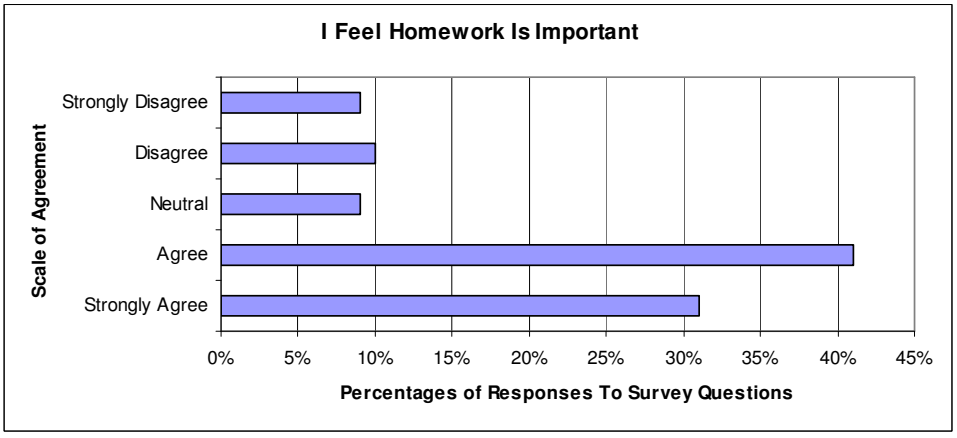

Figure 8. High school parents who feel homework is important.

Response to Statement 7: My child often talks with me about school experiences.

As shown in Figure 9, most of the high school students do not talk about school experiences with their parents as evidenced by 51% disagreement with the question.

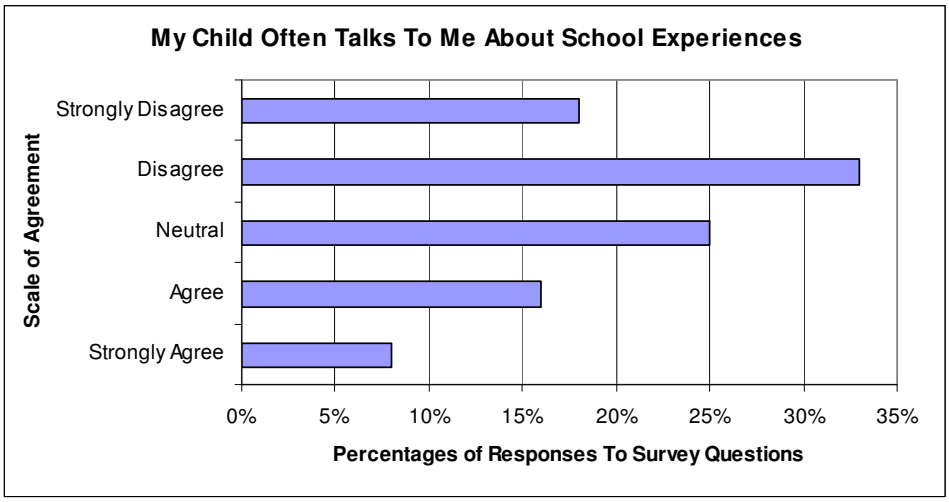

Figure 9. High school parents whose children talk about school often.

Response to Statement 8: The homework supports classroom learning.

Parents perceive that homework supports classroom learning. This was the opinion of approximately 65% of the parents in the survey. As shown in Figure 10, 28% strongly agreed, while 37% agreed with the question. Only 11% of the respondents disagreed that homework supports classroom learning, while 5% strongly disagreed.

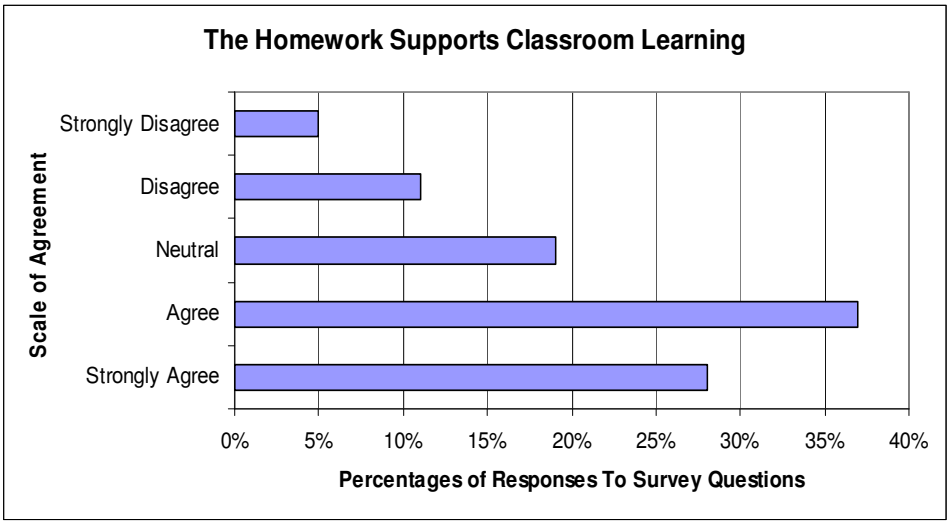

Figure 10. High school parents who believe homework supports learning.

Response to Statement 9: I attend parent-teacher organization meetings.

Most of the parents disagree that they attend the parent-teacher meeting: 41% of the respondents disagreed and 20% strongly disagreed that they attend parent-teacher meetings (see Figure 11).

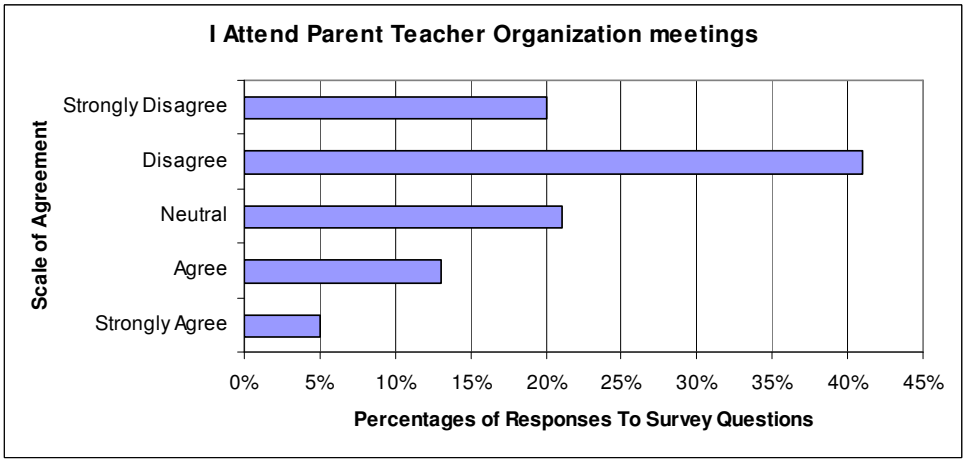

Figure 11. High school parents who attend organization meetings.

Response to Statement 10: I have designated study time at home for my child.

The majority of the parents in the survey have no designated study time for their child. While 35% of the respondents disagreed that they have designated specific time for their children, 17% strongly disagreed that they have designated any specific time for their children at home, while only 22% agreed or strongly agreed (see Figure 12).

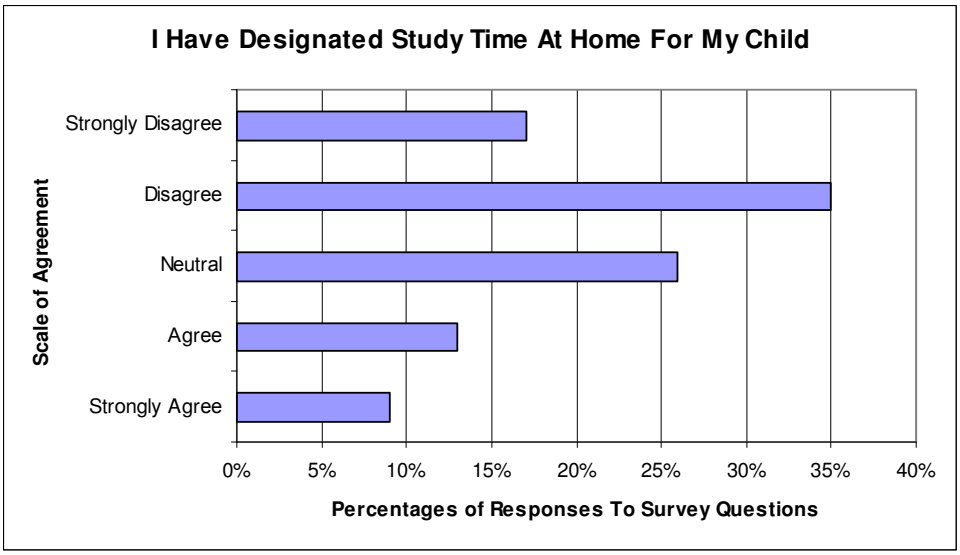

Figure 12. High school students who have a designated study time.

