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How School Leadership Develops Parental Involvement Strategies with Social Capital in Four South Carolina Middle Schools

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HOW SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPS PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
STRATEGIES WITH SOCIAL CAPITAL IN FOUR SOUTH CAROLINA MIDDLE
SCHOOLS

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter Ayden and my mother Betty whose love, support and encouragement means everything to me. I especially want to thank all the colleagues and friends who have always believed in me and provided that little extra push. Thank you, Dr. Roof, I simply cannot put into words how much I appreciate you! My journey never would have amounted to this if you were not such a caring teacher. To my mom, thank you for teaching me the importance of education and working hard. Your sacrifices are countless to the betterment of my future. To my daughter, this passage was possible because of your unbelievable heart! My success only comes because you were able to remain focused through all the trials and tribulations that would make any ordinary teenager stray. You, Ayden, without a doubt are the best part of me!

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ABSTRACT

Passed in 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandate requires schools to have a comprehensive plan for addressing parental involvement. Identifying successful practices to increase social capital and academic achievement in lower socio-economic schools appears to be the area that is having the most impact. Principals can contribute to higher success rates by generating productive partnerships between the school and parents/guardians. The purpose of this study is to describe the parental involvement strategies that four successful South Carolina (SC) middle school principals used and to identify successful practices being implemented to increase social capital and academic achievement. The researcher connected data to support how parental involvement strategies are perceived to contribute to higher student achievement by principals, teachers and parents/guardians.

Another area the researcher planned to examine is whether SC middle school principals were successful because they were utilizing Epstein's model to improve social capital of low socio-economic families. To determine how school leadership developed parental involvement strategies with social capital in four SC middle schools, the researcher investigated the strategies these schools' principals utilized to increase parental involvement among students of low socio-economic statuses, analyzed the perceptions of their parental involvement strategies, and measured the consistency of Epstein's model of improving social capital of low socio-economic status families. To address these questions, the researcher conducted interviews with four SC middle school

principals, teachers and parents/guardians. Additionally, shadowing the principals and teachers supported the data collected from the conducted interviews. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to observe exactly how the principals interacted with parents/guardians from varying socio-economic groups and how the teachers interacted with the parents/guardians whether in person or through communication strategies. The final part of the research came from collecting actual artifacts that provided strong, fundamental support hoping other schools could replicate them in order to be successful in increasing academic achievement through parental involvement practices. These schools were successful partially because they adhered to the recommendations of Epstein's model.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (2002) requires schools in the United States to have a comprehensive plan for addressing parental involvement. In 2004 Epstein conducted a national study of over 200 middle schools in the US, demonstrating the need for parental involvement for all socio-economic classes. Her study utilized schools associated with the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) and used an Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) to execute six types of involvement: 1) parenting, 2) communicating, 3) volunteering, 4) learning at home, 5) decision making, and 6) collaborating.

In addition to Epstein's six types of involvement, ATP recommends a number of other plans that focus on parental involvement in the publication, *Promising Partnerships* Practices, produced by the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) and provides for participating schools in the NNPS. According to Thomas (2013),

> From about 150 submissions, the editors of *Promising Partnership Practices 2013* selected 94 activities from 76 schools, 15 districts, 2 organizations, and 1 state department of education. The contributors are economically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities in 16 states in all parts of the country. (Thomas et al, 2013, p. 1)

Of the 76 schools submitted in the *Promising Partnership Practices 2013*, 12 are from SC. Two of these schools are middle level, Lee Central Middle School in Bishopville

(The Pee Dee region of the state) and St. Andrews Middle School in Columbia (The Midlands region of the state). The activity submitted by Lee Central Middle School is Books and Basketball Family Literacy Night. The concept was to utilize basketball to attract more family participants. According to the activity, the teachers reported over time that students' test scores did improve. The second middle school submitted an activity titled Curriculum Nights. The school decided to have a series of four Curriculum Nights for parents/guardians since the results from a parent survey indicated the desire to understand what their children were learning. The school placed priority on convenience for parents to attend by providing food so parents/guardians would not have to worry about preparing dinner. Administration reported in the activity that parents/guardians were extremely excited and gave rave reviews to this event.

These two SC schools are just a couple of examples of districts utilizing Epstein's (2004) six types of parental involvement strategies. Implementation of these strategies and annually publishing them across all regions of the US offer potential evidence that schools can possibly improve their relationship with parents/guardians across socio-economic status lines.

Schools in the US are middle class places. That is to say, the value, work ethic, beliefs, rituals, and cultural norms coincide with what sociologists referred to as "middle-class." In this sense, SES has less to do with monetary wealth and more to do with the ways in which people believe that the institution of schooling can improve the lives of US citizens by enabling them to compete economically in a capitalist free market system. The American Dream holds that by working hard, completing school (i.e., 12th grade), an individual can succeed in the US. Valuing the institution of schooling is often associated

with middle-class values and often the children of the working class poor are deemed marginalized from this value system. In this dissertation, the term "social capital" is used to describe SES and its connection to persons who value the institution of schooling for their children. The researcher's premise is that oftentimes the children of the working class poor have parents/guardians who are disconnected from public schooling and therefore work needs to be done in order to enable this population to be involved in the education of their children.

"Social capital is the information, attitudinal and behavioral norms, and skills that individuals can spend or invest to improve their chances for success in societal institutions, such as schools. Individuals gain social capital through their social networks" (Sanders & Epstein, 2000, p.342). Developing social capital in all socio-economic classes will help to sustain strategies implemented by school principals to increase parental involvement. Social capital refers to an established set of information, behaviors, resources, or skills that are gained or developed through a person's social network and are used in various environments to improve the opportunity for social success (Sanders & Epstein, 2000). School principals have a very valuable and untapped resource with the development of social capital in parents/guardians of their students (Bourdieu, 1986; Sanders & Epstein, 2000).

In 1986, Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, studied how communities in France reproduced and particularly focused on how classes remained either as a dominant or recessive position. Cultural capital is the primary area in which Bourdieu is recognized. He is also known for his 1979 book *Distinction*, which investigates the middle-class and highlights the culture surrounding this group. The middle-class

individuals compared a variety of items they possessed to those higher on the social ladder to see where they stood in society. Bourdieu learned that the quality of social capital is dependent upon a variety of other variables. These collective variables are items like having financial resources, the acquisition of knowledge, and knowing how certain groups act and preferences. An example is how only a few will ever be able to cross class lines and "fit-in" with certain groups. In order to obtain the level, one needs not only to have the knowledge of which social circles to transition but must also have the financial resources to be in those certain social circles. The few that are able to transition into those different social circles would develop the quality of social capital as those in that particular group.

School reformers could generalize Bourdieu's thoughts of social class transitioning to apply to the school environment as well:

> Bourdieu's definition works on the premise that those who are successful have the resources to continue to be successful. He purported that social capital is comprised of social obligations or connections that can be converted into economic capital (Dika & Singh, 2002). Bourdieu viewed this as the reason for inequality in academic achievement and the lack of development of human capital. Because of the organizational structure of public schools, the social capital of educated middle-class White families is more conducive to school success than is the social capital of less-educated and/or families in poverty. (Mickelson, 2003)

If one could blend the philosophy of a practitioner of sociology and those in the higher echelons of education, social capital and student academic achievement would prosper,

particularly for low socio-economic status. As interest in the international community grows, Bourdieu's work could certainly become applicable to both American culture and the American school system.

Auerbach's study in 2007 examined how to include all families in the urban school environment successfully. Many districts are successful at including parents/guardians from middle to upper socio-economic classes but fail to include those of lower socio-economic status. Minority parents/guardians and parents/guardians of poverty support education in their homes but are often not as visible to educators as parents/guardians from upper social levels. Auerbach indicates the need to perform proactive strategies to gain trust with certain culturally challenged groups. Cultivating relationships has proven to be successful in bridging the collaboration between families and schools. Society benefits when educational leaders allow for full partnerships in decision making from all families at all socio-economic statuses. Other studies have also demonstrated that educational leaders struggle with fully involving all parents/guardians in school decision making. This data collected from surveys of principals' attitudes about their roles in this area (Auerbach, 2007; 2009; 2010). Auerback (2007) observed that although many studies have been conducted concerning administration in school-community collaboration, few have examined parental leadership.

Auerbach's (2007) study reflects upon theories of stewardship and shared leadership, social capital, opportunities-to-lead frameworks, and psychosocial role theory to encourage school leaders to share decision making with all social classes in their communities. She advocates that particularly urban administrators who are dedicated to

the policies of shared leadership enrich the social capital of those families living in economically-challenged communities (Auerbach, 2007).

Goals and Principles of Parental Involvement

Auerbach (2009) suggests administrators merely talk of having parents/guardians share equally in making decisions involving their children's education, but the reality of parents/guardians actually having equal decision-making is far from that. The results of such mutual involvement, however, are powerful: a cooperative partnership between schools and parents/guardians improves social capital in low socio-economic communities and increases significantly the opportunities for improvement for all involved (Auerbach, 2009). Such partnerships, however, are recommended to begin structurally within the schools from the top down, most effectively institutionalized by the principal. Building the partnership with the families and communities requires a solid commitment from the school leader. Auerbach is interested in expanding the literature of social capital growth with families in the lower socio-economic communities so that a better understanding of how escalating those resources will provide great gains academically.

Positionality

The researcher of the present study recalls his parents always saying, "Education is very important." The researcher also remembers his parents never helping him with his homework or even visiting his schools. The researcher's father was never at home; he was always traveling for work, and his mother worked two jobs. The researcher recalls how persistent his mother was about asking if he had done all of his homework. The only areas of parental concern were the interims, report cards and any phone calls home for

bad behavior. Outside these areas, the researcher's parents did not pressure the researcher's brother nor him about school. From his perspective, the researcher's parents' idea of parental involvement with the school was making sure we had clean clothes, food, shelter, and that we were disciplined and attended school. In the researcher's adult years, when he had asked his mother about her lack of help with homework, she admitted that she was embarrassed because she did not understand the work the researcher was doing. The researcher asked why she had never attended school functions, and she said, "I worked two jobs and never had time, and if I did, I was intimidated by the folks at the school." She explained further, "I felt like all I needed to do was make sure your brother and you stayed out of trouble and did your work like you are supposed to and that was my responsibility. I did not feel like I had to be at your school to show my support. Just making sure I provided for you was my way of being involved." Had a middle school administrator reached out to my mother and developed her social capital my future would have been different. Evidence of this action was demonstrated at the middle schools involved in this research. My mother admitted that she would not visit the school unless she had to. Auerbach (2007) discusses how low socio-economic families do not feel valued, but if they did and if they received specific information about how their input would benefit their children, they would probably have been more involved.

Lopez (2001) describes cultural differences as reasons for a lack of parental involvement in children's education, and she paints a similar picture to the researcher's own. Parental involvement does not always mean visibility at school. The present study provides data that supports how marginalized families are often viewed unfairly as uninvolved families. The researcher believes following Lopez (2001) that parental

involvement studies serve to decide current practices and pave the way for policies. Lopez's qualitative research highlights cultural differences in parental involvement that many middle-class teachers do not consider.

Statement of Problem

Middle schools' personnel struggle with parental involvement, especially with families of low socio-economic status (Auerbach, 2009; Brannon, 2007; Catsambis & Gardland, 1997; Gould, 2011; Griffin & Galassi, 2010). There are a number of reasons for this difficulty. Factors which can impact parental involvement stem from all involved in the educational process: the principal, the teachers, and by the parents/guardians themselves. School principals lack courses in college to prepare them for building parental involvement strategies. Some teachers lack knowledge of parental involvement beyond thinking parents/guardians are only involved when they are visibly present at the school (Auerbach, 2007; Brayan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Duchesne & Ratelle, 2010). Many parents/guardians of low socio-economic status are not able to be more involved due to work, lack of transportation or lack of knowledge about involvement. A number of studies have demonstrated how Epstein's six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) contribute to higher success rates in producing productive partnerships between the school and parents/guardians (Epstein, 2004; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Gould, 2011; Griffin & Galassi, 2010; McCollough, 2011; Patel & Stevens, 2010; Wiseman, 2010). Epstein's conceptual framework came from the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, based on the concept that if the home and school are working as a team, the student will achieve at the highest possible level. Today, principals are often

more managerial in schools and lack collegial training to build parental involvement (Auerbach, 2010; Epstein, 2006; Sanders & Epstein 2000; Wiseman, 2010). Research has demonstrated that principals lack the knowledge of how to improve social capital (Boethel, 2003; Brannon, 2007; Epstein, 2004; Lew, 2007). Although the passage of the NCLB Act requires schools to implement parental involvement, schools have struggled to include parents/guardians of low socio-economic status as partners (Epstein, 2004).

Although Epstein's model is more often used than others, she does have her critics. Graue (1999) suggests that Epstein delegates power more toward administrators and teachers than parents. The limited power directed to parents by teachers and administrators makes the process less collaborative for parents. Consequently, the model has more of a top down design than a democratic one. Martin (2009) disputes Graue's criticism; he states that Epstein favors the parents too much in her model, thus giving them control of those involved. "Because schools are not designed for 'parenting' or 'learning at home,' the promotion of parental involvement by schools through this typology, although seemingly plausible and very likely helpful, becomes quickly convoluted" (Martin, 2009, p. 10). De Carvalho sides with Martin, agreeing that educators have too much control, "Taking a decidedly opposite stance to educators encouraging broad policies for engaging parents in their child's education...." (Smith, 2001, p. 152). In spite of such criticism, the researcher still chose to use Epstein's work which continues to serve as the definitive instrument of its kind, both historically and consistently.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe the parental involvement strategies that four SC middle school principals used and to identify successful practices being implemented to increase social capital and academic achievement in these four lower socio-economic schools. The researcher connected data to support how parental involvement strategies are perceived to contribute to higher student achievement by principals, teachers and parents/guardians. Another area the researcher investigated was whether or not these SC middle school principals are successful because they are utilizing Epstein's model to improve social capital of low socio-economic families. The researcher concedes that it is often difficult to conclude that only the variables being investigated are inclusively responsible for set outcomes.

Research Questions

To determine how school leadership developed parental involvement strategies with social capital in four SC middle schools, the researcher asked the following three questions to guide this research:

1. What strategies do South Carolina middle school principals utilize in select successful schools to increase parental involvement among students of low socio-economic status?

2. How are these parental involvement strategies perceived to contribute to higher student achievement by principals, teachers and parents/guardians?

3. Are these South Carolina middle school principals' practices consistent with Epstein's model to improve social capital of low socio-economic status families?

Research Design

This study was submitted to the University of SC Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. The researcher visited each of the four schools three times. The first visit was to interview the principal, teacher, and parent. This and the other interviews provided descriptive data in the interviewees' own words. The researcher's questions were structured from Patton's (2002) six types of questions. The second visit consisted of shadowing the principal and teacher for a day. The shadowing for each participant was in a role as an *Observer as participant* (Patton, 2002). The third visit was for visiting the school to obtain study-related documents. The researcher analyzed the documents for contextual and analytical value. These documents included agendas, newsletters informing parents/guardians of upcoming events.

Interview Protocol

Epstein identifies six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) that she states can contribute to higher success rates in forming productive partnerships between parents/guardians and schools. The six interview questions are posed to obtain data in each of *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership*. The researcher asked the principals about each of these types of involvement at their schools and focused primarily on communicating, decision making and collaborating with the community. Communicating consists of designing effective ways of delivering information to parents/guardians and receiving communications back from parents/guardians. The next type of involvement applicable to principals is decision making. Does the principal include parents/guardians on

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committees to provide input on decisions being made for the school? The researcher asked the principal about the final type of involvement, collaborating with the community; the researcher also asked him or her to provide examples. Epstein (2009) defines community collaboration as being able to prioritize the needs of the group to assist in building stronger relationships that will serve in bridging the home to the school.

Teachers were the second group interviewed. The researcher asked the teachers about each of the types of involvement at the school but focused primarily on communicating and decision making. The researcher asked questions, such as (1) Tell me about your communication methods with parents/guardians and strategies you use to include parents/guardians in decision-making with instruction and curriculum at this middle school; (2) What could this school do better to serve your students' potential for academic achievement?

The final interview group was the parents/guardians. The interviews focused on types of involvement: parenting, volunteering and learning at home. The researcher asked questions, such as (1) Tell me about your parenting strategies as they relate to support for optimal learning, volunteering at the school and helping your child to learn at home; (2) What could this school do better to serve your child's potential for academic achievement? The answers from the principals, teachers and parents/guardians provided a first-hand experience to what efforts the school leader is executing at the school to build partnerships. The answers were used in a second part of the triangulation of the study. For example, the responses from the parents/guardians did match up with what the principal is doing.

Observation Protocol

The researcher shadowed the principals and teachers to collect data possibly pertaining to Epstein's six types of involvement (Type 1 Parenting: Understanding of student diversity; Type 2 Communicating: Appreciation and use of parent network for communications; Type 3 Volunteering: Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school; Type 4 Learning at Home: Respect of family time; Type 5 Decision Making: Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions; Type 6 Collaborating with the Community: Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction). Shadowing provided an opportunity to observe things such as how the principal interacts with parents/guardians from different socio-economic groups and how and/or if the principal implements Epstein's six types of involvement.

Document Protocol

Collecting documents like school newsletters, teacher/parent communication logs, and guidance documents for parents/guardians/students provided evidence of communication to parents/guardians. The researcher did see invitations for parent education and other activities for all stake-holders. This served to see the degree of communication to the varying groups of parents/guardians. The documents provided by guidance counselors showed parent education opportunities for involvement.

Data Analysis

The researcher organized the data by Epstein's six types of involvement - parenting (e.g., Increase parents/guardians' confidence about discussing school and schoolwork with their children), communicating (e.g., Improve students' knowledge

about their own work; Enable students to set goals, with school and family support, for high achievement and positive attitudes and behavior), volunteering (e.g., Increase the number of volunteers available to conduct activities that benefit students and welcome parent volunteers who do not speak English), learning at home (e.g., Improve students' reading skills and attitudes; improve parents/guardians' abilities to support students' independent reading, fluency, and comprehension), decision making (e.g., Increase the number of parents/guardians who are comfortable with the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), improve the dissemination of information in middle school programs and curriculum, and strengthen parent networks), and collaborating with the community (e.g., Create productive connections with a key community partner). Organizing this data into these categories helped to identify the areas in which a middle school principal performs well.