Response to Statement 11: I talk with my child about post-high school plans.

There was an indifferent response to the question regarding the conversation with the children about the post-high school plans. As shown in Figure 13, 27% of the respondents agreed that they talk about post-high school plans, 26% of the respondents disagreed that they talk about post-high school plans. Additionally, 18% of the respondents were neutral regarding the conversation about post-high school plan, while 12% strongly agreed and 18% strongly disagreed (see Figure 13).

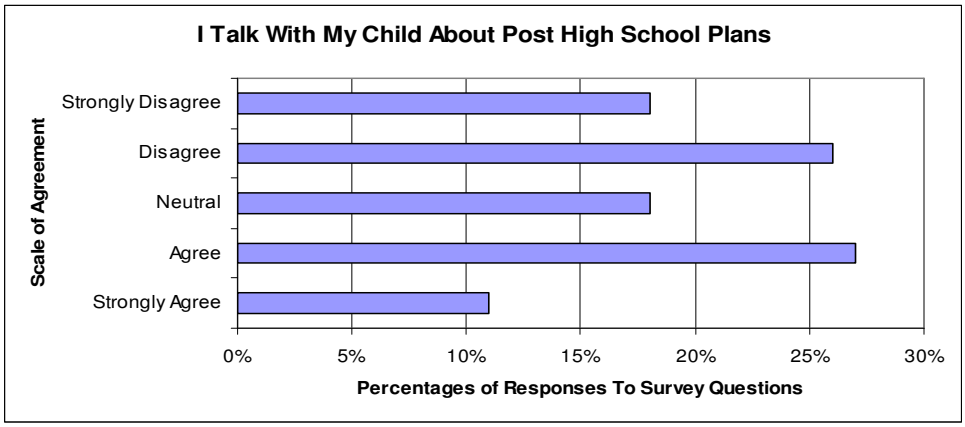

Figure 13. Parents who talk to their high school students about future plans.

Response to Statement 12: Our family discusses rules about maintaining grade average.

Most of the parents or families do talk about maintaining grade averages with their children, evidenced by 53% that strongly agreed or agreed with this statement; 21% of the respondents were neutral about the statement. Only 26% disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Figure 14).

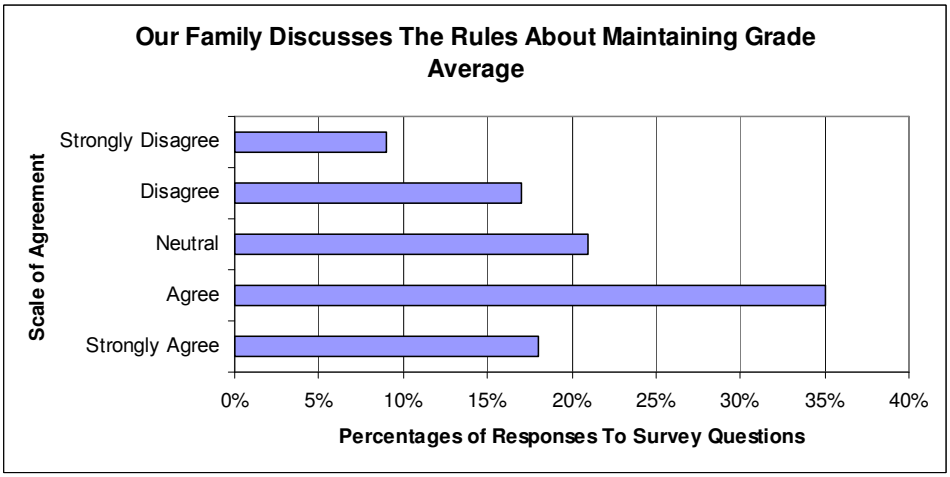

Figure 14. High school student's family discusses maintaining grades.

Response to Statement 13: I feel that I have enough education to help my child with homework.

Most of the parents believed they do not have enough education to help with their child's homework. This was evidenced by the fact that 57% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that they possess enough education to help with the children's homework, while 22% were neutral. Only 21% agreed or strongly agreed (see Figure 15).

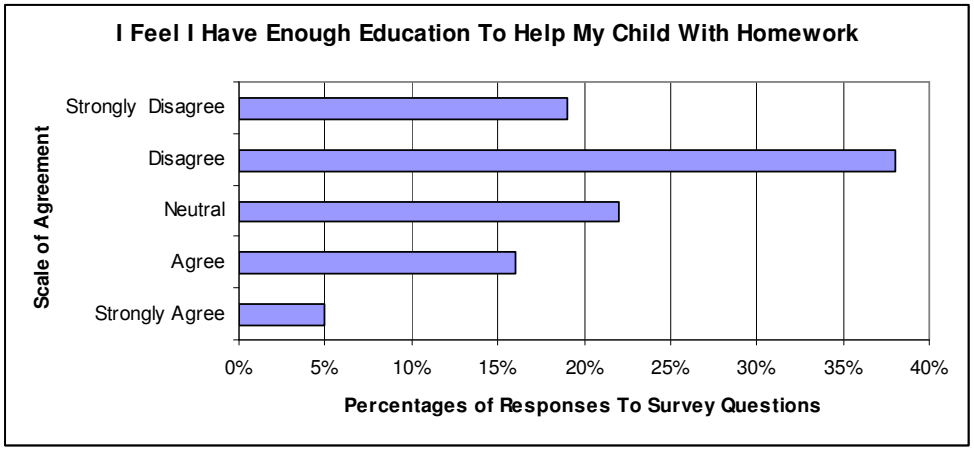

Figure 15. High school parents can help with homework.

Response to Statement 14: My child has literacy time set aside at home for reading and writing interactions.

Most of the respondents, 60%, disagreed and strongly disagreed that they have literacy time set aside at home for reading and writing interaction. Yet 26% of the respondents were neutral. Only 22% strongly agreed or agreed (see Figure 16).

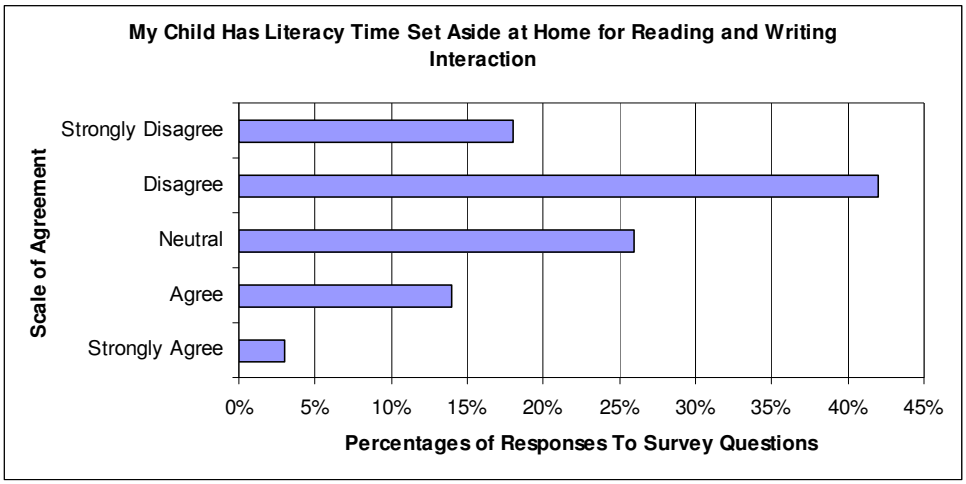

Figure 16. High school students have literacy time at home.

Response to Statement 15: The school helps me establish a home environment that supports learning.

Most parents responded that the school helps in establishing an environment that supports learning. As shown in Figure 17, 45% agreed and strongly agreed with the statement while 23% disagreed with the statement.

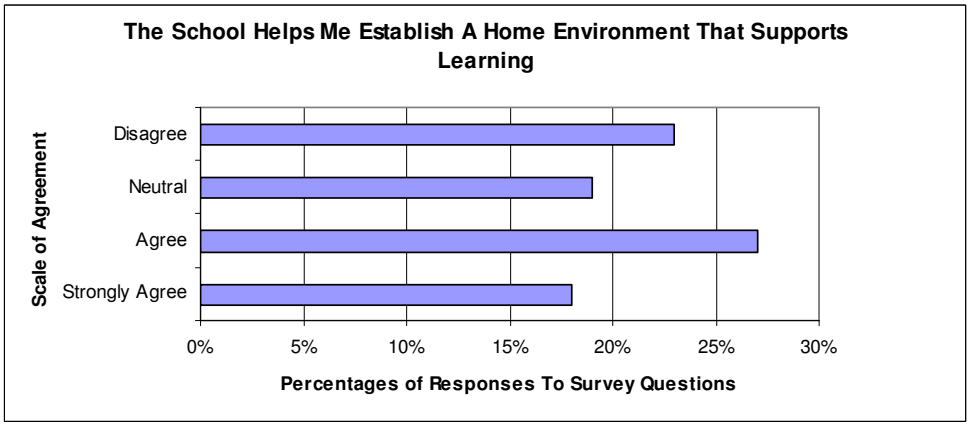

Figure 17. High school students have home support at school.