Theoretical Framework

The goal of this study was to discover critical data by investigating well below the surface of reported parental involvement methods in select middle schools by conducting a qualitative research study. Glesne (2011) describes the study of the case by doing a deep examination, collecting data while conducting the observation of the individual, performing a thorough interview, and collecting artifacts to investigate.

Patton's *maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling* and *confirming* was the strategy used in this study. Patton's (2002) strategy for purposeful sampling is collecting and reporting the main idea free of a variant. This study investigated the "stated" methods of parental involvement by middle school principals in four school districts in SC. To make generalizations across the state of SC, the researcher obtained a list of schools with

an eligibility of fifty percent or higher free and reduced school meals benefits from different regions of SC: the Upstate, the Midlands, the Pee Dee, and the Low Country. Patton notes how a study can be effective in selecting a few sites as long as the researcher utilizes geographical variation. The site selection included public middle schools that house grades six – eight. Private, charter, parochial, and virtual schools were not included in this study. The 2012 SC Annual School Report Card was used to select one middle school in each of the four areas of the state, all with an Absolute Rating of Good or Above. The researcher requested participation from all school districts in each of the four regions for the sake of getting at least one in each region to agree. It was stated that whoever responded first would be the district selected for the research.

Confirming and disconfirming cases was the participant selection strategy used in this study. Patton (2002) provides the purpose as expanding and strengthening the investigation and examining the differences. Participants for this study began with a list of qualified districts from the SC Department of Education website. A formal letter requesting permission to have the qualified district and middle school principals selected to participate in this study was mailed to all qualified SC school district superintendents. For each of the districts that provided consent to participate, the researcher obtained and emailed all the middle school principals in the respective district who have the Absolute Rating of Good or Above on their School Report Card with the consent letter from their superintendent, asking them to participate in the study. Those that did not reply by email received a phone call verifying that they had received the study request information. The participant teacher and parent were identified by their respective school principals.

Significance of the Study

This study provided significant data to SC middle school principals. Epstein (2004) advocates that the six types of involvement provide a proven path in excellence with student achievement and bridging parents/guardians with schools. There is a gap in the literature regarding accountability and parental involvement, especially at the middle school level. This study will contribute to that educational leadership's body of literature by researching what some successful middle schools report that they do and how they go about it. The study is a snapshot of four middle schools in SC and will allow future researchers to add to this research by examining other states which will identify whether the problem is isolated only in SC or if it is a significant issue that might contribute to school boards and lawmakers changing policies that ensure accountability.

Limitations

Cicciarella (1997) states that limitations in a study are possible shortcomings or weaknesses of the study. The limitations of this study concern the transparency of sharing the actual strategies being performed on a regular basis by the principals. Utilizing strategies such as triangulation helped to eliminate some such concerns. Also, understanding the intent of the study, the principals themselves, not the researcher, were asked to select the parents/guardians to participate. The data (the interviews and data transcription and analysis) was collected only by the researcher, his skills somewhat limited in these areas. The research in this study is limited to the experiences of the school leadership at four middle schools in SC.

Definition of Terms

Academic Success: "School performance exceeds the standards for progress toward the 2020 SC Performance Vision" (SCDE, 2012).

Middle School: "designates a school in between elementary and high school, housed separately and ideally, in a building designed for its purpose, and usually covering three of the middle school years beginning with grades 5 or 6" (Wiles & Bondi, 1986).

Parental Involvement: "the participation of parents/guardians in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (NCLB, 2002).

Parents/guardians: "biological parents/guardians, adoptive and stepparents/guardians, and primary caregivers.

NCLB: "No Child Left Behind –common name for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 – "An Act to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice so that no child is left behind" Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), 2001.

Social Capital: "Social capital is the information, attitudinal and behavioral norms, and skills that individuals can spend or invest to improve their chances for success in societal institutions, such as schools. Individuals gain social capital through their social networks" (Sanders & Epstein, 2000, p.342).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Parental Involvement

Auerbach (2009) suggests that weaknesses of a study are called "limitations." In her study many administrators often talked of providing equal decision-making with parents/guardians, but in actuality the administrators are selective to agenda items that are open for parent input. The results of having family and community involvement with schools can be powerful. She supports the types of involvement with low socio-economic communities that are genuine and will increase the social capital which will open the door for additional opportunities (Auerbach, 2009). The majority of schools begin with the best intentions of implementing the practices mentioned above, but only a few schools actually make it a priority and are successful. The most effective way to get anything to become institutionalized at a school is to work through the building principal. It is important to obtain the "buy-in" of the school leader. Building the partnership with the families and communities requires a solid commitment from the school leader.

Research is needed regarding what school leaders are actually doing to increase family involvement. The literature suggests that one of principals' roles is to provide specific invitations to families to become involved at school. The strongest predictor of parent involvement is the way in which parents/guardians conceptualize and construct their role, that is, what they think and do regarding their responsibility to support

education. Middle schools struggle to maintain the parental involvement level found in elementary schools.

Parental involvement provides initiated benefits for everyone who is vested in the achievements of students. The literature on parental involvement provides an understanding that middle-class families typically are equipped with tools that have been obtained from social capital that helps with activities to benefit their children with school-related strategies (Williams, 1998; Wiseman, 2010). These strategies are learned and passed down from generation to generation and are not present with all classes of families. The schools that go beyond the call of duty to promote genuine bridges between families and the schools reap the benefits through a number of positives that include higher academic achievement and improved student behavior. The schools that are still struggling have not realized the significance of genuine partnerships between families and schools.

Parental involvement takes many different focuses. The school leader may provide his or her definition which will be different from the teacher's perspective. Parental involvement from families is also different, depending on who the family is and where they are from. The literature states that a middle-class white family may see parental involvement as serving on PTA/PTOs, helping with field trips, and being visible at the school site (Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, & Efreom, 2005; Patel & Stevens, 2010; RMC Research Corp., 1993). A Hispanic family may see parental involvement as assuring their children understand the importance of working hard at school instead of having to work with their hands. Parents/guardians come from all socio-economic classes, and they all bring a variety of perceptions of how parental involvement looks.

Joyce Epstein is a noted expert on the subject of parental involvement. She is the director of the Schools, Family and Community Partnerships Program and the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University. Epstein's six types of parental involvement are described as follows:

Type 1: Parenting. This type of involvement consists of helping families to establish a home environment that will support children as students by assisting families with parenting skills, family support, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions to support learning at each age and grade level. In addition, it involves assisting schools in understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, and goals for children (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Type 2: Communicating. This type of involvement enforces school-to-home and home-to-school communication by creating two-way communication channels between school and home and communicating with families about school programs and student progress. This allows families the ability to stay in touch with teachers, administrators, and counselors as well as other staff members and families (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Type 3: Volunteering. This type of involvement focuses on recruiting and organizing parent help and support. Components of this type include recruitment, training, activities, and schedules in order to involve families as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations. It enables educators to work with regular and occasional volunteers who assist and support students and the school families (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Type 4: Learning at Home. In this type of involvement, parents/guardians and families learn how to become involved with their children's academic learning at home. Parents/guardians and families are provided with information and ideas about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. It encourages teachers to design homework that enables students to share and discuss interesting work and ideas with their parents/guardians and other family members (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Type 5: Decision Making. This type of involvement includes families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy activities through school councils or improvement teams, committees, and various parent organizations, such as Parent Association (PA) and Parent Teacher Association (PTA)/Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). In addition, it provides assistance for family and teacher representatives in retrieving and disseminating information for those who represent families (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Type 6: Collaborating with the Community. This last type of involvement focuses upon coordinating resources and services for families, students, and the school with community groups, including businesses, agencies, cultural and civic organizations, and colleges or universities. It enables all stakeholders to contribute their services to the community (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

The benefits of parental involvement impact the student, the family, the school, and the community. Students generally do better both academically and socially when parents/guardians are involved. The benefits of quality parental involvement apply to all students regardless of age, gender, race or socio-economic status. A major decline in

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parental involvement occurs when students transition from elementary school level to middle school level. The research does provide evidence regarding the power of parental involvement at all levels of education (Harwell, Brown, Caldwell, Frazier, & McGee, 2009; Lopez, 2001; Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisbert, 2001).

Parental involvement is different at the secondary level than at the elementary level. Parents/guardians may not be as visual at the secondary level by helping in the school and the classroom as in the elementary level, but parents/guardians are motivating their children and talking with them about school and their future. The literature demonstrates higher rates of success with students in home with authoritative parenting style over authoritarian parenting style (Desimone, 1999; Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisbert, 2001; Regner, Loose, & Dumas, 2009). Parents/guardians and teachers often have broken communication which hinders their relationships. Research provides solid evidence of the benefits of building a successful relationship between parent and teacher for the sake of the parents/guardians. Parents/guardians and teachers are able to discover the skills and talents each possesses, which directly and indirectly contributes to the academic success of the student. There is a wonderful performance happening when both parties interact with one another like a perfectly choreographed play. Another contribution to strengthening students' success is when the parents/guardians are actively engaged with the school. When this interaction is witnessed by the child, research shows how learning and behavioral problems tend to vanish. Many positive outcomes develop from genuine relationships between the parents/guardians and teachers. Educating both the educator and parent about such a partnership will benefit the student through understanding the variety of ways parents/guardians are involved.

That partnership between families and the school is described or defined in many and various ways. A clear definition needs to be established since there are many different perceptions of what parental involvement is or looks like. The following list gives key words and their definitions used in this research.

Middle school. In this research, middle school is a public school facility with students attending sixth through eighth grades for educational instruction.

Parent. In this research, "The term 'parent' includes a legal guardian or other person standing in *loco parentis* (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare)" *[Section 9101(31), ESEA.](p. 31)*.

Parental involvement. In this research, "The term 'parental involvement' means the participation of parents/guardians in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring: That parents/guardians play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; That parents/guardians are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school and That parents/guardians are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child" (p. 31).

The literature search strategies consisted of a search for materials on parental involvement and academic achievement at the middle school level in academic journals, books, periodicals, reviews, and trade publications through the University of South Carolina's Thomas Cooper Library. Utilizing the internet by conducting Google searches

was an additional method of accomplishment. References from articles read provided a wealth of leads for related works on this topic.

The literature surrounding parental involvement and academic achievement at the middle school levels is limited. Initial searches produced a number of articles discussing areas surrounding this topic, but few studies have actually been performed in detail. The experts in this field, like Joyce L. Epstein, continue to conduct research in this area. The gap appears to be around what school leaders are actually doing in the schools with an emphasis on minority and low socio-economic groups. The literature demonstrates how school leaders are satisfying the federal mandates on paper, but only minimal numbers of studies provide actual programs principals are implementing.

The organization of the balance of this literature review provides a well-documented list of the articles surrounding perceptions on parental involvement, varying types of parental involvement, school leadership's view on parental involvement, environmental impacts on parental involvement, and programs to assist with parental involvement. Theories regarding parental involvement regularly led to Joyce L. Epstein and her *Six Types of Parental Involvement*. They are classified as (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision making, and (f) collaborating. A number of theories are provided in the following review of articles in the field of parental involvement.

Perceptions on Parental Involvement

Kusum et al (1995) analyzed four components of parental involvement: parental aspirations for children's education, parent-child communication about school, home structure, and parental participation in school-related activities. The parents/guardians'

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aspirations for their children's education have the strongest influence on academic achievement; thus the study suggests that educators and practitioners should work to nurture parents/guardians' educational goals for their children. The researchers state that a need exists for discovering parental involvement strategies for middle school students and more specifically for identifying which aspects of parental involvement would produce the best academic achievement for students during the middle school years (Kusum et al., 1995). Interestingly, the researchers imply that having parents/guardians active in the activities at school provided no evidence for increased academic achievement, which contradicts researcher findings. Many of the activities performed by parents/guardians with their children's education in elementary schools did not produce the same results in middle school. The research suggests that the students in middle school are dealing with other factors like socializing and seeking independence. Kusum et al state that a high number of elementary school children enjoy parents/guardians being at the school and volunteering in the classroom. Middle school students, however, do not appreciate their parents/guardians visiting the school or the classroom. The young adolescents reflect more embarrassment than enjoyment of their parents/guardians' presence. This study suggests that there are different types of parental involvement needed at different ages.

Desimone's 1999 study examined parental involvement through actions, beliefs and attitudes. He supports data provided on parenting studies and the diverse educational outcomes, suggesting that variables like race and income have an impact on parenting practices (Desimone, 1999). Parental involvement is one of the items described by Desimone as an easier item to manipulate than other areas of concern. The researchers

stress the importance of parent involvement policies, suggesting that they are critical to gaining grounds with parental involvement. It is also acknowledged that even though parental involvement is in major parts of federal legislation, the key components are still missing. Attempting to focus on poor families and diverse families seems to be the challenge and is the key component missing in the mandates. Parenting style, like authoritative parenting style, and many other variables produce the best effects for student achievement. Social capital is an area noted by the researcher. If educators are able to teach parents/guardians the complexities of the middle school system, how best to help the children with school work, best parenting practices, and simply how to be more effective in the role of policy modification, the social capital and student achievement will grow simultaneously. Desimone (1999) advocates for improved school – to - home practices for low-income parents/guardians so they will have equal opportunities to those who have middle to high incomes.

Lopez (2001) examines cultural differences involving parental involvement. Parental involvement does not always mean parent active participation and visibility at a school. Lopez's study provides data that supports how marginalized families are often viewed unfairly as uninvolved families for these reasons. Such knowledge is critical for schools because federal funding is connected to those programs oriented toward increased parental involvement. He endorses the majority of research that demonstrates global acceptance of parental involvement practices that improve student academic achievement (Lopez, 2001). This qualitative research was interesting and highlighted some cultural pieces to parental involvement that many middle-class teachers do not consider. Five immigrant/migrant families in Texas were selected to participate in this

study. Observations and interviews were performed over a six-month period. One family shared how the children experienced hard manual labor working in the fields early in life. The father explained how it was important for him to provide that experience for his children because he wanted them to understand they would either work hard in the fields or in the classroom. Secondly, he wanted them to possess a skill to resort to if things did not work out with a position obtained by a formal education. This father feels completely involved in his children's education by making sure they understand their options; essentially, he is trying to teach them to work hard to obtain a good education so that they do not have to perform straining manual labor in the future.

The work by Marchant et al (2001) shows the influences on student achievement through a review of pertinent literature focusing on the more promising parenting styles for achievement. Marchant et als' (2001) study demonstrated the connection the parents/guardians have on student success, and a number of studies show authoritative parenting styles and active parental involvement prove to have higher levels of academic achievement across variables like race and income. High parental expectations and parental values about achievement are important reasons for success. Such realization is providing concrete justification to providing academic achievement for all students regardless of gender, race, or ethnic groups. The researchers preach that if the authoritative parenting style is shared by both the teacher and parent, students demonstrate more motivation (Marchant et al, 2001). Although a number of variables were studied, a student's perception was noted as the most powerful variable for academic achievement. Marchant et al (2001) propose that higher academic success

comes from an environment where both home and school blend well, collaborating seamlessly.

Bryan et al (2004) conducted a study involving 72 SC school counselors, randomly selected. This study examined the perception of their involvement with school-family-community (SFC) partnerships and what barriers they faced at their schools in these areas. The literature mentions the National Education Goals (Goals 2000) as federal legislation which suggests schools find creative ways to build partnerships to generate more parental involvement. The researchers developed a survey which was validated by using a focus group consisting of three school counselors and two counselor educators to pilot and provide feedback on the survey.

Tonn (2005) provides an examination of motivations for parents/guardians. According to Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey, an associate professor and the Chairperson of the Department of Psychology and Human Development at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, parents/guardians' motivations for involvement are influenced by three variables: their sense of invitation from the school, teachers, and their own children; their perceptions of how effective their involvement will be; and their personal beliefs about how they should be involved. This study looks at the partnership between family and school. Technology has helped provide instant information, often utilized for bridging the two. Tonn urges school leaders to implement practices that will keep parents/guardians involved prior to their children being in middle school. In order to have an effective program, parents/guardians need specific invitations to be involved and to feel as if their time is important. Because many families attend meetings at schools only to feel unwelcomed and underappreciated, Tonn praises those leaders who welcome families

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and gives opportunities for them to be contributing stakeholders. The researcher demonstrates the need to execute the basics like posting directions to key offices in the school to help the parents navigate to selected areas of the school and also to alleviate some aspects of their worries.

Green et al (2007) focuses on areas that helped support student learning through attributes like self-efficacy for learning, perceptions of personal control over school outcomes, and self-regulatory skills and knowledge. This study examines what motivates parents/guardians to be involved with their children's education, such as what practices certain parents/guardians utilized and why the parents/guardians selected certain practices for being involved.

> Grounded primarily in psychological literature, the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of the parent involvement process proposes three major sources of motivation for involvement. The first is parents/guardians' motivational beliefs relevant to involvement, including parental role construction and parental self-efficacy for helping the child succeed in school. The second is parents/guardians' perceptions of invitations to involvement, including general invitations from the school. The third source is personal life context variables that influence parents/guardians' perceptions of the forms and timing of involvement that seem feasible, including parents/guardians' skills and knowledge for involvement, and time and energy for involvement. (Green et al., 2007, p. 532)

Self-efficacy theory provides parents/guardians with a simple conclusion in the form of a question: What will the outcome be of the researcher's involvement? Another area mentioned in this article and a number of other articles dealing with parental involvement

is specific invitations. Parents/guardians would like to be invited to schools for specific reasons. They want to know they are valued by the school and that they will be contributing something specific simply by being involved.

Harwell et al (2009) examines three rural southern middle schools, primarily focusing on homework and how homework impacts students' attitudes. It concentrated primarily on parental involvement and gender differences, authenticating the fact that parents/guardians spend more time at school events with their daughters and are stricter on their daughters' socializing time (Harwell et al, 2009). It was noted that homework seems to be the major vein between the home and school. Parents/guardians often see this as a time for them to be involved with their children's education, but for a number of parents/guardians it is an area for issues. The researchers provide evidence that many parents/guardians had low efficacy in helping their children with homework at the middle school level. They were not confident with their ability to understand much less help with the middle school curriculum. Additional research suggested that whether children received help at home with their homework or not contributed little toward student achievement. A growing number of studies suggest that a different type of parental involvement is needed at the middle school level than the elementary level. Providing more space for the middle school student is just one suggestion. Maintaining structure and providing a schedule for the student, however, are mandatory requirements. Parents/guardians who play a supervisory role produce the students' highest academic gains.