Response to Statement 16: Our family discusses rules about how many hours of television will be watched on school days.

Most of the parents and families have not established rules about hours of watching television on school days. This can be seen from the percentage of disagreement (47%), and strong disagreement (7%),while there were 32% respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement about discussing rules regarding hours of television watching in school days (see Figure 18).

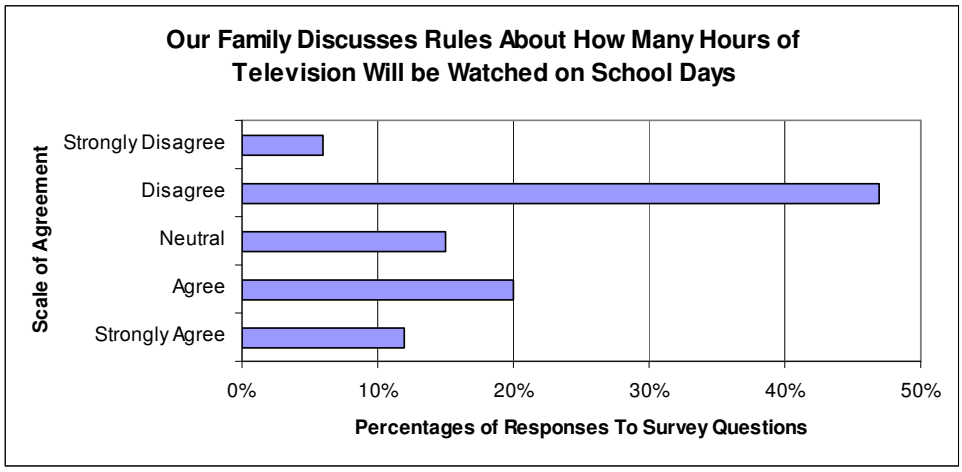

Figure 18. High school families discuss rules about television.

Response to Statement 17: The teacher keeps me informed about my child's progress.

Most of the parents agreed that school teachers keep them informed about the child's progress: 35% of the respondents agreed that the teachers keep them informed about their child's progress, while 21% strongly agreed. Only 18% disagreed and 9% strongly disagreed with the statement (see Figure 19).

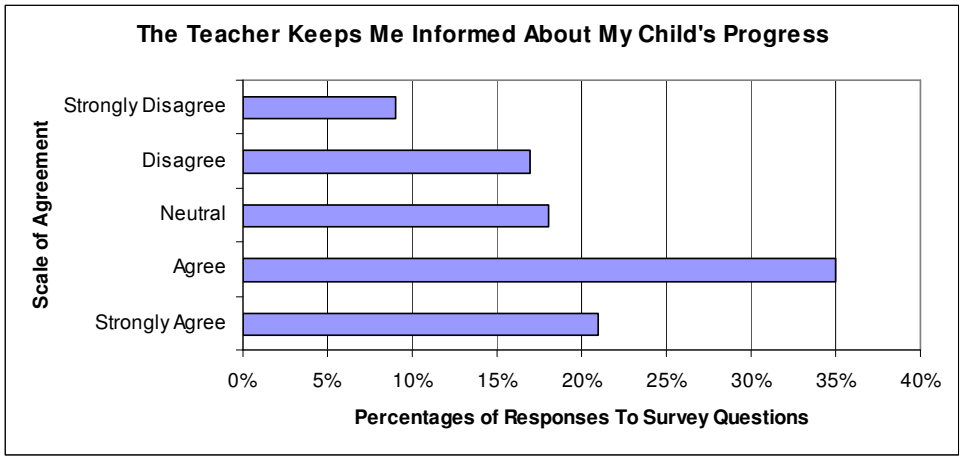

Figure 19. High school teachers inform parents.

Response to Statement 18: The school assists me in helping my child set academic goals.

Most of the parents were neutral about the assistance of the school in helping their child set academic goals. While 45% of the respondents were neutral about the school's assistance with their child in setting academic goals, 12% disagreed, and 20% agreed with the statement, 8% strongly disagreed and 15% strongly agreed (see Figure 20).

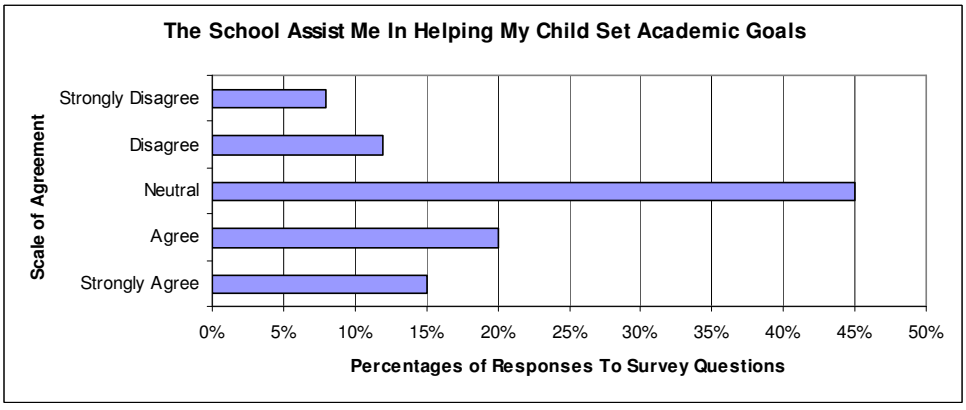

Figure 20. High school helps parents and students set goals.

Response to Statement 19: I belong to the parent–teacher organization.

As shown in Figure 21, 59% of the respondents said that they do not belong to the parent–teacher organization, while 20% said they do belong.

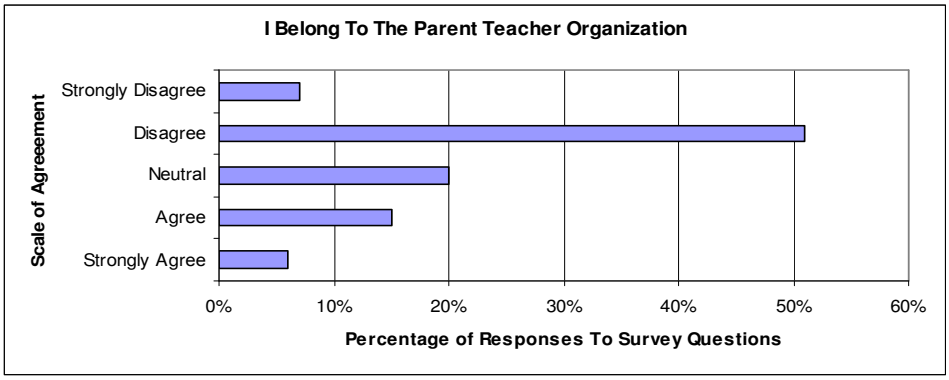

Figure 21. High school parents belong to parent–teacher organization.

Response to Statement 20: The school has an active PTO, PTA, or other parent organization that helps in developing parent leaders and representatives.

It was interesting to note that 52% of the respondents were neutral on the statement that school has an active PTO, PTA, or other parent organization that helps in developing parent leaders and representatives. Only 28% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the school has such parent organizations (see Figure 22).

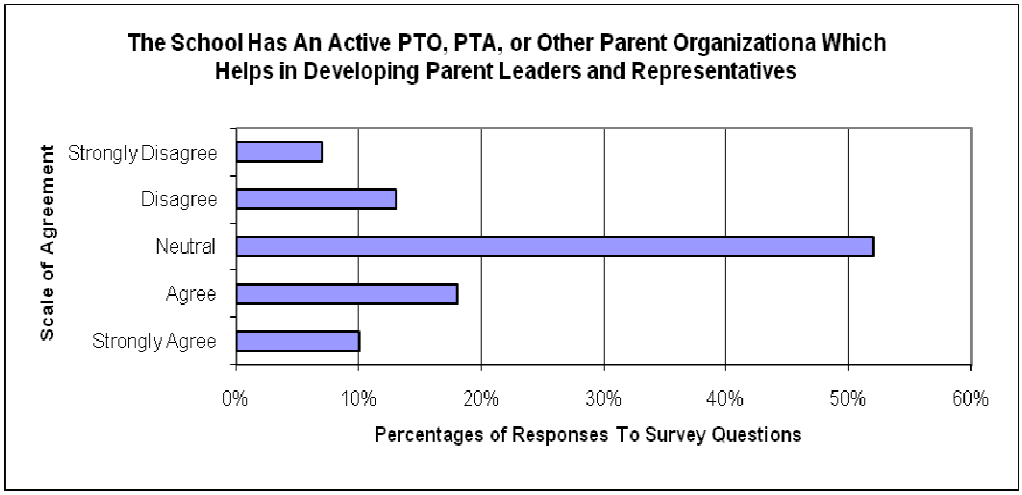

Figure 22. High school parent–teacher organization help develop parent leaders.