Regner et al (2009) conducted a study in France. The students' perceptions were examined to determine whether parent or teacher involvement contributes to the student

wanting to adopt goals of academic achievement. Achievement goal theory was the framework for this research. Previous research on achievement goals provided information like cognitive processing strategies and performance outcomes. The researchers corroborate the importance of variables like perceived competence and fear of failure as major indicators of achieving academic goals (Regner et al, 2009). Encouraging and supporting the decisions made by the students are described as items that help with academic support by parents/guardians and teachers. Authoritative parenting style might be used to describe this type of support. Students want to know that they are cared about. Regardless of how it is done, students simply want to know their parents/guardians and teachers care about their interests, and they need to see it demonstrated. Regner et al (2009) support school practices that involve teachers talking to students about being successful, and protocols should be in place to encourage parents/guardians to communicate to their children about being successful to develop higher success with academic tasks. This study provides some insight to the need of students to have both parents/guardians and teachers involved and to demonstrate the importance of education in order for them also to value the work they must contribute to achieve what is necessary.

Duchesne et al (2010) examined academic motivation through parenting and emotions. The researchers advocate that achievement goal theory is the most significant of socio-cognitive approaches explaining why some students do better in schools and why others do not (Duchesne et al, 2010). Involvement and control are two parenting behaviors researched by these authors.

We believe that our study fits into this recent body of work and propose a mediation model to examine the predictive relationship between perceived parental behaviors (involvement and control) before the transition and achievement goals (mastery, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals) after the transition during which pretransition negative emotions such as anxiety and depression act as mediators. (Duchesne et al, 2010, p.497)

The first area studied is parental involvement with a focus on the behaviors and attitudes of parents/guardians toward their children. The second area is parental control, the influence to motivate the child to adopt the parents/guardians' beliefs. This research demonstrates a history of positive academic accomplishments connected to children's feelings about success and motivation. An extreme opposite view is when parents/guardians have too much control; abuse of such control can cause children to be less motivated and have low achievement.

Gould (2011) examined parental participation in a child's education during the middle school years. Gould uses the Ecological Systems Theory, which served as his theoretical framework. The students' satisfaction with school and parental involvement were the dependent and independent variables used in this research. This study uses the following research hypothesis: there is a difference in student satisfaction with schools where students reside with only biological parents/guardians and those who do not. The null hypothesis claimed there is no difference in student satisfaction in relation to these residences. The Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) was used to measure how satisfied the students were with school in a Midwest public middle school. Gould (2011) validates how students living with both biological parents/guardians are more successful. The

information that this provided is only one third of the population at this Midwest public middle school. Alarmingly, the remaining two thirds do not reside with their biological parents/guardians; this provides a catalyst for principals to update their policies regarding parental involvement.

Varying Types of Parental Involvement

Catsambis et al (1997) examined data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988. Parental involvement data was reviewed and compared between eight and twelfth grade students. How parents/guardians got involved showed differences between racial and ethnic backgrounds. This research stems from a social organizational perspective developed by Epstein (1990). The researchers support the theory of overlapping spheres of influences, defining the interrelationships of those forces most impacting students' academic work (Catsambis and Garland, 1997). The social organizational perspective was established from Epstein's studies on parental involvement, revealing key impact on student achievement when well-developed relationships exist between home and school. Catsambis and Garland (1997) demonstrate how a number of studies have shown the more educated and wealthy a family the more effective parental involvement. This proved true, too, among minority families who benefit tremendously from being involved with schools, and that connection has high success rates on minority student achievement. Research demands higher levels of parental involvement at the middle school level, demonstrating significant decreases in parental involvement in both middle and high schools (Catsambis and Garland, 1997). Catsambis and Garland (1997) found higher levels of success with parental involvement in middle school years with those who establish programs designed to involve parents.

Williams (1998) provided research on how schools themselves have the ability to influence parental support. Williams (1998) states, "Essentially, schools that give, get. First, it is recommended they make parents/guardians feel welcome; then they must engage parents/guardians in activities that promote student learning" (p. 1). One example used in this study describes how a school reaches out to the parents/guardians urging them to participate in the activities benefitting both students and parents/guardians. The leader at one school allows scheduled time for the parents/guardians to bring their concerns about their children's education to a forum where the school leader can hear and address the individual parents/guardians' concerns or issues. Many school leaders believe they are reaching out to parents/guardians and welcoming them to the school, but as this article demonstrates, they are not successful in their efforts. The key suggestion is to make personal contact. Reaching out to the parents/guardians in a manner that helps them feel comfortable, needed and safe increases parental support.

Williams (1998) advocates making parental involvement the school's most important commitment, recommending activities like workshops and obtaining parental involvement resources. The culture a school district establishes is vital as this researcher references Epstein's perception of the role school boards should play in parental involvement. Epstein says that school boards set the tone of a district by offering schools incentives or strongly encouraging them to develop solid parent-involvement programs. Epstein also mentions how administration is not able to force parents/guardians to do anything, but it is able to implement activities that develop behaviors that will help change attitudes. This article demonstrated the need to develop policies regarding

accountability of parental involvement that should be regularly visited rather than just listed as an item on an agenda.

Lopez et al (2001) shows an important connection between parental involvement and academic achievement. He promotes parental involvement as a major contributor to improving self-esteem and developing positive relationships with both parents/guardians and the school (Lopez, 2001). Teachers benefit from parental involvement by acquiring higher efficacy. The article makes reference to the "community funds of knowledge" being acquired from parental involvement. Using the families for input in shaping the current curriculum to variables untapped previously has provided notable impact on students' academic achievement. Unfortunately, this research also demonstrated how schools fail to engender the effort to involve parents/guardians. Parents/guardians expressed the feelings that teachers do not value them or the knowledge or resources they can provide to the school, thus limiting them only to what parents/guardians do in the home, such as providing a roof over their children's heads, clean clothes, etc. This article reinforces the literature on schools only providing activities for parental involvement in the traditional activities like PTA/PTO meetings, bake sales, etc. It does appear that a new trend of literature is surfacing of some schools going beyond the norms and tapping into the cultural values of parents/guardians.

Boethel (2003) reviewed possible approaches to improving academic achievement for the poor and minority populations. This study narrows its scope to race or ethnicity, culture, and socio-economic status. Boethel also categorizes and lists a wide range of studies conducted on parental involvement, noting types of studies conducted, both qualitative and quantitative. The author provided her opinion regarding gaps in the

literature and actual areas researched concerning parental involvement and student achievement. The researcher shows a need for additional studies examining the connections between the two (Boethel, 2003). The author mentions how literature reviews and meta-analysis of research is lacking on minority and low-income populations. Many Americans believe that African-Americans are the highest number living in poverty, but that is simply not true as supported by Boethel, who says, "Though the percentage of African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and non-English-speaking immigrants who are of racial, ethnic, and linguistic minority groups do not live in poverty. And in terms of absolute numbers, more White Americans live in poverty than members of any other racial or ethnic group" (Proctor & Dalaker, 2002)" (Boethel, 2003, p. 12). The results discussed in this work provided some suggestions principals should try to support diverse families becoming more engaged with the education of their children. Communicating through multiple sources, holding informal meetings at different times and at different locations in the community to update policies and practices, making sure families provide a strong presence at teacher/parent meetings, and validating the importance of parental involvement policies assist in bridging the school and families and providing equity to all stakeholders.

Epstein (2004) conducted a national study of over 200 middle schools. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandate requires schools to have a comprehensive plan for addressing parental involvement. Epstein (2004) advocates the use of her research-generated framework of six types of involvement to strengthen the school to community relationship. The schools associated with the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) use an Action Team to execute Epstein's six types of involvement: parenting,

communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) is required each year to write specific plans for improving its school. The plans are recommended to incorporate families and the community. In addition to the above plans, the ATP is required to investigate or create other planned options that focus on parental involvement.

Hawes and Plourde (2005) examined reading achievement and parental involvement for sixth grade students. A number of federal mandates require schools to have parental involvement. The researchers wanted to know whether this was happening or not. If schools say it is occurring, then they should show post-positive results (Hawes and Plourde, 2005). Discussions in this article include questions like why students are graduating from high schools unable to read and even entering middle schools without skills needed in order to be successful. This research attempts to find out if parental involvement is the answer to these and other questions concerning student achievement. The researchers initially provide information about past literature that outlined barriers to parental involvement. Lack of education, feeling unwelcome, and time constraints are provided as some of those obstacles in the middle school years that contribute to students having the ability to prevent parental involvement (Hawes and Plourde, 2005). The research provides evidence that bridging the relationships between families and schools is necessary. Parental involvement has a positive impact on all students regardless of gender, race, or social groups. Hawes and Plourde (2005) show how parental involvement research is needed at the middle school level.

Epstein and Sanders (2006) conducted a study in the southwest region of the US. The researchers surveyed 133 colleges and universities in six states. This study examined

the courses in the colleges and universities of undergraduate education programs and revealed no courses covering parental involvement were required. The researchers revealed that none of the fifty states requires a complete parental involvement course for the certification of teachers (Epstein and Sanders, 2006). They report, however, that a large percentage of surveyed educators expressed the need for a parental involvement course in undergraduate school programs (Epstein and Sanders, 2006).

Additional research in this article deals with the impact courses on school and community relations had on educational majors. Because of those courses educators were more influenced to work with families and the community as well as get the community more involved in the school. Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium's (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders requires educational leaders to promote collaborating with families and community members. The conceptual framework came from the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, based upon the concept that if the home and school are working as a team, the student will achieve at the highest possible level. Other studies have demonstrated how Epstein's six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) contribute to higher success rates by generating productive partnerships (Gould, 2011; Williams, 1998; Wiseman, 2010).

Coleman (2007) uses a unique approach to parental involvement by utilizing a play on words with the family bill of rights. The families in this study are no different from any other typical American family; they simply want to be treated with respect. Coleman approached this study through the right for families to be shown respect, the right for family empowerment, the right of communication with school staff, and the

choice of their own family involvement roles to demonstrate this need. Today's families are not the typical "Leave It to Beaver" families of the 50's. The contemporary family may have a single parent or may be composed of diverse family ethnicities. Coleman suggests the need for schools to acknowledge that a large number of students do not have the traditional mother and father at home (Davis, 1991). He provides this to show educators the need not to abandon family values but to respect the diversity of family values and lifestyles that exist today. This research provides a good foundation for the cultural differences that schools have today, and it recommends a different approach than previously used when communicating with parents/guardians. The key word that appears repeatedly throughout this article is *communication*. Coleman (2007) recommends family workshops as one such method, suggesting that they are educational and should include "topics of interest to families and tip sheets that summarize information about current childhood health, safety, and educational issues" (p. 10).

Wiseman (2010) focused on building partnerships with families of all socio-economic levels as a critical area in helping students achieve academic success. The families with the most influence seem to receive the most attention. These power relationships impact the culture of a school in many different ways. Low socio-economic families are impacted by such experiences in a negative way. They feel excluded from the norm and recall how inadequate they felt when they were students in school. This causes a number of challenges for school leaders. These barriers impede the equity in parental involvement in every way. Communication skills are quite different for parents/guardians of higher socio-economic status and lower socio-economic status. The research demonstrated how teachers expect parents/guardians to communicate with them

but learned that not all parents/guardians were aware of proper communication channels or methods. Wiseman shows how a number of teachers are in need of professional development on cultural backgrounds because low socio-economic families do not have the same social capital as educators. This research also demonstrated how teachers and principals placed themselves in a power position over the families when it comes to decisions about education. This is due to the lack of parents/guardians having input. Wiseman specifies how not all families are able to leave work to attend a meeting at school or even have transportation to get to the school. This study also highlights that students also play a vital role in how much parents/guardians will be involved. Students have different reasons for this, but one provided was an ability to "fit-in," and they simply did not want the other students or even the teachers to meet the parents/guardians.

School Leadership's View on Parental Involvement

The RMC Research Corporation (1993) provides several researchers' examination of the literature on parental involvement. Chavkin's paper is divided into several sections and scrutinizes the research on parent and community involvement, highlighting programs that stand above the rest in this area. Increasing social capital with the parents/guardians of low socio-economic status is just one approach that has been successful. Chavkin (1993) provides the need for schools to increase social capital in families and communities where it has weakened. The research background provides indubitable evidence that including parents/guardians will have the direct impact of raising student achievement, especially during the critical middle school years of adolescent development. Having parental involvement policies in place is important for a

school, but those policies are recommended to be reviewed regularly. Chavkin (1993) advocates building strong partnerships with parents/guardians and allowing equal input.

Another researcher in the work, Chrispeels (1993) examines the structure of middle schools and how this structure itself is a primary barrier. The research demonstrates the need for families and schools to collaborate in a variety of ways. A key is finding innovative strategies to work with families from diverse backgrounds and families facing other challenging conditions, such as drugs and abuse. Chrispeels (1993) discusses the importance of the school taking the lead in building stronger relationships through a number of strategies by developing a structured program that increases parents/guardians' social capital regarding education, adolescent development, and highly successful practices by parents/guardians. She demonstrates how higher socio-economic families utilize their social capital to make sure their children are in the correct classes, to receive proper testing for special programs, to challenge issues related to grades, and to give these families certain advantages over the low-income families. They are able to volunteer at schools and spend more time at home with school work. They understand the school system and how to maneuver around the politics to make things happen that can positively impact their children. Chrispeels (1993) suggests that additional research is needed in this area. She provides evidence for this need suggesting how parents/guardians, students and schools can share equally in improving academic achievement across the socio-economic classes.

Also from RMC Research Corporation's (1993) work, Epstein and Connors (1993) provide an excellent concept of partnership between families and schools, providing clear and concise information advising parents/guardians who want to know

what they can do to help their children be more successful in the middle school years. At this juncture, many families want the school to take the lead and reach out to them with information that they can use at home that will guide their children in a direction that will result in the highest possible academic achievement. Once these families are invited to be involved, the amount of parental involvement increases tremendously. The researchers support middle schools developing and implementing more programs that utilize parents/guardians to take lead roles in organizing parents/guardians, providing input on the training of parents/guardians in being able to assist their children with school work, and assisting with both parents/guardians and students serving in decision-making at the school (Epstein and Connors, 1993).

Continuing, Jones (1993) provides a look into activities at home that support academic achievement in middle school, demonstrating how parents/guardians have an influence on their children's homework. The research examines the influence on homework in four areas: valuing, monitoring, helping and doing. Still, another area reviewed the relationship between parents/guardians and teachers. Studies have produced evidence to support how a negative relationship exists in the middle school level between parents/guardians and teachers (Farrell, Henry, Mays, & Schoeny, 2009; Gould, 2011 & Lopez, 2001).

Finally, Shields (1993) offers a review of the reform movement for family and community involvement policies through Title I. Shields (1993) writes, "Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (now Chapter 1), provides a telling example of the evolution of federal policy on the involvement of parents/guardians" (p. 161). Shields investigates different programs involving parental participation like

Parents/guardians As Tutors (PAT). Tapping the resources of parents/guardians, regardless of education level, is one area examined.

These studies from the RMC Research Corporation (1993) provide evidence for academic gains of students when involving parents/guardians from any level of educational background. Each group provides its own unique contribution, from reading aloud to listening to the students read. The key to gains is clearly connected to parental involvement, both at home and understanding what is happening at school. Eliminating any existing obstructions for parental involvement from all socio-economic statuses is the summit to high academic achievement. Shields (1993) advocates how huge gains come from breaking down barriers that allow more open communication. Breaching these barriers can be successful by allowing the community more opportunities at the school and school staff opportunities in the community.

Redding (1997) provides an examination of how communities have changed over the years. The researcher shows how families in the community and the school prosper when both work toward their common goal of having success with academic and social learning (Redding, 1997). The author discusses the link with social capital and how communities and families are established by beliefs and shared interests by relationships that are formed in the same setting. He demonstrates how community and school relationships are dependent upon commitment (Redding, 1997). Redding (1997) advocates social capital as a valuable bridge and sustenance for partnerships. His research also states that the size of a school contributes to the hindering of social capital. A community is no longer simply the walking distance to a school. It can extend over many miles, and as Redding (1997) states, "To parents, their children's schools are not

organically embedded in the neighborhood, but operate as part of a remote and rigid system" (p. 166). In order to build social capital, community relationships must warrant commitments. The researcher makes reference to the ability educators have in measuring the impact of curriculum and instruction but fail to establish means to measure community values. Also, evaluating whether the community and schools share certain values about education is necessary. Seeking to build such bridges will produce strong, positive outcomes for students.

Christie and Cooper (2005) researched urban school parents/guardians who were considered of low socio-economic status, people of color, and those who have English as their second language. It reveals how important it is for these parents/guardians to increase their social capital with educational reform and have as much influence as those in the upper socio-economic spectrum. Through a qualitative case study, this research focuses on an educational program called District Parent Training Program (DPTP). The results showed how administration needs to promote educational equity at all levels but build greater social capital at the low-income groups. The article examines different evaluation approaches. Evaluation theory is prescriptive and is intended to guide practice. Responsive evaluation approach is more direct to a program and dependent on audience requirements. Social justice evaluation approach focuses on serving those individuals who need the most help. The DPTP offers parents/guardians a thirteen-week institute of classroom instruction, helps them with advocacy and provides other outlets like participating in events both in and outside the classroom. Once the DPTP is completed, parents/guardians explained how this program not only prepared them but also

strengthened their ability to help their children with homework and to determine if their children's teachers are good or bad with instruction.