Response to Statement 21: The school encourages families and the community to be involved.

There were some indifferent responses regarding the school's encouragement to families and the community to be involved. As seen in Figure 23, 36% agreed and strongly agreed that the school encourages families and the community to be involved, 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 34 % of the parents were neutral about the statement.

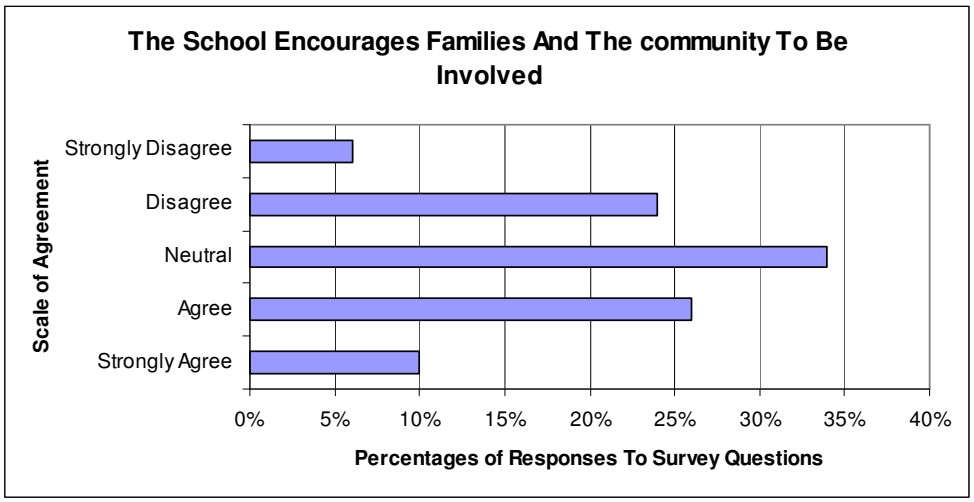

Figure 23. High school encourages parent and community involvement.

Response to Statement 22: I talk with my child regularly about high school plans.

The response to this question regarding the conversation with the children about their high school plans shows that 30% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they talk about high school plans, 41% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they talk about the high school plans, and 29% of the respondents were neutral about the conversation about high school plans (see Figure 24).

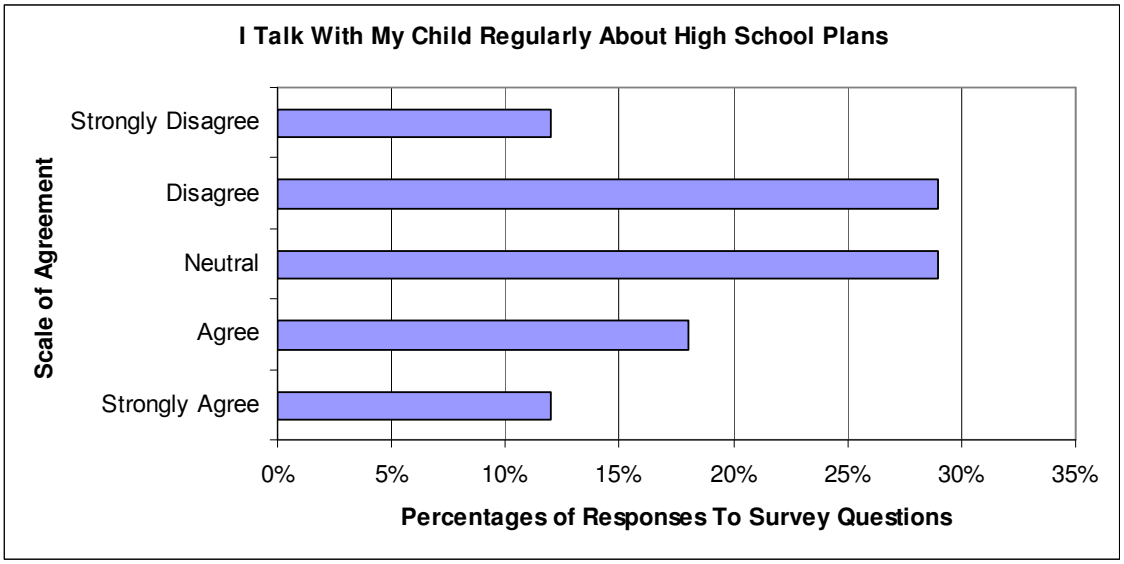

Figure 24. High school parents talk with children about high school plans.

Posttest Scores Analysis and Summary of All Grade Levels—Elementary, Middle and High School

This section will begin to analyze data according to each individual academic level. Analyzing the students' test scores in the area of reading indicated that students scored higher when parents assisted them across all three levels. Disaggregating each test group determined whether the students' perception of parent involvement could be a contributing factor to individual subject results.

Elementary School Level: Data from the elementary academic level were first assessed by Cynthia Warren with the statistical function *f*-test, Two-Sample for Variances, to check for equal variances. The null hypothesis of the f-test, Two-Sample Variance was there will be no difference between the variances of data gathered from the at-home reading and classroom reading scores. The alternate hypothesis was there will be a difference between the variances of data gathered from the at-home reading activities

and classroom reading scores. The *f* value ($f = 3.862$) was compared to the critical value ($f\,cv = 1.446$) and the conclusions showed that the variances were unequal.

Since the variances were unequal, this assessment was followed with the *t*-test, Two Sample Assuming Unequal Variances statistical function using pre and post classroom reading scores to check for the difference between means. The null hypothesis of the t-test was there will be no significant difference between averages for data gathered from the at-home reading activities and classroom communication art scores. The alternate hypothesis was there will be a significant difference between averages for data gathered from the at-home reading activities and classroom communication arts scores. On evaluation of data, the *p*-value for the *t*-test was $p = .002$ (see Table 2). With the confidence level at 0.10, the null hypothesis was rejected with the conclusion that there was enough evidence to support the claim that at-home reading activities did have an impact on classroom communication art scores. A collaborative study involving three investigators was conducted to determine if there was and relationship between at-home reading activities and student success on academic achievement at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Table 2

Elementary School Data Table

t-Test: 2-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	58.82	75.8
Variance	1149.864898	297.755102
Observations	50	50
Hypothesized mean difference	0	
df	73	
t Stat	3.155697754	
P(T < = *t*) 1-tail	0.001163281	
t Critical 1-tail	1.293256413	
P(T < = *t*) 2-tail	0.002326562	
t Critical 2-tail	1.665996224	

Middle School Level: Data from the middle school academic level were first assessed by Linetta Carter with the statistical function *f*-test, Two-Sample for Variances, to check for equal variances. The null hypothesis of the f-test, Two-Sample for Variances was there will be no difference between the variances of data gathered from the at-home reading activities and classroom reading scores. The alternate hypothesis was there will be a difference between the variances of data gathered from the at-home reading activities and classroom reading scores. The *f* value ($f = 2.366$) was compared to the critical value ($f\,cv = 1.498$) and the conclusions showed that the variances were unequal.

Since the variances were unequal, this assessment was followed with the *t*-test, Two Sample Assuming Unequal Variances statistical function using pre and post classroom reading scores to check for the difference between means. The null hypothesis of the t-test was there will be no significant difference between averages for data gathered from the at-home reading activities and classroom communication arts scores. The alternate hypothesis was there will be a significant difference between averages for data

gathered from the at-home reading activities and classroom reading scores. On evaluation of data, the *p*-value for the *t*-test was $p = .06$ (see Table 3). With the confidence level at 0.10, the null hypothesis was rejected with the conclusion that there was enough evidence to support the claim that at-home reading activities did have an impact on classroom reading scores. A collaborative study involving three investigators was conducted to determine if there was an association between at-home reading activities and student success on academic achievement on the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Table 3

Middle School Data Table: t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	56.9047619	68.5
Variance	1092.283391	461.7195122
Observations	42	42
Hypothesized mean difference	0	
df	70	
t Stat	-1.90624362	
P(T < = *t*) 1-tail	0.030362275	
t Critical 1-tail	1.293762898	
P(T < = *t*) 2-tail	0.060724551	
t Critical 2-tail	1.66691448	