Overstreet et al (2005) indicate school receptivity as the strongest predictor of parental school involvement in urban schools. Overstreet et al (2005) write, "Parent level of employment was a significant predictor of school involvement only for parents/guardians of middle/high school students" (p. 101). The literature strongly supports the notion that the more parents/guardians are involved, the higher academic achievement is obtained by students. This study looks at the relationship between parental involvement and children's school motivation and performance. This was acquired by differentiating parental involvement by school, cognitive-intellectual, and personal. The study revealed how children from economically disadvantaged environments are positively impacted from family-school relationships. The researchers demonstrate how a gap exists in literature aimed at increasing parental school involvement in low socio-economic populations, citing that most studies conducted often involve at-risk populations. The most important variable to increase parental involvement was not even related to the child or the parent. Reaching out to parents/guardians, creating a welcoming environment and having clear communications are the important actions taken by schools that involved more parents/guardians. The researcher suggests a need to explore whether the practices in place by a school help or hinder the intended outcomes of parental involvement (Overstreet et al, 2005).

Auerbach's study (2007) examines how to include all families in the urban school environment effectively. Many districts are successful by including those families from middle to upper class parents/guardians but fail to include those from lower class settings.

The parents/guardians of color and poverty do support education in the home but are not as visible to educators at school. This research reveals the need to utilize proactive tactics to gain trust with certain culturally-challenged groups. Cultivating such interaction has proven to be successful in bridging those relationships between families and schools. It is recommended that administration motivate educational leaders to allow for full partnerships in decision making from all families of all socio-economic statuses. Previous studies demonstrate educational leaders struggle with fully involving all parents/guardians in school decision making (Coleman, 2007; Williams, 1998). This data was collected from surveys of principals' attitudes regarding their supervisory positions. Auerbach shows a number of studies dealing with leadership roles in varying agencies, but only a few can be found on leadership for parents/guardians. The study reflects theories of conceptions of stewardship and shared leadership, theories of social capital, opportunities-to-lead frameworks, and psychosocial role theory. The desire for a study like this is to encourage school leaders to share decision making with all social classes in their community. The researcher demonstrates how dedicated urban principals who are willing to share leadership can increase social capital in low socio-economic families (Auerbach, 2007).

Brannon (2007) attempts to address the decline of parental involvement by looking at why involvement decreases, reaching out to parents/guardians, and finding a healthy balance. A majority of the middle school principals she spoke with agreed that such involvement dramatically decreases from elementary to middle school. Why does parent involvement decrease at the middle school level? Brannon (2007) reported that parents/guardians feel as if their kids did not want them to be involved, but the data the

researcher received stated just the opposite. Children want their parents/guardians involved. Many parents/guardians had poor experiences when they were in school, and this provided another reason why they do not want to be involved. Today, curriculum in the middle school is more complex than it was a decade ago. Many parents/guardians do not feel as if they are able to help their children. The researcher advocates for schools to have enough resources, such as a homework hotline and training by the school, to increase social capital for parents/guardians to be aware of where to find help (Brannon, 2007). Lastly, parents/guardians are extremely busy and have many commitments that prevent them from being regularly involved. The only way to address this would be to provide specific invitations to parents/guardians. The most effective ways to reach out to parents/guardians are the next area Brannon examined. These areas are to make sure there are clearly defined avenues for parents/guardians to get involved, make a concerted effort to involve fathers, offer special evening or weekend events that provide hands-on application of what students are learning, use community resources that attract parents/guardians and address their special needs, and a number of other effective practices. The principals all agreed that finding that perfect balance is important but difficult. Parents/guardians and schools simply need to work in equity to guarantee the success of the students in middle schools.

Howard and Reynolds (2008) take a closer look at the impact the social classes are experiencing regarding academic achievement. Howard and Reynolds use The Critical Race Theory (CRT), the conceptual framework used to examine parent involvement with middle class African American students. This study highlights the data from grades four, eight, and twelve, which revealed white, Asian American and Latinos

scored higher than African American students on reading, writing and math. The reason noted was due to the disproportionate numbers who live in poverty. Howard and Reynolds share how African-American students in low socio-economic communities deal with a number of issues that have a significant impact on their academic success. These issues range from non-qualified teachers and large student-to-teacher ratios to poor resources and high staff turnover (Howard and Reynold, 2008). Some research provides evidence on how social class plays a significant role in schooling. The researchers stated when social class is held constant, an achievement gap still exists between white students and African American students. The researchers offer racism as a reason. *Cultural capital* is a term used in Howard and Reynolds' article, referencing a connection highlighting how parents/guardians equipped with more means provide better situations for their children by increasing the cultural awareness that is most desired by that community and giving an advantage to their children (Howard and Reynold, 2008). Getting parents/guardians involved and allowing them to be equal partners are successful practices to increasing student achievement. "While a number of studies have examined factors that motivate parents/guardians to participate in schools (Aronson, 1996; Benson & Nelson, 2003; Epstein, 1991; Harris, L. et al., 1987), few studies, if any, report on initiatives that have included parents/guardians as equal partners and decision makers (Peressini, 1996)" (Howard and Reynolds, 2008, p. 84).

Hill and Tyson (2009) conducted a meta-analytic assessment in hopes of determining the most positive parental involvement strategies for producing academic achievement for middle school students. The authors address social capital as well, discussing the social capital gains through parents/guardians' visits to the classrooms and

becoming familiar with the curricula their children are learning. This increase in parents/guardians' knowledge strengthens the bridge between home and school when parents/guardians are helping their children with homework and familiarizing themselves with the content. Parents/guardians are involved in the elementary years, where they are able to help with the curriculum, but in the middle school years, the curriculum is more advanced, and parents/guardians feel more intimidated. The researchers demonstrate the need for schools to develop programs for increasing parents/guardians' social capital resources to help their children prior to starting secondary schools to increase academic success (Hill and Tyson, 2009). Because most middle schools are larger than elementary schools, parents/guardians expressed concerns with their children changing from one class to another, having many teachers as opposed to having one teacher all day, and attempting to figure out how this complex system operates. Parents/guardians fail before they get started in many cases. Parents/guardians being able to communicate their wishes and values to their children about education is a major component. Taking the time to share reasons for implementing parental involvement strategies and making the connections with the documented results from research may provide benefits to the future plans and desires of all stakeholders.

Griffin and Galassi (2010) researched a rural middle school and the barriers identified by parents/guardians. The researchers show the inequitable distribution of resources and services in rural communities (Griffin and Galassi, 2010). Variables that impact parental involvement are items such as a lack of social networks for parents/guardians and the lack of financial stability. Another area that i noted was the increased difficulty level from the elementary curriculum to the middle school

curriculum. Parents/guardians simply are not comfortable with the material in middle school: they struggled to understand how to do the work, explain the work to their children and simply were embarrassed to acknowledge they did not know how to do the work. Communicating is another identified concern. An increased level of communicating to parents/guardians is needed in order to have an impact on academic achievement. Griffin and Galassi (2010) provide evidence of obstacles to student success from parents/guardians' perspectives. They also share how schools partnering with parents/guardians provide higher student success. Learning about these barriers and ways to have the most positive impact are critical. The research has been exhausted on parental involvement, but Griffin and Galassi (2010) show a greater need for research on obstacles to parental involvement in rural communities. Inviting parents/guardians to be involved was another variable addressed in this study. Specific invitations from the school will help to increase parental involvement.

Hornby and Witte (2010) conducted a study by interviewing eleven middle school principals in New Zealand on ways to improve parental involvement. The researchers demonstrate how parental involvement is improving educational outcomes and is so acknowledged by governments in a number of countries (Horny and Witte, 2010). This study provides the benefits of parental involvement and how it improves variables like attitudes and children's mental health, which leads to academic success. These authors prove that effective parental involvement benefits children from all races, gender, and socio-economic status. The researchers advocate tactful parental involvement for positive student outcomes during the middle school grades as their children transition from elementary to middle school. Information from the school to the parents/guardians seems

to decrease with advanced grades according to this study. It recommends that school leaders do more with parent involvement by implementing a more comprehensive plan for such, like Epstein's *School, Family and Community Partnership: Your Handbook for Action*. This research provides the evidence for the need in finding out what middle schools are actually doing concerning parental involvement. A high number of schools are meeting mandates by simply doing the requirements, but the schools implementing comprehensive parental involvement models have high levels of success with academic achievement for students.

Patel and Stevens (2010) focused their study on the perceptions of middle school parents/guardians, teachers and students around academic abilities and how those abilities impacted parental involvement. The researchers reference Epstein's six modes of parent involvement and how partnerships between schools and families require some involvement of the six modes but not necessarily the immersion of all six. Communication practices by middle school teachers, who use fewer direct modes of communication with parents/guardians, vary but are mostly limited compared to communication practices of elementary teachers. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's framework was used to see why parents/guardians are involved and why teachers involve parents/guardians. Epstein's theory believes the two-way communication is vital from both parties (parents/guardians and teachers) in order to have successful partnerships. The reports by minorities provided by both school and parents/guardians do not match: middle school teachers' state that they communicate regularly with parents/guardians, but parents/guardians state that teacher communication is limited. This leads to broken communication lines and tends to cause poor perceptions between parents/guardians and

teachers. Also, minority parents/guardians are less involved at the school but feel they are highly involved in many other ways like making sure food is available and a comfortable home is provided. Cultural patterns are noted as a rationale to the types of involvement the parents/guardians provide instead of visibility at the school. This research was based upon Epstein's theoretical framework of overlapping spheres. Through examining where the spheres overlap, the researcher was able to provide evidence to support the need of relationships to be formed between parents/guardians and teachers in order to have effective partnerships.

Environmental Influences on Parental Involvement

Farrell et al (2009) focus on the risk factors involved with peers and how those factors like delinquency or being involved with school-related activities impact academic achievement. Farrell et al (2009) share how peer and school factors can weaken parental involvement which in turn can prevent academic success. Evidence is provided in this article from various studies demonstrating the high correlation between parental involvement and conduct issues with youth. The researchers demonstrate how parental involvement can help to calm children and prevent undesirable behaviors (Farrell et al, 2009). This article suggests that parents/guardians take actions such as monitoring their children's whereabouts, activities, and friends, which will greatly control adolescent misbehavior. Because social capital is obtained when both communication and participation occur, parents/guardians should pass knowledge to their children by talking to them more frequently and more often about school and life in general, thus giving them the opportunity to pass down their knowledge about how they believe society functions. Studies have been conducted examining how a parent's beliefs can influence

youth and their perceptions. The parental influence is as strong if not stronger than the child's own beliefs in many cases. This is another area to be considered for further research.

Brooks (2012) provides a historical look at the half-century between 1912 and 1962, viewing it primarily as a period of wars and economic tumult. He sees the second half-century between 1962 and the present as being a period of peace and prosperity but describes America's contemporary social fabric as falling apart and losing the morals and values once associated with it. Reasons for such a breakdown are due to the loss of good working-class jobs and the Great Society programs. The researcher sees a societal shift to higher numbers of single mothers; in all likelihood it is more difficult for a single parent to be as involved in a child's education as a two-parent unit (Brooks, 2012). Brooks shows how difficult it is for certain populations in disorganized neighborhoods to climb out of unfortunate situations. People who grow up in a setting with low social capital will continue this cycle into their adult lives, and thus growth of needed social capital does not occur from one generation to another. The lack of social capital of the families in disorganized neighborhoods is just like many other families in different communities that are not viewed as disorganized. They have similar dreams and aspirations. They simply are not able to acquire the knowledge that many others do from being connected in social settings that produce beneficial learning situations that will strengthen their social capital. Finally, holding individuals responsible for their behavior is examined. The researcher demonstrates the difficulty of growing up in low socio-economic communities where a high number of the men quit school (Brooks, 2012).

DeParle and Tavernise (2012) provide an alarming statistic of a significant boom in births outside of marriage for college-educated white women in a town west of Cleveland in 2009. The researchers share how an increase of unwed pregnancies was largely associated with the poor or minorities in the past but has now impacted all social groups across America (DeParle and Tavernise, 2012). The authors share how other studies have provided the public with concerns about births outside marriage, such as how these families struggle to survive, how their children do poorly in schools, and how they are faced with emotional issues related to surviving. Multiple and diverse explanations are offered as to why these women have children outside marriage. Some liberal analysts blame this on the low salaries of the male population, making it challenging for these women to find an acceptable mate. Conservatives suggest that women really have no desire to get married when they can earn just as much if not more than their male counterparts. Presently, being single does not have the same negative views as it did several decades ago. DeParle and Tavernise (2012) show how certain groups in society view getting married as a designation rather than one of many steps to reaching marriage. Although the article provides staggering numbers, such as a third of Americans being born outside marriage, the most significant statistic concerns black children. Deparle, and Tavernise (2012) state that "73 percent of black children are born outside marriage, compared with 53 percent of Latinos and 29 percent of whites" (p. 2). This is certainly an area that requires significant attention because of the achievement gap between white and African American students. Whether black parents/guardians or white parents/guardians, women have become more independent than ever. Women simply do not depend on men as they did in the past. The article reveals that the individual's

satisfaction and self-development are the key pieces to this rationalization of single women having births outside marriage.

Programs to Assist With Parental Involvement

Castillo and Winchester (2001) examine the impact an after-school program has on student achievement and social awareness. An elementary and a middle school in rural Texas participated in a 21st Century Community Learning Centers program. Federal dollars improved the community and provided high hopes for the low-income students to flourish academically. The study revealed how the parents/guardians felt about being involved due to their lack of education. The majority of the families had low social capital with the process of the American education system and simply did not know how to discover how the system worked. The researcher discovered the important impact of bridging the school and families. Obtaining input from parents/guardians serves to produce positive academic outcomes from building parents/guardians' social capital around extra-curricular involvement (Castillo and Winchester, 2001). Inviting parents/guardians to school is a simple step demonstrated in the literature, yet educators fail to do so. This research explained how an after-school program provided a growth in parental involvement in areas like tutoring, leading meetings and even playing key roles on committees that deal directly with decision-making that impacts their children. Parents/guardians began to express their needs for increasing their academic skills to support their children at home. Providing courses in academic areas and English in the afternoon and weekends for parents/guardians helped strengthen their confidence. The researchers show the benefits of having parents/guardians take on meaningful roles in their children's educational endeavors (Castillo and Winchester, 2001). Parents/guardians

were not the only group impacted by the after-school programs. Teachers gained valuable experiences from the collaborative activities as well. Teachers were able to learn more about their students.

Jasis (2004) examines information on a group of parents/guardians who saw the need to come together and develop a plan of action to support and improve the educational needs of their children. Instead of passively allowing the school to educate their children completely, these parents/guardians formed and developed effective strategies they could implement and work in conjunction with the school. Jasis (2004) demonstrates how parents/guardians can be motivated with specialized programs that will increase the academic success of their children in high schools by partnering with the middle school. This was most significant for the school and the community. The large number of parents/guardians involved continued to gain momentum as more parents/guardians became involved, ultimately making tremendous differences while forming positive relationships between the schools and the families. Latino students are often collectively underserved, but these strategies contributed to improving Latino student achievement. Jasis (2004) notes, "The history of Latino schooling in the Southwestern United States has been marked by an ongoing struggle for educational equality" (p. 33). In a number of studies, Latino students are not provided the same respect as other students at school. Latino parents/guardians feel less valued by the way teachers treat them simply because their English is poor. Evidence proved that the Latino parents/guardians were able to experience higher levels of success through this group effort of working with the school. The key component in this study was the school's embracing the La Familia Initiative.

Lew (2007) compares two groups of Korean youths in an urban school setting. The researcher looks at social class backgrounds and how they applied to student achievement. The researcher demonstrates how parents/guardians with higher social capital benefit even their high-school dropouts by advancing opportunities for those children (Lew, 2007). In the research, key structural factors of family income, parental education level, and access to schooling resources are provided, offering significant movement with student academic achievement. This article mentions availability of resources and cultural capital as the advantages middle-class parents/guardians have over working-class parents/guardians. The parents/guardians who do not have time to visit schools and communicate with the teachers rely heavily on the school to take care of the needs of their children. Lew (2007) shows how the schools in this study valued the cultural capital of middle to high socio-economic classes but not the low socio-economic classes. Asian Americans took a lead in learning from their community about the American school system or found translators to help educate them on guiding their children through it. Social capital is mentioned by the authors with Korean church communities whose families have a network of social norms which reinforce attitudes of doing well in school. In many cases, the children have multiple sets of parents/guardians to help enforce the values of academic accomplishments.

Auerbach (2010) examines a parental involvement program located in Los Angeles in a predominantly Latino immigrant school's community in 2009. Auerbach opens her article with a statement from a former elementary principal in Los Angles stating the need for parents/guardians' voices to be in everything at the school. Openly admitting the difficulty with this approach, the researcher advocates the need for

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parents/guardians to have input with every facet of public schools (Auerbach, 2010). The researcher shares a concern with trust between the school and the population of low socio-economic status. This is a crucial ingredient that is needed for any real partnership. Parental involvement, however, is often viewed differently when it comes to black and white. The two races are generally categorized as whites being of higher socio-economic status and those of color being of low-income. The parents/guardians of high socio-economic status will have more direct contact with the school, and the opposite is true of the parents/guardians of low socio-economic status. The low-income parents/guardians face obstacles that the other parents/guardians do not. Auerbach (2010) demonstrates how parents/guardians of the low socio-economic class are at a disadvantage with school involvement because of variables like cultural disjointedness and histories of distrust. Auerback refers to Cooper (2009), who shares the research on the feelings of low-income black mothers toward schools. They do not feel as if they are valued or have anything to offer in order to form a partnership. The researcher recommends additional research on partnerships between parents/guardians and schools (Auerbach, 2010).

McCollough (2011) studies students and parents/guardians at Falfurrias High School, a rural school in Falfurrias, Texas, in 2009. The purpose of this program was to motivate students to attend college. The school was predominately populated by Hispanic students. Parental involvement was reviewed in this program, and it was demonstrated that parental involvement has a significant impact on student achievement. Parents/guardians' "educational expectations" appear to be the main concept in this article. McCollough (2011) promotes strong parental involvement programs that develop

parents/guardians' educational expectations because they have proven to have the greatest impact on students making the decision to attend college.

This literature review focuses on five areas dealing with parental involvement: (a) perceptions on parental involvement, (b) varying types of parental involvement, (c) school leadership's view on parental involvement, (d) environmental impacts on parental involvement, and (e) programs to assist with parental involvement. The researcher specifically examined the five areas listed above with parental involvement at the middle grade level. Through this literature review, the researcher noted parental involvement barriers, partnerships between school and family, types of parental involvement, and strategies for increasing parental involvement.