High School Level: Data from the high school academic level were first assessed by George Edwards with the statistical function *f*-test, Two-Sample for Variances, to check for equal variances. The null hypothesis of the f-test, Two-Sample for Variances was there will be no difference between the variances of data gathered from the at-home reading activities and classroom reading scores. The alternate hypothesis was there will be a difference between the variances of data gathered from the at-home reading

activities and classroom reading scores. The *f* value ($f = 1.630$) was compared to the critical value ($f\,cv = 1.484$) and the conclusions showed that the variances were unequal. Since the variances were unequal, this assessment was followed with the *t*-test, Two Sample Assuming Unequal Variances statistical function using pre and post communication arts classroom assessment scores to check the difference between the means. The null hypothesis of the t-test was there will be no significant difference between averages for data gathered from the at-home reading activities and classroom reading scores. The alternate hypothesis was there will be a significant difference between averages for data gathered from the at-home reading activities and classroom reading scores. On evaluation of data, the *p*-value for the *t*-test was $p = .004$ (see Table 4). With the confidence level at 0.10, the null hypothesis was rejected with the conclusion that there was enough evidence to support the claim that at-home reading activities did have an impact on Communication Arts classroom assessment scores. A collaborative study involving three investigators was conducted to determine if there was an association between at-home reading activities and student success on academic achievement on the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Table 4

High School Data Table: t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	Variable 1	*Variable 2*
Mean	40.0681818	51.2727273
Variance	287.553383	331.133192
Observations	44	44
Hypothesized mean difference	0	
df	86	
t Stat	-2.9880319	
P(T < = *t*) 1-tail	0.00182943	
t Critical 1-tail	1.29147317	
P(T < = *t*) 2-tail	0.00365886	
t Critical 2-tail	1.66276545	

Note. df = degrees of freedom

Family Literacy Progress Analysis

According to the data from the progress phone log used to monitor the influence level of family literacy (see Table 5), the following results were obtained.

1. Did your child complete his/her homework assignment?

   At the end of the study, there was an 18% increase in the completion of homework assignments at the elementary level; an increase of 29.7% completion of the homework assignments at the middle school level, and an increase of 15.9% at the high school level.

2. Did you have any questions or concerns about the assignment?

   As parents communicated with the classroom teachers, the questions and concerns regarding the assignments began to decrease. At the elementary level, there was a 26% decrease in concerns about assignments a 21.5% decrease in questions and concerns at the middle school level, and for the high school level, a decrease of 20.5% was shown.

3. How many hours did it take to complete the assignments?

   There number of hours necessary to complete assignments either decreased or remained unchanged. The number of hours needed to complete the assignments at the elementary level remained unchanged. There was a 20% decrease in the time it took to complete assignments at the middle school level and a 17% decrease at the high school level.

4. Have you discussed upcoming reading assessments with your child?

   The respondents in the study began to dialogue more with their children regarding reading assignments. The elementary school did show a 16% increase in the discussion about reading assessments; at the middle school level, there was a 23.8% increase in discussions; and at the high school level, an 18.2% increase.

5. How many minutes of reading have you and your child completed this week?

   The number of minutes for reading at the elementary school level increased 25% over the initial number of minutes of reading. At the middle school level, there was a 33% increase in reading minutes. A 50% increase in the reading minutes was evident at the high school level.

6. How many minutes is your family sharing in conversation about education or school?

   At the elementary school, middle school, and high school levels, there was a 100% increase in minutes that family shared in conversation about education or school.

7. I talked with my child's teacher this week about current and upcoming reading assignments.

   There was an increase in conversation and communication between home and school regarding reading assignments. The elementary school level had an increase of 35% of parents communication with the teachers. At the middle school level, there was a 21.9% increase in parents communicating with the child's teacher. For the high school level, there was a 13.8% increase in the communication between the parents and the child's teacher.

Table 5

Progress Phone Log Data

	First follow-up phone data			Final follow-up phone data		
	Elementary	Middle School	High School	Elementary	Middle School	High School
Question 1: Did your child complete his/her homework assignment?	48%	30.9%	22.7%	66%	66.6%	38.6%
Question 2: Did you have any questions or concerns about the assignment?	66%	47.6%	47.7%	40%	21.6%	27.2%
Question 3: How many hours did it take to complete the assignment?	2.0	1.25	1.50	2.0	1.0	1.25
Question 4: Have you discussed upcoming reading assessments with your child?	YES 60%	YES 47.6%	YES 9.5%	YES 76.0%	YES 71.4%	YES 47.7%
Question 5: How many minutes of reading have you and your child completed this week?	60	45	50	75	60	75
Question 6: How many minutes is your family sharing in conversation about education?	30	15	15	60	30	30
Question 7: I talked with my child's teacher this week about current and upcoming reading assignments.	40%	21.4%	15.9%	54%	26.1%	18.1%

Summary of the Findings

According to these findings, parent involvement is essential for improving student achievement and, therefore, is an indicator of student success. The results illustrate this to statistically true within the limitations of the study. The primary research question for this study is, Does at-home parental involvement in reading activities increase student reading scores? According to the findings, the answer was yes, there was statistically significant link between parent involvement and student classroom reading scores. Secondary questions included the following: Does the lack of at-home parental involvement in

reading activities decrease test scores? This was not found to be true within the perimeters of the study. Do students who perceive their parents to be involved achieve higher scores? This was found to be true within the perimeters of the study. Do students who perceive their parents to be uninvolved score lower? This was not found to be true within the perimeters of the study. Parents and students initially appeared to be in concurrence that parent support was a significant factor in student success, which was confirmed by the statistical data.

Chapter Five – Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of at-home reading activities and parental involvement on classroom reading scores with the primary focus on the 8th grade level. Parents who live and interact with their children have been known to greatly influence the literacy development of their children, which lays the foundation for them to become successful in school (Armbruster et al., 2001).

Recall from Chapter 2 that Finn (2002) found that as the student entered the middle and upper grade levels, parents tend to become less involved to allow their student an increased opportunity for self-governance and to make independent choices. It seems intuitively obvious that every parent should continue to be involved consistently throughout their child's entire school experience. Even as society makes available various choices to students in every aspect of their lives, parental involvement continues to be at the very core of academic, as well as social, emotional, and spiritual development.

According to Baker (2000), parents feel isolated by their children because as children move from elementary into middle then to upper grades, they tend to want more freedom, less supervision, and consider themselves less dependent on parents and more dependent on peers. Children during the teen years naturally begin to negotiate their own autonomy and to stretch the parameters of parental authority thus discouraging the parent from participating at a time when their presence is warranted and essential.

Table 6 illustrates survey affirmative responses by grade level as they relate to Epstein's parent involvement strategies. Table 6 guides the reader through each category

of parent involvement strategies as it relates to the respondent base according to each academic level. The representation of the percentages are associated with the number of affirmative responses (agree and strongly agree) received from each question.

Table 6

Illustration of Survey Outcome by Grade Level to Reveal Emerging Patterns Among Epstein's Parent Involvement Strategies

Categories from Epstein's parent involvement strategies	Comments from participant surveys at the elementary, middle, and high school levels	Percentages of affirmative responses to questions		
		Elementary level	Middle level	High level
Communication	1. My child likes coming to school.	60%	45%	34%
	2. The school staff communicates well with me.	60%	50%	33%
	3. I contact the school often about my child's progress.	52%	38%	26%
	11. I talk with my child about post high school plans.	38%	43%	38%
	17. The teacher keeps me informed about my child's progress.	52%	54%	56%
Helping at home	6. I feel homework is important.	60%	55%	72%
	8. The homework supports classroom learning.	65%	65%	65%
	10. I have designated study time at home for my child.	68%	43%	22%
	13. I feel that I have enough education to help my child with homework.	47%	37%	21%
	16. Our family discusses rules about how many hours of television will be watched on school days.	64%	23%	32%
Attending school events	9. I attend parent-teacher organization meetings.	57%	47%	18%
	19. I belong to the parent teacher organization.	59%	15%	23%
	20. The school has an active PTO, PTA, or other parent organization which helps in developing parent leaders and representatives.	28%	16%	28%
Building parenting skills	7. My child often talks with me about school experiences.	66%	29%	24%
	14. My child has literacy time set aside at home for reading and writing interactions.	68%	28%	17%
	15. The school helps me establish a home environment that supports learning.	46%	31%	45%
	18. The school assists me in helping my child set academic goals.	51%	21%	35%
Volunteering	5. I contact the school regularly to volunteer in my child's class.	29%	16%	9%
Fundraising	This parental research strategy was not significant in regard to improving student reading scores.	N/A	N/A	N/A
Participating in decision making	4. The school work is challenging to my child.	65%	59%	70%
	12. Our family discusses rules about maintaining grade average.	20%	20%	53%
	22. I talk with my child regularly about high school plans.	7%	69%	30%
Leveraging community resources	21. The school encourages families in the community to be involved.	53%	24%	36%

In addition, Table 6 illustrates that in general, parent involvement begins to decline as the student moves from lower to upper grades. Table 6 data shows similar and different patterns with connection to particular parent involvement strategies. Within the 22 categories of survey statements, six distinct patterns emerged. The predominate pattern which shows a decline of parent involvement from elementary through middle school and high school, 9 of 22, was in association with greater action on the part of the parent at the elementary level, giving of their talent, time and travel (mobility).

Another emerging pattern which shows a decline of parent involvement from elementary to middle, but an increase from middle to high school, 8 of 22, was associated with statement comments on the survey where the decision or action of parents(which) could possibly lead to (cause) discord. Yet, a pattern that shows an increase from elementary to middle and a decline from middle to high school, 2 of 22, stood out because each of the two statement comments dealt with one-way communication, from parent to child, with parent involvement at an elevated level.

The remaining three patterns: an increase of parent involvement from elementary through high school, 1 of 22; a consistent level of parent involvement from elementary through high school, 1 of 22; and one that shows consistency in parent involvement from elementary through middle but with an increase from middle to high school; were associated with the comments to the survey statements where very little or no action on the part of the parent was necessary (see comments to statements 17, 8, and 12).

A pattern that revealed a precipitous decline in parental involvement emerged at the high school level (see table 6). In the categories of helping at home, attending school events, building parenting skills, volunteering, participating in decision making, and

leveraging community resources were areas of involvement that did not have a high active role of participation at home or at school.

The implication for this lack of support at the high school can be attributed to the fact that high schools are more bureaucratic and structurally complicated, students in high school work with many different teachers and departments, the distance between the home and school create an undue hardship in regards to transportation for parents, and the parent perception that children need more autonomy and the freedom of choice and determination. At the high school level, it is what parents do at home and their involvement at school that have the greatest impact on student achievement.

According to Baker (2000), parents feel isolated by their children because as children move from elementary into middle then to upper grades, they tend to want more freedom, less supervision, and consider themselves less dependent on parents and more dependent on peers. Children during the teen years naturally begin to negotiate their own autonomy and to stretch the parameters of parental authority thus discouraging the parent from participating at a time when their presence is warranted and essential. This research also revealed, Baker (2000), children of parents who are actively involved in their child's educational experiences have a greater rate of success.

The discovery of such a pattern of decline in parental involvement that requires action from the elementary school level to the middle school level and through high school level is disturbing in light of research that found parental involvement is a necessity at all grade levels according to Epstein (2001). Programs and initiatives are needed at all grade levels that will encourage additional parental involvement. Further implications may show that if a decline of parent involvement, after the elementary level,

continues to occur, there may develop a pattern of thinking on the part of the middle school parent that it is acceptable to begin to relinquish some of their responsibility as it relates to their child's academic success. There must be a paradigm shift of thought that advocates for an increase in parent involvement as the child moves from one developmental stage to the next.

Conclusion

After analyzing the data and the interview with parents, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The educational level of the parents does not interfere with the students' communication arts performance. As mentioned in the analysis of the data, students whose parents had the lowest formal education level did as well as students whose parent had a college degree.
2. Parental support is very important to the child's communication arts development. From the information collected through the interviews with teachers and the results in the students' report cards and when parents supported their children's reading at home, students develop reading and writing skills faster which is linked to communication arts. They also respond faster to the reading intervention that supports the communication arts curriculum in which they participate.
3. The support the child receives at school and at home has a great impact on the results of the student's communication arts classroom assessment scores. Through the analysis of the data, all the students in the study received support

both from school and home. Their scores were good, and they all met the required standards.

4. Children who received parental support at home demonstrated significant progress in their communication arts achievement, and had better communication arts scores.

According to the results, there was support to reject the null hypothesis which stated there will be no significant positive relationship between at-home reading and communication arts classroom reading scores. However, there was enough evidence to support the claim that there is a significant positive relationship between at-home reading and classroom reading scores.

Research has generally demonstrated that parents can be powerful contributors to their children's success at school (Baker, 2000) and because NCLB mandates that parent involvement in student academic success is initiated by the schools, this study was undertaken to determine if there was significant evidence that demonstrated a relationship between parental involvement with increased student communication arts scores. The research finding presented in this study demonstrated that parental involvement improved overall at the high school level, and at-home communication art activities were effectively integrated into the classroom teaching and learning process as it relates to reading.

A positive impact was realized in student achievement through: classroom communication arts assessment scores, articles that encouraged abstract reasoning, vocabulary preparation for college entry examination, use of computers for writing a synopsis of communication arts classroom assignments. This research revealed evidence

that these at-home communication arts activities helped to advance and promote student success in historically high-need schools and communities, and provided a foundation of improved reading-based skills that gauged internalized thinking which were essential in achievement measured through classroom communication arts assessment scores.

Data in this study revealed a 53% increased in classroom communication arts scores as supported by information in the section titled Posttest Scores Analysis and Summary of All Grade Levels in Chapter Four. This research showed that parental involvement remains very beneficial in promoting achievement and affective outcomes with high school students. Evidence shown in this research supported the effectiveness of parental involvement in fostering achievement and affective gains at all levels. The researcher of this study was encouraging schools to engage parents and maintain this involvement throughout high school years.

Due to the NCLB mandate, schools must find avenues of involvement that encourage parents to become more substantial partners in the endeavor of educating their children. If parents are to understand how significant they are in the educational development of their children, schools must be at the forefront of this understanding. If schools are to encourage parents to become more involved in the success of their children through interaction in the various avenues that schools provide, schools must include parents as stakeholders.

In 1982 Cervone and O'Leary created a framework for parent involvement to include four forms of parent activity: reporting activity, special events, parent education, and parents teaching at home and in school. Research has long linked student success with parental educational levels (Bowles & Gintis, 2006). Today, not only do colleges

inquire as to parental educational level, but so do student loan vendors, indicating that parent educational level is a predictor of student success. This finding was supported in the same year when Madigan (2005) identified four key characteristics for home-school partnerships. Several of these characteristics echo the previously mentioned authors and offer more support to the current research pool of parental involvement studies. Moles (2002) found that there were certain school-facilitated program characteristics that led to student success. These included, but were not limited to, the following: parent-school cooperatives through learning resources provided by the school to the community and to the home, parent-teacher conferencing, parent education and support from the school, and channels of communication provided by the school. It is interesting that Moles moved the contact responsibility of the parental involvement from the parent to the school. This advocacy is clearly carried forth in the NCLB mandate.

Review of the literature indicated that parents need to be involved in student achievement and success. However, it is still unclear as to the best way to facilitate this concept, or, for that matter, to come to a consensus on a universal definition of parental involvement. Policymakers appear to agree that it is more feasible and less challenging to hold the schools accountable than the parents, because it is thought that accountability can be demonstrated through improved student reading scores and mandated curriculum. Furthermore, in high poverty areas, schools should develop contracts in which schools and parents agree on mutual responsibility for educating children in order to receive Title I funding. This concept of accountability tied to funding reaches back several decades. However, with NCLB, accountability once again appears to be swinging back to the schools as high-stakes testing becomes the norm to measure student achievement.

Certainly, NCLB contains clear wording that the responsibility of accountability lies with schools to initiate, implement, and facilitate parental interaction and involvement. However, the major dilemma not only in research, but also in policy, remains in the inability to define exactly what parent involvement is and how it is to be measured. This research study was no different in that, although parent involvement was defined at the onset of the endeavor, and attempted, through the survey, to encompass all concepts of that definition, it became apparent that researchers and policymakers have trouble agreeing on what parental involvement entails.

To further elaborate, one of the characteristics that Moles (2002) supported in facilitating the use of parent-teacher conferencing as an effective tool for student success, the value of parent-teacher conferencing, merits a closer look. Given this researcher's experience, there is an inordinate emphasis placed for school responsibilities on student success today, it would be a leap, indeed, to suggest that parent conferences should be eliminated based on the findings in this study. The study results do suggest, however, that teachers need to focus strategies on all areas of the student learning, with an emphasis on their specific needs. Rather than using parent-teacher conferences to show parents ways to work with their children at home, perhaps teachers can explore what parents are already doing to help and emphasize to parents that they are already the primary teachers of their children. Stronger internal locus of control on the part of the parent will, in turn, positively affect student achievement.

For schools to accomplish this, however, teachers need training and support to conduct such conferences (e.g., not squeezing conferences into short periods of time after teaching four hours and seeing all families in a period of four days). Given implications

of this study, teachers should act as ethnographic researchers, making home visits, rather than holding the traditional teacher-parent conferences. A program that moves conferencing into the homes and is based on two-way communication might lead to better student achievement in the long run. The content and quality of parent conferences are more significant than the actual number of times a parent and teacher engage in a conference.