This review of literature advocates that parental involvement is a crucial component of improving student achievement. It is recognized to be important enough to create federal mandates requiring schools to build relationships with parents/guardians. The review demonstrates that these mandates are often satisfied on paper only. A number of studies also demonstrate the lack of parental involvement strategies for minority and low socio-economic status groups. Upper and middle class families take advantage of involvement at their children's schools. Other social classes are generally not being reached by school leaders. Some researchers argue that the lack of social capital is a major contributor to minority groups not taking part in school involvement. Further research is needed to examine what schools are actually accomplishing with parental involvement beyond the paper trail. Major gains in academic achievement across the social classes are possible if schools are able to implement strategies that build social capital with minority groups through parental involvement programs.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter explains the research design and methodology used to investigate how school leadership develops parental involvement strategies in four SC middle schools. The conclusion of this chapter will provide the limitations and summary of the data analysis. The purpose of this study is to describe what parental involvement strategies four SC middle school principals in lower socio-economic schools employ and identify those successful practices implemented to increase social capital and academic achievement.

Study Design and Rationale

The research utilizes a qualitative methodology to discover critical data by going well below the surface of reported parental involvement methods in select SC middle schools. "The study of the case, however defined, tends to involve in-depth and often longitudinal examination with data gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and document collection and analysis" (Glesne, 2011, p. 22). This study used a qualitative methodology to explore what strategies of parental involvement SC middle school principals utilized to improve academic achievement. Historically, Epstein's six type of parental involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) from her *Framework of Six*

Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership is the most recruited instrument applicable to research in this area.

Based on more than three decades of research on parental involvement, family engagement, and community partnerships, NNPSS's tools, guidelines, and action team approach may be used by all elementary, middle and high schools to increase involvement and improve student learning and development (Epstein, 2000).

As stated earlier, there is a limited amount of scholarly literature on social capital in middle schools.

Theoretical Framework

The goal of this qualitative research was to discover critical data by challenging superficial reported parental involvement methods in select SC middle schools. This study utilized the lens developed by Joyce L. Epstein and Associates (2009) *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined a conceptual framework as one that "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied - the key factors, constructs, or variables - and the presumed relationships among them. Frameworks can be rudimentary or elaborate, theory-driven or commonsensical, descriptive, or causal" (p. 18).

The theory driven by this research is Epstein's Framework (2004) of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership and Sample Practices; Challenges and Redefinitions for the Successful Design and Implementation of the Six Types of Involvement; and Expected Results for Students, Parents, and Teachers of the Six Types of Involvement. Another critical component guiding this study was Epstein's *Overlapping Spheres of Influence*, which "recognizes that the three major contexts in

which students learn and grow - the family, the school, and the community - may be drawn together or pushed apart" (Epstein et al, 2009, p. 10).

The Interview, Observation and Document Protocol provided the map that was guided by Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement and Overlapping Spheres of Influence. The Interview Protocol covered questions in the following areas: (for Principals) - Type 2: Communicating, Type 5: Decision-Making, and Type 6: Collaborating With the Community; (for Teachers) - Type 2: Communicating and Type 5: Decision-Making; (for Parents/guardians) - Type 1: Parenting, Type 3: Volunteering, and Type 4: Learning at Home. The Observation Protocol covering all Six Types of Involvement guided the researcher during shadowing of both the principal and the teachers. The Document Protocol provided primary focus on Type 2: Communicating. The researcher advocates using these varying methods as a check and balances system to ensure the support in validating the conclusion (Maxwell, 2013).

Participant Selection

Patton's *maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling* and *confirming* is the strategy used for this study. The researcher practiced purposeful sampling in the attempt to demonstrate a dominant theme (Patton, 2002). This study investigated the stated methods of parental involvement by middle school principals in four school districts in SC. To make generalizations across SC, the researcher identified four schools with an eligibility of fifty percent or higher free and reduced school meals benefits from different regions of SC: the Upstate, the Midlands, the Pee Dee, and the Low Country. Patton notes how a study can be effective in selecting a few sites as long as the researcher utilizes geographical variation. The site selections included public middle schools that

house grades six – eight. Private, charter, parochial, and virtual schools were not included. The 2012 SC Annual School Report Card was used to select one middle school in each of the four areas of the state, all with an Absolute Rating of Good or above. The researcher requested participation from all qualifying school districts in each of the four regions for the sake of getting at least one participant in each region to agree. It was stated that whoever responded first would be the district used for the research.

Confirming and disconfirming cases is the participant selection strategy used in this study. Patton (2002) explains the purpose as expanding and strengthening the investigation, searching for irregularities. Participants for this study began with a list of districts from the SC Department of Education website. A formal letter requesting permission to have the district and middle school principals selected to participate was mailed to all qualifying SC school district superintendents. For each of the districts that provided consent to participate, the researcher obtained email addresses and emailed all the middle school principals in the respective districts that have the Absolute Rating of Good or above on their school report cards with the consent letter from their superintendent. Those with no replies agreeing to participate in the study by email received a phone call to the schools verifying a receipt of the study request information. The participant teacher and parent were identified by the respective school principals. These two individuals from each school were selected through a random selection process with the help of the school.

Researcher Role

The strengths the researcher brings to this study are first-hand experience and knowledge. Using these strengths provided a perspective from an individual who will

connect with the participants. This knowledge helped with designing the study and keeping parameters within the scope of the study. Working with low socio-economic populations for over twenty years and reviewing literature on social capital has provided some interesting connections between theory and practice. A significant weakness can be described as being too close to the study and not being able to obtain critical data. Minimizing the potential impact of the researcher's subjectivity and positionality throughout this research process was accomplished by following the appropriate qualitative research models and using multiple data collection strategies to help with the validity of the study. An example of one of these multiple data collection strategies is the use of *Kvale's Quality Criteria for an Interview*. Triangulation is another strong strategy, offering checks and providing validity to the study; it is accomplished by using multiple methods. These strategies are commonly used in qualitative research.

Data Collection Methods

This study was submitted to the University of SC Institutional Review Board for approval. The researcher visited the four schools three times each. The first visit was for an interview with the principal, teacher, and parent. This and the other interviews provided descriptive data in the interviewees' own words. The researcher's questions were structured from Patton's six kinds of questions for the purpose of receiving clear questions and answers on the topic being discussed. The second visit consisted of shadowing the principal and teachers for a day. The shadowing for each participant was in a role as an *Observer as participant*. The third visit was for observations around the school to obtain study-related documents. The researcher analyzed the documents for

contextual questions and analytical value. These documents included parent education

flyers, newsletters informing parents/guardians of upcoming events.

Table 3.1

Data Collection Design Matrix

Data Sources	Research Questions		
Participating Groups	What strategies do South Carolina middle school principal utilize in select successful schools to increase parental involvement among students of low socio-economic statuses?	How are these parental involvement strategies perceived to contribute to higher student achievement by principals, teachers, and parents/guardians?	Are these SC middle school principals' practices consistent with Epstein's model to improve social capital of low socio-economic status families?
Principals	Interview and Observation Notes		
Teachers			
Parents			
Documents/Artifacts	Document Analysis Summaries		

Interview Protocol

The data collection from interviewing was the principal instrument utilized in this

study. The researcher used audio-tape for semi-structured, open-ended interview

questions. A principal, teacher and parent from each of the four schools were

interviewed. Twelve total interviews were conducted. The interviews were face-to-face at the school.

The six interview questions are posed to obtain data in each of *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership*, a manual for implementing best practices. Question Number One is on parenting: what are some activities performed by the school to increase social capital of the parents/guardians in creating the most conducive home environment for students to be successful academically? Question Number Two is on communicating: what methods of communications are in place for the school to reach parents/guardians and parents/guardians to reach the school? Question Number Three is on volunteering: what volunteer opportunities are available for parents/guardians, and how are they communicated? Question Number Four is on learning at home: how has the school provided assistance and resources on helping students with homework? Question Number Five is on decision making: how does the school involve parents/guardians in equal decision-making? Question Number Six is about collaborating with the community: how does the school partner with the community? The answers provided were connected with notes the researcher collected during the observations.

Observation Protocol

Shadowing the principals and teachers was crucial in supporting the data collected from the conducted interviews. The researcher had the opportunity to observe exactly how the principal interacted with parents/guardians from varying socio-economic groups and how the teachers interacted with the parents/guardians, both in person and through communication strategies. This served as a part of the triangulation for validity in

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implementing Epstein's six types of involvement. Eight total observations were conducted. The researcher shadowed the principal for half the day and shadowed a recommended teacher by the principal for the second half of the day. The researcher's notes were categorized into the following: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. The data collected during the observations served to anchor the answers provided during the interviews, but the process of triangulation was complete with the collection of documents.

Document Protocol

Collecting actual artifacts provided strong, fundamental support in replicating these practices for other schools to be successful in increasing academic achievement through parental involvement practices. The researcher asked for permission to make copies of all documents. Each of the documents were categorized by items that fit with parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community.

Data Analysis

This analysis performed from the data received from interviewing, observing, and collecting documents serves as triangulation. Using multiple methods for data recording is the best method to validate qualitative studies (Glesne, 2011). The researcher compiled the three categorized data areas of the four successful schools and reported the methods that make these schools successful in parental involvement for all socio-economic groups equally.

CHAPTER IV

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, this study examined in detail successful parental involvement strategies utilized by four SC middle school principals that contributed to higher rates of academic achievement for low socio-economic students. This chapter is organized in terms of the three specific research questions posed in Chapter 1. Epstein's six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) are used to provide guidance for each of the research questions. The chapter first reports the strategies being utilized to increase parental involvement among students of low socio-economic status; it then examines how these parental involvement strategies are perceived to contribute to higher student achievement by principals, teachers and parents/guardians; and finally it explores whether or not these SC middle school principals' practices are consistent with Epstein's model to improve the social capital of low socio-economic status families.

Data Analysis Findings

Research Question 1: What strategies do SC middle school principals utilize in select successful schools to increase parental involvement among students of low socio-economic status? According to the interviews with the four SC middle school principals, a variety of strategies are used to increase parental involvement among students of low socio-economic status. The family involvement strategies to increase social capital by the

school, as reported by the principals, observed during shadowing, and noted from documents, were parenting activities, methods of communication, volunteering, learning at home, equal decision-making for parents/guardians, and partnering with the community.

Type 1 - Parenting

The activities shared to increase social capital of the parents/guardians in creating the most conducive home environment for students to be successful academically by the four SC middle school principals are accomplished with district workshops, parent orientation and parent-teacher conferences, non-academic activities, family nights and student showcase nights, and technology.

Each of the four districts offered a variety of workshops for families. These workshops ranged from discipline specific to general parental involvement. During the interviews, one of the parents/guardians explained,

> We do have workshops. Now, it's more of the district that puts them on, but they held a lot of workshops over the summer to get parents/guardians to know what your child is going to learn; because of the economic conditions of our school, a lot of parents/guardians can't keep up with their students. I have to admit my child is going into the 8th grade, and his math is getting beyond my capabilities, so the district had training sessions all summer long or workshops where parents/guardians could go in, and they would talk with them, and they say this is what your child is learning this year. If you need more help, by all means contact us.

Parent orientations occurred at all four of these schools for sixth grade families. The activities at the orientations ranged from the school providing the families with basic information about the school and how to help their children be successful as middle school students to the schools having a book reading series on parenting skills for middle school students. A principal stated,

> That's one thing that we try to do. We do our rising sixth grade parent orientation in which we basically talk to parents/guardians about how to be middle school parents/guardians, how to let go, how to let their kids make mistakes. Last year, I could probably get you some hard evidence; we did a parent series on a book called *Raising Teens with Love and Logic*. It's Levine, and, I can't think of the author's name at the moment, but it was a fantastic book. We had maybe about forty parents/guardians attend. It really helped them to understand their middle school child and to not make the mistake of trying to not let them fail but to let them fail and let them learn from those mistakes now, before they get to high school, when it really counts.

Non-academic activities are another area these four SC middle school principals shared during the interviews that provided unique moments for schools to interact and provide social capital in a less formal manner for the parents/guardians. A principal explained how they always invited their parents/guardians to come in to have lunch with the children. She explained how that is an opportunity for them to visit and not only talk with their children but to talk with teachers, too. She continued to say that so many parents/guardians do not want to come to the parent conferences; they are too busy. They have work schedules and things outside of work that will call them away from the school.

When they have an opportunity to take a lunch break and come and eat with the children, however, it is a win-win situation for all. This principal highlighted extracurricular activities being a huge opportunity for parental involvement. This principal reiterated, "Once again, that's another opportunity for them to converse with the teachers and the staff members."

Family nights and student showcase nights are very prominent activities with these four SC middle schools. During the interviews, each principal recognized how challenging it is to actually get parents/guardians involved in a traditional sense of actually being present at the school. The reasons provided ranged from transportation issues to work schedules. Each expressed the key to obtaining a higher parent turn-out was to combine activities, to keep them to a minimum time-wise, and to offer food, which helped tremendously. One of the principals stated,

> We did a Family Reading Night, which we introduced summer reading books. Parents/guardians came out, and the teachers presented the different books that kids would choose from, summer reading books. The school, we buy the summer reading books for the kids, because these kids are poor, and if we said, okay, go somewhere and get the books, they would not be able to because there's no bookstore to go to. So we give them a copy, even though it costs us some money. We feel like if we get it to them, better chance of them actually reading the book over the summer. Teachers explain that to the parents/guardians. We get them out here, because we do a hot dog supper. We have our school Book Fair going on at the same time.

Technology has annually increased as an important strategy. Teacher webpages and new educational software products which allow parents/guardians to have immediate access to student grades and other pertinent information have allowed both parents/guardians and teachers to communicate early enough to prevent students from falling too far behind in school. All four principals agreed that this is opening up more communication between home and the school. One principal told how, "They call and talk a lot, and our parents/guardians feel comfortable enough that they'll call and ask me, they'll call and ask the guidance counselor, Okay, I need to talk with the teacher. What's going on in that classroom? Email, Parent Portal, where they can see kids' grades immediately." Epstein validates these types of involvement strategies and supports them in research. She explains how they help families to establish a home environment that will support children as students by assisting families with parenting skills (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Type 2 - Communicating

The methods of communication shared by the four SC middle school principals are phone calls, mailings and newsletters, their Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSA) and School Improvement Councils (SIC), websites and emails, and meetings with the principal.

These four schools utilized phone calls in a variety of ways from a simple call to one parent to major call out systems to all parents/guardians. The phone system remains an important means of communication for these four SC middle schools. One principal explained the need for continuing to use phone calls, stating, "But we're lower socio-economic, and some of them don't have e-mails, so we tend to get phone calls. They will

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phone and have questions or whatever. Maybe criticisms or whatever the case may be."

Another principal recommended the use a system which allows them to program messages that can be sent to all their students at once:

> We have an Edulink system. Different school districts, they call it various things, but here in our district we call it Edulink, where I can launch out a message to all the households there, inviting them to come into the school, if there's an event going on. If I'm sending home report cards, I send home a message. If there's a parent conference night, the message will go out. We use it for any event or any opportunity for the parents/guardians to come to the school. If we have inclement weather, I'll send something out.

Newsletters and mailings help to create a consistent medium for communications between the families and the school. Although not all items provided to students to deliver home actually make it home, this is still a method many families appreciate as these principals expressed during the interviews. One principal stated, "We send home flyers, believe it or not, still at the middle school level. Now, they all don't make it home, Mr. Boatwright, you know that." In some cases the principals felt that items of more importance needed to have additional mechanisms to ensure the delivery of items to parents/guardians. Another principal explained, "When we send home important information, we'll couple it with a phone to say, your child is bringing home free and reduced lunch forms. Your child is bringing home picture day information."

Parent organizations like the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) and the School Improvement Council (SIC) help in communicating with families, but they do not always reach everyone. The principals expressed how these organizations are completely

open to all families regardless of socio-economic status, but they do not always have parents/guardians from low socio-economic statuses involved. One principal explained, "Our SIC, we probably used it a little bit incorrectly in that we have our Board, but any parent is welcome to come at any time. It is the same thing with the PTSA."

All four of the principals shared how technology is allowing them to reach more of their families in a variety of ways. The schools are able to place information on their websites for parents/guardians and the community to have access to events happening at the school even if they do not have technology at home. Many parents/guardians are utilizing the computers in the county libraries, and these parents/guardians, including the low socio-economic families, now have smart phones and are able to connect to Wi-Fi at restaurants like McDonald's. Parents/guardians are able to obtain information faster than they used to, and they are able to make contact with the teachers when they have a concern. One principal explained, "Parent Portal is probably the biggest way that our parents/guardians can communicate with the school as far as looking at their students' grades and keeping up with it." He explained how email would be the next way. He also used Alert Mail, an automatic message system which works well for the school. The principal explained how they would record the message, and then system sends it out to all parents/guardians.

Strategies like these enforce school-to-home and home-to-school communication as supported by Epstein's framework of involvement (Epstein et al, 2009). Social media is an alternative technology tool being used. Another principal explained,

> We used Facebook...We're just now starting to use it a good bit. That was one
>
> way I got parents/guardians to come in and volunteer to help us with some of our

spring events, our field day and our activities and things. I said I need five

parents/guardians to come in and help with this or help with that, and they would

messenger back on Facebook and say, 'Yeah, I can be there. What time?' Those

kinds of things. That's been a big addition. Meeting with the principal is the most

direct way parents/guardians have to increasing their social capital with the

school.

Each of these four SC middle school principals believed in providing time for

both parents/guardians and students. The methods ranged from a typical meeting with the

principal to special planned events like breakfast with the principal. One of the principals

stated, "September-October I always do a 'Breakfast with the Principal.' Then in the

winter time, we'll do a lunch, and in the spring, we'll do a dessert. I try to do three

different times of day, hopefully hitting three different populations of parents/guardians

just to come in. I have a quick twenty-minute little spiel that I do about what's going on at

the school."

Type 3 – Volunteering

The opportunities given for parents/guardians to volunteer by the four SC middle

school principals are parent organizations, extra-curricular activities, and extra help

around the school. Regardless of the type of volunteering, it was suggested that all

opportunities for parents/guardians are key for receiving their support in their child's

educational process. The principals explained how recruiting parent volunteers can be

difficult but how they must always continue trying new strategies to get as many

parents/guardians as possible involved. One principal explained how he attempts to ask

the parents/guardians at the beginning of the year about what types of volunteer

opportunities they would be interested in at the school. This principal stated, "We do a parent volunteer form at registration and ask parents/guardians to sign up. On that registration form they can let us know what they're willing to do or interested in doing."

Parent organizations like the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) and School Improvement Councils (SIC) are standard among our schools, but they do not always reach families of all socio-economic status. Also, there are often years that a number of parents/guardians join these parent organizations but rarely take part in the meetings. One principal stated, "Our PTSA is not as active as it could be, but for a situation we're in, I think it's probably about as good as it's going to be." He explained how they get about 100 people to join, but all of them do not come to the meetings. The principal said it is mostly an administrative group, and the parents/guardians become officers that actually run everything.

Extra-curricular activities appear to be a very popular area for parent volunteerism. Parents/guardians volunteer at the sporting events by working the gates at football games, working the canteen and supervising dances. These are just a few mentioned by the four principals. One principal stated, "We have parents/guardians that volunteer with the athletic programs and feed teams and come to games. They work judging lines at volleyball. They help us out if we need help at the gates or selling concessions."

Extra help around the school is another noteworthy opportunity for parents/guardians to be involved with the educational process. Parents/guardians volunteer by making copies for teachers, working the book fair, and monitoring during state testing. Each of these principals expressed how important it is to build a foundation

with the parents/guardians where they enjoy volunteering. One principal noted, "They come in and copy papers, go pick things up, run to the store. There are just a number of things that they do. A lot of times they'll just say, 'I'll volunteer. Just let me know what you need,' and then we just contact them and say, 'Can you do this?'"

Type 4 – Learning at Home

The learning at home strategies shared by the four SC middle school principals are extra help before and after the school day, extra help during the school day, technology, and textbooks at home. All four principals noted how great it would be if all principals could reach all families with workshops and training for parents/guardians on how to access resources that would have an impact on student learning at home to support the school curriculum, but each expressed the necessity of trying additional strategies as well. Providing extra help both before and after school seemed to be a prominent strategy with these four middle school principals. One principal stated,

> We do not have a homework center, whereas most schools have a homework center. What I've charged all of my teachers with: they have to have a day of tutoring, one day a week. Some do it more than that, but at least one day a week they must provide tutoring. They can either do it before school or after school. The average teacher will tutor one day a week after school. It could be with class assignments, the homework, or whatever the child needs assistance with.

Each of the principals commented how some students simply are not able to arrive early or stay late after school due to transportation and scheduling issues. Being able to offer extra help to those students contributed to fulfilling a need for that population. One principal stated, "We do what we call Café. It's during lunch. Teachers

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are available if students have issues with their homework, or they are not doing homework, then you get caught up." The principal explained how they would send the students to the Café where they can work while they have their lunch, and then they can ask for help if they need it.

Technology is uncovering strategies each year that are helping schools to extend learning at home. Each of the principals expressed a variety of methods they utilize with technology. PowerSchool, Parent Portal, and Edmodo were prominent among the four SC middle school principals. One principal stated, "Now through our technology, we have Edmodo accounts, so all of our kids can email on Edmodo." He explained how they can contact any teacher, including him, and ask questions. The principal explained how Edmodo has changed the way that students submit homework and the way that they ask for help.

Each principal described how most of their decisions are based on the availability of resources. Feedback received from both parents/guardians and teachers often provided a need for some students to have extra textbooks at home. One principal stated,

> Pretty sure it's in science and maybe math...two of the books, a lot of the publishers will give us an extra copy. They have, like, a corner cut off. We will leave those in the classroom, and the kids keep their own book at home. Because we found kids always saying, 'Oh, I left my book at school, so I can't do my homework.' So that way, they can leave those at home, and we can use just that publisher's book in the classroom as a classroom set-up kind of thing. Also, we found that they don't tear the books up because they're not going back and forth. I know we do it in science; we may do it in math, when they came out. Those give

the opportunity for the kid not to tell the parent, 'Oh, I left the book at school. I can't do it.' That kind of thing.

Type 5 – Decision Making

Being able strategically to involve parents/guardians in school-related decision making requires careful planning ahead of time. The ways these principals involved their parents/guardians in decision making are surveys, parent organizations, and adjunct family. A school increases the student participation levels in programs and activities when parents/guardians are involved with decision making.

Surveys were used by all four of the SC middle school principals. The results from the SC Department of Education Parent Survey are utilized along with other specialized surveys developed by the schools to help move schools in a positive direction that parents/guardians would be in agreement with. One principal stated, "Through surveys, we just cleaned up our website. We used to put our surveys out on that website if there's a decision." He explained that they have not made many decisions that would require significant input from their parents/guardians, but that is the primary tool they use. One principal reported that this is his second year and that he had just completed the school's second parent survey; he added that the few surveys that he normally sends home requiring needed input would be posted to the school's website through Survey Monkey where the parents/guardians can actively participate and have their voices heard.

Parent organizations like the Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSA) and the School Improvement Councils (SIC) appear to be dominant in how the four SC middle school principals utilize parents/guardians in decision making. One principal stated,

Of course, we let parents/guardians, anybody participate on SIC that wants to. It's not really a fundraising organization. Really the committee there is an advisory. I don't mind if parents/guardians want to come in and want to express whatever views. Of course, PTSA is very strong here. Our Board probably consists of about 12 to 15 very active parents/guardians. I'm pretty excited about that. I bring a lot of stuff to the SIC and to the PTSA. We share all of our test data, and we share our scores.

"Adjunct family" is an unusual term used by a principal during an interview. This principal said,

I'll share this, and this is just my opinion, take it for what it's worth. Some of our parents/guardians aren't very good parents/guardians, and I feel like a lot of our teachers...Because I want to hire someone, I tell them, I don't care a whole lot about what your math skills are, I want you to love these kids. Love and care about them. I feel like a lot of our teachers, I feel like our school, is a family atmosphere. I feel like it's almost like a family. So I think that's kind of like the parent influence. So when you're getting some positive feedback from someone, someone they respect...and that's the key to relationship between teachers and the students. If I had to look at what our school was doing differently, I think it's...we're the adjunct family for a lot of our kids. Because we have lots of weird family dynamics sent up here.

Type 6 – Collaborating With the Community

The ways the four SC middle school principals collaborated with the community are partnerships with local businesses, mentoring programs, and students are a part of the

community. Each community has its own unique characteristics which determine the types of involvement for the four schools. The local businesses like Boeing and Chick-fil-A are partners that contribute either financially or with in-kind donations. One principal explained,

> We have, of course, MUSC, with the wellness grant; we got over $3,000 from them last year. We're also paired with Boeing. They gave us $75,000 to start an engineering program. Kind of like you, they looked around and surveyed and said, 'Hey, here's a school with high poverty that's got some pretty good scores. That's where we want to be.' They gave us that money to start, it's called, Middle Schools Gateway to Technology, but the high school program is Project Lead The Way. It's all the same.

The mentoring programs range from The United Way to local citizens coming to the school and playing an important role in a student's life. One principal stated,

> There's a local funeral director, maybe not funeral director, maybe his dad's a funeral director. He helped with a kid here whose father was killed. Anyway, this little kid was just always silent and kept to himself. When this guy started coming like, once every week or once every two weeks the little kid just brightened up that somebody was taking time with him. I mean, he was bringing McDonald's burgers for him when he came. That was like the biggest deal to that kid. That kid was just so happy. Just those kinds of things within the community are examples that make a major difference with our students. Once again, it feels like it's somebody taking a parent role in the life of somebody because there was no one there to do that.

Students being a part of the community is an interesting perspective agreed upon by the principals. The principals explained how productive it is to involve stakeholders in decision-making, so why not include the students as stakeholders, also. One principal said,

> We always try to go on our television program and say, 'Hey, look, you're a stakeholder here. You've asked for these things. This is what we're doing for you. You want a PTSA dance. We're going to have a PTSA dance.' The kids feel like, 'oh I have a voice, and my voice is heard.' Sometimes we cheat a little bit, and we were going to do something anyway, but we'd make them think that it was their idea.

Research Question 2: How are these parental involvement strategies perceived to contribute to higher student achievement by principals, teachers and parents/guardians?

Although *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement* were not completely understood by the all of interviewees, all of those interviewed agreed that their respective schools do implement parental involvement strategies that fit in each of the areas of the framework. According to the interviews with the four SC middle school principals, teachers and parents/guardians, a variety of strategies are perceived to contribute to higher student achievement. Many of these strategies learned from conducting interviews, observed during shadowing and also noted from collected documents were parenting activities, methods of communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making for parents/guardians, and partnering with the community that contributed to higher student achievement.

Type 1 - Parenting

Each of the four districts offered an abundance of activities that each expressed had value in contributing to higher student achievement. Family Night at schools is one example of an activity where the parents/guardians can visit their children's core content areas and find out more about the teachers and their instruction. They can get a greater understanding of the standards, the assessments that are used, homework policies, and classroom procedures and protocol so the parents/guardians will know what is going on in the classroom. In conferences during the year, teachers talk with the parents/guardians about their children's progress and provide parents/guardians with information about the teacher webpages as additional resources. Each of the districts expressed good relationships between the school and home. The parents/guardians call teachers and feel comfortable talking with them. The parents/guardians appreciate how they have access to technology resources like emails and Parent Portal where they can receive feedback and see their child's grades immediately. During the day, all four schools provide some type of extra assistance for struggling students because, it was expressed, many students simply do not return homework. They either do not have the environment at home, or they do not have the help at home to get their assigned studies completed, so the schools provide additional time during the day to work with them. One parent interviewed said their district does have workshops for parents/guardians that often provide a focus for families. She explained how the district provided training on parenting skills and health topics. This parent gave examples of how the school provides opportunities for families to learn how to help their children with their studies or with other activities around the school. Her son was in a self-contained class but comes out for science, social studies and

reading. She suggested that the relationship she had with the teacher was so good that both of them could address issues easily.

All three groups, principals, teachers and parents/guardians, agree that a school needs a variety of approaches in order to be successful with increasing student academic achievement especially since there are such a variety of families.

Type 2 - Communicating

What are the most important areas in communication between the school and home? All of the participants interviewed agreed that communication plays a key role in contributing to student achievement. Many of the participants expressed how reaching every family can be challenging, but a variety of methods was shared during this research. All of the schools have the internet, and email was expressed as a significant addition to their tool kit for communicating. Teachers are able to create class webpages which often slows back-and-forth emailing for information that can be placed on their sites. The principals told how parents/guardians can also contact them by phone, and faculties actually do phone conferences to help with those families unable to come to the school. For those parents/guardians who are able to come to the school, there are face-to-face conferences that are available.

Another very popular means of communicating with parents/guardians is texting. For many of the parents/guardians, texting works better than the other modes of communicating. One teacher said, "They'll send me a quick text, and I'll send them a quick text back. It really depends on the parent and what works best for them." The schools did make it very clear that they did still have some families who do not have

accessible technology, so they continue to incorporate traditional communicating methods to reach all parents/guardians. Another teacher stated,

> We have some parents/guardians that don't have access to the internet, and that's something that I'm always constantly reminding people. Everybody who you think has internet access does not have internet access, so we still have to have other ways of communicating like flyers and letters. I have one child I can think of, I really, really wanted to talk to his mom, and she didn't return phone calls, so I sent her a certified letter. Low and behold, here came mom. We got a chance to talk because I was really concerned about this child.

As important as it is to have a variety of methods in communicating about academic achievements, it is even more important to communicate those complimentary efforts like opportunities for volunteering as well. Epstein would support such involvement activities which allow families to stay in touch with principals and teachers (Epstein, Sanders, Sheldon, Simon, Salinas, Janson, Williams, 2009).

Type 3 - Volunteering

Parents/guardians volunteering on the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) and the School Improvement Council (SIC) were the top two mentioned. The principals, teachers, and parents/guardians who were interviewed agreed that volunteering helps some families understand the laws and regulations behind many decisions that impact students. This understanding also contributes to more appropriate lobbying of items that will impact student achievement.

The other volunteering opportunities in each of the four schools are unique to their communities. Parents/guardians coaching athletics is prominent in these four SC

middle schools. The principals recruit parents/guardians through newsletters and sending flyers home with the students. Schools also used their phone dialer, bulletin boards, and their marquees. One principal said, "We even use smoke signals and sent text messages. We do whatever it takes! I've actually started a Twitter account this year. We have a Facebook account that we push out information." The teachers of students whose parents/guardians volunteer also have great experiences with those volunteers, contributing to student achievement. One teacher told how some African-American men actually come in and mentor some of the young African-American males who have some disciplinary and academic issues. The teacher did not give reasons for the students' issues, only sharing that it was not because the students could not do the work, but maybe it could be issues at home or that these students do not have parents/guardians at home to get them to do their work. The teacher commended these men who volunteered and praised the positive difference they are making in the students' academic achievement. A parent interviewee offered,

> Okay, now you're in my wheelhouse. I am the PTSA Vice President, so we have a list of general volunteers. When we had Facts and Fees registration, we asked parents/guardians to sign up. If we have an event coming up that we need volunteers for the PTSA, we send out a general email saying if you'd like to help we would be more than happy to have you. The school also has a volunteer coordinator; one of our vice principals has that role. She has her own list of parents/guardians who maybe didn't want to sign up with PTSA but wanted to sign up directly with the school. Volunteer opportunities include anything from book fair, the registration Facts and Fees, selling concessions at sporting events.

There are less of them now because of the federal guidelines. It used to be to come in and sell popcorn. When we have fundraisers to come in and count the money or to take care of the fundraising. The office staff sometimes needs help. The theater and fine arts department might have a need for help building sets or costumes. There are numerous volunteer opportunities, and we try to cover them all. I think we do.

These four SC middle schools shared how they were able to improve student achievement by implementing successful recruiting strategies topped with effective training methods for volunteers. The training provided also extended to the learning at home opportunities as supported by Epstein's rationale that recruiting and organizing parent help and support is the primary actions under volunteering (Epstein, Sanders, Sheldon, Simon, Salinas, Janson, Williams, 2009).

Type 4 – Learning at Home

One of the more challenging areas for schools falls under the category of learning at home. Epstein (2009) would ask for schools to "Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning" (p.16). These four principals expressed how schools can make a difference with student achievement by incorporating additional strategies for those students living in difficult home environments.

The four SC middle school principals do not place a major emphasis on homework. Their reason was because of high poverty. One principal makes it a priority to remind the teachers that homework is not a priority. This principal makes it an important topic every year by emphasizing this fact to the teachers throughout the year. He

explained how the first five days of staff development highlights the fact that homework is not a top priority. A grading speech is provided every year stating that grading needs to be based on achievement, not on behavior. He states, "Behavior should be absolutely no more than a grade's worth."

Technology has allowed for additional strategies to be employed for learning at home. One school shared how every student can use Compass at home for all four core subject areas. Other technology resources like E-Talk, online textbooks, Power School Parent Portal, USA Test Prep, Discus, and Edmodo help some students tremendously that have internet access but fails to help those who do not. For those without internet, the school can provide an extra textbook for the students to keep at home, or students can check out a computer with downloaded assignments to take home. One teacher stated,

> I make special accommodations for those students who do not have internet access. I always interview at the beginning of the year and find out how many, and I make special arrangements for them. I happen to have six computers in my classroom, so I'll allow them to either come in during break or sometimes at the end when they've finished whatever it is we're working on in class. I let them get a jump on whatever it is that we're doing. Most of the teachers here will make those types of concessions for that.

One parent interviewed expressed how many parents/guardians simply appreciate the efforts made by the school to accommodate their unique needs. It makes them feel valued and helps them eliminate reasons their children provide. She said, "I know that with my son, his big thing was he never liked to bring his books home. They've allowed us to take books home, and at the end of the year we just turn them back in. That's really

helped out because then it's no excuse." Each of the principals expressed how making decisions just like this one of providing an extra textbook is critical in building relationships. These types of gestures by the school bridges positive relationships that will contribute to future decision making that will impact student achievement.

Type 5 – Decision Making

All twelve participants involved in this research believe that parents/guardians who are involved in the schools' decision making processes do make a difference with student achievement. The principals value how surveys play a vital role in their decision making. They all expressed how they provide the surveys to the parents/guardians starting in January each year. Any time the school has a parent function, they provide access for the parents/guardians to complete the survey. Some schools get computers set up for them so they can just click and complete it. Other principals have events like breakfast with the principal, lunch with the principal, and dessert with the principal to collect input from parents/guardians. Such sessions give parents/guardians more of an opportunity to help "steer the ship" by providing input. A principal explained that sometimes they have unique situations, and it is not always about the contributions of decisions coming from the parents/guardians: it is how the faculty must proceed to have an impact on students that are not related to academics. One principal stated,

> So when you're getting some positive feedback from someone, someone they respect and that's the key to relationship between teachers and the students. If I had to look at what our school was doing differently, I think it's we're the adjunct family for a lot of our kids. Because we have lots of weird family dynamics sent up here.

A caring faculty was mentioned by all four of these SC middle schools. All four teachers in this study expressed additional areas that go beyond a grade received on an assessment that impacts student achievement. Some of those additional areas mentioned are attendance and discipline. One teacher commented,

We do so many different things. We even give an incentive for perfect discipline. We have an incentive program that I've never seen anywhere else. For all the students in first quarter that have perfect discipline, the first or second week of the second quarter, they get some type of treat. The first treat might be just chips, their choice of chips at break time. The next choice is, I think, they do popcorn. The next go around might be a movie. Then at the end of the year when it's hot, they have popsicles. I think I just heard we had a whole bunch of popsicles left. They'll do popsicles. At the end of the year, all those who've had perfect attendance up to the end of the year, they're invited to go on a Carowinds trip. It makes the students want to, and their parents/guardians encouraging them. You want to be a part of that. You want to be a part of the fun activities. The last two weeks of school we have so much stuff going on that they all want to be a part of all of those activities.