Implications of these findings are that parents' own perceptions of their involvement in their children's schooling is one of the best predictors of children's academic success, whereas, parents' perceived locus of control having a positive effect on children's learning. Locus of control, teacher perception of a parent's involvement, and student achievement are all tied to each other in, as yet, inexplicable ways. Ironically, educators treat the issue of locus of control as though one is born with a tendency to be either internally or externally oriented and thus dismiss parental locus of control related to student achievement as outside their sphere of influence. In fact, parents' sense of control over their children's academic success exists to some degree in nearly all families, and this sense of control can be enhanced by educators.

Teachers need to be willing to engage in open conversation with parents in a way that fosters respect for families and for the rich fund of knowledge they possess. Within the confines of present educational structures, helping teachers become ethnographic researchers, who enter into students' households and engage in two-way, mutually respectful communication with parents, is difficult. The teachers of this study suggested bringing parents into classrooms as guest speakers and teachers. A common activity mentioned was to invite older family members into the classroom to share myths and

legends about education and reading and have this lead into classroom studies on myths and legends across different cultures. Another activity mentioned was students could take home laptop computers already purchased by the school to document family histories and create a chronological timeline.

The primary research question was: Does at-home parental involvement in reading activities increase classroom reading scores? Yes, because evidence for increased reading scores was supported by interview responses directly linked to at-home activities of, the school work is challenging to my child, I feel homework is important and the teacher keeps me informed about my child's progress.

There were three secondary research questions. The first secondary question was: Does the lack of at-home parental involvement in reading activities decrease reading scores? No, this study did not reveal that a lack of at home reading activities and parental involvement caused a decreased in classroom reading scores

The next secondary research question was: Do students who perceive their parents to be involved achieve higher reading scores? Yes, the research presented evidence that was supported by the fact that communication arts assessment scores improved by 53% at the end of this study based on pre-and post-test data. Also, teachers kept parents informed about their child's progress, homework was considered very important, and the family discusses rules about maintaining grade point average.

The last secondary research question was: Do students perceive their parents to be uninvolved in communication arts score lower? No, this study did not reveal any support or data that would indicate that students of uninvolved parents had lower reading scores.

Research results indicate that there was a strong correlation between parent involvement and student success (Epstein, 1995; Karther & Lowden, 1999; Sussel et al., 2000). Furthermore, Epstein (2001) found that there were three conclusions that could be drawn about parental involvement. The first is that parental involvement tends to decline as children move from elementary school to the upper grades. The foundation of this phenomenon can be attributed to several factors that can be interrelated or independent, such as children in higher grades may want less involvement and more independence from their parents and other adults; parents may feel too challenged by the more demanding subject matter of the upper grades and, therefore, tend to shy away from overt input as far as helping their children grasp the information; or, parents may feel inclined to rejoin the workforce once their children are old enough to handle the responsibilities of staying alone at home.

The second conclusion drawn by Epstein (2001) was that SES status does appear to have a direct effect on parental involvement in that more affluent, better educated families tend to be more involved in school more often and in more positive ways than do families of lower economic or educational status. Finally, Epstein (2001) recognized that the fractured status of the family tends to keep families from being active within the school community which might have an effect on student reading and achievement. Single parents, parents who live long distances from school, employed parents, and non-custodial parents tend to be less familiar with, and, therefore, less likely to participate in school related activities and avenues of input. Epstein (1995) also found that families who tend to support reading throughout the life of the child tend to have successful children.

Reynolds et al. (1993) found that when parents expect more from their children, the children tend to rise to the expectations as long as the expectations are reasonable and expressed in an appropriate and clear manner (Clark, 1993; Reynolds et al., 1993). This form of parent involvement tends to span across the educational lifetime of the child. Sociologists have long linked the family as the centrifugal force at the center of adulthood. What is given importance in the family unit tends to remain important throughout life. However, it is important to note that negative endorsement of an idea can be as strong as a positive endorsement of the same idea. This accentuates the importance of not only talking the talk but of walking the walk. A child that hears *get your homework done so we can do something desired* may interpret that to mean the homework is less important than that which is desired. Thus, it is essential that parents and schools work together to create a positive flow all along the students' learning continuum. Schools must develop programs that include families that would otherwise not become involved on their own volition.

Recommendations for future research

There is no doubt that parent participation has a dynamic effect on student performance. There is little doubt that this relationship could be the key to how well students perform on tests. However, in order for researchers to capture and explore these dynamics, future studies should perhaps be more longitudinally oriented and observational. Because researchers cannot expect some parents to agree to be involved and others agree not to be involved, a more natural evolution of parent-child relationships must be observed over time and through a multifaceted study to find the true relationship between parent involvement and student communication arts assessment success. This

concept would be impossible to study in a true experimental study for ethical reasons. Bell (2001) examined parental involvement as an intervention tool for student success. He asserted that to understand and fully document the impact of parent involvement, researchers should categorize parent involvement effects separately from other related variables and from the impact of other adults. To do this, Bell suggested that the type and level of involvement be separated from other components of intervention, and, furthermore, the assessment of the intervention program itself should be evaluated for the different influences on the program.

It can be argued that isolating parental involvement alone is impossible, because parents influence may or may not be known simply because it cannot be known what factors of parent involvement are in play at any given time during student testing. Even in the true experiment, which Bell (2001), indicated as the only study design that would overcome the threats of internal validity, there will be problems. It seems unlikely that there can be a situation where the parent will have no significant impact on a child in any given situation, simply because the parent is part of the sum of what the child brings to the testing environment. Parental involvement would have to be separated not only from outside intervention components but also from interrelated family factors such as home environment, parental expectations, increased cognitive stimulation, and parental educational experience. Furthermore, the researcher of such a study would have to rely on some outside source for measuring parental involvement rather than the parent because involvement itself is purely subjective. An objective measurement is necessary and may not be able to be isolated for the purposes of valid research.

Perhaps open-ended interview questions and longitudinal observational research would provide greater insight, by the very nature of this type of research, to allow for a more accurate finding of the dynamics of the multifaceted interactions and complex relationships that evolve between parents and their children's reading success. Because NCLB requires parental involvement, more research is needed to determine in what capacity parental involvement is most beneficial to students' success as well as to the school environment. By nature, parental involvement is a complex and multifaceted subject, one that is not only interdependent with many variables but also independent and dependent on many more variables. Variables such as age, gender of the parent, and a specific child's gender, birth order, personality, physical characteristics, and simple or complex interpretations of societal expectation may influence the reading success of one child and not another, even if they are raised by the same parents in the same household. At best, the complexities of human interaction are difficult to capture accurately in a research project, regardless of design, simply because the dynamics of human nature are such that much is not known and, therefore, cannot be accounted for in the growth of a specific human being. Subtle interpretations of the same experience can lead to totally different accounts of an event: perspectives of parenting styles and techniques are different from parent to parent, child to child, and can be a source of frustration for the researcher.

Finally, the greatest challenge to this parental involvement research is how to isolate the parental involvements that is the most beneficial for student reading success. The research of the future will have to overcome many challenges to effectively determine which aspects of parental involvement will be best used by schools to increase

student-reading outcomes. More complex and diverse research is necessary if NCLB mandates are to have deep and lasting results, not only for the success of the student, but for the success of society.

Reflecting on Epstein (2002) research presented in chapter two of this study, and the analysis of the data along with the discussion of results, the five strategies below are recommended for schools by this researcher:

1. Schools provide activities or programs to get parents of students more involved in working with their child at home to increase student achievement, such as encouraging parents to attend their child's school to learn computer techniques, tutoring strategies, and GED classes to improve their chances of employment.
2. Schools implement parent-involvement programs that have been proven to be successful in increasing parental participation, such as providing mentors to help parents gain an associate degree or certificate, complete at least 10 mini lessons, such as resume writing or interviewing techniques, at their child's school to improve their chances of employment, and train and mentor parents in healthy sleeping tips and strategies for children.
3. Schools sponsor workshops throughout the school year to train parents on strategies about how to develop their child's skills.
4. Training should be provided for teachers and administrators on how to reach parents and work with them in helping students attain continuous progress, for community agencies that help with health and nutrition needs for at-risk families, and for assigning the parents a central office mentor, building

teacher, principal, teacher assistant, resource specialist, district director, or superintendent as an immediate contact for the parents.

5. Parents should be made aware of how important their support is to their child, both at home and at school, regardless of their child's grade level. The school's newsletter, website, district's educational television channel, or the Parents Teachers Organization is just a few mediums that would serve as an effective communicative tool.

Conclusions of the Finding at the High School Level

The focus of George Edwards' research was to investigate parent participants at grade 11 within an inner city high school. In brief, the findings of the effects of at-home communication arts activities showed that the population participating in this research at the 11th grade level clearly indicated a significant increase in student classroom communication arts scores when parents were actively involved in family reading initiatives with their children at home.