The parents/guardians supported these incentives through Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSA) by conducting fundraisers in the community to sponsor the events because they believed students being absent less, due to disciplinary issues or other reasons, would increase student achievement.

Type 6 – Collaborating With the Community

What are the most effective ways to collaborate with the community? Great relationships exist with each of these four SC middle schools and their community. Whether it be monetary donations or in-kind donations, all twelve participants told how their respective schools collaborate with their communities with smiles on their faces. Each individual's body language demonstrated a sense of pride they have with their partners. Each individual shared significant rationales as to how these community partnerships contributed to student achievement. One principal articulated how a local fast food restaurant has been a great business partner by giving him a stack of free sandwiches, kids' meals, and ice cream which he provides to his teachers for acknowledging their hard work. He expressed how he loved the path this partner affords him with an opportunity to award a teacher.

All four principals articulated the domino effect from a teacher being rewarded to teachers going beyond their normal duties to help their students. The teachers expressed how they are with the students for a significant amount of time and are often able to notice needs of those students. One example provided was how often they noticed students wearing the same clothes all the time. All four teachers commented to how self-esteem contributes to student achievement and providing students with clothes certainly has had tremendous impact on their students in past years. The partnership they expressed with local businesses that supply them with clothes is invaluable. They said they could never afford to buy all the clothes for their students who needed them, and this collaboration with the community does have an indirect if not a direct impact on student success. Epstein's collaborating with the community states how schools can "identify and

integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development" (2009, p.16).

The parents/guardians in this study suggested that it is not always about the community interacting in our school building, but sometimes it is about how the school can interact in the community. Epstein's last type of involvement focuses upon coordinating financial or in-kind resources for the school to help the students (Epstein, 1995; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein & Salinas, 2004). One parent explained,

This past Saturday we had Meet Me at The Market. We have Our Town's Farmers Market every Saturday, and by *we*, I mean the school, not me personally, realized that a lot of the kids didn't know where their food was coming from. The students were thinking that it came from Piggly Wiggly, or it came BI-LO. Our principal thought it would be good for the kids to get out into the community to meet the farmers who are growing their food to see where it comes from. To maybe try a fruit or vegetable they haven't tried before, so he does that twice a year at the market. Then when the kids come out to it, the added incentive is their names gets entered into a drawing, and they win fishing gear or camping gear. We have teachers who also go to the market on those same days, and they will incorporate what the kids are learning in their classrooms to what they're doing at the market whether it's consumerism or marketing or whatever they find a way to incorporate it.

The parents/guardians voiced how they know these types of experiences contribute to the whole child and will influence new interests in certain areas of their education that were not stimulated previously.

Research Question 3: Are these South Carolina middle school principals' practices consistent with Epstein's model to improve social capital of low socio-economic status families?

What makes these four SC middle school principals successful in improving social capital of low socio-economic status families? It is possible for the researcher to conclude that the success of their schools came partly due to utilizing methods that can be placed in Epstein's model, according to the participants in this research. At the end of the six interview questions, all participants were given an opportunity to share any additional information they might want to share that they felt contributed to their school being successful. The principals suggested that the two most important contributors to a successful school are the community and the faculty. Teachers believe that building relationships are the most critical area in having a successful school.

One principal mentioned how a group of financial consultants visit and work with twelve to fifteen of the students who are considered to be low academically. He praised the work of these individuals with these students, admitting that it is amazing how they are able to obtain significant academic gains with these low-performing students. He contributes this success to the positive role modeling. The same principal continued to talk about others from the community making a positive impact in building relationships with the students through mentoring. Mentoring was expressed as an important component, but quality teachers were even more important. Caring teachers are another component the principals agreed on. One principal proclaimed, "I think the number one thing in having a good school is having good teachers. I've been here ten years, and I

think it's important for someone to have continuity." Each of the principals articulated how good teachers are crucial to their schools.

The teachers recommended building strong relationships, that being their top priority. One teacher stated, "You're not just their teacher, you're not just their principal, and you're not just their assistant principal, or you're not just their media center specialist. It's all about building the relationships yet holding them accountable." With authority, the teacher wanted the researcher to know how students will respect a teacher and how students know who cares about them. She suggested that no matter how high a teacher's expectations are for the students, most students will rise to the occasion. If they are not able, then the teacher must ask himself or herself why not. The teacher may need to see about special services or may need to get the students in an additional math class.

Another teacher supported the other teachers in this study, sharing, "I would say the number one thing here is it starts with building a relationship with the kids and it's not just the teacher; it's the principal and the assistant principal. We go to church with these kids. We go out, and we shop at Wal-Mart with them." These teachers believe they all are part of a community. This was evident by statements like how they handled students who get in trouble. If a student gets in trouble in one teacher's class, the teacher communicates this to others who need to know, so the student is aware that the school functions as a team. This was offered as a simile to the child who goes to one parent and does not get what he or she wants and then goes to the other parent hoping to do so. The teachers explained how this helps the students understand that they cannot pit teachers against one another because they all work like a family. One teacher stated, "Now, you're not going

to get everybody, but if a parent or a student wants to be successful, they have every opportunity to be successful here at this school."

The parent participants in this study believe the success of the schools is due to having a great principal and staff. One parent stated,

That's easy, the staff. Without a doubt they're amazing. Our principal directs traffic in the afternoon in the car rider line. He's at every sporting event or fine arts event. They care. The teachers come, and if you're having a birthday party and you invite your teacher, they're going to come. Their day does not start and stop when they walk through that door. They see their kids as I hate to say an extension of their family but almost in that respect, and you get that feeling here. You get the feeling that they want to see you succeed. They're not going to let you get away with the fact that well, I come from a broken home or my dad left. We have so much to offer you that you can't give us an excuse. Give us an excuse, and we'll find a way to fix that.

Another parent described how their principal brings everything together. The parent expressed how wonderful the principal and the assistant principals are at her school. She explained that they care, and because they care so much and their staff sees them caring, it makes the staff want to care. The pay-it-forward perspective surrounds all involved: if a person does something good for somebody, then somebody else will do something good for him or her.

The parents/guardians boasted that the faculty that worked at their schools are truly great people. They feel as if the teachers have dedicated their lives to their community and to these schools because the kids are the future. The parents/guardians

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really felt comfortable at their schools. They feel as if they can say anything because their schools have an open door policy, and anything that they need or anything that they need to talk about, they were able to do just that. One parent proudly admitted, "We can come in and we can talk. And that makes all the difference in the world to me."

Summary

Interviewing participants, shadowing participants and collecting documents provided evidence to how school leadership develops parental involvement strategies with social capital in four SC middle schools. Increasing parents/guardians' social capital of all socio-economic status is a major undertaking by the middle schools in this study. Building the relationships between the school and home is demonstrated by the participants to be critical to increasing student achievement. Each of the schools' principals provided strategies that easily are placed in *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership and Sample Practices*.

Getting all parents/guardians involved in the school is crucial. All their voices must be valued, considered important, and heard equally. The principals in this study expressed how important it is to help all parents/guardians to feel valued. If they are feeling valued, they will participate in school functions, contributing to all involved, especially their own children. These schools utilize a variety of strategies like parent workshops and orientations aligned with successful parenting strategies to increase social capital of their parents/guardians. Teachers communicate through their creative use of technology and phone systems. Through those communication methods, the schools are able to recruit volunteers for mentoring and being involved in parent organizations. The schools shared how these parent volunteer opportunities led to parents/guardians

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acquiring knowledge related to learning at home and having significant decision making

to policies impacting their children. Collaborating with the community may be the last of

the Epstein's six involvement categories, but certainly is not the least important. All four

SC middle school principals expressed that their community partnerships are the

difference maker in getting parents/guardians of all socio-economic statuses involved.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Researchers, such as Auerbach (2009), Epstein (2004), and Thomas et al (2013), provide data to support students performing better academically when school principals utilize a variety of parental involvement strategies to increase their families' school-related knowledge. Although the benefits from having parents/guardians involved are significant, middle school principals do struggle to reach families of low socio-economic status. Studies have demonstrated how Epstein's six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) can possibly produce higher participation rates with parents/guardians of all socio-economic statuses (Epstein, 2004; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Gould, 2011; Griffin & Galassi, 2010; McCollough, 2011; Patel & Stevens, 2010; Wiseman, 2010). Although some stakeholders believe that parent/guardian involvement at the middle school level is not necessary in order for students to experience academic success, researchers provide evidence in support of parents/guardians guiding their children through collaboration with teachers and administration (Auerbach, 2007; Christie & Cooper 2005; Desimone, 1999).

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to learn about the strategies used by four academically successful SC middle schools serving predominantly low socio-economic

families. Specifically, the researcher used Epstein's conceptual framework derived from the theory of overlapping spheres of influence to guide this research in documenting strategies; that framework includes parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

Qualitative techniques were used to obtain data in this study. Vis-à-vis interviewing, shadowing, and the collecting of documents were employed for this purpose. This study investigated the stated methods of parental involvement by middle school principals in four school districts in SC. To make generalizations across SC, the researcher identified four schools with an eligibility of fifty percent or higher free and reduced school meals benefits from different regions of SC: the Upstate, the Midlands, the Pee Dee, and the Low Country. The 2012 SC Annual School Report Card was used to select one middle school in each of the four areas of the state, all with an Absolute Rating of Good or above. Participants for this study were selected through purposeful sampling. Twelve people (4 principals, 4 teachers, and 4 parents/guardians) were interviewed. The interviews provided descriptive data in the interviewees' own words. Eight people (4 principals and 4 teachers) were shadowed for a day to observe these strategies first hand. Finally, the researcher obtained study-related artifacts. The researcher analyzed these documents for contextual and analytical value. These documents included agendas, newsletters informing parents/guardians of upcoming events, and other documents substantiating parental involvement. The three methods listed above served as the primary practice for this research. The remaining sections in this chapter are the discussion of the findings and the recommendations for future research.

Discussion of the Findings

Research Question 1: What strategies do SC middle school principals utilize in select successful schools to increase parental involvement among students of low socio-economic statuses?

During the interviews with the four SC middle school principals, strategies to increase parental involvement among students of low socio-economic status were analyzed. Most of these family involvement strategies were either observed by the researcher during the time of shadowing and/or noted from documents collected from the schools. Although principals provided strategies they executed at their school that fit in each of Epstein's framework categories, unique themes among the schools did surface in each of the six areas.

The principals provided a variety of activities because they understand that what works for one school does not particularly work for all. Each of the four principals expressed the need for having multiple strategies in order to reach families effectively. The scenarios for lack of parental communication and involvement ranged from parents/guardians working more than one job and having limited time to visit the school to parents/guardians feeling uncomfortable visiting the school; one principal admitted that such discomfort could have been from unpleasant experiences when they were in school themselves, and they did not want to revisit that experience. A few of the principals told how their strategies to increase their parents/guardians' knowledge continued to come from trial and error. There is simply not one way of reaching families from all socio-economic statuses. All four principals expressed the importance of educating as many parents/guardians as possible by making it a priority, if students are

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expected to be successful. One principal admitted that some parents/guardians simply will never become involved. He stated,

We have Awards Day programs for every quarter, and you're patting them (students) on the back, praising them because we know there's nobody at home to do that. We also do lots of little extra things. Some of the 6th grade teachers, they would carry the kids out ... the kids that made straight-A honor roll; they carry them up through the little town and carry them bowling. That's not a big deal but for kids that never get to do anything. I came from a poverty background, so I know. When I made straight-As, my parents might've said, 'Good.' And that was it. We didn't get money or anything like that, or 'Thatta, boy,' or anything.

At this particular school, the principal fondly referred to his faculty as some students' "adjunct family." The researcher found the phrase new and surprisingly refreshing. The question some may ask is whether or not the adjunct family concept still supports the researcher's data, suggesting that the results of having family and community involvement with schools can be powerful regardless of whether it is a child's biological family or a school family. Auerbach (2009), however, supports the types of involvement with low socio-economic communities that are genuine and will increase the social capital which will open the door for additional opportunities. For one of the principals, it is not about the level of involvement; it is about maximizing the efforts to reach every parent by whatever means necessary. This principal stated,

The School Improvement Council (SIC) and Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) can help with increasing family involvement. We have a lot of parents/guardians for coaching. We use our newsletters to advertise for coaches,

we send home flyers, we use our phone dialer, and we sometimes do special bulletin boards. Like I said, we use things like our marquee, smoke signals, text messages, just whatever it takes. I've even actually started…I haven't quite gone live with my parent population…but I've actually started a Twitter account this year. We have a Facebook account that we push out information. Some parents/guardians love the texting; some don't. They can choose whether they'll want to be in it or not. Some do all their stuff by the internet. The last couple of years, we have to file for the State, the summer data. Our parent conference rate is always high. It's like 96, 97 percent. Usually the 3 percent that we don't get in to have that conference with is because they were transient. They moved before we could get to them, or they're just that 2 or 3 percent of the population that you can't track down. You don't have a working number. They don't want to come in.

Making it a priority to invite parents/guardians really makes a difference according to the principals. One principal confided that one really must find out what motivates certain parents/guardians. Providing food usually works really well for getting them to the school, but a principal will still need to find ways to ask the parents/guardians how they feel they should be utilized. Tonn (2005) provides an examination on motivations for parents/guardians being involved. According to Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey, an associate professor and the Chairperson of the Department of Psychology and Human Development at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, parents/guardians' motivations for involvement are influenced by three variables: their sense of invitation from the school, teachers, and their own children; their perceptions of how effective their involvement will be; and their personal beliefs about how they should be involved.

Research Question 2: How are these parental involvement strategies perceived to contribute to higher student achievement by principals, teachers and parents/guardians?

This research question followed the same method of data collection as Research Question 1. Interviewing four SC middle school principals, teachers, and parents/guardians provided the researcher with their perceptions of how parental involvement strategies contribute to higher student achievement. Most of these family involvement strategies were either observed by the researcher during the time of shadowing and/or noted from documents collected from the schools.

It may be difficult in some situations to have twelve individuals from four different geographic regions of a state to agree on a topic, but not when it deals with whether their parental involvement strategies contribute to higher student achievement. Equipping parents/guardians with information that can have a positive impact on their children is critical for increasing academic achievement. Middle school students are unique from the elementary and high school students according to these twelve participants. The parents/guardians do not need to be controlling of every aspect of their children's day as performed in elementary school. This is where the school can build that social capital with the parents/guardians by conducting workshops and getting the parent involved even if it means reading a teacher's website.

The research suggests that principals can increase student achievement by improving family involvement (Auerbach, 2009). The literature suggests that one of principals' roles is to provide specific invitations to families for being involved at the school (Williams, 1998; Wiseman, 2010). One principal stated,

We do Student Showcase Nights. We do one in the fall and one in the spring. We invite parents/guardians in, and we change it up each time so it's not the same thing every year, twice a year. It's an opportunity for students to share what they're doing in the classroom. We've done this from a range of game-like situations, like one year it was 'Are You Smarter Than An MSP Student?' Parents/guardians got to see the types of questions and things that students are asked to do. This past spring it was a fair type, and they would go to booths for each of the contents and get to see some of the things and participate in a science experiment, do a lesson in social studies, a mini lesson, get to talk about reading, different things that they already do in the classrooms, so the parents/guardians can see what the kids are expected to do. We do that twice a year.

Studies performed by researchers like Regner provides relevancy in this exploration. Regner et al (2009) conducted a study in France where students' perceptions were examined to determine whether parent or teacher involvement contributes to the student wanting to adopt goals of academic achievement. They corroborated the importance of variables like perceived competence and fear of failure as being major indicators of achieving academic goals (Regner et al, 2009). Keeping that line of communication open by encouraging and supporting the decisions made by the students is described as an item that helps with academic support by parents/guardians and teachers.

All participants agreed on the importance of their communication methods. The principals and teachers shared how they utilized both technology and basic methods to

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increase parent involvement that directly contribute to higher student achievement. One teacher explained,

> We as teachers have to have our E-Talk page filled out. You can update it weekly, as long as the homework is on there and what you are doing. We also have a homework hotline that the parents/guardians can call if they (students) don't write their homework down. They punch in every different teacher's extension. It tells them the homework for that night. If they're (students) absent, they can still do their homework. I sign their students' agendas every single day, and that way the parent cannot tell me that they (students) didn't know they had homework because if my signature's in there, you know they have homework. We also have had several parent conferences this past year, whether it's teacher asked for or parent asked for. Probably in the upwards of 60 to 80, I would say.

Research provides evidence for the need to incorporate various types of communication on pertinent student information to the parents/guardians. All twelve participants relayed to the researcher the importance of increasing the knowledge of parents/guardians of the school's method of communicating.

Parents/guardians are involved whether they are at the school or not, according to all four of the parent participants in this research. A parent who is the President of the Parent Teacher Student Association, who does not work and is able to volunteer at the School, admonished that parents/guardians do not have to be physically visible in the school to support their children's educational process. There are those parents/guardians who work and struggle to make ends meet financially with no time to volunteer at the school, and those who work but cannot make arrangements to attend certain meetings and

can only volunteer minimally. Research continues to support varying types of parental involvement.

The research by Lopez (2001) also suggests that a parent can be involved without being visible at school. Lopez writes of how marginalized families are viewed unfairly as uninvolved families. Lopez's qualitative research highlighted cultural differences in parental involvement that many middle-class teachers do not consider. The four parents/guardians agreed that the direct efforts of their principals to engage previously uninvolved families has helped get them involved through varying opportunities created by the school. One parent said, "We do have a parent day. They have events, and we received flyers reminding us about different opportunities to volunteer." She explained that some of the volunteer opportunities included working in the media center, the front office, teacher classrooms, and even helping with field trips. Sporting events hold a large number of positions for which most parents/guardians volunteered.

Sanders and Epstein's (2000) research around the overlapping spheres of influence and social capital within the relationships of home, school, and community provided evidence that particular practices return varying results. Although these four schools did not convey to the researcher that they were formally utilizing *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership*, each of their strategies fit into those categories.

Research Question 3: Are these South Carolina middle school principals' practices consistent with Epstein's model to improve social capital of low socio-economic status families?

Interviewing, shadowing, and collecting types of involvement documents directed the researcher to conclude that these four SC middle school principals might be successful in part because they are utilizing strategies that fit with Epstein's model to improve social capital of low socio-economic status families. Qualitative findings from all twelve participants indicate that Epstein's model did contribute at least in part to the success of these four schools.

According to the qualitative findings, all four principals agree that the strategies they executed in their respective schools did align with *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement*. Each principal was given an opportunity at the end of the six questions to add additional information that they believed made a difference with their respective schools being successful. The researcher noted a significant change in the body language of all four principals with this request. The participants' moods and shoulders seemed to lighten, and their eyes opened wider with a sparkle. They all had a change in their tones when telling their unique stories about why they believed their schools were successful.

Two of the participants agreed solely on the importance of their community being the reason their school was so successful. One participant believed his staff was the reason they were successful. Lastly, one participant believed it was a combination of their staff and community. One principal explained,

> I don't think you can underestimate partners. We've got a lot of businesses that welcome our kids for field trips. My CDF does a wonderful job. We bring in career speakers every week. We don't just have career week. We have where the kids tell us on cards what they want to hear and then we find those speakers and then we only invite those kids. The speakers have a better engagement with us

because they're talking to kids who want to listen to them. I can't encourage enough. From my past testing, one of the things that I did before that, I walked around to every home room and personally held a fifteen-minute conversation with every homeroom of, 'Guys, why does Google want to come into our school? Why does Boeing give us $75,000 for Gateway? Why are we winning all this money for health and wellness?' I tell them all these different things that business partners do. 'Why does Chick-fil-A want to come and sell? Why does Kona Ice come here? Because they want to be part of a winning team.'... I tie in our business partner relationships directly to their performance on paths. You want to tell that business partner that we're a winning team. Even if you're not exemplary on the school report card, be a 'met' on the school report card and be the best 'met' that you can be.

Although these two participants agreed on the importance of community as the reason for their schools' success, one utilized their community differently, connecting directly with the volunteering category of Epstein's model. This principal indicated,

I really think it's the support of our military. I really do. We get so many diverse backgrounds coming through here. There's just no one different race, or it's just the diversity that we get from or military families, and the support. They bring new perspectives to the school, new ideas. I really think that has been the difference for this school. They're willing to share. You have some people that don't want to share. They're willing to share. There at the Base, you have so many different, talented people there, and they're willing to come in. Sometimes, it's bombarding me. They come in and ask what they can do to help. I'm like,

okay, I'm just trying to get this taken care of, but they're here, and they want to help. I think that has been the difference. It doesn't matter what we do here: if we call on them for their support, they're here.

The participant who suggested the importance of his staff being the reason their school was so successful demonstrated how a negative thing caused a positive for these students. This principal proposed that the best thing to happen for these students was the "Great Recession." He admitted that people could not find jobs, "but people who once snubbed their noses to come out here to work were now saying, they wanted a job here! They would say, they did not care how far the drive was, they just want a job." The principal proclaimed how this was the best thing to happen to them: "The good thing was, I was afraid when the 'Recession' was over, that everybody would start leaving. Well, they're still here because they said, 'You know what? I like this school.'" The principal said that regardless of driving distance the staff stayed because they liked the family atmosphere, and they liked the kids. He feels the collegiality among the faculty is strong and familial, and both the teacher and parent shared the exact sentiment. Building a strong relationship with the faculty and the students provided amazing results. He explained,

I think the number one thing is, for a good school, you need good teachers. I've been here ten years. I think it's important for someone to have continuity. I think switching principals all the time. I think it's bad. Once they run the community they pull them out. I feel like I've been able to bring a lot of really good teachers. This is not a criticism. When I first came here, there were some bad teachers here. You get rid of them and replace them with better teachers. It was still hard to find

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people to drive this far and so forth. We do lots of recognition of students. I do think that's important, and it kind of goes back to what I said earlier. When I first came here, I was going around for back in those days called a 'pat test.' I was going around to each little classroom and talking to kids. I was on the 8th grade hall, Ms. Jane Doe's class, and I was going to do that same little routine: 'All right, y'all, I want you to do real well.' You can count on it. When I came to school, we were last in everything, everything in the district. We made a lot of progress.…We celebrate when they win an essay contest. It's a big deal, we do a victory flag, and we announce it at the morning assembly. We do a Monday-morning assembly every Monday, school-wide, to recognize kids and talk about what we're going to do. I think that's important, too. That's like a family meeting on Monday morning. We clap for other people, for their achievements. So those are some things, I think, that we do differently.

The first three participants placed their rationale for their success with only one of *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement*. The last participant was the only one who believed it was a combination of a good staff and the community. The principal said that they strive to build relationships; it is the most crucial part of their success. He explained how the teachers are not just students' teachers, he was not just their principal, and the media center specialist is not just their media center specialist. The principals suggested that it is all about building strong relationships with students yet holding them accountable. The concept he conveyed was that when students realized that their teachers care about them, they reciprocate with respect. With that respect comes greater industry: he advised that it does not matter how high the expectations, most students will achieve.

He proudly admitted that one way or another the teachers always make sure to help every student. Often it is because the students need to see about receiving special services or maybe his school needed to get them in an extra math class. The principal explained,

> The two biggest things in this building, in my opinion, is our faculty first, and our community second. That's what drives it. On top of that, a district that's very supportive. Whatever we need, we're a small school, yes, but we don't lack for things. There's a large middle school in the district. If they get a course, we get the same course. They make sure it's equitable for our students. I think it's the fact that our faculty is first because they love the kids, they love what they do, and they give 110 percent. It's a strong faculty, and I think that that's the biggest thing. We were in 2012 very close to being an excellent school, and that's hard for a middle school. That is still our goal is to get to an excellent school, and you know year after year it just depends on all of the other extenuating circumstances, but I think it's just the fact that our parents/guardians know our school. But I would say the number one thing here is it starts with building a relationship with the kids and it's not just the teacher, it's the principal and the assistant principal. We go to church with these kids. We go out and we shop at Wal-Mart with them. It's a community. Whenever one of them gets in the trouble, even if they get in trouble in her class, I'm going to fuss at them because they know that we are a team. They also know that they can't pit teachers against one another because we all work like this together. It's a family. It's all centrally is a family when it comes to the faculty and the kids. I think that's a huge part of it. It's that it's a community effort. Now,

you're not going to get everybody but if a parent or a student wants to be successful, they have every opportunity to be successful here at this school.

Building relationships with the staff and community emerged through the interviews and conversations regarding the rationale for success of these four SC middle schools. The findings from this study, as summarized in this research, are explained and supported by literature previously reported. Since each of these successful principals placed more weight on building relationships, then this might be an area for future studies.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research offers several other areas that could lead to further investigation, including more research using a variety of parental involvement models for success. *Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement* provided one model's evidence that supported effective strategies implemented that bring theory from literature to practice in successful SC middle schools. Other research could be conducted in SC and elsewhere using Epstein's work as a basis for implementation for success.

Because this study learned of the power of building strong relationships between students and teachers as a highlighted strategy for success, additional investigation is warranted concerning the purpose and outcomes of such.

Regarding strong relations, as well as what the researcher found in the works of Bourdieu, a different approach could possibly be conversations with both students and parents from low socio-economic families concerning the benefits of social capital and how academic success could potentially lead to upward academic and social mobility. Knowledge of the school system and comprehension of navigating choices which lead to

progressive growth academically would open opportunities and possibilities for the students and the families. Rising through academic and social ranks, adapting accordingly as Bourdieu suggests, could possibly lead to both challenges and successes. Work in this area could allow schools the opportunity to grant these students and their families exponential growth.

More work needs to be done concerning the involvement of parents/guardians from low socio-economic statuses. Additional benefits could come from future studies that compare other specific programs or models to Epstein's, especially with stakeholder feedback. To expand this study to include student input would be informative and beneficial since they are the ones who know firsthand the advantages and consequences of these collaborations. Learning how students are impacted by the home to school relationship could provide additional strategies for schools to increase student academic achievement of low socio-economic students. Parental involvement is crucial for student success. The home environment impacts the school environment and learning. More research needs to be conducted demonstrating methodologies for such inclusion.

More research could be performed to identify and publicize successful strategies for accommodating families of low socio-economic status. Emphasis could be placed on drop-out rates and grade retention by these families and how such families could be better served by the school and their collaboration.

Several of the principals in the research stressed the use of technology currently available assisting with contacting parents, making connections more easily and conveniently. This is an area with much potential, and investigations to find more programs and applications that could serve to encourage better communication between

parents/guardians and schools and to publicize opportunities for parents/guardians to become move actively involved with the schools would benefit all those involved.

College course work and district professional development sessions could also encompass ways to assist in this area. With more knowledge both principals and teachers would better understand their relationships with students and parents/guardians in the lower socio-economic area. Drawing attention to discrepancies in this area and offering information for better understanding of them.

Elementary school parental involvement should be encouraged more in both middle and high schools. Students are older and become more responsible, but parents/guardians must continue to monitor their children's progress whether they can assist with the studies or not. If proper information is communicated to parents/guardians, they will know who to contact at schools and how they can be assisted in this area so that they can feel more comfortable in the school setting.

Additional research might also be considered on the state and national levels. Families of the low socio-economic status exit throughout the US, and schools should be doing whatever they can to assist in providing these families and their children with an equitable education.

Conclusion

In this study all four SC middle school principals, teachers, and parents collectively agreed that effective parental involvement strategies may have affected student academic achievement. According to these principals, doing everything possible to provide the best opportunities for their students remains their first priority. The types of involvement strategies being implemented at these four schools can serve as models

for other SC middle schools. Although the data cannot conclusively state that these four SC middle school principals are successful because they utilized Epstein's model to improve social capital of low socio-economic status families, a large number of strategies were demonstrated in conjunction with Epstein's model.

After investigation of this topic, the researcher decided to use Epstein's model for this study because it is supported by nineteen years of utility and continued annual research. The model has been used nationally, it seemed to have few limitations, it appeared to be represented and held in high regard in research on this topic, and the researcher was impressed by its comprehensive and realistic categories from the start.

Teachers who participated in the study strongly supported the strategies used by each of their respective principals. In addition, the data obtained from shadowing and parental involvement documents collected aligned with the actions provided during the interviews. Placing the needs of the students first was reiterated by all four teachers. Each talked about how important it was that the school provide adequate opportunities for each student's success.

Although there are varying perceptions of how successful school leadership develops parental involvement strategies, most educators will appreciate having additional strategies to support students of all socio-economic levels and methods to encourage parental involvement to improve academic success.

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APPENDIX A: Sample Superintendent Letter

June 1, 2014

Superintendent

_____ School District

, South Carolina

Dear Superintendent,

I am writing to apply for permission to conduct research at _____ Middle School which will be for my dissertation requirement. My background consists of over 20 years in the education profession as a district administrator, school level administrator and classroom teacher. My academic experience is with the University of South Carolina with the following degrees: Educational Specialist in Education Administration, Masters in Educational Administration, Bachelors in Science. The majority of my school level experience has been in the middle school and because of this experience; I would like to conduct this research at the middle school level.

_____ Middle school was recognized as a school that was successful in 2012 by achieving an Absolute Rating of Good or Excellent with having above 50 percent student eligibility for Free/Reduced Meals Benefit. These are two of the variables that qualified _____ Middle for my research. The research is on the successful strategies school leaders implement to build social capital with low-socio-economic families. I would like to request a total of three visits or less to the middle school. One visit over the summer to do an in person interview asking the six questions of the principal, a teacher and a parent the principal selects. This should take a total of 15-20 minutes each.

The second part would be collection of communication documents from the school. Showing how the school communicates with parents/guardians. This could be accomplished the same day as the interview or I could come back another day. The last part would be shadowing of the principal and a teacher. I would like to shadow the principal for half a day and the teacher the other half. This would be performed early in the Fall, preferably the beginning of September. Please let me know if I can clarify any of the three methods to collect data for this research. I am requesting permission to conduct this study to see what strategies this school is using to be successful.

Sincerely,

Anthony N. Boatwright

APPENDIX B: Sample Participant Letter

June 1, 2014

Principal

_____ Middle School

                    , South Carolina

Dear Principal,

I am writing to apply for permission to conduct research at _____ Middle School which will be for my dissertation requirement. My background consists of over 20 years in the education profession as a district administrator, school level administrator and classroom teacher. My academic experience is with the University of South Carolina with the following degrees: Educational Specialist in Education Administration, Masters in Educational Administration, Bachelors in Science. The majority of my school level experience has been in the middle school and because of this experience; I would like to conduct this research at the middle school level.

_____ Middle school was recognized as a school that was successful in 2012 by achieving an Absolute Rating of Good or Excellent with having above 50 percent student eligibility for Free/Reduced Meals Benefit. These are two of the variables that qualified _____ Middle for my research. The research is on the successful strategies school leaders implement to build social capital with low socio-economic families. I would like to request a total of three visits or less to the middle school. One visit over the summer to do an in person interview asking the six questions of the principal, a teacher and a parent the principal selects. This should take a total of 15-20 minutes each.

The second part would be collection of communication documents from the school. Showing how the school communicates with parents/guardians. This could be accomplished the same day as the interview or I could come back another day. The last part would be shadowing of the principal and a teacher. I would like to shadow the principal for half a day and the teacher the other half. This would be performed early in the Fall, preferably the beginning of September. Please let me know if I can clarify any of the three methods to collect data for this research. I am requesting permission to conduct this study to see what strategies this school is using to be successful.

Sincerely,

Anthony N. Boatwright

APPENDIX C: Sample Informed Consent Form

HOW SCHOOL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPS PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES WITH SOCIAL CAPITAL IN FOUR SOUTH CAROLINA MIDDLE SCHOOLS

You are invited to join a research study to look at potential methods to increase academic achievement for all students. In this study, I will interview, shadow, and collect documents from your school involving how it currently communicates with parents/guardians. The purpose of this study is to describe parental involvement strategies that four South Carolina middle school principals use and to identify successful practices being implemented to increase social capital and academic achievement in these four, lower-socio-economic schools. I am relying heavily upon Joyce Epstein's six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community). Epstein believed that if home and school are working as a team, the student will achieve at the highest possible level. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a part of an academically successful South Carolina middle school in a lower socio-economic community. If you participate, you will be asked to provide responses to questions during a brief interview, approximately 15-20 minutes, by the researcher and allow the researcher to shadow you during the school day at the school. The data collection from interviewing will be the significant instrument utilized in this study. The researcher plans to audio-

tape semi-structured, open-ended interview questions. A principal, teacher and parent from each of the four schools will be interviewed. Shadowing the principals and teachers is crucial in supporting the data collected from the conducted interviews. All information from you will be completely confidential, protected, and anonymous. The names of the district, principal, school, teacher, and parent will not be used and remain confidential. The researcher will be the only individual who will have access to the data and records of this study. If you have any questions or concerns, please call Anthony Boatwright at (803) 231-6874 or email anboatwright@gmail.com. You may also contact Dr. Edward Cox, Associate Professor at the University of South Carolina at (803) 777-3089 or coxep@mailbox.sc.edu

APPENDIX D: Interview Questions

The principal, a teacher and a parent will answer the following six questions in a face-to-face interview:

Question Number One is on parenting: What are some activities performed by the school to increase social capital of the parents/guardians in creating the most conducive home environment for students to be successful academically?

Question Number Two is on communicating: What methods of communications are in place for the school to reach parents/guardians and parents/guardians to reach the school?

Question Number Three is on volunteering: What volunteer opportunities are available for parents/guardians and how are they communicated?

Question Number Four is on learning at home: How has the school provided assistance and resources on helping students with homework?

Question Number Five is on decision making: How does the school involve parents/guardians in equal decision-making?

Question Number Six is about collaborating with the community: How does the school partner with the community?

APPENDIX E: IRB Approval Letter

From: <eIRB-Notification@eirb.healthsciencessc.org>   Wednesday - May 14, 2014 3:21 PM

To: <aboatwright@richlandone.org>

Subject: Not Human Subjects Research

Email Header

NOT HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH

ID: Pro00034226

Title: Not Human Subjects Research

PI: Anthony Boatwright

Study Title: How School Leadership Develops Parental Involvement Strategies with Social Capital In Four South Carolina Middle Schools

Description: A study application has been confirmed to be not human subject research. To navigate to the project workspace, click on the above ID.

APPENDIX F: Sample Interview Transcript

Speaker 1: I'm doing both just in case one of them fails, I still have a back-up.The pictures and stuff ... there are things out here, if you don't mind, I would love to get some pictures of, just for me to refer back to, and then I'd put-you see it on the bottom here. Then the documents. What I'm trying to collect, and you may not have those today, but maybe I can get some from your website, or maybe you can pull some of them for me before the fall, when I come back in the fall, to support these six questions. That's all I'm looking for. When you start giving me explanation of how you communicate with parents/guardians, you might say a newsletter, well, maybe you have a newsletter, get a copy of that or something. I'm going to dive in, if that's OK?

Speaker 2: Yup.

Speaker 1: First question is on parenting. What are some activities performed by the school to increase the knowledge of parents/guardians in creating the most inducive home environment for students to be successful academically?

Speaker 2: This past year, we did what we call "Family Nights". We did a Family Reading Night, which we introduced summer reading books. Parents/guardians came out and the teachers presented the different books that kids would choose from, summer reading books. The school, we buy the summer reading books for the kids, because these kids are poor, and if

we said, "OK, go somewhere and get " There's no bookstore to go to. So we give them a copy, even though it costs us some money. We feel like if we get it to them, better chance of them actually reading the book over the summer. Teachers explain that to the parents/guardians. We get them out here, because we do a hot dog supper. We have our school Book Fair going on at the same time. Because we're so isolated up here, parents/guardians just can't hop in a car and come to the school. So we try to combine a lot of things a "big bang for your buck" so to speak. Try to get them to come out. Sometimes we have more success than others. We have Family Reading Night. Earlier in the year, we had Family Health Night, in which we fed them healthy foods, we had a fitness center opened over here, we had activities in the gym, we talked about nutrition. We had somebody from the drug center in town to come and talk to them about the dangers of drug use, and some signs for parents/guardians to have some idea of what to look for. Then we had our school nurse took blood pressure and vision different kinds of tests, screenings. Not just for students but for the parents/guardians themselves.