In Table 6, Epstein's parent involvement strategies, data revealed an overall average of 38% of the parents surveyed believed that the category of communication was important between home and school and was a vital tool to be used to enhance student achievement. Evident by an overall average of 45% of parents who agreed and strongly agreed, helping at home was the strategy considered critical to the success of students outcome. Although, an overall average of the high school parent surveyed believed that attending school events (23%), building parenting skills (30%), volunteering (9%), and leveraging community resources (36%) were strategies less likely to be embraced as critical tools that would help foster and promote student achievement at the high school

level. However, the most encouraging data revealed that 51% of the parents believed that the category of participating in decision making was highly important in improving student outcomes.

The literature review in Chapter 2 revealed the varying degrees of parental involvement between the middle, high school, and elementary levels. The results revealed that parents, who have created a literary environment at home, regardless of the language used, have instilled in their children the importance of reading. Though research has been conducted in the relationship between parental involvement and student success, there are always other issues to be investigated. The following are recommendations for further research at the high school level:

1. Identify and implement programs that will provide rigor, relevance and relationships to allow students to perform at their maximum proficiency in their communication arts skills at the high school level.
2. Expand the present study to become a district wide initiative with a systemic focus on parental involvement beginning at the ninth grade level to support students as they progress into post-secondary experiences.
3. In the future a study around parent involvement forged between the practitioners and researchers that would embrace community stakeholders as a new level of partnerships.
4. The use of experimental procedures to collect data in at-home settings and school staff concerns as it relates to random assignment is potentially intrusive and needs to be addressed.

Finally, the results presented by this researcher provide a framework for strengthening parent and family and involvement. This study shifts the focus from what schools should do to involve parents to what parents, schools, and communities can do together to support student success at the high school level.

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Appendix A

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Appendix B

Questionnaire

Effects of At-Home Reading Activities to Influence Family Literacy and Classroom Reading Scores

1. In what grade is your child? □ 4th □ 8th □ 11th

2. Your child is a: □ Girl □ Boy

3. Circle the highest educational level completed. □ 4th □ 8th □ 11th □ Other

4. Please give your response to each of the following questions:

SCORING RUBRIC:

1: Strongly Disagree 2: Disagree 3: Neutral 4: Agree 5: Strongly Agree

A. My child likes coming to school	1 2 3 4 5
B. The school staff communicates well with me	1 2 3 4 5
C. I contact the school often about my child's progress	1 2 3 4 5
D. The school work is challenging to my child	1 2 3 4 5
E. I contact the school regularly to volunteer in my child's class	1 2 3 4 5
F. I feel homework is important	1 2 3 4 5
G. My child often talks with me about school experiences	1 2 3 4 5
H. The homework supports classroom learning	1 2 3 4 5
I. I attend parent-teacher organization meetings	1 2 3 4 5
J. I have designated study time at home for my child	1 2 3 4 5
K. I talk with my child about post high school plans	1 2 3 4 5
L. Our family discusses rules about maintaining grade average	1 2 3 4 5
M. I feel that I have enough education to help my child with homework	1 2 3 4 5

N.	My child has literacy time set aside at home for reading and writing interactions	1 2 3 4 5
O.	The school helps me establish a home environment that supports learning	1 2 3 4 5
P.	Our family discusses rules about how many hours of television will be watched on school days	1 2 3 4 5
Q.	The teacher keeps me informed about my child's progress	1 2 3 4 5
R.	The school assists me in helping my child set academic goals	1 2 3 4 5
S.	I belong to the parent teacher organization	1 2 3 4 5
T.	The school has an active PTO, PTA, or other parent organization which helps in developing parent leaders and representatives	1 2 3 4 5
U.	The school encourages families and the community to be involved	1 2 3 4 5
V.	I talk with my child regularly about high school plans	1 2 3 4 5

Appendix C

Lindenwood

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

13 October 2008

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Dear Parent/Caretaker:

_____, _____, and _____, graduate students at Lindenwood University – St. Charles, are conducting a study to assess the effects of at-home reading activities to influence family literacy and classroom reading scores after participating in a semester-long reading and writing initiative. Your child is being asked to participate in this study because he/she is in the fourth (4^{th}), eighth (8^{th}), or eleventh (11^{th}) grade classroom at _____ School. If you and your student agree to participate in this study, the teacher(s) will provide at-home activities that are to be used to support their in-class reading and writing program.

There are no risks involved with this research greater than those involved in everyday classroom practices and assessments. The potential benefit to your child is that he/she will get additional support at home and could receive helpful feedback for continued literacy development. Your participation will also help the teacher to better understand individual student need(s) and how to best teach to those needs.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and your child may withdraw from the study at any time without any effect on their academic standing. If your student does not participate in the study, his/her performance and grades at school will not be affected in any way. The student will still receive reading and writing instruction in the classroom. Any personal identification will be omitted so that your child will not be identifiable in the written analysis. Any reference to student interviews will be anonymous. Notes for the interviews will be stored in a locked cabinet. All information gathered in this study can be made available to you upon request.

This study has been approved by the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about the study, you may direct those to the researchers: George Edwards (314 838-3351), Linetta Carter (314 556-7892), and Cynthia Warren (314 393-5774). You may also direct questions/concerns to Dr. Cynthia Vitale, the researchers' advisor/professor, at (636) 949-4315. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB, at (636) 949-4618.

Thank you.

Please check the response that applies and return this page to your child's class/homeroom teacher.

_____ **Yes**. My child may participate in this research study.

_____ **No**. I would prefer that my child not participate in this research study.

_____	_____
Student (**Please Print**)	Student's Signature
_____	_____
Parent's/Guardian's Signature	Date
_____	_____
Researcher	Date
_____	_____
Researcher	Date
_____	_____
Researcher	Date

Appendix D

Parent Progress Phone Log

Please check the appropriate answer (yes or no) to the following questions.

Grade Level ◊ 4th ◊ 8th ◊ 11th

Yes	No	Questions	Comment(s)
		1. Did your child complete his/her homework assignment?	
		2. Did you have any questions or concerns about the assignment?	
		3. How many hours did it take to complete the assignments?	
		4. Have you discussed upcoming reading assessments with your child?	
		5. How many minutes of reading have you and your child completed this week?	
		6. How many minutes is your family sharing in conversation about education or school?	
		7. I talked with my child's teacher this week about current and upcoming reading assignments.	

Total number of yes answers_____

Total number of no answers_____

Appendix E

Institutional Review Board Approval

09-38
IRB Project Number

Lindenwood University
Institutional Review Board Disposition Report

To: George Edwards, Linetta Carter, and Cynthia Warren
CC: Dr. Dan Edwards

Congratulations! I have reviewed this revised proposal and it has been approved. Thank you for the work that went into this proposal. Good luck with your data analysis.

Dr. Colleen Biri _____ 12/10/2008
Institutional Review Board Chair Date

_____Cynthia Vitale_____
Dr. Cynthia Vitale, Advisor

Professional Vita

PROFESSIONAL VITA

GEORGE EDWARDS

Associate Professor
Education Division

Academic Degrees

BS Degree	1965	University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
Master of Arts	1977	Truman State University, Kirksville, MO
+45 Credit Hours (Education)	1981	Truman State University

Professional Experience

Lindenwood University
2005-Present
School Leadership Cohort
Associate Professor

St. Louis Public Schools
1969-2006
Teacher (07-12)
Assistant Principal (07-12)
Principal (06-12)

Certifications

Missouri Administrator Certificate
Missouri Secondary Teacher Certification (07-12)

Higher Education Teaching Experience
Faculty and Administrative Load

Graduate Level
EDA 505 Foundations of Educational Administration

EDA 520	School Business Management
EDU 520	Curriculum Analysis and Design
EDA515	School Supervision
EDA 510/512	Elementary / Secondary School Administration Organization
EDA 530	Public Community Relations

Faculty Assignments and Activities

Recruiting/Advising/Sponsoring/Mentoring

Professional Development

Missouri Partnership for Mentoring School Leaders
American Federation of School Administrators for Staff Development

Professional Academic Affiliations

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE)

Institutional Partnerships

St. Louis Public Schools District Mentorship Program (2007)
St. Louis Administrators' Professional Development Committee (2007)
SAB Parental Involvement Committee (2007)
Principals' Partnership (Union Pacific)
Local Administrators' Union 44 – Executive Director for High Schools
Council of the Great City Schools – Member
McRel's Leadership Consortium – Member

Publications

AFSA Handbook (2006)
St. Louis Public Schools Handbook for Students (2006)

Presentations

St. Louis Public Schools District-Wide In-service Meeting (2006)
School Leadership Team Forum – (Sheraton) (2006)

Awards and Honors

Educational

Award for St. Louis Mentor Program

Individual

St. Louis University's Talent Search Program
Ville Area Neighborhood Housing Association Award

Community Service

San Francisco Temple Christian Assembly – Member
Missouri Eastern Corrections Volunteer
Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity