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UNTOLD STORIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PARENT AND EDUCATOR
PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN TITLE ONE ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS

BY

Alexandra E. Rogers

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of

Bellarmino University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2021

Alexandra E. Rogers

Untold Stories:

A Phenomenological Study of Parent and Educator Perspectives of Parental Engagement in

Title One Elementary Schools

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother, Lori Ann Mobley. You were taken from this world when I was very young. I can only hope that you are proud of the young woman I have become. We did not get to spend that much time together, but I know you are watching over me every day. I miss you and love you so much.

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Abstract

This qualitative, phenomenological study explored parent and educator perceptions of parental engagement in Title One elementary schools. Twelve participants were included in this study. Six parents and six educators from the Southeastern, Southwestern, and Western regions of the United States defined parental engagement and how parental engagement impacts student achievement. The following research questions guided this study: (a) What are parent perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools? (b) What are teacher perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools? (c) What are the similarities and differences in parent and teacher perception of parental engagement? (d) How can these perceptions be utilized to improve parental engagement to benefit student achievement? Joyce Epstein's six types of involvement was the framework used in this study. Six themes emerged: (a) Communication, (b) Partnership/Relationship, (c) Methods of Engagement, (d) Achievement, (e) Mental Health, and (f) Resources. Themes one through five emerged for parents, while all six themes emerged for educators. This study concludes with a discussion of findings, implications for future research, and recommendations for practice.

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Chapter One: Introduction

As a child's first teachers, parents have an important role in their child's education. Goodall (2013) stated that "it is widely accepted that parents' involvement in their children's education and learning is of the foremost importance" (p. 133). Engaging parents in "low-income communities, in their children's education remains one of educators' greatest challenges" (Williams and Sanchez, 2013, p. 55). Williams and Sanchez noted that this could be the case due to lack of resources and knowledge. This study adds to the literature by highlighting ways to increase parental engagement by interviewing parents and teachers to identify their perceptions of parental engagement with regards to what works and what can be improved.

In education, the terms parental involvement and parental engagement are heard regularly. The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has recently begun the discussion of the term parental engagement instead of parental involvement (K. Christian, personal communication, October 28, 2016). Goodall (2013) also stated that "parental engagement is a much larger concept that has often been understood by the term 'parental involvement'" (p. 134). Utilizing the term parental engagement indicates a deeper level of engagement than what parental involvement entails.

Young, Austin, & Growe (2013) defined parental involvement "as presence at school, communicating with teachers, or helping at home with homework" (p. 292). According to the National Education Association (NEA, 2008), there are "six different types of involvement—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community—that offer a broad range of school, family and community activities that can engage all parties and help meet student needs" (p. 1). Despite the different definitions of parental involvement, at the core is the development of students in a way that only parents can

provide. Educators can provide support to students, but parents are integral to a child's educational journey. The term parent is also subjective depending on family dynamics. In this study, the term parent refers to a student's biological parent, guardian, relative, or court designee. Many researchers work to find ways to engage parents in and out of the school building to improve areas such as student achievement and parent-teacher relationships, and to increase parent presence.

Statement of the Problem

Parents play an integral role in the success of their students. However, parental engagement can look different based on the school a child attends. Schools that receive Title One funding are required to include a parent engagement component in their school plan (United States Department of Education, 2018). Title One provides "financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or percentages of children from low-income families to ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards" (U.S. Department of Education). Lexia Learning (2020) adds, "The goal of Title One is to provide a fair and equal opportunity for disadvantaged students to access high-quality education, and to attain proficiency level on state achievement tests."

For educators, finding ways to engage parents is a continual effort. Increasing parental engagement, inside the school building as well as in the community, has been shown to increase student achievement (Epstein, 2019; Finn, 1998; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Young, Austin & Growe, 2013). Another aspect of parental engagement is teacher perception of parental engagement. Teacher perception of parental engagement is important:

Parents and teachers must perceive the meanings and functions of parent involvement at least similarly and compatibly, if not identically. Beneficial outcomes for children,

teachers, and parents alike hinge on the relationships parents and teachers develop around shared commitments to parent involvement. (Lawson, 2003, p. 78)

Lawson (2003) indicated that “if children viewed parent involvement in a more positive light, parent-teacher interactions would improve” (p. 101). With teacher and parent perception of parental engagement aligning with each other, these perceptions can impact the outcome of how parents are engaged in their child’s learning, thus potentially impacting student overall achievement levels.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, the study assessed parents’ perceptions of parental engagement and provided an opportunity for parents to share what parental engagement means and how it impacts their child’s education. Second, the study assessed teachers’ perceptions of parental engagement and how their views influence the relationships that are created with parents of the students in their classrooms. Often in education the parent voice is perceived to be limited (Brown et. al, 2020, p. 90). Including parent voice provides a different viewpoint on programs and resources provided for the families served. Through recognizing both parents and teachers’ perceptions, both parties may be able to identify new methods of improving student achievement and socially acceptable behaviors, as well as to identify practical ways those methods can be used in schools.

Many schools in the United States have a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or a Parent Teach Student Association (PTSA), as well as school-based decision councils. According to the National PTA (2020), “PTA is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit association that prides itself on being a powerful voice for all children, a relevant resource for families and communities, and a strong advocate for public education” (para. 2). Each of these entities requires that there be

parents present on the PTA board. At the elementary level, schools have a PTA whereas at the middle and high school level,-they may include student voice and become a PTSA.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are parent perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?
2. What are educator perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?
3. What are the similarities and differences in parent and teacher perception of parental engagement?
4. How can these perceptions be utilized to improve parental engagement to benefit student achievement?

Significance of the Study

Finding ways to engage parents in the classroom, whether it be at a Title One school or a non-Title One school, impacts student achievement. There is a lack of research surrounding the topic of parent and teacher perception of parental engagement. This study may provide teachers and parents a better understanding of how parents feel about parental engagement, as well as clarify ways educators may help parents become more engaged in their child's educational journey. In addition, recognizing teacher perception and whether it needs to be improved can build better relationships between schools and the communities that teachers serve. Furthermore, the findings of this study will add to the growing literature base around parent and teacher perception of parental engagement and how to increase levels of engagement at all academic levels.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this research was Epstein (2019) six types of parental involvement. Epstein (2019) shared “The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about children’s families” (p. 11). Epstein explained how she created her framework, stating:

The six types of parental involvement are based on the results of many studies and many years of field work by researchers with educators and families in pre-schools and elementary, middle, and high schools. The framework helps educators develop more comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnerships. (p. 16)

The six types of involvement include parenting, helping with homework, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Each type of involvement plays a role in the success of a student and relationships with families and communities. Epstein (2019) noted in her framework that there are various methods in which parents can engage in their child’s education, dispelling the narrative that parents are not engaged if they are not present in the school building.

Epstein’s (2019) framework was chosen due to the variety of ways she identified in regard to how parents can be engaged in their child’s education. It highlights how much parenting and learning at home impact a student’s learning. Parents creating a nurturing, learning environment along with teachers providing resources and support for parents connects the teaching teachers are undertaking in the school with ways parents can provide support. In conjunction with that, Epstein’s framework stressed the importance of collaborating with community. In schools considered low-income, collaborating with community agencies allows schools to provide services that were potentially unavailable previously, or to add to the number

of services and resources that can be provided to students and families. Volunteering, communicating, and decision making provide opportunities for parents, schools, and community partners to work together in the school building, as well as community, to bridge any gaps in student success.

Summary of Methodology

For this study, a qualitative methodological approach was employed, utilizing a phenomenological research design. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that “a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). Creswell and Poth continued, noting “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence (a ‘grasp of the very nature of the thing’)” (p. 75). Participants included parents and teachers, and they were selected utilizing purposeful sampling. The study was conducted virtually with participants in Title One Elementary schools in different regions of the United States.

This study included twelve participants. Six of the participants were educators who worked in a Title One elementary school. The other six participants were parents of students enrolled in Title One elementary schools. Data were collected utilizing semi-structured interviews and surveys conducted by the researcher. Virtual interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Data were then organized based on themes that arose from the coding of interview and survey responses. To participate in this study, participants were required to sign an informed consent that outlined their rights as participants. At any time during the study, participants had the option to choose to withdraw from the study. All participants remained in the study until its completion.

Definition of Terms

Parental involvement: “presence at school, communicating with teachers, or helping at home with homework” (Young, Austin, & Grove, 2013, p. 292).

Parental engagement: “parents’ engagement in their children’s lives to influence the children’s overall actions” (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 402).

Student achievement: the measurement of the amount of academic content a student learns in a given time frame; refers to the extent to which a learner has attained their short or long-term educational goals” (Top Hat, 2019).

Parent: for the purposes of this study, the term parent will refer to a child’s biological parent, legal guardian, aunt, uncle, or relative who has stepped into the parental role.

Barrier: Anything that prevents a parent from engaging activities in their child’s school or community.

Title One: Consists of “financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or percentages of children from low-income families to ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (United States Department of Education, 2018, para 1).

Title One school: School that receives funds from Title One.

Limitations

There were a few limitations in conducting this study. Due to COVID-19, participant selection and interviews were conducted virtually. This was to ensure the safety of the participants and researcher. Due to participant selection being conducted virtually, the geographical location of the participants was expanded to the different regions of the United States. Another limitation was the researcher’s interest in the subject. The researcher has

personal experience in this subject, so steps to reduce bias are reviewed and examined in Chapter Three. Finally, this study relied on the experiences of the participants. The parent participants of this study may have been parents who are more engaged in their child's education, thus making it difficult to get a true picture of how parental engagement may be lacking.

Overview of the Study

This study includes a review of the literature regarding parental involvement and parental engagement, including a discussion of the differences between the two terms. The literature review provides research on parent and educator perception of parental engagement, types of parental involvement, and a deeper exploration into Epstein's (2013) six types of parental involvement. Lawson (2003) suggested that "parents' and teachers' perceptions of the meaning and functions of parent involvement are different but at times may include overlapping elements" (p. 116). Lawson added that parents' thoughts were more community-centric whereas teachers' thoughts were more school-centric. Chapter three identifies how data were collected during this study. Interviews were conducted with parents and educators in Title One elementary schools in the Southeastern, Southwestern, and Western regions of the United States. Upon collecting data, themes that arose were identified. This research concludes with a discussion of the findings and addresses areas of parental engagement in which parents and educators identified are similar as well as any differences that arose from participant responses.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature on the history of parental engagement to provide a better understanding of how it has evolved over time. It defines both parental involvement and parental engagement, thus providing a clear explanation of the similarities and differences between the terms. Epstein's (2019) six types of parental involvement are discussed in detail, while recognizing the various ways in which a parent can be engaged in their child's educational journey. Additionally, research surrounding parent and teacher perceptions on parental engagement is explored. This chapter also includes research on the barriers and benefits to parental engagement.

Parental Involvement

What is Parental Involvement?

The impact of parental involvement on parental engagement has been a topic covered by many researchers (e.g., see Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013; Jeynes, 2003; Eccles & Harold, 1993). Eccles & Harold (1993) state parental involvement is lacking in all levels, with a decrease during the transition from elementary school to secondary school. According to Eccles and Harold, "parents play a critical role in their children's academic achievement as well as in their socioemotional development" (p. 571). The authors noted that, "Critical to this role is the relationship that develops between parents and schools, and between communities and schools" (p. 571). According to Olsen and Fuller (2003), "The U.S. Department of Education launched GOALS 2000 so that 'every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of

children” (p. 135). This causes schools to reevaluate their “Current policies, practices, and programs on parental involvement” (Olsen & Fuller, 2003, p. 136).

Young, Austin, & Growe (2013) observed that “Parental involvement boosts a child’s perceived level of competence and autonomy, offers a sense of security and connectedness, and helps to internalize the value of education and performance” (p. 291). As cited by Young et al. (2013), Deslandes, Royer, Turcotte, and Berttrand (1997 – as listed in Lloyd-Smith & Baron) defined parental involvement as “Presence at school, communicating with teachers, or helping with homework” (p. 292). The authors also cited Abdul-Adil and Farmer (2006), who defined parental involvement as “Any parental attitudes, behaviors, styles, or activities that occur within or outside the school setting to support children’s academic and/or behavioral success in their currently enrolled school” (p. 292).

Jeynes (2003) indicated that the term parental involvement “Can be a vague term that can mean countless different things to different people” (p. 204). Jeynes cited Hoge, Smit, and Crist (1997) who defined parental involvement as consisting of four components: parental expectations, parental interest, parental involvement in school, and family community (p. 205). Parental expectations were found to be the most important out of the four components. Like many other researchers, Jeynes indicated that minority parents were less likely to attend school functions than White parents.

Watson, Sanders-Lawson, and McNeal (2012) noted, “parental involvement was designed to create a partnership that allowed for greater collaboration between home and school for the expressed purpose of improved student outcomes” (p. 41). Watson et al. placed the parental role into six categories:

(a) Traditional (parent as audience or bystander-observer), (b) parent as a decision maker (PTA), (c) parent as a classroom volunteer, (d) parent as a paid paraprofessional or teacher's aide, (e) parents as learners (participants in child development or parenting classes), and (f) parents as teachers of their own students at home. (pp. 41-42)

These six role categories are closely related to Epstein's (2019) six types of parental involvement. Each of these parental roles provides essential information as to how parental involvement plays a part in the success of the student and teacher relationships.

History of Parental Involvement

The topic of parental involvement has been researched for years. According to Berger (1991), "parents were the most important educators of their children as long ago as prehistoric times. Before history was recorded, evidence indicates that parents were nurturers and educators of their children through modeling, care giving, and guidance" (p. 210). Berger continued noting that children were seen as the future in Greek society, and that how they were raised was important. It was during the seventeenth century that the importance of the interaction between children and their parents/caregivers was recognized (Berger, 1991).

Three theories were identified in the United States regarding child rearing. They are defined by Berger (1991). The first theory was derived from the Calvinist doctrine of infant depravity, in which the parent provides guidance, and the child obeys. The Calvinist doctrine included parents identifying and learning ways to discipline their children and breaking the will of their child. This thought came from the idea that "to spare the rod was to spare the child" (p. 211). The second theory stemmed from the influence of past researchers who believed in the natural goodness of children. In this theory, the focus was on introducing a child to the world through maternal instinct and love. Lastly, the third theory derived from John Locke who viewed

children as influenced by their environment, thus asserting that education intervention was necessary (Berger, 1991, p. 212).

During the 1880s, child rearing support became commonplace. Support became active through groups such as the “American Association of University Women (AAUW) (1882), the Congress of Parents and Teachers, called the PTA (1897) and the National Association of Colored Women (1897)” (Berger, 1991, p. 212). Berger (1991) stated, “PTA membership grew from 190,000 in 1920 to nearly 1,500,000 in 1930” (p. 213). In the 1930s, the White House held a conference on Child Health and Protection with the goal of providing increased support for parents:

Parent education would help parents learn about proper ways to rear their children, modify their attitudes toward children, improve their personal adjustment, understand social and economic issues, verbalize ideas of the norms of society and their ability to adapt to them, and understand the functions and purposes of education. (Berger, 1991, pp. 213-214)

Programs were also created to help families survive during the Great Depression. Many additional programs began to flourish in the 1970s, when the “inclusion of parents on boards took hold in other federally funded programs such as Parent and Child Centers, Home Start, Parent Child Development Centers, Title One, Follow Through, and those emanating from Public Law 94 142” (Berger, 1991, p. 215).

During the 1980s, “many schools took a leadership role in developing ideal models for successful parent-school collaboration” (Berger, 1991, p. 216). According to Berger (1991), five levels of involvement with regards to parent participation were identified in the 1990s:

“(1) Parent as an active partner and educational leader at home and school; (2) parent as a decision maker; (3) parent as a school volunteer or paid employer; (4) parent as a liaison between home and school to support homework; and (5) parent as a supporter of the educational goals of the school.” (p. 217)

Berger and Epstein (2019) have similar views on how parents can support students in the classroom and at home. This confirms the idea that parents must be partners with educators to improve student achievement.

Olsen and Fuller (2003) stated that in order to understand the children they work with educators must understand their families because children carry their family experiences with them to school. This aligns with Epstein’s (2019) first type of parental involvement of parenting. In her framework, which will be discussed next, Epstein identified six types of involvement.

Olsen and Fuller (2003) continued:

Parents must be team members in the education of their children. Educators are experts in their field—children and the education of children—and parents are experts on their children. However, because past experiences have given either parents or teachers disproportionate power in the relationship, both now must learn to work as a team. (p. 10)

Understanding a family and its needs is the first step to getting parents involved in their child’s education.

Types of Parental Involvement

Epstein (2019) identified six types of parental involvement. The six types include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community. Epstein’s framework “helps educators develop more comprehensive programs of school, family and community partnerships” (p. 16). Epstein stated that schools must identify

how to apply these six frameworks to meet the needs of the families they serve. Additionally, “students are the main focus of the school, family, and community partnerships, the six types of involvement also produce important results for parents and teachers” (Epstein, 2019, p. 17).

According to Epstein:

The framework of six types of involvement is a typology, not a hierarchy. Type 1 is just as important as Type 6 and vice versa. There is no such thing as a “pure” type. This means that some family and community engagement activities incorporate more than one type of involvement in design, implementation, and/or results. (p. 17)

Type (1) – Parenting. Epstein (2019) defined parenting as “helping all families establish supportive home environments for children and helping the school understand its families” (p. 16). Epstein identified the following as synonyms for parenting: “supporting, nurturing, loving, understanding, and child raising” (p. 26). She noted that it is important for educators to understand their students and their parents to better serve the families. Accumulating research indicates that while schools are all different, knowledge about students and their families helps educators to communicate more effectively (Epstein, 2019).

Type (2) – Communicating. Communicating is “establishing two-way exchanges using varied technologies about school programs and children’s progress” (Epstein, 2019, p. 16). Synonyms for communicating have been identified as “relating, reviewing, and connecting” (p. 26). Epstein noted that communication between parents and school increase understanding and cooperation and show that parents and teachers are working to help students succeed. It is important that when the school is communicating with parents, the school provides translated messages and translators to reach all families. In addition, schools also can use different methods of communicating per the parent preference (Epstein, 2019).

Type (3) – Volunteering. Volunteering is defined as “recruiting and organizing parent help at school, home, or other locations, including audiences for student activities” (Epstein, 2019, p. 16). “Supervising, advising, giving, and fostering” are synonyms for volunteering (p. 26). Individuals can volunteer by sharing their time and talents to support the school, teachers, and student activities at the school or in other locations. Epstein adds that parents, family, and community members “may assist individual teachers by helping students practice specific skills, or volunteers may help the school in the media center/library, family room, computer lab, playground, cafeteria, afterschool program, or in other ways” (p. 65).

Type (4) – Learning at home. Learning at home is “providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related materials” (Epstein, 2019, p. 16). Learning at home can also be identified as “managing, recognizing, interacting, enriching, and rewarding” (p. 26). This type of involvement guides parents in helping with homework, mastering skills at home, planning for postsecondary education, discussing summer programming, and more (Epstein, 2019).

Type (5) – Decision-making. Decision making involves having family members serve as representatives and leaders on school committees, and as advocates for their children and other children on school decisions (Epstein, 2019). Decision making can be referred to as “contributing, considering, participating, and judging” (p. 26). In decision making, schools can include parents in school committees such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). This gives parents an opportunity to share information and ideas about how to improve school policies (Epstein, 2019).

Type (6) – Collaborating with community. Epstein (2019) defined collaborating with community as “identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to

strengthen school programs and to enable students to serve the community” (p. 16).

“Cooperating, assisting, developing, problem-solving, and sharing” (p. 26) are other words that can be used to refer to collaborating with community. Epstein emphasized that relying on community connections could provide assistance and opportunities that might not be regularly available to schools. Collaborating with the community could also help to provide financial support to the school as well as hosting or supporting parent programs by providing resources relating to the families served (Epstein, 2019).

A more in-depth look at the different types of involvement indicated that parenting style impacts a parent’s outlook on parenting. In 1991, Baumrind discussed four types of parenting. These parenting types, identified by Darling (1999), are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved. Darling (1999) described parents in the authoritarian category as highly demanding and directive, and not as responsive. These parents are also very structured, with clearly stated rules and are well-ordered. Authoritative parents are demanding and responsive as well as assertive but not intrusive. Their disciplinary methods are supportive rather than punitive. Parents who are permissive, otherwise known as indulgent or nondirective, are considered to be more responsive and less demanding. These parents are also non-traditional and lenient. Uninvolved parents are low in responsiveness and demandingness and might encompass both rejecting-neglecting and neglectful parents (Darling, 1999).

Epstein (2019) identified parenting as helping families create a supportive home learning environment. For parents who are uninvolved and permissive, it may take more of an effort on the school’s end to address the lack of involvement in their child’s education. Understanding the factors that play a role in what type of parent a parent identifies as is useful in identifying ways to increase their involvement. Darling (1999) observes that parents who identify as authoritarian

and authoritative may be more present in the school as well as in their child's efforts at home and in the community. The type of parent a child is raised by influences that child's behavior, academic performance, and psychosocial development (Darling, 1999). While schools cannot identify what type of parenting style category a parent falls under, there are scales available to identify an individual's parenting style.

Communication among schools, families, and communities allows for everyone to be on the same page. Increased communications provides families with the necessary information about what is happening at the school and parents are included in different activities (Epstein, 2019). When parents are contacted only due to something problematic that their child has done, it weakens the relationship between the family and the school. In addition to communicating with families, parents and caregivers can volunteer their time. This can be either in school or in other locations (Epstein, 2019). Providing opportunities to volunteer outside of school reaches parents who may not be able to attend school functions, thus finding new ways to incorporate them and their skills into supporting the school.

Learning at home is just as important as learning in the school building. Research indicates that when parents show an interest in what their child is learning at school, the child is more likely to be interested in what they are learning (Epstein, 2019). Additionally, providing parents with the tools and resources to learn at home creates an awareness and pride in their child as a learner. Epstein (2019) notes that one thing teachers should consider when assigning homework is the ability to learn from home. Parents can act to extend what teachers are teaching but the amount of homework assigned shows that teachers respect time with family (Epstein, 2019).

When including parents in decision making, parents are more aware of what policies and procedures are in place as well as have a voice to speak up about programs they would be interested in seeing the school provide and what programs or school supports are not working for their child (Epstein, 2019). Most schools have a Parent Teacher Association, which includes parents, school, and community members. At the secondary level, “student voices must inform that conversation as equal members with an equal vote,” making the organization change to Parent Teacher Student Association (National PTA website, 2020, para 2). This group meets regularly and assists schools with hosting programs and providing space for each stakeholder to come together and discuss what needs the school has.

Lastly, when collaborating with the community, schools are able to add to the resources and services provided. For example, if a school has a need for support for students with incarcerated parents, partnering with a community organization to provide services can assist those students and their families with needs that the school would not normally be able to provide. Moreover, schools can collaborate with different agencies to provide support to student learning and provide opportunities for students to engage in community service (Epstein, 2019).

Parental Engagement

As cited by Goodall and Montgomery (2014), Macmillan Dictionary (2009-2012b) states, involvement may be defined as “the act of taking part in an activity or event, or situation” while engagement may be defined as “the feeling of being involved in a particular activity” or “a formal arrangement to meet someone to do something, especially as part of your public duties” (pp. 399-400). The authors note the level of commitment involved in engagement:

Engagement would seem to encompass more than just activity – there is some feeling of ownership of that activity which is greater than is present with simple involvement. This

means that parental engagement will involve a greater commitment, a greater ownership of action, than will parental involvement with schools. (p. 400)

Research indicated that many entities are using the terms parental involvement and parental engagement based off a continuum, with benefits to both the school and student's learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) defined parental engagement as "parents' engagement in their children's lives to influence the children's overall actions" (p. 402). The authors cited the definition from Kim (2009), indicating that parental engagement and parental involvement are not the same terms. Parental engagement must be rooted in the home for it to be the most effective. The research indicated that parents understand the importance of being engaged, however, their confidence level in helping their children is decreasing (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 402).

Hands (2013) noted that while both parental involvement and parental engagement are similar, the term involvement focuses on parent support to the school and the term engagement includes a shared power and an understanding that parents can also contribute to teaching and learning. Hands stressed the growing research surrounding the positive correlation between student achievement and parental engagement in student learning. In addition, Hands (2013) mentioned a disconnect between parent engagement and educator expectations of parent engagement based on a quote from Superintendent Roberta Mack, stating how much work educators put in on Curriculum Nights and the lack of parent presence. The lack of engagement and attendance at parent nights can impact the ways parents are viewed by educators and school staff.

Harris and Goodall (2008) stated that student achievement is positively impacted by parental engagement in school. This is important in that “across the world there is a growing recognition of the importance of engaging parents, families, and communities in raising the educational aspirations and attainment of young people” (p. 278). The authors noted that empirical evidence shows parental engagement is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement and school improvement whereas the research indicates the impact of parental engagement is complex due to the interaction and influence of various factors (Harris & Goodall, 2008).

In 1998, Finn identified three types of parental engagement at home: (1) actively organizing and monitoring the child’s time; (2) helping with homework; and (3) discussing school matters with the child (p. 20). Actively organizing time is indicated by having students on a daily and weekly schedule. Finn indicated that students who have regular routines tend to perform better in school; this includes monitoring extra-curricular activities and limiting activities such as watching television. When a parent is involved in their child’s homework, it provides them with an opportunity to show interest in what their child is learning and be a part of their schooling. Finn cited Epstein (1983) in that more than 85 percent of parents “spent at least 15 minutes daily tutoring their children when the teacher requested” (p. 21). In addition, students perform better when they discuss their school experience with their parents.

Title One

According to McClure (2008), on April 12, 1965, as part of his War on Poverty, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed legislation for low-income schools to receive Title One funds. The purpose of Title One funds was to “ensure federal financial aid is spent on top of state and local funds to which all public school children are entitled” (McClure, 2008, para. 1); these

funds were to be used comparable services to those offered to students in schools that did not receive Title One funds. The United States Department of Education (2015) notes “the purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (para 1).

According to Misturelli and Heffernan (2010), poverty means not having enough money to buy oneself out of deprivation. It also means the deprivation of basic means of livelihood. Misturelli and Heffernan further stated that:

Poverty can be understood as deprivation...Or it may be a lack of something absolute necessary – one cannot survive without sufficient food and water. Or it may be the lack of something one ought by ordinary civilized standards to be entitled to, such as medical care, or education, or a job. (p. 40)

African American and Native American people suffer from higher rates of poverty (McLoyd, 1998). Furthermore, poverty rates have risen significantly over the past five decades for African American and Latina women (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Allen-Meares, 2002). In fact, in the United States, 80% of the population owns only 15% of the country’s wealth, and the number of people living in poverty increased from 37.3 million in 2007 to 43.4 million people in 2009 (Brueggemann, 2013).

Title 1 provides “financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or percentages of children from low-income families to ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (United States Department of Education, 2018, para 2). A requirement of receiving these funds is that schools must develop a Parent and Family engagement policy (United States, Department of Education, 2020). These components

can include hosting parent nights, sending home newsletters, having parent volunteers in the school building, or including parent presence on committees. Including parents on committees that make decisions about programming or activities at the school can potentially add a different perspective than what is normally heard from the staff.

In some low-income schools, there is a range of parents these schools serve, some being from low socioeconomic status (SES) and others from higher SES. To receive Title 1 funding, 40% of the students enrolled must be from low-income families (NCES, 2015). The funds can be used to upgrade programming to increase student achievement through schoolwide programs. If a school has less than 40% of students who are classified as low-income, schools can offer a “targeted assistance program” to assist students identified as failing or at risk of failing to aide them in meeting the state’s achievement standards (NCES, 2015).

Evans and Radina (2014) stated that it is critical to have family, school, and community partnerships for students to achieve. In 1994, the United States passed a version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to address the challenges of building a strong home to school connection. As part of ESEA legislation, there is a written agreement between a Title One school and parents to identify activities that will increase student achievement through a shared responsibility between home and school. The goal is to create systems that will continue to engage low-income families to improve attendance, student achievement, and overall attitudes towards school. Parent perception and feelings towards schools can impact how students view school and efforts they put forth.

Parent Perception/Expectations of Parental Engagement

As previously mentioned, parental engagement positively impacts student achievement. Schueler McIntyre, and Gehlbach (2017) indicated that school districts who receive Title One

funds must utilize at least one percent of these funds towards family engagement if the funds total more than \$500,000. Schueler et al. shared a hypothetical situation about two parents who both care about their child's education, with one parent having the necessary resources and the other not having as many resources. Both parents are integral in the success of their children but how schools assist each parent will look different. Schools must take stock in what the needs are and identify programming and resources to help the families that it serves.

Without communicating with parents, it can be difficult to provide programming and resources for them because schools may not identify appropriate programming and resources. Three reasons are identified as factors that complicate measuring family engagement in schools. These factors include understanding that both the engagement and barriers to engagement must be measured; tools to assess engagement function as a traditional tool whereas tools to assess the barriers may function differently; and lastly, "parents/guardians are uniquely busy survey respondents" (Schuler et al., 2017, p. 278). Schueler, Capotosto, Bahena, McIntyre, and Gehlbach (2014) discussed how a parent's attitude towards school impacts how students perceive school. Many of the measurement tools assess student and teacher perception but tools are needed to gauge parent perspectives as well to get a more holistic view of school climates.

Research indicates that to increase parental engagement, schools must work on ways to improve how parents view the school (Schuler et al., 2014). Parent perceptions of the school may influence the child's views of the school, which impacts student achievement levels (Schuler et al., 2014). Much research has been conducted around identifying scales that will be beneficial in measuring parent perception to identify ways to improve parental engagement (Schuler et al., 2014; Schuler et al., 2017). Erdener and Knoeppel (2018) supported the growing idea that communication about which programs are beneficial for parents is best achieved through two-

way communication. The authors discussed how Epstein's (2019) six types of involvement can engage parents in a variety of ways, thus not making in school participation the only way to be involved.

Teacher Perception/Expectations of Parental Engagement

Teacher perception of parental engagement can hinder positive relationships between parents and schools. Lawson (2003) stated that when parents and teachers have competing perceptions, it leads to misunderstanding and conflict. Lawson noted that parental involvement is defined by teachers "as a means for parents and families to cooperate and acquiesce to the needs of the school as defined by teachers" (p. 104). Teachers indicated several reasons as to what they identify as parental involvement. For example, one teacher in Lawson's study stated that she saw parental involvement as parents being there when whenever she calls. Furthermore, teachers suggested that the majority of their students were not prepared to learn when they arrived at school.

According to Olsen and Fuller (2003), "Teachers develop ideas about parents based on their interactions with them" (p. 96). The authors continued, noting it is easier for educators to communicate with parents when educators realize the vulnerability and sensitivity parents have about their children. Understanding the family has been one constant that has arisen through the literature (e.g., see Olsen & Fuller, 2003; Epstein, 2019). Being vulnerable can be difficult for some parents and educators. Taking time to build relationships with families and understanding family needs allows space for the vulnerability that may need to happen when creating partnerships with each other. Olsen and Fuller added that teachers who are parents have a different perspective and are more comfortable in the school.

Research also indicates that lack of parental involvement stems from their parents not having been involved and needs to be addressed by teaching parents how to be involved in their child's education (Lawson, 2003). Identifying programming to provide parents with tools to better support their children is one method schools can use to meet the Title One component of engaging parents. According to Lawson, teachers observed that they view lack of involvement as parents neglecting their responsibility as parents. Even when parents are bribed by being given incentives to attend parent nights or parent programs, some teachers indicate there is still a lack of parent presence. This outlook on parents by teachers negatively impacts the relationships that teachers and parents are able to build with each other (Lawson, 2003). Teachers in Lawson's study seemed to use their personal experience to evaluate and judge parents and the decisions they made. This notion of teachers' negative views about certain parents supports the identification of why some parents do not feel comfortable in attending events at their child's school.

Benefits of Parental Engagement

School, community, and family partnerships are not a luxury but a necessity (Henderson et al., 2007). Partnerships and student achievement are closely related, with increased graduation rates and students more likely to enroll in postsecondary education (Henderson et al., 2007). A growing body of evidence that shows that, in addition to improved student achievement, increased parental engagement tends to lead parents to become more involved in their communities (Map et al., 2007). Henderson et al. (2007) elaborated further that when parents are engaged, they are more likely to understand the goals of the school and teacher as well as to support potential changes. The more positive the interaction between teacher and parent, the more positive rating a parent receives from the teacher.

While parents play a key role in the success of students, they have been recognized as a child's first teacher (LaRocque et al., 2011). One benefit to parents being involved in school is that it gives parents the opportunity to socialize with other parents as well as to share concerns (Domina, 2005). Parents can create alliances with each other and help monitor each other's children. It confirms the saying "it takes a village" (NEA, 2008, p. 1). Another benefit is being able to make differences within the school, such as being part of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA; Domina, 2005). Parents have an opportunity to join PTA and vote on decisions or concerns that are brought up at those meetings, giving them an avenue to voice concerns and provide suggestions to the school.

Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) stated that since parents are considered stakeholders in the school community, educators must realize the extent and intensity that parents have regarding their child's education. Schools must create strong collaborations with parents to create a sense of belonging with the school. Studies have been conducted on how parents will move into a specific neighborhood because the climate of the school was rated very high (Schueler et al., 2014). School climate also factors into parents choosing to withdraw their children from a school. Parents want to be included in their child's education but if the climate of the school is not right, parents can be less likely to participate.

Additionally, by parents being engaged in their child's education, research indicates their academic achievement is higher. As cited by Sapungan and Sapungan (2014), "Pinantoan (2013) pointed out the influence of parental involvement on a student's academic success should not be underestimated" (p. 45). The authors state that students are 52% more likely to enjoy school and have better grades if they have two supportive parents. An area that needs to be explored is the notion that creating a learning environment at home, having high, realistic expectations, and

involvement in education via the school and community is the most accurate predictor for student achievement.

Increased parental engagement is not only beneficial for students and their families, but for the school and teacher as well (Olsen & Fuller, 2003; Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). Olsen and Fuller (2003) discussed the benefit of parental involvement as it relates to students, parents, educators, and schools. In addition to improved achievement, students benefit from parental involvement by having positive attitudes about school and improved behavior. Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) supported this idea, explaining that students whose parents are engaged tend to have better self-esteem and have a positive attitude towards school. Students also benefit from consistently completing homework and less placement in special education classes.

Parents are benefited by increased confidence in helping their child and are more aware of the policies that impact decisions made regarding their children's education when they are more engaged (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). Olsen and Fuller (2003) stated that parents have more confidence in their parenting and decision-making skills with increased engagement. For teachers and schools, they are better able to understand the cultures present in the school and are more likely to experience higher morale with engaged parents. Additionally, improved parental involvement leads to improved communication and relationships between parents, teachers, and administrators (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014).

Title One schools that engage parents in various activities address the parent component required to maintain federal funding. Schools who do not meet that requirement run the risk of losing the additional funding. As part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), school districts can use the funding to pay for afterschool tutors or supplemental services to assist a student in improving academically (Henderson et al., 2007). In addition to funding from NCLB, schools build stronger

community ties and may experience better support from their communities (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014).

Barriers to Parental Engagement

The extent to which a parent can be involved in their child's education is based on a myriad of factors, however, barriers have been identified that hinder parents from participating in different aspects of their child's educational journey. According to the National Education Association (NEA, 2008), examples of barriers can be identified as busy schedules, discomfort when communicating with school personnel, and lacking knowledge of resources and school policies. It has been noted by some parents that they are only contacted only when there is a problem or concern (NEA, 2008).

Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) advanced the notion of Family Support America that identifies the following as common barriers: attitudes, logistics, system barriers, and lack of skills. The attitudes of parents and staff impact relationships, therefore having a direct impact on parent presence in a school building. The authors noted that sometimes staff do not view parents as equal partners. This can pose a problem when parents have concerns or needs to communicate with school staff. Logistically, not all activities are offered during times when some families are able to attend. Those families who work second shifts are unable to attend parent events that are held after school, and events such as special luncheons or parent meetings may be difficult to attend for parents who work first shift.

One systemic barrier identified by teachers in the study conducted by Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) is compensating parents for their time. Financially compensating parents and teachers for their extra time usually is not in the budget of the school or school district. Parents in low-income neighborhoods who are working multiple jobs tend to not be able to take any extra

time off from work to attend school programming but if options such as stipends or vouchers for being present are offered, the number of parents attending events may increase. Lastly, Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) highlighted the issue of families not being aware of school policies and procedures. These policies impact resources and programming available for the students and families served by the school. Furthermore, staff may not be “ready to work with families in new ways” (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014, p. 44).

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) mentioned that parental belief can be identified as a barrier to parental involvement. Their research indicated there are some parents who believe that the school is responsible for teaching their children. This is partly due to the fact that some parents do not feel equipped to help their child with their schoolwork, a factor that which has also been identified as a barrier to engagement. Often, when parents have had a negative interaction in their child’s school, they do not feel comfortable reaching out to the school for help (Hornby & Lafaele, 2012). Having school staff that is supportive of families and their concerns, creating welcoming environments, and open communication are ways to assist parents in feeling comfortable with coming to the school when there is a problem.

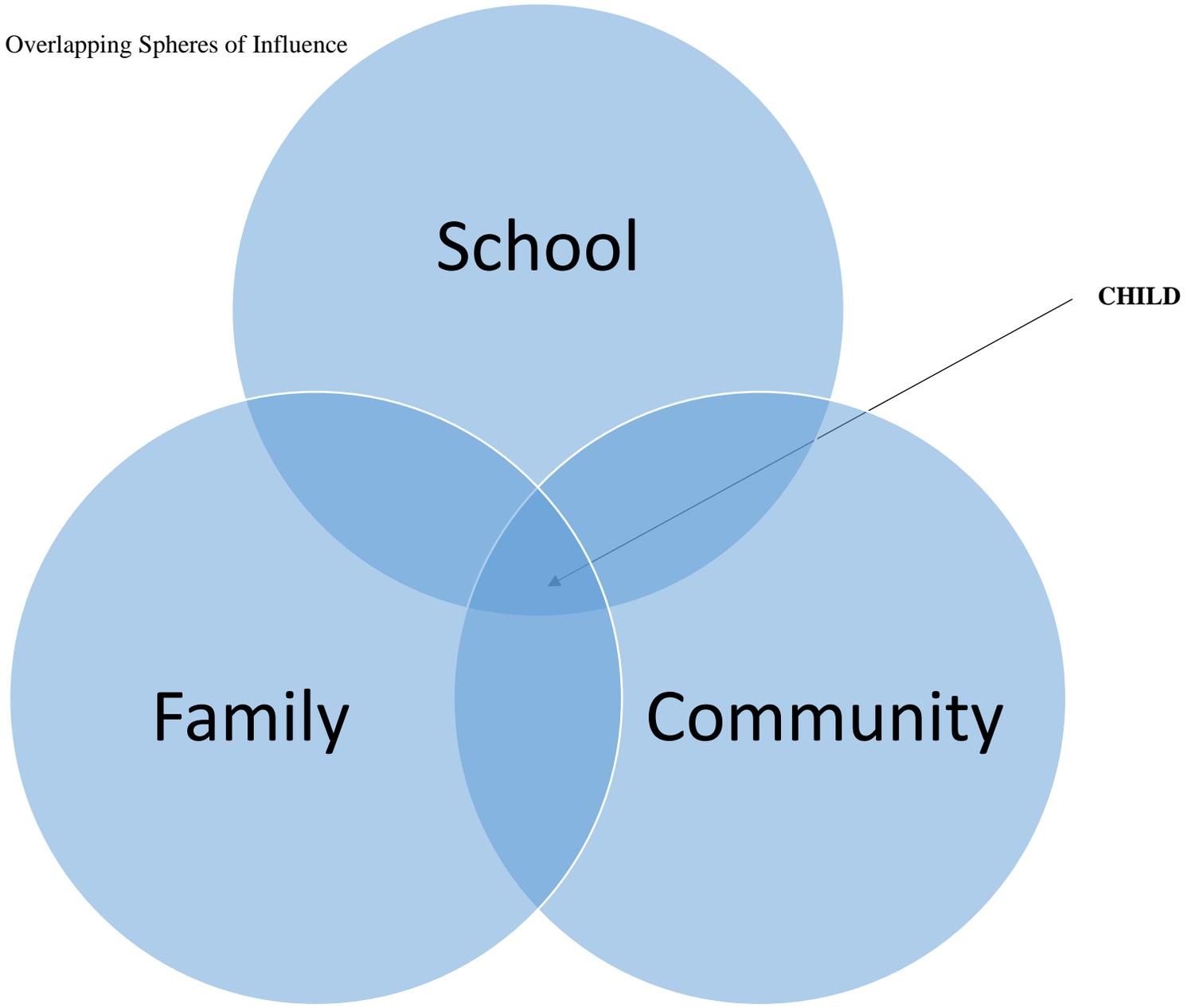
Conceptual Framework

Epstein’s (2019) framework of six types of involvement was used to conduct this study. Epstein introduced the idea that the relationship between families and schools should be a partnership. She stated that partnership shares the responsibility of student learning between parents, schools, and community organizations and identified that the partnership includes terms such as involvement, engagement, and collaboration. These partnerships are pertinent to school climate and can improve the overall climate of the school, provide parents with the necessary

resources they need to support their families and their children’s education, as well as strengthen programs offered by the school.

Epstein (2019) identified schools, families, and communities as the three spheres of influence, meaning that these three spheres collectively impact a child’s overall learning. She further explained that there is an external and internal model to the influence of the three spheres. The external model refers to how students learn in three different environments—school, home, and community. As educators and school leaders, it is important to make sure that it is noted that a child brings their home and community life with them each day they arrive at school. The internal model refers to the relationships and interactions that occur in each sphere. Figure 2.1 shows Epstein’s external overlapping spheres of influence as she described them. The sphere shows how the child is at the center of each entity, supporting the need for partnerships between communities, families, and schools.

Figure 2.1 Epstein Overlapping Spheres of Influence



Epstein's (2019) six types of involvement include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. As previously noted, each of these components is equally important. There will be times where some parents can engage with their children only in learning at home due to a busy work schedule or inability to attend school functions due to lack of transportation and there will be times where parents are able to be present in all aspects. Highly critical to these six types of involvement is the school's willingness to partner with families and the community. While Epstein's framework was identified in earlier research, she has continued to evolve her framework to adapt to societal changes and the factors facing families, schools, and communities.

Epstein's (2019) framework has been applied to assessing how parents and teachers view parental engagement. Often, a basic assumption of parental engagement is that if parents are not present in the school building, then they are not engaged or do not care about their child's education. This framework indicates that while presence in the school is important, it is not the only way parents can assist their children and their child's school. While there are other frameworks that support parental engagement, Epstein's framework has been researched and utilized by many. The use of this framework will guide questions to ask of parents and teachers in order to better understand parent and teacher perceptions of parental engagement.

Chapter Summary

Involving and engaging parents in their child's education is imperative to not only the child, but to the family, school, and community. Epstein's (2019) framework on the six types of involvement was explained and explored to identify ways in which parents and teachers are considering all avenues in which to address the lack of parental engagement in Title One schools.

Through this framework, Epstein discusses how there are a myriad of ways in which parents can be engaged in their children's education. Additionally, Epstein's framework addresses the significance of creating partnerships between schools, families, and the communities.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides information about how this study was conducted: the research questions, methodology, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. It also includes a statement on the researcher's positionality in relation to this study and a statement of ethics that include how the researcher's views influence the results of this study. The goal of this chapter is to explain the steps the researcher took to better understand parental engagement and how to recruit participants with fidelity. Additionally, this chapter discusses how bias was mitigated in order to ensure the best outcome.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to assess how parents and teachers define parental engagement and how it influences student achievement. This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How do parent perspectives of parental engagement impact levels of parental engagement and student achievement in Title One schools?
2. How do teacher perceptions of parental engagement impact their relationships with students and their families in Title One schools?
3. What are the similarities and differences in parent and teacher perception of parental engagement?
4. How can these perceptions be utilized to improve parental engagement to benefit student achievement?

During the study, I interacted with parents and educators in select Title One elementary schools with the goal of adding to the current literature on how parental engagement influences student achievement and how parents, schools, and communities can work together for the betterment of the child.

Methodological Approach

This study was conducted utilizing qualitative research. Beaudry and Miller (2016) stated that “the qualitative paradigm is rooted in the philosophy of *naturalism*” (p. 6). The authors continued that the best place to study people is in their natural settings and cannot be understood as a “single, objective reality” (p. 6). Qualitative research also seeks to view participant realities holistically, including their lived experiences, allowing the researchers to immerse themselves in the lives of their participants. Maxwell (2013) stated that qualitative research should be a “reflexive process” (p. 2) and as “do-it-yourself” (p. 3). Ravitch and Carl (2016) defined reflexivity as the ability to assess your identity, positionality, and subjectiveness. A researcher’s positionality—one’s identity as it relates to the research—has the potential to create a level of bias when conducting the study. Being aware of how one’s own identity plays a role is important when conducting research because the participant voice must be heard.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) indicated that qualitative research transforms the world through its interpretive practices. One of the key components of qualitative research is the researcher as instrument. The researcher as instrument is important because as the research progresses, the researcher’s role and identity continue to develop. Due to the researcher being the primary instrument in collecting data, the researcher’s influence must be monitored throughout the entirety of the study. This can assist in reducing researcher bias that may impact the overall outcome. While there are many types of qualitative research (Hatch, 2002), Creswell and Poth

identified five main types of qualitative study: narrative study, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.

Qualitative research is best used when studying a group of people, or voices that have been silenced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Often, parents' voices are not heard, so utilizing a methodology where parents are able to add their lived experiences strengthens the validity of this study. To better understand parental engagement and how to improve it, parent and teacher experiences must be included. For these reasons, a phenomenological approach was selected to conduct this study.

Phenomenology

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), to study phenomenology is to study the “lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” (p. 69). The authors noted that when doing a phenomenological study, the purpose is to understand the essence of an individual. Phenomenological study began with German mathematician Edmund Husserl who described it as a way of studying “how people describe things and experience them through their eyes” (as cited by Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). Vagle (2018) stated that “phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences” (p. XI). Understanding how people experience phenomena aids researchers in understanding human behavior. In conducting a phenomenological study, data can be streamlined with one or multiple interviews with participants, providing a deeper understanding of participant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Simply put, phenomenology is “utilized to depict the essence or basic structure of experience” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26). “When we study something phenomenologically, we are not trying to get inside other people’s minds. Rather, we are trying to contemplate the

various ways things manifest and appear in and through our being in the world” (p. 23). Groenewald (2004) states that the “operative word in phenomenological research is ‘describe.’ The aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts” (p. 44). The phenomena of parental engagement can be better understood by asking those who experience it. How each participant internalizes their truth on the subject helps build a better understanding of what is that the research, educators, and parents can do to build upon this topic.

Merriam and Grenier (2019) observed that for a researcher to truly understand the essence of a participant’s experience, the researcher must bracket, or put aside, their personal beliefs about the topic. In doing so, the researcher can intuitively understand the phenomenon differently than if bias and personal beliefs were not set aside, thus impacting the validity of a study. Validity is later discussed further when discussing the researcher as instrument. Groenewald (2004) cited Holloway (1997) and Hycner (1999), recommending listening to an interview recording multiple times so that the researcher may develop a holistic view and better understand what the interviewee is trying to say. The researcher is also charged with reconstructing the inner view of the participant when summarizing interview responses. Reviewing participant responses to verify that the responses were understood correctly was a method of validating the response that was given. Moustakas (1994) identified that a researcher’s perception is “regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted” (p. 52).

Creswell and Poth (2018) identified a few challenges when conducting a phenomenological study. One challenge is that having researchers bracket their personal experiences may be difficult because the assumptions made by researchers have helped to

implement interpretation of data. The authors continued to discuss redefining bracketing, leaving it up to the researcher as to how they will incorporate their prior knowledge, or personal understanding, in the study. Another challenge identified is that phenomenology may be too structured for some researchers, and it requires understanding of broad philosophical content, which can sometimes be abstract concepts. These concepts are important when it is time to analyze the data, so common themes may be identified.

Positionality Statement

As a budding researcher, I am interested in exploring and identifying how parental engagement is beneficial and impactful for student achievement. I would like to provide parents and schools with the tools and resources to increase their parental engagement, whether it be in the school or in their communities. As an educator, I see differences in how students perform in the classroom, be it academically, behaviorally, socially, or emotionally, as well as how students interact with each other and school staff. One thing that I have noticed, is that students whose parents are involved and engaged in their academic affairs tend to have higher academic achievement, behave better in the classroom, and to attend parent events at the school, as well as various extracurricular activities.

Relles (2016) defined positionality as “a research method to mitigate bias” (p. 313). Everyone has biases, whether they are aware of them or not. As a researcher, it is important to take into consideration any biases that may be held when working with certain populations. For me, I must be careful not to assume that parents do not want to be engaged in their child’s academic endeavors. My parents were very involved in my education, coming to parent teacher conferences, band competitions, track meets, and whatever else I had going on. Not every child has the opportunity for their parents to attend school functions. Fortunately for me, my parents

worked first shifts and were able to attend events. Families that I work with now may work second shifts or multiple jobs to provide for their families.

It is equally important that I am aware of the experiences the students and their families bring with them. Much research has been conducted on whether parents were following in the examples that were afforded to them when they were children. Some parents reported that they remember their parents being engaged when they were children and how it showed them the importance of being engaged in their child's education. Others had little to no recollection of their parent's engagement; therefore some felt it not as important in comparison to making sure basic needs were being met.

One limitation during the study is that it was conducted in the midst of a global pandemic—COVID-19. COVID-19 has led to many deaths and quarantining people to their homes. Due to COVID-19, schools transitioned to virtual learning to keep everyone safe. States required people to social distance, which limited in-person interactions.

Statement of Ethics

In conducting this research, it is important to note that avoiding unfounded assumptions is necessary not only for parents, but for educators as well. Often, one might hear educators talking about how parents do not care or how the same parents attend the parent events. I remember having a conversation with a teacher about how he was not using his Class Dojo— (an in-class behavior system app used by teachers to improve behavior and communicate with families)—because some students did not care about how many points they received. He stated that the parents of students who did care about Class Dojo points had the app and communicated with him about any concerns. Understandably, it is easier to assume that parents who do not have

the app are less likely to be engaged, but educators must be aware that some families do not have the necessary tools or resources to participate in activities related to the school building.

On the other hand, this teacher noticed a marked academic and behavioral differences in the students whose parents were in constant communication with him versus those who were not. Although educators may have the best intentions for children and their families, they must in the end, be respectful to the decisions that parents make for their family. Educators cannot look at themselves as saviors, but as partners with the child and parents. Relationships are important when working with families. Communication is key, making sure that it is both positive and provides areas for improvement. Educators want to work with parents and show that they are on their side in making sure their child is safe, cared for, and their best interest is in mind.

When selecting participants, it is important to select them from various backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses, as well as having varied levels of engagement. Doing so provides a better representation of the community that is served and benefits each participant. Even parents who educators think may know how to help their children may themselves need help. Times are changing and educators must work with families to stay current with the different teaching methods and help identify opportunities for learning outside of the school building. Educators want parents to get the most out of what is offered to them and part of that process includes getting feedback from the parents. Parents are the ones who will best be able to guide the research in identifying areas of improvement and/or concerns they may have.

When describing qualitative research, Hatch (2002) identified five research paradigms—positivist, postpositivist, constructivist, critical/feminist, and poststructuralist. These paradigms guide researchers in their assumptions about what research is and how it works. The author posed four questions for each paradigm: “What is the nature of the reality? (ontology); what can

be known and what is the relationship of the knower to the known? (epistemology); how can knowledge be gained? (methodology); and lastly, what forms of knowledge are produced? (product)” (pp. 12-14). The constructivist paradigm is one that accepts “individual perspectives or constructions of reality” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15).

For that reason, I explored this study from a constructivist lens. In doing so, participant experiences drove the research in finding what worked best for them. For some parents, negative experiences can drive how a parent views school. Educators must take into consideration how experiences impact a parent’s willingness to engage in activities in the school building. I am eager to learn different ways of helping to bridge parents and education, as well as to identify ways to remove barriers to engagement. Parents play an integral role in educational achievement, potentially improving their child’s outlook on education. Educators must work as a team to obtain the best results, preparing students for all avenues available post-high school graduation.

Study Design

For this study, the first step was applying for consent to conduct the study through the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once IRB approval was obtained, participants were recruited to partake in the study. During the recruitment phase, participants were made aware that at any point during the study, they had the option to opt out of the study. Once the participant selection was completed, I provided each participant with a demographic survey to gather background information. Interviews were then conducted via Microsoft Teams, but one participant was interviewed over the phone because that individual was unable to connect to Microsoft Teams. After completing the interviews, I analyzed the data by coded interview responses utilizing line-by-line coding to generate themes. These themes were then utilized to attempt to answer the research questions that guided this study.

Participants

This study included 12 participants. Six participants were parents, and six were educators. Creswell and Poth (2018) identified that phenomenological studies include between five and 25 individuals who have experienced the same phenomena. Participants were selected utilizing criterion sampling. Criterion sampling works best when all participants have lived experiences of the phenomenon in which the researcher is studying (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The following criteria had to be met to qualify for this study:

1. Must identify as teacher in a Title One school
2. Must be a parent of a child who attends a Title One school
3. One parent per household

The goal was to have a representative sample of parents and teachers to get a clear understanding of participant views on parental engagement. Due to the global pandemic, participants were recruited via social media, word of mouth, and participant recommendation.

All participants completed a demographic survey prior to being interviewed for this study. The demographic survey included information such as: age range, salary range, whether they self-identify as a parent or educator, if there are children in the home, and how many children. Participants had the option of choosing not to answer a question if they did not want to. Table 3.1 provides a demographic overview of the participants that were included. Participants ranged in age from 25 years old to 55 years old. Several regions of the United States were represented (i.e., Southeastern, Southwestern, and Western regions). Each participant brought a unique vision of parental engagement and how it influenced their life, whether they identified as an educator or parent.

Table 3.1

Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Race/ Ethnicity	Role/Title	Highest Degree	Salary Range
Joe Clark	M	45-55	AA	Educator, Behavior Interventionist	Masters	>65,000
Michelle	F	35-45	AA	Educator, Reading Interventionist	Masters	50,000-65,000
Angelica	F	45-55	AA	Educator, Literacy Coach	Masters	>65,000
Dr. Assatta	F	45-55	AA	Educator, Teacher, Former Admin	Doctorate	>65,000
Scarlett J.	F	25-35	White	Educator, FRC Coordinator	Masters	NA
Ellie	F	25-35	White	Educator, School Sports Performance Coach	Bachelors	>65,000
Miss Smith	F	45-55	AA	Parent/Educator, ECE Implementation Coach	Masters	>65,000
Ann	F	35-45	White	Parent	Masters	>65,000
Breonna	F	25-35	AA	Parent	Bachelors	40,000-50,000
Selena	F	25-35	Hispanic	Parent/Educator, ECE teacher (K-5 LBD)	Masters, pursuing advanced certification	50,000-65,000
Glenn	F	35-45	White	Parent	HS Diploma	<30,000
Karen	F	25-35	White	Parent	HS Diploma	<30,000

Note: *Each participant selected, or was given, a pseudonym to protect their identity.

**Names of institutions and children were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

***NA=participant preferred not to answer.

Data Collection

For this study, data were collected by conducting interviews and demographic surveys. The survey provided background information for each participant, with each participant being coded anonymously to match survey responses with interview responses. Each interview was conducted via Microsoft Teams. One participant chose to have the interview via a phone call due to not being able to access Microsoft Teams. Participant interviews ranged from thirty minutes to two and a half hours long.

Participant consent was obtained prior to conducting each interview. Participants were given the opportunity to refuse to participate and withdraw participation at any point of the study without any penalty. All participants remained in the study until its completion. Confidentiality was maintained by utilizing password-protected documents; all documents were kept on a password protected computer. Participants were given the opportunity to choose their pseudonym at the end of their interview and to confirm the pseudonym with the researcher. Participants chose pseudonyms that represented who they are as a person.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one to protect the identity of the participant. Prior to the start of the interview, participants were asked for permission to video and/or audio record the interview so that I could be fully present during the interview. Upon completion of the interviews, recordings were uploaded to Kaltura to begin the transcription process. Before interviews were conducted, a qualified researcher reviewed the interview questions and the demographic questionnaire to ensure that each instrument aligned with the research questions. Castillo-Montoya (2016) discussed a four-phase interview protocol process. These four phases include ensuring that interview questions align with research questions (phase 1); constructing an

inquiry-based conversation (phase 2); receiving feedback on interview protocols (phase 3); and piloting the interview protocol (phase 4; Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 812).

Using an interview protocol increased the quality of data obtained from the research interview (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The four-phrase process for interview protocols ensured that robust and detailed information was obtained to address the research questions. Having a clearly identified interview protocol assisted in achieving qualitative reliability, which Creswell and Creswell (2017) identified as the consistency and stability of research approaches.

Interviews were recorded and utilized to code interview responses to identify reoccurring themes that arose. Recordings of interviews were protected on a password-protected laptop for further review. Upon completion of the study, transcripts and recordings were maintained in a secure folder in the event of study publication. At no point will participant names ever be revealed. Each participant, school, district, and child's name were all changed to a pseudonym to protect the participant identities.

Data Analysis

Interview recordings were uploaded to a third-party transcription service, Kaltura, and reviewed upon return for accuracy. Once completed, interview transcripts were emailed to participants for verification. Data were analyzed by utilizing line-by-line coding. Saldaña (2016) defined a code as “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 4). Ravitch and Carl (2016) defined coding as “typically a part of qualitative data analysis, but it is only one of many aspects of qualitative data analysis” (p. 248). Coding interview responses for themes helped identify whether any participants, either educators and

parents, agreed or disagreed on their thoughts about parental engagement and the overall benefits it provides.

The codes were identified by reading each transcript, line-by-line, and pulling out information relevant to the study, adding to the body of research on parental engagement. Saldaña (2016) stated that a code is generated by the researcher and symbolizes or translates the data. Chenail (2017) indicated that line-by-line coding can be utilized to slow down a researcher's pace when analyzing data. Line-by-line coding assisted in identifying strong data that supported the research surrounding the topic of parental engagement. When conducting line by line coding, each line was input into a codebook. Saldaña (2016) indicated that utilizing a codebook can be helpful because the number of codes can accumulate quickly. After inputting the initial codes, the researcher reviewed each line to identify a theme. Once themes were identified, these codes were combined by theme for similarities. Initial coding was reviewed by a critical researcher for accuracy.

Creswell and Creswell (2017) identified three categories of codes when analyzing data: expected codes, surprising codes, and codes of unusual or of conceptual interest. Expected codes are "codes on topics that readers would expect to find, based on literature and common sense" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 195). Surprising codes are those codes that could not be anticipated before the study began. Codes of unusual or of conceptual interest are derived from the conceptual interest to the readers. Codes that arose in this study were categorized as expected codes and codes of conceptual interest.

In addition, each theme was related back to Epstein's (2019) six types of parental engagement, with the hopes of identifying whether any type of parental engagement was used more frequently, or if one was lacking in a particular area. Themes were also organized by

participant type. Once themes were identified amongst all parents and all educators, the researcher identified whether there was any overlap between parent and educator responses. The researcher coded the difference in responses in two categories: parents and educators. This was to identify any disconnect between schools and families. In addition, direct participant quotes were utilized to strengthen the results that were found. Prior to conducting this study, the thought was that Epstein's (2019) framework would show up more frequently during the analysis phase.

While reviewing themes, a process of winnowing was conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Winnowing data is "a process of focusing in on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it....The impact of this process is to aggregate data into a small number of themes, something between five and seven themes" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 192). Elliot (2018) cited Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), stating that winnowing is also considered data condensation. A large amount of useful data was collected but all the information could not be included in this study. This process required being familiar with the data, making sure to capture information that will add to the growing research surrounding this topic.

Researcher as Instrument

As the only researcher for this study, it was my responsibility to recruit participants, collect and analyze data, and write up the results and future suggestions of research. In doing so, it was my duty to check my bias at multiple stages of the study. Creswell and Creswell (2017) discussed how validity is the process by which "the researcher checks the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures" (p. 199). The authors continued, suggesting that multiple procedures of validity are used to enhance accuracy. One procedure of validity utilized was member checking. Ravitch and Carl (2016) identified member checking as the researcher checking in with the participants. Member checking is a way to check researcher bias by having

the participants verify if the researcher grasped the concept in which the participant conveyed. This method lends to achieving validity in a study. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and sent to the participant for member checking. Another method of reducing bias was through triangulation. Triangulating data involves utilizing various avenues of interpreting data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Additionally, triangulation helps the researcher identify if there is enough data to achieve the depth that is desired.

Identifying ways to reduce researcher bias was important to this study. This allowed me to be objective when selecting my participants and collecting data by making sure I had a true representative sample to obtain the most accurate information. If I had not conducted member checking or triangulated the data, I could have misinterpreted what the participants were trying to share. My personal experience with parental engagement could have blurred the lines of gaining more knowledge to help families and schools and adding to the growing literature on parental engagement. Through these steps, I was able to ensure the validity of the study. While participants in this study hailed from different regions of the United States, results of this study do not yield generalizability. Creswell and Creswell (2017) indicated that the term qualitative generalizability is used in a limited way. Furthermore, generalizability refers to repeating a study's findings and achieving the same results. Because of the type of study, results may vary based on the participants and schools selected.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an outline on how this study was conducted. This qualitative, phenomenological study included 12 participants, six of whom self-identified as educators and six who self-identified as parents. All participants were connected to a Title One elementary school located in the Southeastern, Southwestern, or Western regions of the United States. This

study aimed to address the research gaps in parent and teacher perceptions of parental engagement. Data were collected through participant demographic surveys and interviews. To address bias, member checking and triangulation of data were utilized. Data were transcribed utilizing line-by-line coding to identify themes that arose from the interviews. To organize data, a code book was utilized to help the researcher to organize thoughts and themes.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

This qualitative, phenomenological research study aims to identify parent and teacher perceptions of parental engagement. The purpose of this study is twofold. First, the study will assess the parent perception of parental engagement to provide an opportunity for parents to share what parental engagement means and how it impacts their child's education. Secondly, the study will assess the teacher perception of parental engagement and how teacher's views impact the relationships that are created with parents of the students in their classrooms. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are parent perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?
2. What are teacher perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?
3. What are the similarities and differences in parent and teacher perception of parental engagement?
4. How can these perceptions be utilized to improve parental engagement to benefit student achievement?

This chapter is organized by first providing background information on the participant. The participant profiles will include demographic information as well as information that is relevant to their work and their interest in this topic. Following the participant profiles, each final theme that emerged will be discussed by providing a general overview of the themes, then discussing how each theme impacted educators and parents. Each research question will be addressed in this chapter; however, research question four will be further discussed in chapter five as part of the future implications for research.

Participant Profiles

Twelve participants were selected for this study. Participants were in the Southeastern, Southwestern, and Western regions of the United States. Participants included in this study all came from Title One elementary schools and identified as educators working in a Title One elementary school or as the parent of a student currently enrolled in urban Title One elementary schools. Of the 12 participants, one identified as male, and the other 11 identified as female. All names of participants, schools, co-workers, and children included in this chapter have been changed to pseudonyms to protect participant identities. Each participant profile begins with a quote from the participant interview. The selected quote for each participant provides an insight into the participant as a person.

Educator Participants

Joe

When I look at the school, as a whole, the parents and students, I see them as all family...That's kind of twofold. Right? One allows the children again to feel more comfortable in the school environment, but also it helps the parents to feel more comfortable in the school environment.

Joe is a 45–55-year-old, male educator who has been working in education for 24 years. Currently, Joe works in a Title One elementary school in an urban district, in a southeastern state, where he is a behavior interventionist. He works with various students, teaching social skills lessons as well as small group reading. Joe works diligently to assist students with managing their anger, providing services in the classroom (push-in) as well as pulling students out to give them more individual attention. As a behavior interventionist, Joe has had to make difficult phone calls to parents about their child's behavior, making sure to reassure parents that

they are partners. Joe shared that there have been times that he has had parents become upset with him just for calling. Most of the time, parents have been open and welcome to the support that he has provided to their children. When parents have been less open, Joe works to meet with them to rebuild that relationship, so the child ultimately is able overcome his or her current challenge.

Michelle

I think they [Epstein's six types] are all beneficial for my school. Each one plays a different role. One, like the first one, the parenting, that's more like family support to the last one that is more like community support. So, they all have a piece in it, in parent involvement.

Michelle is a 25–35-year-old, female educator, working in the southeastern region. Her highest level of degree is completion of a master's degree, and she has worked in education for 12 years. Michelle's quote relates to Epstein's (2019) six types of parental involvement. Michelle is a reading interventionist in her current role. She works with individual students and small groups to assist students with improving their reading levels. In her previous roles, Michelle has taught second and third grade students. Throughout her career, Michelle has worked with parents and students closely, finding new ways to interact and engage with both parents and students. As is the case with many other participants, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted how Michelle works with her students and families that she serves. She continues to do what is best for her students, making sure they have what they need, as well as using various methods to communicate with her students' families. As an interventionist, communication is vital to the relationship she has with her students and their families, as families must work together in the home so what the students learn at school is being carried over in the home.

Angelica

The six things that were identified truly are the six things that will need to happen in order for engagement to be successful...For me, as I relate it to my kids...I'll now go back and make sure that I'm touching each one of them, each one of those definitions, each one of those areas.

Hailing from the southeastern region, Angelica is a 45–55-year-old female educator. She has received her master's degree and is currently working on her PhD. She has worked in education for 19 years and currently is a literacy coach. Angelica communicates regularly with her families, hosting family literacy nights to help families and students. In these family nights, she enlists a mystery reader, and that reader can be any staff member or a parent. She shared about how the students in her school did not have access to Wi-Fi, so a local radio personality purchased hotspots, so the students are able to log in for virtual learning. As a thank you, she assisted the students with practicing their literacy skills in writing thank you notes. Angelica shared that volunteering is an integral part to student success. Incorporating parents in her family literacy nights is a great way to include parents or other relatives in the events that are hosted by the school. Communication is another integral piece in working with her families. Communication helps to create and build relationships with families and the community.

Dr. Assata

I believe communication is key...You can communicate but you also have to have, I'll say a joyful spirit. Or a very professional, but understanding demeanor, where you get it, you know what I'm saying? So, you get their plight and not judge them for their plight.

Dr. Assata is a very passionate, engaged teacher who teaches in the western region. She has received her doctorate degree and enjoys working with her students. Dr. Assata has an

educational background rooted in social justice and has been working in education for 23 years. She brings that same fire from her educational journey into her classroom. She works well with her families, going above and beyond. She mentioned that she has taken an alternate route to the classroom, in that she started off as a principal, was a vice principal, assistant principal, and now is a teacher. She enjoys working in the classroom, building relationships with her families, and problem-solving ways to improve things for her families. Dr. Assata shared she is willing to put in the extra work to make sure that her families are being met where they are. She thinks outside the box, also recognizing that sometimes she cannot share some of her concerns or findings with the administration because it is “frowned upon”. Dr. Assata brings a very interesting dynamic to her classroom and her families are grateful. Her expectations are set in the beginning, and her families follow them. In her school, there are two sides: the community side and the gifted magnet side. Teaching on the gifted magnet side, she has noticed a difference in the level of engagement of the parents, noting that the community side tends to have lower engagement.

Scarlett J.

I think when students feel supported at home and at school, they're going to do better, try better. They're going to want to impress...They love to come to school and say, 'Oh, you know, my mom and I stayed up all night and we practiced these spelling words and I'm ready for this test....'

Scarlett is a 25-35-year-old educator from the southeastern region. She has her master's degree and currently is employed in an urban district as a Family Resource Center (FRC) Coordinator. Working as an FRC, she provides resources to families in need, be it basic needs or connecting families with community resources. Scarlett works constantly to maintain positive relationships with her families and the students she serves. Furthermore, Scarlett provides

opportunities for families to be involved in some capacity with their child. She spoke of an FRC Advisory Committee that is comprised of staff, community, and parents. Through this committee, everyone comes together to identify programming and supports she can provide to her schools' families. Scarlett is intent on making sure that parents and teachers work together. She often contacts families on the behalf of teachers. Scarlett also shared how, at one of schools, the staff did a neighborhood drive thru at the end of the 2019-2020 school year to cheer up the students since the pandemic ended the school year early. She shared that some staff were shocked about the living conditions that the families lived in. Scarlett encourages her co-workers to reach out to families to maintain an open line of communication, as well as to understand where their students are coming from.

Ellie

Now in the middle of the pandemic, the communication with the parents has actually opened up a lot more and it's been a lot more positive. Like, my elementary students are using two different platforms, ClassDojo was one and Google Classroom is the other. So, parents, because we are a separate classroom now outside of the normal first grade, second grade teacher, and we have our own links, parents are actually communicating with me...

Ellie is a School Sports Performance Coach (P.E. teacher) in the Southwestern region. She currently works at a Title One charter school that services K-12 students. She works with all levels, working with middle and high school students daily and with elementary students three days a week. Ellie noted that in her role, pre-pandemic communication with parents was not as positive. Since the pandemic happened, and students are now learning virtually, she has been able to communicate more positively with the families whom she serves and has better

relationships with them. Additionally, in her role, Ellie notices that there are some parents who are involved only in their child's extracurricular activities. To her, it is unfortunate because she has students that are failing and cannot play but there is a lack of accountability on some parents' parts with regard to the student's academic success. She believes that parents should be engaged in all aspects of a child's life, academically and socially. Because she is a P.E. teacher, and students were in the midst of winter break, Ellie posted family activities on her students' page so everyone could be involved and active during the break. She is grateful that through the pandemic she has been able to interact more positively with all families and not just the families of the students she coaches.

Parent Participants

Miss Smith

If I had to say anything, I would say I'm curious as to when did we get away from 'it takes a village to raise a child?' When did we get away from that mentality? Because I don't know about you, but I know if—we didn't like it as kids—that the neighbor, you know could correct us before our parents got home. And then when our parents got home, we still got corrected.

Miss Smith is a parent of five, residing in the southeastern region of the United States. Miss Smith received her master's degree and currently works as an Exceptional Child Education (ECE) Implementation Coach at a Title One elementary school. She has worked in the education field for 19 years. In her role, she works with families through the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process, working with parents and families regularly. She brings a wealth of knowledge to her role as an educator, and as a parent. Miss Smith spoke many times of using your village. As a parent, it is important to her that she relies on those around her to help. Growing up, she had that

village with her family and spoke of the benefit of being able to receive help and give help to others. She is very involved in all of her children's educational journeys. Miss Smith shared that when she had students in college, she had them give her permission to communicate with the university and teachers her sons had. Her children know what her expectation is with education and she wants them all to be successful. She stresses the importance of education, telling her children that there have been many sacrifices so they can go to school for free. Because education is so important to her, she constantly communicates with her children's teachers to ensure everything is turned in on time, review any upcoming events, and just to check in. She shared that her daughter has been at her current school for two great years, as she has had a great relationship with her daughter's teachers.

Ann

Well, I think the more involved you are the higher the kids' grades are. I mean, I think it's a two-way street. If the teachers can't reach out, the parent can't reach out, you know, there's no partnership. Any child that has any type of struggle is just going to struggle.

Ann is a parent of three, residing in the southeastern region of the United States. She is in the 35-45-year-old age range and has received her master's degree. Ann is very engaged in her children's schools, as she is a member of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Participating in her children's educational journey is very important to Ann. She does what it takes to make sure that her children are successful, whether that is learning in person or virtually. Virtual learning has been an adjustment for their family. She has spent hours online with a daughter and her teacher to make sure she is able to get caught up. She communicates with her children's teachers constantly to make sure she is aware of what is going on and what she can do to support them. Having a relationship and partnership with her children's schools is one way to show the

importance of education to her children. She prides herself on being able to volunteer in her children's schools and being a support to the teachers. The relationships that she has created have made it easier for her to reach out when she needs support, and the teachers are willing to meet her where she is.

Breonna

I just feel like, in order to really make sure your child is on the right path in school, you have to be involved. You have to know what's going on. You can't just read a paper from their backpack. You actually need to have the teacher, access you when they need to, or you should be able to access the teacher.

Breonna is a very passionate mother of one, and she is in the 25–35-year-old age range. She and her child live in the southeastern region, and she is very involved in her son's school. Breonna has completed her bachelor's degree. Recently, Breonna was invited to sit on her son's school decision making committee. She was honored to receive the invite, stating that she will be able to help make decisions that benefit the students and the school. There is an extensive training to be part of the committee. Having a relationship with not only her son's teacher, but others in the school, is important to Breonna. She mentioned that any time she was in the building, pre-COVID, people were always coming up to her and greeting her, asking how her son was doing. It felt good to have those relationships so whenever there was a concern, Breonna felt comfortable sharing her concern and she felt like they listened. Her relationship with her son's school has turned into a true partnership to make sure that her son was getting everything he needed, and she could also use her voice to help others.

Selena

To me, it means you are involved in the school in all of those different capacities, but you're just as involved at home, to kind of facilitate that learning and those extra opportunities become available to them.

Selena is a 25–35-year-old, mother of three who lives in the southeastern region. She also is an educator at a Title One school and currently serves as an Exceptional Child Education (ECE) teacher, teaching a K-5 Learning Behavior Disability (LBD) class. In her role, Selena works very closely with parents, while providing educational and behavioral supports for the students she serves. She has two daughters in elementary school and one toddler son. She is very involved in her children's educational journey, noting the level of importance that education holds in their household. Both of her daughters have received invitations to participate as speakers in various parent night events. She shared that she communicates as much as she can with her daughters' teachers and when she is unable to reach the teacher, she contacts another support in the building. Selena believes in a partnership between families and schools, agreeing that it is important to maintain positive relationships as a parent and teacher. She brings a different lens in that she not only has children attending a Title One school, but also works in a Title One school as well.

Glenn

I'm your odd parent, right? Because I completely believe that I'm gonna let you borrow my kid, but they're my kid 24/7. So, I am very involved in the school and if my kid is in that building, I will be in that building.

Glenn is a 35-45, year-old, parent of four children. Her children attend Title One schools in the southeastern region. Glenn is the PTA President at her children's school and is very active

in her children's schools. She has a high school diploma. Glenn has a very strong personality and uses her voice to ask those hard questions to make sure that what is being done at the school is beneficial for all families. Glenn believes that parents should be present in the building, but also understands that there are barriers that prevent families from being present in the building. One barrier she stressed was how her youngest child's school does not promote in-person help during the school day. She also admits that she is going to struggle when students return from virtual learning due to COVID-19. She is very supportive to her children's teachers and their schools. Glenn has advocated for families from the school side, as well as at the district level.

Karen

So, I try to take advantage of my PTA role and try to, you know, get them, those benefits for those kids that don't have those parents to say, 'Hey, I need this'.

Karen is the parent of three children, two of whom attend a Title One elementary school in the southeastern region. She is 25-35 years old, with a high school diploma. Karen is the PTA president at her children's school and is very passionate about her work in the school. Karen uses her role as PTA president to advocate for the needs of the families and students served at her children's school. She believes that it is important to give a voice to those who feel like they do not have one, as well as use her role to increase the level of engagement at her school. Since Karen has been PTA president, she has been diligently working in person and via social media to show the benefits of being involved with the PTA. She encourages families to reach out and be present, making sure parents are aware of what is going on with the school and that they communicate their concerns to the teachers and administrators. Karen looks forward to increased parental engagement at her school, since there are only about three parents who participate on a regular basis.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are parent perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?

As parents have a very integral role in their student's education, it is important to take an introspective view as to what parents feel their role is in their child's education. Parental engagement is something that all Title One schools, regardless of the level—elementary, middle, or high school—must include in their school documentation. According to the United States Department of Education, schools receiving Title One funds must include a written parent involvement policy (2018). Most parent definitions of parental engagement were very similar as to what they felt their role was in their child's education.

When asked what parental engagement means, Breonna shared:

Well to me, I feel like a parent should be involved in their child's studies in, their extracurricular activities, try to be involved in like parent, thing[s] to groups for the schools. Also, attending the parent teacher conferences, going to the school dances, you know, volunteering for the field trips. That's all the things that I have done. (Breonna, personal communication, December 23, 2020)

Breonna continued:

I just feel like, in order to really, make sure your child is on the right path in school, you have to be involved...Or, you should know where the school is, you should know when the field trips are, you should know when the dances are...Everything that is going on with your child's school, I feel like you should know, be aware of it, and also make your best effort to participate.

Her son's school offers a variety of opportunities for parents to be engaged. For Breonna, she makes every effort she can to attend school functions but sometimes she is unable to attend certain events due to her work schedule.

It would just be my work schedule...Sometimes I am still working at like 5:30 or 6:00...And it seems like some of their activities are just around like 5:30-6:00. And so, if we can't make it to something, it would just be because of my work schedule, because I try to go ahead and schedule my work schedule around what I know is going on with my son...If I know, the only problem with my work schedule is, I schedule my meetings, three months ahead.

Miss Smith indicated that parental engagement, to her, includes an awareness of both academics and other school activities:

Being well-informed about my child's academics, whether it be missing assignments, assignments that are coming up, but being informed about what she's learning, and being, you know involved in a school, you know. Whether it be PTA but any function that's going on, just being an active participant in the, activities at school. (Miss Smith, personal communication, December 21,2020)

As a parent who is also an educator, Miss Smith works very diligently to encourage her children to take their education seriously and has very high expectations for each of her children, even her children who have graduated high school. She also was very active in her daughter's school's PTA and also attended parent nights. Miss Smith shared that she was more active at parent nights before the COVID-19 pandemic, but since everything has gone virtual her school has not had any virtual events that she can think of other than virtual awards ceremonies.

Ann indicated that parental engagement needs to include communication:

I think it's more of a partnership between the parent, teacher, and the school. I mean, it's definitely not just dropping your kid off. You know, leaving their problems at that door. I'm very much a partner with my teachers, for my kiddos... I have one that's out of school and I have two more in school and I've always, you know, been available via text, phone, you name it. There's always something. I think the idea is to support the teachers. (Ann, personal communication, December 21, 2020)

Like Miss Smith, Ann participates in activities at all her children's schools as she currently has children at both the elementary and middle school levels. She notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed what in person participation looks like.

In the middle school, we haven't actually even walked inside yet because the COVID. However, that's changed everything...The teachers have been great about even Zoom meetings and text messages or emails or phone calls...They run the gamut of reaching out. When we were in school, in elementary school, we had teachers or parents in the building all the time, regularly. Whether it be cutting things out, or throwing a party for the kids, or anything. They welcomed us in, which was really awesome.

Selena shared:

That [parental engagement] means being engaged in all aspects from, in the classroom, like in the school and at home, though too. So, whenever there are events at school, we take the girls...So for us that means whenever there are class projects, we are involved in helping them, whatever they need to facilitate the creativity and you need supplies, we're going to get them...So to me parental engagement means, giving them those opportunities of 'Okay. Well now we're going to go at 5:30 so you can have a platform to present to other grown-ups.' (Selena, personal communication, December 23, 2020)

She continued:

We definitely support the teachers, too, in parent-teacher conferences and as a teacher...I want to know how my kid is doing academically and even more socially. Because, my girls, they're going to be different at home than in a group of middle, or the upper intermediate elementary girls whenever they are getting a little petty, mean mode. So, I want to know if my girl is wrapped up in that or not...To me that's what it means is you're just, you are involved in the school in all of those different capacities, but you're just as involved at home, to kind of facilitate that learning and those extra opportunities become available to them.

When asked how often they attend parent events at her daughters' school, Selena responded:

Well, Pre-COVID...I would say that they had a parental engagement event almost monthly. I mean, and we weren't able to make all of them... Anything that was at the school and I just felt had more of like a academic rigor, to it, we definitely were a part of. And even if that meant like I had to pick up the girls and we would come back to my school and hang out for an hour before we went back to their school for their showcase whatever... We would definitely do that because, I just feel like that was it was more life skills that I think, were what they needed. They did the public speaking...I just required I felt like a lot more rigor with that socialization piece and I had fun with it that I was okay with missing out on the Skate Worlds.

Glenn discussed being present at the school:

So, parent engagement can be something as simple as coming to community nights. It can be something as simple as coming in having conferences, teacher, or having lunch with

your kids. So, where I'm at is a little different than where I understand most people have been... (Glenn, personal communication, December 23, 2020)

Karen's view on parental engagement was a combined version of all other parent participant's perceptions. She defined parental engagement as "being involved in the school, in the children's grades, volunteering. Coming to the events that they have, stuff like that" (Karen, personal communication, December 23, 2020). Many parents noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted events from being able to be physically present in the school building to attending parent events to attending parent teacher conferences.

Research Question 2: What are teacher perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?

Educators also have an integral role in a child's educational journey. While a child is at school, educators not only have to teach the content, but they work with students on social emotional skills, peer interactions, specially designed instruction, and providing support outside of school. Data indicated that educators have similar ideas of what parental engagement means to them.

Joe shared:

Well, at my school, we strive for parental engagement to be in person. And, actually on the scene, actively working with, not just your child, but with the whole school population. But I do realize that parental engagement could include monetary donations and also volunteer time outside of school. (Joe, personal communication, December 16, 2020)

He followed up on his statement of volunteering time outside of school, stating:

If their child is involved in any extracurricular activities. That could be engagement in that manner. Also, there's fundraisers and things that they can do to not only help uh the school in reaching other areas, like, what, where they work or things like that but also, they could actually just kind of, have shown support for like PTA and different organizations like that.

Angelica's perception of parental engagement was similar to Joe's perception:

Parental engagement will be where the parents are fully involved in the academics of their children. Practically, well not just their academics, but in every aspect of their lives... Participate in the extracurricular activities, show up for the extracurricular activities. If they come to the school and inquire about their children, not just when there's an incident but just on a normal basis. Have a daily rapport with the teachers and the administration. (Angelica, personal communication, December 20, 2020)

For Michelle, parental engagement "is basically families being involved in their child's academics, participating in school events, having open communication with teachers and staff within the building" (Michelle, personal communication, December 18, 2020).

Both Joe and Angelica discussed the idea of parental engagement outside of the school. Often, some educators feel parents are less involved in their child's education when they are not present in the building. Engagement outside of the school dispels the idea that engagement happens only inside the school building. In Joyce Epstein's framework, she proposes six different ways in which parents can be a part of their child's life. Additionally, Michelle supports Joyce Epstein's framework in her views of parental engagement, stating, "Volunteering in the classroom, is another way. Seeking help with their child even if it is behavioral or academics,

going to school for their resources, help from the [community coordinator], taking their child to the library.”

Dr. Assata stated:

Parental engagement means parents being involved in some capacity. I think involvement and engagement are synonymous in that if all a parent can do is be present and respond online on ClassDojo, they're engaged in what I'm doing. They're responding to what it is that I need. So, I think that there is the presence of parents, which can be subjective, but the presence of parents involved in their child's academic journey. (Dr. Assata, personal communication, December 20, 2020)

Dr Assata’s view on parental engagement is different from her colleagues in that she is more flexible in what she expects from parents. Her colleagues do not give as much notice for parent teacher conference or offer alternative methods or times to meet. She understands that she has some families who will be able to participate in person and also those who will not. In her many years in education, she shared that flexibility is something she has learned along the way, especially now in the midst of a global pandemic.

Scarlett believes that parental engagement takes different forms:

We have a lot of different ways that we try to get parents involved on different committees to help plan events for the schools, to make sure that it's something that parents themselves are telling us that they want...I think parental engagement ranges from coming in and volunteering, from being on the PTA to serving on the [district] Family Engagement. And we're supposed to have a parent representative on that. Just being in the school, knowing who the teachers are, who's interacting with your kid on a regular basis, how can you help support us? So just getting parents invested in their

child's school in any way that they can. (Scarlett J, personal communication, December 21, 2020)

In her role, Scarlett works very closely with families to assist with basic needs and often hosts events where parents have the opportunity volunteer their time in the school building. She also connects families with community supports to help with tutoring if that is a need for the family.

Ellie shared:

Parental engagement to me is a parent that takes an active role in their child's education.

So, someone who they know what their child is learning in the school, at that time in school. They can tell you 'Yeah, in math, my child is learning their multiplication tables.'

It is a person who has some sort of, maybe not weekly but maybe bi-weekly, I guess it would depend on the child, if the child needs a parent to be engaged weekly, but bi-weekly engagement with the teacher and constantly understands like what's going on, like what their child's grades are. But that's bare minimum parental engagement for me. (Ellie, personal communication, December 21, 2020)

When asked what more parental engagement looks like, Ellie explained:

More parental engagement would be that parent who does have a weekly communication with their child's teachers, on top of knowing, like what their grades are, what they're learning in class. Maybe the parent takes it even a step further and prepares study materials with their children. Then, even another step further would be the parent who takes like an active role in their child's PTA organization, or in their child's. If there's classroom activities of some sort, sporting activities. So, I kind of have three levels of a definition of a parental engagement.

Research Question 3: What are the similarities and differences in parent and teacher perceptions of parental engagement?

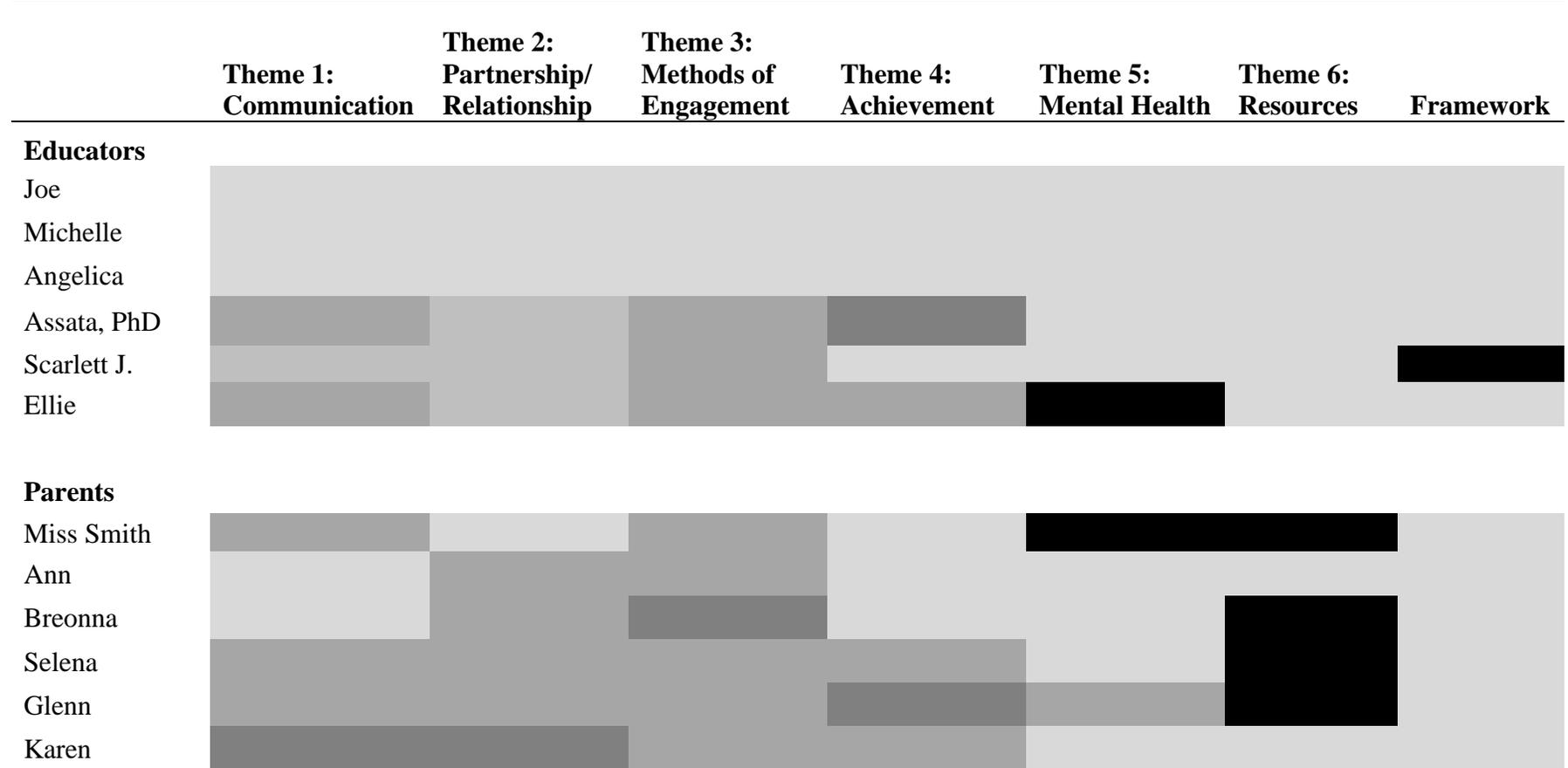
Parent and educator perceptions of parental engagement in this study indicated that both have the same idea of what parental engagement should be. All participants mentioned that should include communication between schools and families, participating in family nights, volunteering time in the school building, being aware of what is going on with their child, and more. Communication, which was identified as a final theme, appeared to be the most important aspect of parental engagement. For students to succeed, there needs to be communication between schools, families, and community agencies. This will be discussed further when reviewing communication as a final theme.

Additionally, parent and educator responses stressed the importance of partnerships and various methods of engagement. Discussion surrounding partnership indicated that without communication, creating lasting partnerships between school, home, and community would be difficult. Both parents and educators spoke of how creating partnerships and positive relationships with students can reduce non-preferred behavior incidents and increase student achievement.

Figure 4.1 identifies how many times each participant referenced each theme: communication, partnership/relationship, methods of engagement, achievement, mental health, and resources. The chart also includes how many times each participant made a connection to Epstein's (2019) six types of parental involvement framework. The light shade of gray indicates that the participant mentioned a theme 1-30 times. Medium gray shade indicates that participants referenced the theme 31-60 times. The dark gray shade indicates that participants referenced that theme 61-90 times. For those that are shaded black, the theme was not mentioned at all.

The themes that had the most mentions by educators were communication and achievement. Conversely, parent responses indicated that communication and partnership were mentioned the most. Closely following communication and partnership, parents valued methods of engagement and achievement.

Figure 4.1 Participant Mentions of Theme



Note. Black = 0, Light Gray = 1-30, Medium Gray = 31-60, Dark Gray = 61-90

Research Question 4: How can these perceptions be utilized to improve parental engagement to benefit student achievement?

While educators and parents both identified similar definitions of parental engagement, data indicated that there is a disconnect between schools and families. When conducting educator interviews, data appeared to vary as to how parental engagement can benefit student achievement. Joe said:

I know I've said before, but I want to make sure that this point is brought across that in order for our kids to achieve, and to be the best that they can be, we have to first make them feel comfortable being at school. That needs to be the number two, safety place in their mind. Right? Of course, always home is going to be the best, the first safety place, but you want it to be the school to be number two...And that's because if you look at the time they spend in school, some spend more time in school than they do at home. So that's why you really want it to be that safety, that comfort, that place that they want to be. And again, if you get them where they want to be there, they can't do nothing but be successful.

Joe shared that when he was teaching, he made sure to connect with the parents and students, stating that he will treat them as if they were his own children. That atmosphere of family carries on to today, even though he is not in the classroom teaching. He shared that it has helped him make a difference in the lives of many of his students.

Miss Smith stated:

If I had to say anything, I would say I'm curious as to when did we get away from 'it takes a village to raise a child?'...Nowadays, a parent will get in your face for correcting their child for doing something that, could have brought harm to them. When did we get

away from that village? It takes a village mentality and I wish we could go back to that...And I think if we did, our community, our children will strive, will be able to succeed more...I think we would excel as a community. For one, so that's the only thing that I would say.

For Miss Smith, finding that sense of community aids in student success. She spoke very highly about the village that she was raised with and attributes a lot of her successes to her village and hopes to pass those same benefits along to her children.

A few parents also shared their thoughts on how parental engagement can improve student achievement. Selena shared:

I just feel like parental engagement could be increased. I would say just from that simple of stating that expectation of what that really means. Just because we all have a different definition of it. So, how can we all increase it if we all have ideas of what it means to begin with...So just kind of getting everybody on the same page and then going from there.

Selena's view shows that there is still work to be done surrounding parental engagement. While many of the parents and educators in this study had similar definitions of parental engagement, Selena wants to ensure that everyone is using the same definition and is on the same page.

Breonna said:

I feel like a happy environment is always going to be a good environment. And if you feel like a teacher is on your side, and they're helpful and they even like you, I feel like this already kind of set you up for success...If you have a teacher who you feel like is not really on your side, I feel like that already sets up anxiety towards that teacher or towards that class or whatever...I feel like students who have higher grades, it's because of the

level of positivity and the full circle of interaction in, you know. I feel like it all stems from the parents. I honestly do. You have to be involved in what's going on with, with your child's school. Because if you had a parent who is not involved, would you really feel like it should matter? If you don't come to my events, or you don't come to my basketball games, or you don't come to my band concerts, or my choir concerts, or you don't even come and meet my teacher, why should I even care about doing this work? Or even being involved in extracurriculars or whatever. You know, kids need that support in the biggest way to be a supportive parent is to be an active parent. You have to be active.

Breonna continued:

And in fact, myself and my sister are the first two college graduates in our entire family...So it wasn't a thing that was stressed, you know? We knew we were going to college, but it's just over the generations, it was nothing that was stressed. And so, I feel like it's more, it, it is a cultural thing.

She would like to see more parents involved in their children's academics.

Overview of Themes

This next section will discuss themes that arose during the data analysis phase. Throughout this study, participants were interviewed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are parent perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?
2. What are educator perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?
3. What are the similarities and differences in parent and teacher perceptions of parental engagement?
4. How can these perceptions be utilized to improve parental engagement to benefit student achievement?

This section will address and attempt to answer the research questions for this study. While several themes emerged, six overarching themes were identified by educators and five overarching themes were identified by parents. Upon completing the line-by-line coding, sixty-eight themes were identified from interviewing educators. Fifty-five themes emerged from the parent interviews. Themes will be broken down in two categories. The final themes that emerged were the following:

1. Communication
2. Partnership/Relationship
3. Methods of Engagement
4. Achievement
5. Mental Health
6. Resources

Utilizing Epstein's (2019) six types of parental involvement as the framework for this study, not all types were evidenced as currently being implemented in schools. Themes will be broken down into two categories: educators and parents. The first category will discuss how themes emerged during the educator interviews. The second category will discuss how themes emerged during parent interviews. The purpose of sharing responses in separate categories is to show how the responses were similar and differences that surfaced. Then, the discussion of themes will explore participant responses to support the research questions guiding this study.

Theme 1: Communication

The first theme that emerged was the importance of communication. Both educators and parents stressed the importance of communication. Without communication, everything else that

is important falls away. Epstein (2019) defined communication as “establishing two-way exchanges using varied technologies about school programs and children’s progress.”

Educator Responses

In her definition of parental engagement, Michelle shared “parental engagement is basically families being involved in their child's academics, participating in school events, having open communication with teachers and staff within the building” (Michelle, personal interview, December 18, 2020). She continued to share that “it's important that parents, teachers, and students keep the communication lines open because that is, that’s essential in student's academic success” As an educator, Michelle utilizes various methods of communication, noting:

For NTI, email, phone calls, Google classroom, and School Connection, the app. In the classroom, it would probably be the same, phone calls, text messages, if I use Class Dojo. I’ve even contacted parents on Messenger, Facebook...Notes, a handwritten note.

In Michelle’s school district, NTI refers to their virtual learning, standing for Non-Traditional Instruction.

Keeping an open line of communication also helps to build those positive relationships between families and the school. Dr. Assata shared that “I believe communication is key... You can communicate but you also have to have, I’ll say a joyful spirit. Or a very professional, but understanding demeanor, where you get it, you know what I’m saying?” (Dr. Assata, personal communication, December 20, 2020). She continued to state how she can, at times, become judgmental when parents are not receptive to her communication methods. She makes sure to document all contacts and attempts to contact her families in her school’s database, so when someone does reach out to her principal, there is documentation of each attempt. Each participant referred to times where the communication has been positive and times where it has been

negative, noting that positive communication is better, but that the way in which negative communication is presented determines how it is received.

One participant, Ellie, indicated that for her, communication was difficult. As a special area teacher, pre-COVID, the majority of her communication was negative. She stated:

Pre-pandemic, my engagement with parents was solely through phone calls. And usually, they're not positive phone calls because I coach, every single kid in the school. So, my school has 1,300 students, I'm coaching 1,300 students. I'm a K-12 school...It's a lot of kids so I don't have the time as an educator to call home and be like, once a week, and be like 'hey I just want to let you know, Julian did awesome today in class' right? I don't have the time. I have 800 students. So, my communication with the parents is like 'hey, Sarah didn't want to do her movement prep today and this has been going on for five days.' So, mine is more of a negative thing and even like when we have parent teacher conferences or open houses, they don't come see me. They go to the other to the main teacher they don't come see the PE teacher. (Ellie, personal communication, December 21, 2020)

Ellie shared that since the pandemic happened, her communication with families has actually gotten better.

Now in the middle of the pandemic, the communication with the parents has actually opened up a lot more and it's been a lot more positive. Like, my elementary students are using two different platforms, ClassDojo was one and Google Classroom is the other. So, parents, because we are a separate classroom now outside of the normal first grade, second grade teacher, and we have our own links, parents are actually communicating with me...

She is grateful that she has been able to communicate more positively and frequently with the parents of all students she works with, not just those whom she coaches during extracurricular activities.

When asked about what methods are used to communicate with parents, all educators shared that their methodology has changed slightly due to COVID-19. Prior to the pandemic, most utilized social media a little, but now due to social distancing and the inability to meet in person, social media is being utilized more. Scarlett stated that “I’m over our social media on Facebook, so I post a lot of stuff to the Facebook to get them involved. And we do Twitter as well” (Scarlett, personal communication, December 21, 2020). Scarlett indicated that not only does she personally use social media as a source of communication, but her school utilizes it to communicate with families as well. Across all participants, even though they were in different parts of the country, the communication methods seemed to be the same. Other forms of communication that were utilized virtually are ClassDojo, Blackboard Connect, Google Classroom, and Schoology. Even though all of these methods of communication were used, one participant shared an area of improvement.

Dr. Assata shared the positive of Schoology, stating:

Our district has contracted with Schoology...It's our learning management system...But the cool thing is, is that there's a connection to the parents on Schoology. The parents use the parent portal. And so, our district has really pushed the parent portal. They have made contests...They're really, really pushing parent engagement...And so it was a big push for teachers to get these parents on. Parents can check scores; they can email the teacher directly...For them it's like all inclusive. It started with high school, then they opened it to middle school. And so now they've hit the elementary level. And that's rare, because at

the high school and middle school, parents check on the grades of the kids and stuff for years. So, this has been rolled out for years.

Conversely, as she continued to discuss the impact of Schoology at the elementary level, she explained that the parents do not approve.

And now it's elementary, these parents are like “What?”. The parents are not feeling the parent portal, because they only use it for their middle school and high schoolers. And for the elementary, it's not the same functioning, but there's been a big push for parents to sign up. And so okay, they sign up, and they don't know how to use it... Which is they want the parent engagement piece on the portal, but we can't email the parent on the parent portal at the elementary level. So as teachers, if we wanted to contact the parent about the kid, we can't email them and message them. But they can message us.

Somebody messed up right there. (Dr. Assata, personal communication)

When asked about replying, she stated:

I can reply to their messages, but I can't initiate. And I just figured this out, because I had a parent that was like ‘When a parent conferences?’ I have sent it out on ClassDojo. And I was like, I done sent messages out since November 1. And mind you it was like three weeks later. I sent messages out on ClassDojo. And she was like, ‘Wait a minute. You can't send a message to me on a parent portal?’ And I was like, ‘No, but it looks like you could send a message to me’ and she said ‘my middle school and high schoolers, the teachers communicate on the parent portal with the parent.’ But the elementary level we have to use class dojo or remind or some other system.

This story highlighted the barrier of communication that she and other elementary school teachers in her district have. At the elementary level, teachers are using multiple platforms

because the one the district chose does not allow them to initiate messages to the parents. Dr. Assatae discussed how she is willing to do the extra work and make sure that her parents are getting the information they need. With the pandemic, communication has been a big focus amongst many educators due to normally being able to send correspondence home with students.

Another barrier shared amongst all educators was the inability to reach parents at times. When those instances occurred, schools usually had a team of people who did home visits, or porch visits due to COVID. These teams would make the visit, follow up with the family to make sure everything is ok, verify the contact information, and offer support to families in need. In response to being asked about increasing participation for families they could not reach, Angelica shared, " Basically, we send social workers to the house. We send guidance counselors to the house. I mean, we have a crew that goes out every day to go to houses and knock on doors" (Angelica, personal communication, December 20, 2020). The hope with home visits, before and during the pandemic, is multifaceted in that they have been done as a method of communication, ways to build relationships with families, and ways to improve student achievement.

Parent Responses

From the parent perspective, communication is vital to the relationship that parents have with the school, as well as the success of their children. Miss Smith mentioned the effectiveness of her child's school's communication methods, stating "I think they're effective. I mean, like I said in person, um, we would get an actual hard copy. And there are emails that I'm receiving, I'm getting texts, uh, you know. When they were using remind, there would be remind..." (Miss Smith, personal communication, December 21, 2020). For Miss Smith, communication is very important because she wants to be included in all aspects of her children's learning. Without

communication, whether it be about the academic piece or events that are going on at the school, it is difficult to make sure that her children are doing what they need to be successful.

Breonna shared that communication is extremely important for her family because her son is in a special needs classroom. She stresses the importance of her son's teacher communicating with her, as he is not able to fully communicate certain things with her.

If he wrote his name, if he wrote something that she wrote on the board, that was being sent home because my son is still at the point where he can't come home and say, 'Oh well today, I did this' or 'I wrote this' or 'I sang' or 'I did'...My son's not at that point yet, so I have to rely on them to communicate that with me. And they do an excellent job.

(Breonna, personal communication, December 23, 2020)

She continued stating, "So, my son's school is very, they are very good with communication. I have never not been aware of anything that has gone on with my son's school."

Ann spoke about how she communicates with her children's schools at the beginning of each school year.

I'd email them at the beginning of the semester. I try to reach out to all the teachers on the front end and go 'Hey, I'm here to help too. Let me know what my kids need.' And I think there's some of that that needs to happen to from a parent side where you have to, at least let the teacher know you're open to communication as well. I think that that makes a big difference. (Ann, personal communication, December 21,2020)

Offering her supports to the schools upfront has helped in building the relationship with the school and teachers so when there is a need, they will communicate with her.

While all participants shared the benefits of communication between schools and families, Glenn and Karen discussed ways that they have had to use communication to advocate

for others. Karen, as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) president at her children's school, spoke about having to advocate for the families that her school serves. One instance she shared was how the parents had been waiting for their Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer Card (P-EBT). She explained that students who are on free and reduced lunch qualify for these cards.

We still have not gotten the P-EBT for the school. So I've called, and I have, as PTA president, expressed for the parents and told them, 'Look. We're Title One. We should have been granted that a long time ago. There should be no mistakes.' There are parents—we are one of those schools that are struggling, you know? And so I try to, as much as possible, but daily I call DCBS on their behalf as well. And we've kind of pushed it along. (Karen, personal communication, December 23, 2020)

Using her voice to advocate for families has helped them receive benefits that are helpful, especially during the pandemic.

Glenn discussed how she also uses her voice to advocate for others. When her children started their elementary school, she was told that if she wanted to have her children continue receiving Special Education Services, she would need to reach out to the board because the school's administration team did not want Special Education at the school. After she reached out to the board, services were provided at the school. She discussed another situation where she has used her voice in different meetings at the school to speak for those whose voices may not have been heard otherwise.

Sometimes as a society, we don't care about other. If it doesn't impact me or mine, right? And so, if my Gen Ed kid is, is doing great and I don't have any problems, I'm not going to worry about that ELL kid... 'Oh, our test scores or are down, but my kid did great.' So is it really, isn't really down because my kid still got a proficient or distinguished? Do we

really need to focus on this special needs and the ELL babies? And then the answer is yes.

She uses her voice to hold the school accountable in making sure that all students and families benefit, and not just a select few.

Theme 2: Partnership/Relationship

The next theme that emerged was the idea of there being a partnership between schools, families, and communities. All participants spoke about how a student would struggle to succeed without having a positive relationship between parents, schools, and communities, creating a partnership amongst all entities.

Educator Responses

Joe spoke of how schools should incorporate the concept of family.

But it's really the school's responsibility to get it started...creating an atmosphere where the community, the parents, and the student all see this as the center of excellence. And, and what happens when you, when you do that is you get a sense of pride, not only in the student in being a part of the school, but also in the parents and the community. (Joe, personal communication, December 16, 2020)

Having that partnership between families, schools, and communities ensures that families are able to connect with what they need, whether that be providing academic assistance or connecting the family to a community agency to assist with mental health or with basic needs.

Joe also shared that in his tenure as an educator, he has worked with students who were considered challenging. When he first began teaching, the school had a family atmosphere. He stated:

If you can get the parents and the students and the community to be proud of, to be a part of that school, then you know you're building on a strong foundation. And then what happens when you build that strong foundation whatever you pour into it is going to be stirred because the foundation is stirred. And so, once you build that strong foundation of pride in the school, and kids who want to be there and you have less distractions and you have less failures.

This family atmosphere created a space for those students who were considered “challenging” to thrive.

We had some pretty rough characters back when I first started teaching. And those kids, literally, would do any and every-, you couldn't get them to leave. They were there, first thing in the morning... And then at the end of the day, we finally had to send them home about 6:00, because their parents were ready to try to feed them and get them ready for bed. So, they literally they were there all day, they would get there early in the morning and stay late in the afternoon, and all they did was work.

Michelle shared that relationships with families are necessary to build trust. She shared:

If you have good relationships with the parents, then the parents will trust you with their child. And when you have a good relationship with the student, then the student will also trust you as well. So, when the relationship is not good, then it makes your school year long. Because that means that the parent doesn't believe in you. And if the parent doesn't believe in you, then they're conveying that message to the child and then the child believes their parents, and then the child doesn't believe in you. Then the child won't be successful because they don't want to listen to you because they don't trust you.

She reflected on times where students' behavior indicated that there was no trust or positive relationship between the students and their families. For her, she does everything she can to make sure that the relationships she cultivates are positive because she wants her students to succeed.

Dr. Assata stated, "I think when parents are engaged and communicate with the teachers, it encourages, it makes it look like it's a team effort between the teacher, or team effort between the school the administrators, and all of the itinerant employees we have." (personal communication, December 20, 2020). That team effort, in the end, will ultimately impact the student's success. She indicated this by stating, "When a parent is not involved, it irritates the bejesus out of me! ... It bothers me. It, I try not to take it personally. It bothers me because the kid is impacted." Dr. Assata shared a few examples of students whose parents are more involved and communicate their concerns. Because of the location of her school, there are families that she has identified as the "haves, have-nots, and have-mores." She was able to identify families in each category but stressed that she finds alternative ways to build those relationships and partnerships with each kind of family because it is important to her to do so.

Angelica mentioned how the majority of her students did not have Wi-Fi at home so when the COVID hit and families were quarantined, many schools in her district had to reach out to their community partners to get assistance with Wi-Fi for students. Her school reached out to a local radio personality, who was able to get hotspots so the students could participate in virtual learning.

We just did a big thing as far as like Wi Fi for our students, because none of our students... We're high poverty school, and none of our students had anything. And then

they reached out to [radio personality] and he provided Wi-Fi for the entire project, where we serve.

With her role being the literacy coach, she assisted the students in writing thank you notes to the radio personality for taking the time to partner with them, so they had access to Wi-Fi and could continue their studies. She stressed that her school and families were extremely grateful for the support they received.

Parent Responses

Parents expressed how the relationships that they have with their children's schools and community can impact how they interact with a school. Ann shared a time where her son's teacher shared some disturbing news with her.

It was a parent teacher conference, he was in third grade when this was a year, if you know anything about kids, you know it when they get diagnosed for ADHD it hits in the third grade generally. Well, my son who's ridiculously smart, same son that went to Griffin and had an IEP. I showed up and he was failing third grade at Taylor Elementary. And she said to me, 'Your son's gonna fail the third grade,' and like there'd been zero indication that there was a problem up until then. And my head just snapped like 'what?!' She just, like, she had written him off. He was just the hot mess and that was who he was going to be. And by the end of the school year, I had him diagnosed, was medicated, and he tested as gifted.

When asked if that interaction impacted her relationship with that teacher, she stated:

I was livid. And it didn't matter who his family was, she just had this opinion of this boy and I was like, 'uh-uh, not with me.' Meanwhile, I had a newborn. And I'm trying to

juggle him. It was really interesting, and she was trying to tell me all this crap and I was just like, 'I don't know who you think I am. I'm not some uneducated fool.'

As a member of PTA, she was always in the building and the lack of community negatively impacted her relationship with that particular teacher, when it easily could have been a partnership between her and the teacher to figure out how to best support her son.

Karen shared a time when she was volunteering at her son's school and saw a student in the hall that she knew.

A student that I was kind of close to came up to me, he was venting to me. And I was unaware that he was supposed to go to the bathroom, but he saw me in the hallway and he's like, 'Hey, can I talk?' ...And started venting. Well, the teacher yelled at me...And I was like 'I apologize on his behalf as well because he is first grade.' ... And so, she was like, 'No, he should have known better!' He's first grade. My child was in kindergarten. I don't even expect that from him, you know?... And so, when he came to see me and talk to me and she started yelling at him, it kind of made me like, if that's my son's teacher, I'm not going to be happy. Because I'm like, you're yelling at him in front of me. Next year, my child could be in your class. And, you know, how do I know you're not going to yell at my child the way I just witnessed you yell at another child?

This was unacceptable to her, and the following year, Karen's son was in that teacher's class.

That relationship was tainted because of the previous experience. She continued to volunteer her time because it was a priority for her, and she wanted to continue using her voice to help others.

Selena, who not only has two daughters in elementary school, but teaches in an elementary school, recalled a time where she had a strained relationship with her youngest daughter's teacher.

So, we've had two extremes. But I feel like they have never been treated differently... Like they are both loved so much. She had a couple of teachers, whether it was her main teacher, special area teachers, that I don't think had, I don't know if it was a patience thing, a training thing...She had an incredibly strong-willed streak in her that could not be bent in second grade...I think that some of her teachers almost engaged in like a power struggle. (Selena, personal communication, December 23, 2020)

It became obvious that the relationship was being impacted when she and her husband would speak to the teacher.

Because she did have one teacher that whenever we would speak to that teacher, I could hear, kind of like the negativity in her voice, the frustration in her voice, with my daughter... We could tell, you're definitely not very fond of my daughter. And that was a not fun feeling as a parent and, and as like a teacher-parent to feel that. I think it absolutely affected our relationship... We went to the teachers and we were like 'here's what's, here's what's going on with her.' 'Like, okay. That makes sense to me why she melted down,' ... At first, I felt like that teacher got it? ... But like I said she became very quickly frustrated, I think, just with the needs of my daughter.

That situation with her daughter's teacher frustrated her but she was able to still be civil anytime they interacted. She knew if she needed someone to help with her daughter, she would have to rely on other staff in the building that she had created relationships with.

When discussing relationships and partnerships, Miss Smith identified that she has a village mentality. Growing up, she was raised "where it took a village to raise a child". She stated that at some point, as a society, we have gotten away from that mentality, and for her, it has helped her children be successful. Miss Smith very much believes that parents and schools

should work together, and that belief shows in her work with ECE families. She relies on the relationships she has with her children's teachers to make sure her children are current on what they need to be doing. She shared:

My daughter has been lucky. The teacher, this is her second year at, uh, her current school. And she's had, both teachers have been wonderful...If she's missing an assignment, I'm getting a text and say 'Hey, your child is missing week six or week sixteen assignments.'

Miss Smith also discussed how her children know what her expectation is when it comes to education and makes sure to let the teachers know that she is there to help. She reiterated how she wanted to have relationships with her older children's college professors because education is just that important to her.

Theme 3: Methods of Engagement

The third theme that will be discussed is the different methods of engagement that were identified from educators and parents. Various methods were introduced; however, many of the participants identified similar ideas of what parental engagement looks like. The methods identified were participating in school committees (i.e., PTA, school-based committees), in-person, volunteering their time, extracurricular activities, participating in fundraising, attending parent-teacher conferences or different parent nights, as well as being involved in academics.

Educator Responses

Ellie shared that she has multiple levels in which parents can be engaged. They can be engaged in varied activities:

I said PTA, creating a study guide, communication with parents, sports. I think, well at my school, my school is a little unique. We are a charter school, so we have like fall

festivals. You don't necessarily have to be involved in the PTA in order to do that. But so maybe just being at the school events. If there's a literacy night, going to that...If there's a pizza night. You know some schools have those like functions? Ours would be our Fall and Spring Festival. So, if there is something like that going to those things, going to those school events. That would be the only other way I would include an example of being more involved.

As a PE teacher, Ellie spoke from her experience as a teacher and coach. She has students that excel at a sport but cannot play due to their Grade Point Average (GPA).

I had powerlifting practice and the basketball team was there and there's a kid I'm really close with and I haven't seen her in months because she's doing virtual, but she comes to school for basketball practice and she's failing like three classes. I was like 'what is going on?' She was like, 'well you know Ms. Ellie, sometimes I just don't really feel like doing the work' and I was like, 'sometimes I really just don't feel like coming to my job but then my boss tells me he's not going to pay me,' like, turn in your work?! What do you mean?!

She explained how virtual learning has changed how some students complete and submit their assignments. She has had several students who will wait until the last minute (end of the grading period) and submit work. For Ellie, she would like some of her parents to take a more active role in their child's education.

Scarlett shared that her school, they struggle to get parents to participate in their school's PTA. She explained "We've struggled with getting people on the PTA, struggled to get representatives for the family engagement teams. It's hard to get parents on the committees." Although they have struggled historically getting parent representatives on different committees,

her school has identified a plan to increase parental engagement this upcoming school year. She mentioned that with the school year being half over, and being unsure if students will return in person, it would be best to start the following school year.

Michelle shared that at her school, volunteering is difficult due to COVID, she explained “right now volunteering is kind of hard because of COVID, but before COVID, I know that we had a PTA. So they would come into the building and do various stuff.” Even though the pandemic has made it difficult for parents to volunteer in the building, she shared that parents can be engaged by “families being involved in their child's academics, participating in school events, having open communication with teachers and staff within the building.” Michelle and Dr. Assata have worked to identify ways to keep their student’s families engaged by thinking outside of the box. Michelle has reached out to parents via Facebook Messenger when she was unable to reach out to her parents any other way.

Dr. Assata shared that for her:

I think involvement and engagement are synonymous in that if all a parent can do is be present and respond online on ClassDojo, they're engaged in what I'm doing. They're responding to what it is that I need. So, I think that there is the presence of parents, which can be subjective, but the presence of parents involved in their child's academic journey. She understands that not all of her parents will be able to participate in the school building due to work schedules or the inability to get to the building, but with everything being virtual, she has had to rely on reaching parents via phone, email, or their school’s messaging apps. She is willing to meet with parents outside of normal business hours and she goes above and beyond to help students with learning by offering additional sessions.

Parent Responses

Glenn spoke very passionately about her intentions of volunteering her children's school.

I'm your odd parent, right? Because I completely believe that I'm gonna let you borrow my kid, but they're my kid 24/7. So, I am very involved in the school and if my kid is in that building, I will be in that building...But I am constantly, if I'm not at work, I'm in a school building, because that's where my kids are.

She recognizes that that may not be possible for all families and shared how difficult it would be for her once the students return to in-person learning because she will not be able to volunteer in the building due to health guidelines from the COVID-19 pandemic.

And if Lori County ever goes back to school, it's going to be even more important because parents won't be allowed in the school. Like we understand for health reasons. I'm going to struggle with that one, right? Because if my kids in your building, so am I...The only way that's going to work is if the communication is on point.

Glenn shared that at her son's school, they do not request volunteers during school hours. The only way someone can volunteer is if they ask certain people at the school about volunteering.

They allow you to come in and volunteer, but it's not like...You kind of have to go in and ask because it's not something that they put out there. I think they would have more parents if they did that.

It was interesting to hear that a school does not advertise for parent volunteers during the day, except during the book fair or for events that are being hosted after school.

Glenn's experience with volunteering is opposite from Karen's experience. As PTA president, she encourages parents to volunteer their time. She shared that she only has three

parents she can rely on, and that the other parents say they do not have time in their day to volunteer.

When I ask other parents as PTA, they just don't have the time...I'm a stay-at-home mom, so I have that time on my hands, you know? I don't do much except for take care of my kids. So, but it's, other parents. but other parents say that they always work. They don't have time in their day. And they've always said that they would want to, but they just don't have the time in their day. Simple things as, can you help the teacher on your lunch break with copying papers could be a good help as parent engagement, because those are things that your student is going to need. And so, I tried to explain that to parents simple things as copying papers, on your break, or something like that would be helpful in engagement.

Karen has been working diligently to encourage more parents to join school committees, giving them an opportunity to have their voices heard. Karen did mention that she has been able to recruit two parents in her tenure as PTA president and gets excited when more parents follow the school's Facebook page that she manages. She also stated that parents can be engaged by "being involved in the school, in the children's grades...Coming to the events that they have."

All participants noted that they have to look at engagement differently due to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has forced everyone to think creatively as to how to engage families. For example, Ann shared about how her daughter's teacher visits all his students at home, dressed up as different characters and sits outside the house while playing a game or talking with students and their families. She shared that when he visited their home, he dressed up as Darth Vader and interacted with her family, and they really enjoyed him taking time out of his day to do something fun.

Theme 4: Achievement

The fourth theme that emerged was student achievement. Communication, having partnerships/relationships with families, and the various methods in which parents can be engaged have all been found to directly impact a student's achievement. Without these entities, it would be difficult for students to achieve. Ultimately, educators and parents want their students to be all they can be to move on to the next phase of their lives.

Educator Responses

When asked whether she noticed a difference in her students based on the level of parental engagement, Angelica responded:

Yeah, especially like during this time since we have online learning. When parents are more involved, the kids are turning in their work. The ones that, that you know are not, the kids come on certain, some days, they don't come some days, they don't show up.

She continued, noting that "we send social workers to the house. We send guidance counselors to the house" to contact those students who have not participated much. She also added that "I think that volunteering, parent engagement, parent involvement, all of that collaboration, I believe, I believe, all of that does impact a child's academic abilities. And they are achievable, achievement of their goals. Because, if they don't have this support at home. If they don't have that parental support or someone just there. It can be hard."

Joe shared that he loves when his student succeeds and that sometimes, you may not see the results of that success immediately. He recalled a time where a former student shared her success story:

And that's one of the things that I can safely say teaching for 23 years is a proven fact. I've had kids and they tell me, 'You know, Mr. Clark, you are the first person that has

ever told me that I'm capable of doing whatever I need to do. And because of you, I'm a nurse now or I'm a doctor, or I'm a teacher'. And so, that in itself tells me that we're doing something right.

He expressed that he treats all his students as if they were his own children and works to build that family atmosphere with their families as well. Joe stated that the area in which he teaches is not a very transient area, and he grew up with or taught a lot of parents of his students, so he has relationships with a lot of families. He mentioned how he also supports his students outside of school. He has showed up at football practices and games, business openings, and other events that his students invite him to.

Michelle stated that:

When students know that their parents are involved, they tend to want to do better. They, sometimes they tend to have a better behavior because they know their parents are involved. When students know that their parents don't like the school, some students feel like they don't have to try as much. Or they don't care about what their behavior is like because they know that their mom doesn't like the school.

She shared times where she has had students whose parents openly expressed their disdain for the school for something that happened, and that student's behavior showed it. It was difficult to reach that parent and to teach when that student was acting out. In response to being asked how she would rebuild broken relationships with families, Michelle replied, "I would really just take the time to reconnect with the student, and then try to rebuild that relationship, not only with the student but also try to rebuild that relationship with the family too." She admitted that sometimes it was harder to rebuild relationships with some families, but she always made an attempt to do better and interact better with all of her students.

Dr. Assata mentioned a community program that her school has in which retired people come and volunteer with students. She exclaimed:

I completely forgot! We have the Gen Xers! I don't know where it fits. Generation X is a program we have collaborated with through [a local university]. And it is retired grandparents that are selected to come to our site, to provide support to the lower grade kids. And what I've gotten out of it is the amazing grandparent love that they give these kids, has made the biggest difference, ever. And we love our Gen Xers...They come with their little denim shirts on, that say 'Gen Xers'. And they get their homies to come, they're all seniors. And the love that they give these kids, in tutoring, in the helping and the test scores are starting to rise because of their sheer presence. And they are such a blessing.

She explained that only the primary students get a 'Gen Xer' because there is not enough funding for the intermediate students to have a Gen X mentor. The students are very passionate about their mentors and love having them around. She went on further to state:

And they will reach out, they will reach out to the parents and be like 'look-y here' because they can talk to them in a different way than we can. Man! I love seeing them on campus...And you can feel it, because they'll stay with that class and teacher for the next year. So, people be like that's my Gen Xer. Like I don't care if this person just came on board, it's my Gen Xer.

Dr. Assata shared several examples of the different levels of engagement of parents and how it impacts the child. She shared a story of a student who was on her live Zoom class while in the laundromat and his mom had a seizure. He wrote her a message in the chat and told her what was

going on and stayed logged in until the ambulance came. He wanted to be in class with her because she has created a welcoming and family atmosphere in her classroom.

Scarlett reflected on a few students and their families:

I'm thinking of like you know we had a family last year and the, the mom on the PTA, the two parents that like we're head of PTA. Both their kids are involved in sports, they're involved in clubs, and beta club they have higher grades. And then I'm thinking of— There's two families. One of them is by district standard is homeless. And then we have another one we have kids that use incorrect addresses and end up at our school... He struggles in class, he struggles with positive interactions, he'll cuss out the principal... So, there's a lot of other things going on and same with our homeless family, you know. Their kids have been like throwing up, and the mom has the school number blocked. They don't perform as well, they're late to school. We had to put them on the bus sick, because they wouldn't come get them after we called and called and called multiple times. So, it's like, I feel like there is a correlation there.

She continued to discuss how some students whose parents are less involved feel let down by their families, noting that often those are the students who have more behavior issues.

Ellie shared an interesting insight about how virtual learning and parental engagement have impacted students at her school. In her district, grading practices have been altered:

Literally our kids can not do anything for four and a half weeks out of a six-week cycle and come back and so pass the class because we have to allow them to turn in everything. And then grade based on it being turned in on time. We cannot dock them points for something being late. So, if you turn in an assignment, five weeks late, and you technically have 100% on it, I still have to give you that 100%, and I cannot give you

below a 50. Period. So even if you do the work of a 25% on a test, you automatically get a 50, no matter what. That's the lowest grade I can give.

In her opinion, she feels as though that is a disservice to the students she teaches.

Like if you truly don't understand the material and we need to revisit and relearn some material because you are truly getting a 25% on it, yes, I support that. Let's give you extra time. Let's go back over this, let's give you another chance. But if you're just saying, 'no, Coach, I just don't feel like doing it. I'm not going to do it and I'll just do it in three weeks because I know I can still pass it', that's a problem...

Because her school is a charter school, their funding is based on how many students pass.

We pass them along, as messed up as it sounds, because of funding issues. If we hold you back, we don't get the same amount of funding here, from the way I understand it. We don't get the same amount of funding. And because we are a charter school and we're kind of battling for that funding we don't get the tax money that the ISD's, the Independent School Districts do. Everything, *everything* is based around funding.

She understands the need for funding but would like to give students what they need to ensure they are getting the content needed to move on. Ellie mentioned that their school has students in high school that are reading at a second grade reading level because they have been passed on to the next grade.

Parent Responses

For Breonna, her son's academic achievement is very important to her. When her son was first enrolled in his current school, she was upset because the school was a low-performing school. She added that the school did not have any special education teachers prior to the year he started and had to send teachers to a training right before school started.

And I was honestly upset at first because for one, I was upset about the previous school closing down. Because they were really good school, they were small school, but everyone, again, knew my son... Two, I was upset that they chose to throw these children into a school that one did not have a special needs program, and three was already on the list of failing schools?

She continued:

His principal took it upon herself to call a meeting with the parents and whoever else would come, and it was parents and teachers... And so she was transparent. She called for this meeting and she said, 'Listen, this is where we are. And this is where we're gonna get.' And so, as a parent I appreciated that because I didn't know very much about the school... And they made a full turn around, and I don't know if it was just because everyone banded together and said we have to fix this. We don't want to lose our principal, we don't want to lose our funding, we don't want the state to take over this school. I don't know what it was, but they have made a full turn-around.

At her son's school, the teachers, parents, and community came together to change the outcome of the school and everyone succeeded. Breonna, in her recent role of being on the school-based committee, has been able to use her voice to speak out about what she would like to see implemented as a parent and she appreciates how they listen to her and she feels her voice is heard. Additionally, her son's teacher makes sure to accommodate for her son's needs in a virtual setting.

My son is not a distance learner, so this virtual learning has really been a struggle for him because he does not like computers... And something good about that is his teacher knows that and so she's took it upon herself, last year and this year, to drop off paper

documents for us, so that he doesn't have to spend that time on the computer. He can do his via paper. And so, you know that with her, she is in tune with what his specific needs are. And she doesn't just put everyone in the same bubble. So, if he doesn't really like computers, she prints off papers, come to our door, drop them off, you know. Sends me a text saying 'Hey, I've dropped these off to you,' ... And then we just go from there.

She appreciates how his teacher does not require him to do his work via the computer because he does not do as well on the computer. Breonna also appreciates how her voice is heard in meetings about his progress with her son's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and that it is truly teamwork.

In Glenn's case, her son's teachers do everything that they can to make sure he is successful. He has a medical diagnosis that causes him to miss between 40-50 days each school year. Virtual learning has been beneficial for him in that he does not have to miss as much. When school was in-person, he would have to stay home certain days for medical treatment. She explained:

They [teachers] are always really good about catching him up. So, he has always been on grade level. Like he'll have a drop, where he's behind and they always are really good about catching him back up. [Virtual learning] he's only had to miss two days because he can still be on oxygen at home. And we're looking at having that at school for next year.

It wasn't an option at the elementary school.

Surprisingly, her son's elementary school did not support the use of oxygen in the building unless it was used in the nurse's office, which for someone who is immunocompromised, is not the safest, or healthiest place to sit to receive oxygen treatments for multiple hours. She has already spoken with the middle school that her son will be attending, and he will be able to bring

his oxygen machine to school. If Glenn could identify an area of improvement, she would like the school to do a better job for all students. She mentioned that there are students who fall through the cracks because of things the school is not doing.

For example, the school previously had a decent gifted and talented program.

It used to be that they had a lot of students who were identified as gifted and was able to meet those needs. And over the years, and it might just be the way the chips fall, I don't know. I would be surprised...They might have had 10 fifth graders who are gifted going into sixth grade now they have like, maybe one. Or they have none. Like, last year's kids, there was not one gifted student coming out of all of fifth grade. And I was like, there's no way that...Sometimes, I think the focus is a lot of times on the students' test scores.

Glenn would like to see the school do a better job at making sure students are achieving at a higher rate. She stresses that the teachers do a wonderful job but that as a school, the school needs to do better, rather than focus on the standardized test results, stating that "it's not a fair assessment for people. But that's just my opinion."

Selena discussed how for her, she is lucky to be a teacher because when it comes to helping her daughters with homework, she would be lost in certain areas. She identified this as a potential barrier for parents helping their children at home and has reached out to her daughters' teachers, requesting additional supports.

We have asked for some additional 'Hey, can you send, she's struggling on multiplication. Can you send some extra stuff home for her to work on? Or can you give me a website that y'all use? Can y'all, like what is it that we can be doing to help her?'...I know as a teacher in another building, we have talked about how we might, we might not have parents that even understand how to teach their kid that. And so, I could see that

being a barrier just because we teach are very, very similar like demographic of kids, that you might have a fifth grader who was trying to learn, you know what I mean, multi-digit multiplication. And you might have a parent that doesn't know how to walk through those steps either.

Selena continued:

So, again, I could see sending home those kind of resources and a parent being like, 'I don't know what to do this! Like, teach yourself, child. I don't know what to do with this.' That's a hurdle that like, we have tried to talk out too, is 'how do we help that kiddo with resources at home whenever the parent doesn't know what they're doing?' So, I mean, like again. My kids are blessed because I'm a teacher, so I can teach them. And then teach them multiple methods if that one method doesn't make sense like, 'okay, well, let's, let's look at it this way' or 'here's a visual representation of it.' Because I'm teaching the same kind of stuff daily.

Selena expressed that having that open communication between parents and teachers improves student outcomes because when she has a question, she is able to reach out to the teacher for clarification. She did admit that one of her daughters' teachers is not that great with communication, and she would love for her to do a better job with communicating concerns about her daughter's academics. She reflected upon a time where her oldest daughter's teacher neglected to communicate that an assignment was missing.

And my fifth grader, the one who usually she has been like Johnny on the spot, like, the perfect student in class. She has struggled more. And we weren't aware of it because the teacher didn't communicate as often. So, all of a sudden, we had an F on a progress report

and we were like, 'what, like why do you have an F and I don't know about it until progress reports?'

After some discussion, they realized that it was an ongoing assignment that had been overlooked:

Didn't have a due date or something so it didn't pop up as missing. It was like an ongoing project ...As a teacher I missed it...I've emailed a couple of times and she may respond to one, not all of them.

While she and her husband were very disappointed in the lack of communication about the assignment, they did what they needed to do to make sure that the grade was corrected.

Ann spoke about the impact of parent engagement on achievement and shared a little about her daughter's experience in virtual learning.

I think the more involved you are the higher the kids' grades are. I mean, I think it's a two-way street. If the teachers can't reach out, the parent can't reach out, there's no partnership. Any child that has any type of struggle is just going to struggle. There's no way of fixing that but...My daughter... Got so behind I spent basically two weeks, grounded with her trying, sitting beside her so that she got her work done. Every evening after work, I turned around and spent three-four hours sitting beside her so that she could get done. And then I'll be emailing the teachers and checking in and making sure that we were getting what she needed. So, it wasn't just the teachers going 'well she needs this this and this', that was me saying 'hey, this is what we're doing, what else do we need, you know, are we on the right track. Are we getting what we need to get her passing?' because my AB student isn't an AB student in [virtual learning] ... So, it was, it was a push, but we got her through it.

It was important to Ann to sacrifice the time in the evenings to make sure her daughter was successful, but there are some parents who are unable to do that because of their work schedules or their lack of knowledge of how to help in particular subject areas.

Theme 5: Mental Health/Trauma

The fifth theme that emerged was mental health. This will include the past experiences parents had when they were in schools themselves and how it may have impacted their current levels of engagement. It will also discuss how students' mental health plays a role in their interactions at school, including the possibility of it impacting a student's achievement levels.

Educator Responses

Joe shared that parents who have negative memories about when they were in school are less inclined to come to the school building. He stated:

When I look at the school as a whole...the parents and students, I see them as all family, and that's kind of twofold. Right? One allows the children again to feel more comfortable in the school environment, but also it helps the parents to feel more comfortable in the school environment...Because a lot of times parents have had negative memories, and incidents with school, right, in their past. They would kind of shy away from the building, because of what they went through as a child. But once we can create that climate of family, it helps them to feel more comfortable to come in, and be it, sometimes they come in a little too relaxed. But at least they're there. And that makes a difference.

He shared that creating a family atmosphere is really one of the most important things a school can do. You have to build those partnerships because without them, it can be difficult to carry on the learning that is going on at school at home. He shared that his school is a neighborhood school and mentioned that school needs to also be a safe place for students. Joe

indicated that his school is not in one of the best areas in town and that the students sometimes witness traumatic events prior to coming to school. As an educator, he has worked with countless students on “navigating through some of those experiences” and believes that “without taking care of the mental health and behavior of a student, it is difficult for the learning to occur.” Joe conveyed that his school has been intentional these past few years about becoming more trauma informed because it has become more prevalent.

Similarly, for Scarlett, she shared that at her school, students experience a myriad of traumatic situations. She stated, “We have a lot of kids coming from pretty traumatic backgrounds for one reason or another... We have a lot of kids with their parents have OD’d and they’re living with grandparents, kids that have found their parents...” Her school has also been taking trauma informed care trainings to help the staff with navigating these experiences with their students. She shared further, stating:

We really work with our staff to make sure that they're like trauma-informed... making sure that we are sensitive and empathetic to their needs and what's going on at home. So, making sure that our staff know what they need to know to help support that kid, you know? Making sure that we understand that family doesn't mean just a mom and a dad. It means, aunts, and uncles, and cousins, and grandparents, you know? Making sure they understand that whole thing. And then making sure that our staff communicate the good with the bad. Don't just be calling home to say, ‘Johnny threw food today.’ You know, call and say, ‘he got an A on his test. He read out loud.’ Making sure that we're giving that positive communication home to parents so they're just not dreading hearing from the school as a negative thing.

She explained that in her role, she is constantly communicating with families, providing supports for them and sometimes families do not even realize that is something the school offers.

I have a good relationship with our teachers so that they know they can come to me. If a kid has a hole in their shoe or like, we've had kids who have roaches and like I don't. They're not the most pleasant conversations to call home, but to make sure that you call home and check on them and don't make them feel bad about whatever their situation is. And to offer that support, 'hey, we're just checking in,' you know, 'making sure this, this, and this.' And then, we've had families that have like broke down crying and like 'oh my God. I didn't even know that, you know, we could get this support from the school like this,' you know.

She, too, mentioned that some parents at her school may not want to be involved with the school because of their past experiences.

A lot of parents have had historically bad interactions with schools when they were younger, for whatever reason, so they kind of have that 'Oh I don't want to be involved with the school.' So, getting them to understand that we're not the enemy. We're here to work together to see your child and your family succeed. So, trying to make sure that we have fun events, fun and welcoming events for everybody in the family. Bring grandma, grandpa, uncles, cousins to this trunk or treat, or this mental health night, family math game night, you know? Making sure that we incorporate everybody.

Dr. Assata shares the same concern for parents. When discussing reaching out to parents about parent teacher conferences she stated:

We don't know what's going on in their households. You know what I'm saying? And so, I think is really important to remember to give two, at least two weeks if you're pushing

it, a week in advance, because I'm like, people aren't responding to parent conference scheduling, because they have to check with their boss! And when you don't leave room for that, and then you'd be like, you left a note in the system if the parent came to conferences or not. It sucks, because you're like, what is this parent going through that, they can't meet with me? What did they experience, even in their own educational journey that, where it was a really funky experience in school? And they don't want to have anything to do with school. They just want to send their kids, send me the grades, and, to hell wit all y'all...

She provides multiple avenues for her parents to participate in parent teacher conferences so she can meet the parent where they are and does not mind adjusting her schedule to fit the needs of her parents. Dr. Assata also shared how her school is located in a rough area.

Because a lot of people don't quite get it. I work in the hood. I work around the corner from where a major celebrity was killed. We hear helicopters all the time, it really is getting down and to get down.

The things that her students, and families, have to deal with on a regular basis can make it difficult for anyone to learn. She shared a story about one of her students, noting what is going on at home.

I've got Kim. Parents are divorc—*ing*, and they living in the same household. It's a funky environment because the one that's responsible for getting her logged on is like, 'to hell wit all y'all. I'm not logging her on to nothing'. Dad goes to work...35 miles away, to make the money. Mom's been the caretaker. She's resentful because Dad got custody, and she needs to get out...She's been taking care to kids, right? And so, she's mad. She refuses to help my student get online. Kim missed 25 days of school. Split parent

involvement... So, Dad is like, 'whatever you need, Dr. Assata, can you tell me? ... Then you got mom that won't communicate, she won't answer any of our calls. That, that's crazy. Kim, she got all 2's. She, too, would have gotten all fails. And so, she's so jacked up, psychologically, when she gets on, she responds in a shaky crying voice. She don't know what to do, because her parents are still living in the same house and they don't like each other. And she's caught in between and she ain't coming to class. So, you see how that's confusing? Kids in the class, parent is nearby, kid is like, 'Thank you, Dr. Assata, thank you. My mom wants to know this.' It runs the gambit. It impacts academics, like it is *no-body's* business.

Joe, Scarlett, and Dr. Assata's schools all employ various persons to assist students with their mental health. In addition to school counselors, the schools also employ mental health providers, community-based counselors that work in the school, psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists. If the need becomes greater, the schools reach out to their community partners to provide in-home services for those families that request it or are referred for those services.

Parent Responses

Conversely, Selena shared a story about her youngest daughter, feeling like her daughter's teacher was not equipped to deal with her trauma.

They are my Bonus Daughters... They were going through a lot of trauma... And we weren't aware of it at first. And then whenever it came about like we were like, 'holy crap. Like, no wonder she is having meltdowns, and she is losing her mind at school.' She and her husband updated the school, "And granted, we didn't get all of the details of the trauma she was experiencing but enough that as a teacher, you'd be like 'I get it.'" Feeling let down by the teacher, she reached to other supports in the school.

We have crossed that bridge and like I said, that's where a lot of that like the community coordinator, and the counselor and like the mental health counselor I mean just, they provided that extra amount of support that was needed. And I felt very comfortable going to them and be like, 'Look, get your teacher before I snatch her up, because, like she's, she's getting in trouble. And her behavior is a direct reaction to her trauma, like make that connection for your teacher for me, because I'm going to lose it. Like, that's my baby and I'm going to lose it on her in a minute.' And you know that coordinator was like, 'Girl I got you. You know I get it, like, I'm just go and get her. I'm just go and get her and let her hang out in my office for a little bit.'

She was grateful that she had those relationships in her daughter's school to rely on because the transition was rough for her daughter. They put supports in place for her daughter to help her in her time of need.

They definitely tried to like wrap their arms around her. So, it was like, they offered more supports...The suggestions they were giving though, where they would be like 'well you know, we, I've put like a reward system in place for her' or 'she really likes Mr. Claude, the security guard. So, you know, whenever she's having a really good day, I'll let her go, have a moment with him.' So we've really appreciated just like the overall support.

Without the support from the school, her daughter could have struggled more. She recalled how the situation made her daughter feel.

Building that relationship more, it became very like punitive and my daughter felt that. And so, then it just became even more compacted because then it was just kind of like this, this person who helped me in the beginning, now is frustrated with me and now I'm getting in trouble again and getting in trouble more.

She stressed that it is really important to her to have those positive relationships and partnerships, especially when it comes to dealing with mental health.

Glenn took note of how sometimes schools do not factor in how parents feel about being present in the school building.

I think that we don't make it, as a society, we don't make it easy for parents to be involved. Coming into the school, I think community nights are great, but that's spending a little time with your child in a different setting. I completely support it, don't get me wrong, but that's not a true representation to me for parent engagement. That's one of the things I don't like about Title One is you have to have the parents sign in saying they were there and that's when it counts for a parent engagement. Well, if I drop off my son off at the door, I don't do this, but I've seen it done, and they don't stay, but they sign their name, so you get credit...Schools don't take in consideration, maybe I had a really bad experience at school. And I don't, I don't feel comfortable. I don't feel comfortable questioning, that doesn't mean that I don't care what's going on in my kids, right? That doesn't mean that I don't value his education and I think that that's a lot of times overlooked.

For her, she is sometimes unable to attend school events depending on how her children are feeling. She also shared how she sometimes before her son's IEP meeting, she gets sick with worry and "can't keep anything down." Listening to someone judge her child is difficult for her. She mentioned:

They're sitting there and they're judging your child. And they know your child better than you do, obviously because they spend like seven hours a day. So, and you're the only one who truly will speak up for your kid, right... And there are a lot of parents who because

of that, do not go to IEP meetings that is not that that parent does not care. It is that parent is so lost. And instead of supporting that parent. And this is my just personal opinion from other people's experiences. There are ways we can support that parent and be an advocate with that parent, so they don't feel like, but if you're going to sit there and, and. That'd be like me, you having to sit there and be judging your baby. You know what I'm saying? You're not going to want to sit through that.

She wants schools to be more understanding of the plight of the parents they serve.

Karen shared that she too feels uncomfortable at times being in the school building but continues to support when she can. Everyone acknowledged that right now, in the midst of the pandemic, nobody is doing in person supports. She considered that if she as PTA president was feeling this way, how many other families feel the same way? Karen suggested that one way to alleviate this is by making sure that schools and families have positive relationships and create those lasting partnerships, so parents feel comfortable reaching out to the teacher or school when needed.

Theme 6: Community Support/Resources

A number of the participants who identified as educators mentioned the importance of providing resources to families to help when they are in need. This theme mainly emerged from the educator standpoint, whereas some parents mentioned resources but not as much. This theme will be focused on how educators mentioned the need for resources and community collaboration to help students and their families.

Educator Responses

Joe mentioned that at his school, the community coordinator is phenomenal. He shared,

Yeah, I got one thing for that. That is Penny C. She's the [community coordinator] and she is dynamite with that. You know she goes with all the different community partnerships that is around the school and, and in the city and she gets them to pitch in and we get things donated and all kinds of things happen and that's been a big plus for our students and our community.

He elaborated on how Penny works very hard at connecting with community partners. He shared examples of when she connected with a major technology company and coordinated a volunteer effort to pack up the weekend food program bags for students and also partnered with different agencies to help with exposing the students to different experiences like going to the zoo. He continued to note that collaborating with community is beneficial because,

It creates a sense of home, where the students not only feel comfortable in the school, but they feel comfortable with what the teachers are asking them to do. And they feel comfortable with the teachers. So it creates a bond, where achievement is as easy as possible, simply because the child feels more comfortable to be themselves and not pressured or pushed to be something other than what they are capable of being.

Additionally, feeling comfortable coming to the school, asking for help is a big piece in creating those partnerships with families.

Angelica shared that community is important because it “basically involve[s] relationships and in order for the school to be effective, they have to have those relationships established, or you cannot succeed because we need that parental involvement in order to get those kids, where they need to be academically.” At her school, they are intentional about making sure they have positive relationships with everyone, taking the time out to address any concerns that parents or the community may have. Angelica shared one way to address concerns:

Go in and develop a relationship with the families, individual families. And maybe they just need to pull out certain families and start there. And then, how people talk and word of mouth, and then you can establish that relationship with the entire community. But you got to start small, you got to start somewhere.

Taking a moment to address concerns that arise can go a long way in strengthening relationships. It builds upon the idea that schools, families, and communities can engage in a partnership, with each entity bringing something to the table. Many schools rely on their community partnerships to help meet the needs of their families so it is equally important to nurture these relationships so that families can benefit from the additional support.

Dr. Assata shared about how their community coordinator supports the families at her school.

We have a psychiatric social worker, a psychologist, and a school community coordinator that wraps their arms around our parent community by offering resources, parenting classes, how to talk to your kids, how to setup schedules, how to help them for the three-week winter break we are going on...Here's some ideas of what you can do with your kids during the break...Here's help, for mindfulness. Here's some connections for clothes... Here's some numbers for housing and resources, like, it truly is a hub. And this year, they brought the fire with all of these folks coming in to help, at my site?! They are for real, for real, being a community school. Which is what our school is designated as a community school to be that hub for parents and resources. The resources I've seen this year, I've not ever seen. Because it there has not been enough money.

Dr. Assata's school tries to provide whatever resources it can, collaborating with its community partners to help their families with food, clothing, shelter, mental health needs, etc. She shared

that her school is very diverse, and it is very important for their families to have those outside resources as a support. Without them, some families may continue to struggle.

Scarlett shared about community support that her schools have gotten. One of her schools was selected for a program called Flash Dads. She explained:

Flash Dads is this thing through my district, and they coordinate with a lot of local community and business partners in the schools. And I think they show up like once a month and they kind of like make signs, high five, cheer kids on as they come into the school, get them pumped up and like feeling welcomed and loved. So, we had that, and it was, we got some male role models to come out, but it was more community members than parents. And it scared our kids. They were looking around, they were like ‘what is going on? Like high five? I don't know?’ Like they liked once they got going, but it was like, I guess our kids aren't morning people...

Additionally, Scarlett’s school is planning to start a Watch D.O.G.S. Dads program in the fall.

It's kind of similar like to positive male role models, because we only have four male staff at our school. Well, trying to get positive male role models in the system in the school and like they can help with kids at lunch, they can sit with them and cut up, they can help them, they can help us make copies they can take kids and do reading or are their support so we ordered, it's a true program and we got a startup kit for it so we're waiting until we can get back in the building and get volunteers and stuff like that and kind of get that going...

Scarlett shared that they are looking to start Watch D.O.G.S Dads in the upcoming school year and explained that the pandemic has put a lot of opportunities and programs on hold. Similarly, amongst all educators, there is an understanding that most programs that are currently

being implemented are either being implemented virtually or are postponed until the following school year.

Joyce Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement

This study was guided by Epstein's (2019) six types of parental involvement. When beginning this study, the thought was that these six types of involvement would be prevalent during the data analysis phase. While they were mentioned, other themes were more evident. The types that did emerge the most were communication, volunteering, and community collaboration. Without these three, many of the participants felt that it would be difficult to build those partnerships with families and communities and to help students succeed.

Educator Responses

When asked which of the six types of involvement is most beneficial for his school, Joe responded,

I would say the collaborating one is more beneficial. Simply because it creates a sense of home, where the students not only feel comfortable in the school, but they feel comfortable with what the what the teachers are asking them to do. And they feel comfortable with the teachers. So, it creates a bond, where achievement is as easy as possible, simply because the child feels more comfortable to be themselves and not pressured or pushed to be something other than what they are capable of being.

He spoke again of this sense of community within the school and community partners. He stressed that meeting students where they are and providing equitable supports for them helps them to feel more comfortable in their academic abilities.

Angelica noted that some issues still need more attention in her school:

Well, to me, personally, the six things that were identified truly are the six things that that will need to happen in order for engagement to be successful...I'm more proficient in the areas of communication and probably collaboration, but there are some areas that that now have identified that we probably need to work on.

When asked to identify which areas needed to be worked on, she shared:

While we touch parenting, we need to go more in depth and showing parents how to actually become engaged. You know, a Parent 101 workshop or something like that...Learning at home. That would be the other one because a lot of times with areas, just as with area that I service. This is a, I don't know how you put it, a generational thing, generational poverty. And so, a lot of times they don't do because they don't know how to do. So, we would probably need to work on that thing because maybe if we help the parents do more or be more or get the education that they missed, then perhaps they will be encouraged to support the children.

Dr. Assata shared:

The communicating...I think the parenting one...I think that was a really good one. We sometimes we're just amazed at the things that we're like, 'Didn't we just say that?' "Why is this parent?" 'Why are they? Why are they rewarding a kid and they don't come to class?'...And try to help a parent get on track. And you're like, 'What in the name of Jesus?' I mean for real. We just be befuddled. And so, the interesting part, it's like the thing is that you need to get the parents to come to the parenting part. You know what I'm saying? And so, with the parenting, it seems like the grandparents, and the great grands, that log in are so grateful because so much time has passed since they raised their own. And this whole new era of kids, they like they don't know what to do!

She explained that there are a lot of students living with older relatives so finding ways to assist those older relatives during this time of virtual learning. Scarlett had similar thoughts towards parenting at her school.

I would say parenting because I'm not necessarily, and this is like for the world, I'm not sure that people necessarily understand what it means to be a parent. And I know that it can be so different, depending on what family, everybody's raised differently and stuff. But I think understanding, as far as school goes, what you are responsible for as a parent or guardian and getting people to understand that...And then I think volunteering. Like I said, it's just hard to get [parents], I don't know why...They'll come to a basketball game. But, they're not going to be on the PTA...

Scarlett splits her week between two schools, mentioning how one school has better parent volunteer turn out than the other. She would like for both schools to have increased parent representation.

Ellie shared:

Each has their place. I think the two-way communication is huge. And I think the like parental support with the education...After school hours would be, I think those two go hand in hand...I think parental committees, committees have their place, and there's definitely a void when we don't have any, but as far as like how significant they are, I think, I don't know. I think that one in the community would go hand in hand. So, my biggest two that I would say would be the parental support at home, like with, with learning and furthering like education and so on. And the two-way communication. I think without that everything else will fall away.

At Ellie's school, the dynamic is different being a Title One school and a charter school. They have committees now but she indicated that they were only put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past, when they have tried to do committees, they have been mainly supported by the teachers and not by parents. She spoke of how many of the parents who have students who participate in extracurriculars are more focused on the extracurricular activities rather than the academics.

Parent Responses

Miss Smith stated:

I think all six are equally important, but I would like to see more, parent volunteers. I think it's just the same handful of parents that are volunteering, and that can be overwhelming and tiresome at times. So, I think if we have more parents started getting involved and volunteering, you know, especially when there are multiple activities throughout the year. That would be great.

Miss Smith was not the only one who mentioned seeing the same parents volunteering at parent events. Karen repeatedly mentioned how there are only three parents she can rely on regularly.

Even though there are very few parent volunteers, Karen explained:

I think they're all equally important, but I feel like the most beneficial would be the resources because our family is, most of our school is low income. And, being Title One, I feel like the resources is a major thing that they really have to focus on...Simple things as a pencil, our families cannot afford...So having those resources, will be able to help you pretty much with all parts, I guess? You know with the at home learning and stuff like that, having those resources will branch out to all the other ones. So, I feel like resources will be the number one.

She stressed how she works very hard as PTA president to make sure that her parents get connected with resources.

For Selena, communication was the most important type.

I think communication is always like a top, most important thing. Because I think like the rest, some of the other ones can kind of fall into it being community...I think communication and community. I think the kids need to be involved in their own community and understand an impact that they can have on their own community. So there seems to be a lot of that connection within the community. Where you can change a community through your school.

Selena discussed how she has been able to connect with more community partners in her teacher role during virtual learning because her students are attending learning hubs in their community to support the learning from school. As a parent, she understands that building relationships with the community creates lasting relationships and life lessons that may be taught outside of the school building.

Breonna explained:

I feel like they're all equally important. And I say that because I can't say that my parenting at home should be less than what they are doing, or more. I feel like having people come in from the community and talk to these families, because a lot of the families at this school are probably low income...Or you know, a lot of them speak different languages. And so, I thought that's fairly important...And volunteering. I feel like your student's teachers and other people who work in the buildings should know who you are. And should know who your child's teacher is. And I don't feel like you should

just show up when there's something going wrong, I feel like you should also be there when things are going right. So, you know, I think all of it equally is important.

Glenn had a more all-inclusive view of Epstein's (2019) framework:

I think they're all equally important. I would like to see them have more community involvement because I am pretty much 'it takes a village to raise this child' type mentality. I like to see them be more accepting to volunteering. Communication I think is super important, especially like this year. And if my kids ever go back to school, it's going to be even more important because parents won't be allowed in the school. Like we understand for health reasons...And the only way that's going to work is if the communication is on point...They're all equally important but those are the ones that the communications, the community engagement...Don't just ask your community to come in and help you buy gifts for Christmas or food for food banks, right? Have them come in, and volunteer and read to the kids. Like those are the things that I think are probably most important.

In Glenn's case, she shared that she is going to struggle with the volunteering aspect for the remainder of the school year because she will not be able to volunteer in person, so she is relying heavily on the level of communication from her children's schools to ease her mind.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was two-fold. First, the study assessed parent perception of parental engagement to provide an opportunity for parents to share what parental engagement means and how it impacted their child's education. Secondly, the study assessed the teacher perception of parental engagement and how their views impact the relationships that are created with parents of the students in their classrooms. This study discussed similarities and differences

held by parents and educators on parental engagement. Lastly, this chapter discussed how parent and educator perceptions of parental engagement can be utilized to benefit student achievement. Twelve participants—six educators and six parents—were interviewed utilizing semi-structured, virtual interviews, and they discussed their experiences as an educator in a Title One elementary school or as a parent of a student in a Title One elementary school. Participants resided in the Southeastern, Southwestern, and Western regions of the United States. Interviews were then transcribed and analyzed through line-by-line coding.

The themes in this study reflect how the 12 participants feel about parental engagement and its impact on student achievement. These themes included communication, partnerships/relationships, methods of engagements, achievement, mental health, and resources. The participants shared many experiences among them, even though many worked in different school districts across the country. Throughout this study, it became evident that as educators and parents, there is still work that needs to be done. Educators longed to communicate with families and build relationships with the students and families they serve. Educators additionally indicated that in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, creating partnerships with families and community partners has been even more crucial than before because everyone is learning at home, and they noted that it can be difficult to build those relationships in a virtual setting.

Additionally, parents were just as committed to doing what it takes to help support their child. While most parents did not identify as much with community resources, they did agree that without communication from the school, and to the school, it is extremely difficult to create positive relationships and help their students succeed. Parent participants shared stories about instances where the lack of communication had negatively impacted their child's academic outcome and stressed the importance of the need for the teacher to communicate with them.

Parents eagerly welcomed the idea of volunteering in the building and helping their children at home. Parents also indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their children in a mostly positive way but mentioned different areas that needed improvement.

While this study provides a view into Title One elementary schools across the United States, this research is just the beginning as to how schools, families, and communities can partner together to support students, especially in the midst of a global pandemic. More research is needed to identify how schools can incorporate some of the practices learned while in quarantine and virtual learning. These new and reinvented practices could help schools, families, and communities to bridge any gaps in creating partnerships and in improving student success.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

Creating partnerships between schools and families has been a topic of research for many years (i.e., see Epstein, 2019; Evans & Radina, 2014; Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). In Title One schools, parental engagement has been historically found to be lacking. Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) discussed how a school's environment impacts a parent's desire to participate in school. Providing parents an opportunity to define parental engagement and how it has impacted their child's education was one of the purposes of this study. This study also aimed to define parental engagement as it pertains to educators and how their views impact the relationships that were created with parents of the students in their classrooms. Epstein's (2019) six types of parental engagement was utilized as the framework to answer the following research questions:

1. What are parent perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?
2. What are teacher perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?
3. What are the similarities and differences in parent and teacher perception of parental engagement?
4. How can these perceptions be utilized to improve parental engagement to benefit student achievement?

The experiences of 12 participants in various school districts from the Southeastern, Southwestern, and Western regions of the United States were examined in this qualitative, phenomenological study. The participants engaged in semi-structured, virtual interviews and identified as educators in Title One elementary schools or as parents of students currently attending a Title One elementary school. This study was grounded in existing literature, adding to the growing body of research about the importance of parental engagement and how it can

impact student achievement in Title One schools. Data were analyzed utilizing line by line coding to identify any commonalities amongst participants. This chapter includes a discussion of study findings and how Epstein's (2019) framework emerged throughout the study. Furthermore, this chapter includes recommendations for practice and implications for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study indicate that educators and parents have very similar views as to what parental engagement means and how it impacts student achievement. This study aimed to advance the work of Epstein's (2019) six types of parental involvement while identifying parent and educator perceptions of parental engagement. Epstein's framework included parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. Epstein identified that support for parenting should include "assisting families in understanding child and adolescent development and in setting home conditions that support children as students at each grade level" (p. 155). Communicating referred to "communicating with families about school programs and progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications" (p. 155). Volunteering entailed "improving recruitment, training, and schedules to involve families as volunteers and other locations to support students in school programs" (Epstein, 2019, p. 155).

Learning at home meant to "involve families with their children in learning at home, including homework, other curriculum-related activities, and individual course and program decisions" (Epstein, 2019, p. 155). Decision making was identified by "including families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through the PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations" (Epstein, 2019, p. 155). Lastly, collaborating with community was described as "coordinating community resources and

services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community” (Epstein, 2019, p. 155).

Prior to conducting this study, it was imperative to note that Epstein (2019) indicated that there is no hierarchical relationship amongst the six types. She stated that they are a typology and are all equally important. The data indicate that some types of involvement are more prevalent in schools than others as indicated by the themes that emerged:

1. Communication
2. Partnership/Relationship
3. Methods of Engagement
4. Achievement
5. Mental Health/Trauma
6. Community Partnerships/Resources

How themes emerged and their connection to Epstein’s framework will be discussed further. Of the six types of involvement, communication, volunteering, and collaborating with community were most prevalent. The remaining three types were interwoven throughout the major themes.

In this study, participants were introduced to Epstein’s (2019) framework, explaining each type of parental engagement and providing examples related to each. Each participant was asked whether their school engaged in any of the six types and if so, which ones and how. All participants spoke about communication and how without communication, everything else would fall away. Hornby (2011) stated:

All parents need to have channels of communication with their children’s teachers...They need to know when their children are having difficulties and what the school is going to do to address these...Parents need to feel that they can contact the

school at any time when they have a concern about their child. Some parents prefer to communicate by telephone, others would rather call in to see the teacher face-to-face, while others find that contact through written notes or home-school diaries suits them best. (p. 35)

Hornby (2011) encouraged educators to maintain open communication, having an “open door policy” (p. 35). Most parent participants felt like they could go to the school with any concern, noting few incidents where the lack of communication impacted their child. All indicated how, due to COVID-19 and the inability to attend events in person, it was extremely vital to remain in contact with the school.

A few parents recollected times when there was not open communication about their child’s academics. They shared that their child was not doing as well as they thought. While they did not appreciate the lack of communication, they did what was needed to get their children back on track. This relates to Epstein’s (2019) framework because it highlights the importance of two-way communication. Schools and parents communicate with each other to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Epstein also noted challenges to communication. She indicated that a challenge to communication is making sure any form of communication from the school is clear and understandable for all families, including communicating in different languages. Only a few participants mentioned the inadequacies in reaching English Language Learner (ELL) families. They stressed the importance of understanding family cultures and how these can impact their ability to engage in activities or communicate with the school.

Another challenge Epstein (2019) noted was obtaining ideas from families on improving communication between home and school. This challenge lends credence to how participants expressed difficulty in having parents join school and district-based committees. Several

participants made note that parent participation on committees was lacking. Scarlett, Karen, Dr. Assata, and Glenn all mentioned how difficult it is to get parents to participate on different committees. From the parent aspect, Glenn and Karen advocated for parents to join school committees. Dr. Assata and Glenn shared that at their schools, they recruit parents but COVID has really impacted many of the efforts to increase parent participation, even with some parents being present while their child was in a live class meeting.

While decision making is a main tenet of Epstein's (2019) framework, it was not sufficiently prevalent in this study to be identified as a main theme. Being part of different committees that make decisions at the school level and district level was mentioned as one of the ways in which a parent could be engaged in their student's academic journey. Karen shared how she tries to encourage other parents to join the PTA, so they have an opportunity to have their voices heard. Breonna spoke of how she recently was asked to be part of her son's school's main decision-making committee and was grateful for the opportunity. She continued that she may be considered the representative for students in her son's class, but she is looking forward to being included in making decisions that will not only benefit her son, but the whole school.

Epstein (2019) identified that including parents from all backgrounds can be a challenge when identifying parents to participate in these committees. All participants mentioned how their school or child's school's population is diverse. Karen shared how she tried to have translators available during PTA meetings and initially had a few families attend, but they soon stopped attending. Findings from this study support how it can be challenging to have parent representatives on various committees and in the schools that do, often it is the same parents each time. In Karen's situation, she repeatedly stated that there are about three parents she can

rely on for assistance and support. She has continued to recruit more parents so the work can be spread more evenly.

Breonna stated that when she was invited to become a part of the decision-making committee at her son's school, she was required to complete an extensive training to prepare her for her role as a parent representative. This training explained all that her role would entail and how the committee was there to support students by addressing the needs of the school. Epstein (2019) stated that a challenge to decision making is to offer trainings for parent leaders to represent other parents. As a parent of a special needs child and identifying that she may be the representative for her son's classmates and peers, this training should assist Breonna with communicating concerns and suggestions effectively.

Ultimately, decision-making committees are an example of a partnership between the school, family, and community. It takes a true partnership to identify strengths and weaknesses, have a level of transparency with families, and to problem solve ways to address the needs of students. Breonna recalled how the principal called a meeting and was very transparent about how the school was doing academically. She appreciated that because while she was unhappy that her son was placed at one of the district's lowest performing schools, she felt better about it after meeting with the principal, other parents, stakeholders, and teachers. Improving the achievement of all students became a goal for all parents, educators, and community partners and the school is now doing much better.

Partnership was a recurring theme amongst all participants, as many noted that without communication and partnership between all entities, it would be difficult for students to succeed. Stories from parents like Selena and Ann about how the lack of communication about their children's academic performance diminished their partnerships indicate that there is still work

that needs to be done. The lack of communication from the teacher did not indicate a partnership. Both Selena and Ann found out about their children's declining academic performance after many failed attempts of communicating with their children's teachers. Selena found out once she received her daughter's progress report, while Ann found out at a parent teacher conference. Both parents shared that while the situation bothered them immensely, and the relationship was impacted, they did whatever it took to help their children.

These examples showed that parents do engage in various techniques to support learning at home. Due to the pandemic requiring everyone to be quarantined for some time, many parents had to work with their children at home. The pandemic facilitated learning at home by providing more of an opportunity for parents to interact with their children in completing their schoolwork. Work schedules for some parents were altered with many businesses temporarily closing. COVID-19 brought more attention to the fact that many families did not have what they needed to support learning at home. Angelica shared how in her school district, they reached out to a local radio personality for Wi-Fi hotspots, so the students were able to participate in live learning sessions. Selena mentioned how she would see news stories about how virtual learning was failing students. As a parent and a teacher, she expressed that this has been a learning experience for everyone. She shared that her daughter had a failing grade, but she was not failing, and the grade got corrected.

Volunteering did not emerge as an individual theme, but it was heavily woven into the themes of communication and methods of engagement. All participants noted that with the pandemic, their schools were not hosting in person volunteering opportunities. Pre-pandemic, schools were providing various opportunities to volunteer, whether through the PTA, staying after and helping with parent nights, supporting on field trips, etc. Although participants did not

mention the lack of volunteer opportunities, both educators and parents stressed the importance of having volunteers. Glenn indicated that at her son's school, they request volunteers only for after school events. If a parent wanted to volunteer during the day, that parent must request the opportunity by speaking to certain staff.

Epstein (2019) stated that volunteering is “designed to improve recruitment, training, and schedules to involve parents and others as volunteers and as audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs” (p. 202). Karen shared that she encourages parents to take just a few minutes out of their week to help teachers make copies, pass out papers, etc., but also understood that with pandemic, volunteering at the school is difficult with everything being virtual. However, schools can use this time to identify the different talents that parents and community partners have so when schools begin to reopen, there is a directory of volunteers.

This directory of volunteers could also build additional partnerships and collaboration with the community. Epstein (2019) noted that collaboration with community can “draw upon and coordinate the work and resources of community businesses” (p. 205). In most Title One schools, funding and resources are limited, so partnering with agencies is important when working to address family needs. A few examples of community collaborations are with local mental health agencies, colleges and universities, government agencies, and senior citizen groups (Epstein, 2019). Breonna spoke of how at a family night at her school, there were local vendors for insurance companies, companies that discussed safety such as cyber safety and domestic violence, staff members from their local library, and even from an afterschool tutoring agency. Leaning on these partnerships to help bridge the gap between schools and families ensures that families can get what they need.

Out of all six types, there was a lack of discussion surrounding the parenting type, even from the parents. Educators stated that some parents need help with parenting, indicating that some parents have shown their children do not seem like a priority to the parent. Scarlett shared a story of a parent who continuously stated she would come to the school to support her child and never showed up, despite repeated phone calls from the schools. Parents indicated they do what they can at home but related that intent more to learning at home than to the parenting type. Each participant was asked of the six types, which type would be most beneficial for their school and there was an overwhelming response that communication and collaborating with community were the most important.

Communication and collaborating with community were suggested because without those two, everything else would seem to fail. Communication is key and both parents and educators stressed the need for positive communication. Selena shared that in her role as a teacher, she floods parents with positives so when she has to share news that is more difficult, the relationship has already been established. As a parent, she wanted her children's teachers to respond or reach out when necessary. Overall, both educators and parents expressed that during a time of uncertainty with the pandemic, communication and collaborating with community have been beneficial for engaging students and families in virtual learning.

Recommendations for Practice

This study indicates that both educators and parents identify with similar expectations when working together in a school. Many of the parent participants in this study have children in middle and high school, and they noted the differences in the experiences their older children have. From the educator lens, identifying ways to improve relationships with their students'

families can help create the sense of community and family in the classroom. When parents feel supported by the school, they are more willing to reach out when there is a concern or a need.

Parents noted times where their relationship with their child's teacher was directly impacted by communication or the lack thereof. Educators should identify ways to reach out and communicate with those parents who are hard to reach. The inability to reach families can be due to work schedules and the inability to answer their phone at work, the family not having a working phone number, or the parent may not answer or call back. Parents can improve their communication with the school by making sure that the school has a working number, identifying additional family members that the school may reach out to in case of an emergency, or reaching out to the school when they need help. Sharing concerns with school gives the school the ability to attempt to rectify a situation before the situation escalates.

Whitaker and Fiore (2016) shared that schools should welcome all families into the school community, communicate effectively, support student success, speak up for every child, share power, and collaborate with community (pp. 151-152). Additionally, schools need to recognize barriers that parents face when trying to engage with schools and continue to understand that engagement is more than just presence in the building. Schools should also continue to address concerns of trauma, providing their staff with trauma informed care trainings.

Recommendations for parents include communicating concerns with the necessary school personnel and having current contact information on file at the school. Parents can also ask questions when clarification is needed about a program or assignment. Without clear communication from the parent or school, student achievement can be negatively impacted. Both

parents and educators shared that a student's academic performance and social interactions can be directly linked to the relationships that parents and schools have.

When identifying recommendations for practice, it is important to make note of any potential limitations that may arise. Currently, a limitation to engaging parents and the community is the pandemic. This is new for everyone and schools are trying to navigate the pandemic while assisting students in virtual spaces. Collaborating with community partners in supporting families, such as in providing Wi-Fi hotspots or electronic devices for students who do not have access to a computer or tablet, will aid families in staying connected.

Implications for Future Research

Without partnerships between families, schools, and communities, students may struggle. This study is a step towards how Title One elementary schools can work to bridge the gap between parents, schools, and communities. Future research should address how schools can incorporate all six types of parental involvement as defined by Epstein (2019). Those six types include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. In this study, parenting, learning at home, and decision making were not prevalent. Future research should identify ways that schools, families and communities can build upon these three types, possibly identifying alternatives to bridging the gap as to how to incorporate them into regular practice.

Researchers should assess the effectiveness of offering virtual options for parent events such as parent teacher conferences, behavior meetings, special education and 504 meetings, and the possible benefits of continuing to do so. In education, it is important to meet families where they are and offering these options may allow for those families on alternate work schedules to feel included. Researchers should also examine how to increase awareness of the importance of

participating in decision making committees not only at the school-level, but at the district- and community-levels as well. Many parents may not realize how policies and procedures that are put in place may impact their children. Attending board meetings, parent meetings, and sending letters or emails provides an opportunity for parent voices to be heard.

From this study, there are a few potential research questions that could be considered. One research question that might be explored is whether parents feel their child's school offers opportunities to support student learning at home. Another question that could be researched is to compare parental engagement practices in Title One elementary schools with those in elementary schools that do not receive Title One funding. These research questions may indicate what schools that are considered to have successful parental engagement practices look like and how other schools can improve their practices. Previous research has indicated that parental engagement decreases as students transition to middle and high school. Researchers on parental engagement should also examine what causes the decrease in parental engagement across levels.

In addition, researchers should continue to seek to understand how parent and educator perceptions can impact student achievement. Participants in this study shared their experiences and what worked and what they would like to see done differently. For educators, trainings should be provided on how to build and create partnerships with families, to address biases that may impact partnerships, and to continue to create spaces for educators to be trauma informed. For parents, focus groups or surveys could be utilized to help schools identify areas of improvement and obtain a better understanding of the families they serve. While there is not much research on perceptions of parents and educators, continued studies should also take into consideration how society has changed as we move further from the integration of schools and

how families are affected by busing for desegregation. All of these factors ultimately impact student achievement.

This study was conducted during a global pandemic. Throughout educator and parent interviews, the impact of COVID-19 on schools and families was brought up constantly. Families, schools, and communities were forced out of their comfort zones, identifying ways to engage students while they were learning at home. From meeting students for the first time virtually to one teacher visiting his students at home dressed up as Darth Vader, COVID-19 has brought about a lot of firsts. For educators, learning how to navigate various platforms to host live meetings for students and assisting students and their families' adjustment to virtual learning was a learning experience for all. For parents, they spoke of having to support their children throughout the day and were willing to do what it took to make sure their children were getting the most out of virtual learning. Parental engagement in a global pandemic looked a little different but all participants noted that they are willing to do what it takes to ensure students are achieving at their highest potential.

Conclusion

This study aimed to assess parent and educator perceptions of parental engagement and how student achievement is impacted. Six educators currently working at Title One elementary schools and six parents with students currently attending Title One elementary schools were interviewed and given the opportunity to share their perceptions of parental engagement and how it can impact student achievement. This study was guided by four research questions, exploring whether parental engagement practices needed to be improved or enhanced. Data were collected by conducting semi-structured, virtual interviews. Each participant's interview was conducted individually so participants felt comfortable speaking freely about their experiences.

The participants in this study were all very passionate about the topic of parental engagement and about identifying where schools, and families, could improve. Their experiences can be utilized to help schools identify how to incorporate parents into their daily or weekly practices and how families can advocate for themselves when there is a need. Efforts should include bringing in community partners to meet additional needs that the school may not be able to meet. As schools, families, and communities continue to work together, student achievement will increase because barriers are being broken down. Whether the need be for mental health supports or academic supports, taking care of the whole child is imperative. Students are unable to learn if they are distracted by the trauma of what is going on in their lives or are unable to complete their work. Schools, families, and communities should continue to work on partnering with each other, and incorporate the middle and high school levels, continuing to provide supports until the student graduates from high school.

Furthermore, schools should continue to address communication concerns with parents and parents should continue to communicate their needs with the school. Lack of communication between school and family ultimately impacts the child and the partnership that could have been built. Positive relationships and communication between families, schools, and their communities may support improved student outcomes, supporting the whole child, emotionally and academically. Improving two-way communication between schools, families, and communities ensures that relationships flourish, and everyone is on the same page. Children deserve this type of investment in their futures.

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Appendix A

Appendix A: Interview Email Request

Dear _____,

My name is Alexandra “Alex” Rogers, and I am a student at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. I am currently a PhD candidate in the Education and Social Change program. I am reaching out to you because I am interested in exploring and documenting the lived experiences of parents of students in Title I elementary schools and educators in Title I elementary schools. Participation includes the completion of a brief demographic survey and one (1) initial interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes, with the possibility of a follow-up interview.

Requirements for participating in this study consists of identifying as a parent of a student in at Title I elementary school or currently be employed as an educator at a Title I elementary school. If you think you are able to help me with this research, please review the attached consent form and complete the questionnaire by following this link (<https://forms.gle/66e9mNFqxmdmbEEH7>). Your demographic criteria will be reviewed in order to get a diverse sample of 10-20 participants, so not everyone will be interviewed. If selected, I will contact you to set up an initial interview time/date, and to discuss other important information related to the study.

There are no known risks to you in participating in this study. Your participation may benefit schools in developing stronger parent engagement programs. Also, should you qualify and choose to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. You will also have the option not to respond to any question that you do not wish to answer.

If you know anyone else who meets the requirements and may be interested in participating in this study, please forward this email along or have them complete the questionnaire linked above.

Thank you very much and I look forward to hearing back from you. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Alexandra “Alex” Rogers
PhD Candidate, Education and Social Change
Bellarmine University
Email: arogers3@bellarmine.edu
Cell phone: [REDACTED] (text and calls accepted)

Appendix B

PARENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTION OF PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Alexandra “Alex” Rogers, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY. You are being invited to complete the attached questionnaire about teacher and parent perception of parental engagement in Title 1 schools. My research will focus on understanding how parents and teachers perceive parental engagement, while identify ways, if any, to improve parental engagement practices in Title I schools. I am also interested in learning what suggestions parents and educators have in suggestions for improving parental engagement practices.

This topic is of interest to me because parental engagement directly impacts student achievement. As an educator in Title I schools, I would like to make a difference in reaching more parents and improving relationships between families and schools.

If you agree to participate, your participation will include:

- **Pre-interview survey:** Each participant will be asked to complete a survey that will gather brief demographic information, identify your role as a parent or educator, highest level of degree completion, salary range, family size, ethnicity, and age range. Demographic responses will be reviewed in order to get a diverse sample of 10-20 participants.
- **Interviews:** Participants will be interviewed for one interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted via phone or video-conference. With your permission, interviews will be recorded so the interviewer can be present and engaged fully during the interview. There is a possibility for a follow-up interview if further questions arise. Once interviews are completed, recordings will be sent to a third-party service, Kaltura, for transcription.
- **Review transcripts:** Upon review of completed transcription, the document will be returned to you, the participant, via email for clarification on the transcription.
- **Communication:** I will remain available throughout the entirety of the study for any questions that may arise. As the participant, you have the right to stop participation at any point in the study without any penalty as participation in this study is voluntary.

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this study. Your participation may or may not benefit you directly. However, the information learned in this study may be helpful to others. The data you provide will be utilized to help define parental

engagement and identify any gaps or misconceptions between parents and teachers. Individuals from Department of Education and Social Change, the Annsley Frazier Thornton University School of Education, and the Bellarmine University Institutional Review Board may inspect these records. In all other respects, however, the data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed.

Please remember that your participation in this study is voluntary. By submitting the attached questionnaire, you are voluntarily agreeing to participate. You are free to decline to answer any particular question that may make you feel uncomfortable or which may render you prosecutable under law. Further, your provided identifiable private information or biospecimens collected as part of this research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me via phone at [REDACTED] or via email at arogers3@bellarmine.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Institutional Review Board (IRB) office at 502-272-8032. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in confidence, with a member of the committee. This is an independent committee composed of members of the University community and lay members of the community not connected with this institution. The IRB has reviewed this study.

Sincerely,

Alexandra “Alex” Rogers
PhD Candidate, Education and Social Change
Bellarmine University
Email: arogers3@bellarmine.edu
Cell phone: [REDACTED] (text and calls accepted)

Appendix C

Subject Informed Consent

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Dr. Rosemarie Young, professor of education at Bellarmine University and Alexandra “Alex” Rogers, who will serve as a co-collaborator for the study. The study is sponsored by the Department of Education and Social Change at Bellarmine University. The study will take place at via phone or video-conference. Approximately 10-20 subjects will be invited to participate. Your participation in this study will last up to two hours.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is twofold. First, the study will assess parent perception of parental engagement to provide an opportunity for parents to share what parental engagement means and how it impacts their child’s education. Secondly, the study will assess the teacher perception of parental engagement and how their views impact the relationships that are created with parents of the students in their classrooms. This research may be utilized for future study or recommendations on increasing parental engagement in Title I schools.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to engage in a phone or video-conference interview to discuss your views on parental engagement and how you feel it impacts your child or student’s achievement. Alexandra Rogers will conduct the interviews and they will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. You are free to skip questions as you wish. After completion of your interview, it will be transcribed by Kaltura, a third-party company that maintains confidentiality, with each transcription to be verified by Alex Rogers. Depending on interview responses, the possibility of an additional interview may be requested. Your completed interview transcripts will be stored on a password-protected personal computer. Your demographic survey and other identifying information will be kept separate and your name will not be on any of the data. Alex Rogers will then analyze the data. If there are any questions you feel uncomfortable answering, you as the participant reserve the right to choose not to answer.

Potential Risks

There are no reasonably foreseeable risks.

Benefits

The data collected in this study may not benefit you directly. However, the information learned from this research may be helpful to others in the future.

Confidentiality

Although absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. The study sponsor or the Institutional Review Board may inspect your research records. Should the data collected in this research study be published, your identity will not be revealed.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your consent at any time without penalty or losing benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your Rights as a Research Subject and Contact Persons

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Institutional Review Board Office at 502.272.8032. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions, in confidence, with a member of the Board. This is an independent committee composed of members of the University community and lay members of the community not connected with this institution. The Board has reviewed this study.

You acknowledge that all your present questions have been answered in language you can understand. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Alex Rogers at [REDACTED]

Consent

You have discussed the above information and hereby consent to voluntarily participate in this study. You have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Subject or Legal Representative

Date Signed

Signature of Investigator

Date Signed

Signature of Person Explaining Consent if other than Investigator

Date Signed

Appendix D

Interview Questions and Participant Questionnaire

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<p>What are parent perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does parental engagement mean to you? 2. In what ways does your child's school invite parents to be engaged? 3. How often are you able to attend school activities? 4. If you have not able to participate in school activities, what are some reasons why? 5. Do you feel the school's communication methods with families are effective? Ineffective? 6. What do you feel your child's teacher/school does well? 7. What areas of improvement do you feel your child's teacher/school could make? 8. Joyce Epstein, a notable researcher on family engagement, identifies 6 types of parental involvement. They are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. Do you feel as though your child's school engages in all 6 types? If no, which ones and how? 9. Of the six, which one would you like to happen in your school?
<p>What are teacher perceptions of parental engagement in Title One schools?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. What does parental engagement mean to you? 11. In what ways can parents be engaged? 12. In what ways do you communicate with your student's families? Does the school communicate? 13. Are parent voices included on committees?

<p>What are the similarities and differences of parent and teacher perception of parental engagement?</p> <p>How can these perceptions be utilized to improve parental engagement to benefit student achievement?</p>	<p>14. Parents defined parental engagement as _____. How does this relate to your definition of parental engagement? -OR-</p> <p>15. Teachers defined parental engagement as _____. How does this relate to your definition of parental engagement?</p> <p>16. Joyce Epstein, a notable researcher on family engagement, identifies 6 types of parental involvement. They are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. Do you feel as though your school engages in all 6 types? If yes, which ones and how?</p> <p>17. Of the six, which one(s) do you think would be beneficial for your school to do?</p> <p>18. How do you feel these definitions impact your child's/student's academic achievement?</p> <p>19. Do you notice any difference between student's whose parents are more or less involved?</p> <p>20. How do these perceptions of parental engagement impact relationships you have with your families/child's teacher/school?</p> <p>21. Do perceptions impact a student's ability to succeed academically (i.e. 3.0 GPA or better)?</p> <p>22. How can schools/parents/community work to address any negative</p>
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	perceptions to improve student outcomes? 23. Is your school addressing negative perceptions? 24. Is there anything else you would like to add that you feel wasn't covered?
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Participant Demographic Survey

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. Responses will be used to select participants for a study to better understand parental engagement in Title I schools. Your name will be change to a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

1. Full Name:
2. Preferred method of contact
 - a. Email
 - i. Email address if preferred:
 - b. Phone Call
 - i. Phone number if preferred:
 - c. Text
 - i. Cell number if preferred:
3. Contact information
4. What is your ethnicity?
 - a. Asian
 - b. Black/African American
 - c. Hispanic/Latino
 - d. White/Caucasian
 - e. Prefer not to answer
 - f. Other _____
5. What is your highest level of degree completion?
 - a. G.E.D.
 - b. High School Diploma
 - c. Associates
 - d. Bachelors
 - e. Masters
 - f. Doctorate
 - g. Currently in school
 - h. Other _____
 - i. Prefer not to answer
6. Are you currently employed in a Title I Elementary School?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. N/A
7. If a teacher, how many years have you taught?
 - a. 1 - 2
 - b. 3 - 5

- c. 6 – 10
 - d. 11 – 20
 - e. Over 20
8. Do you have a child(ren) attending a Title I Elementary School?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. N/A
9. If parent/guardian, what is your relationship to your child(ren)?
- a. Parent
 - b. Guardian
 - c. Foster
10. What is your age range?
- a. 18-25
 - b. 25-35
 - c. 35-45
 - d. 45-55
 - e. 55+
 - f. Prefer not to answer
11. How many children are in your home?
- a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. 4
 - f. 5 or more
12. Which describes your current household income?
- a. Less than 30,000
 - b. 30,000-40,000
 - c. 40,000-50,000
 - d. 50,000-65,000
 - e. 65,000 or more
 - f. Prefer not to answer

Appendix E: Social Media Post

I am completing the data collection for my dissertation on Parent and Teacher Perception of Parental Engagement in Title I schools. I am seeking participants who identify as (1) parents of students enrolled in a Title I school (2) educators currently teaching at a Title I school. My research will seek to document and understand how participants define parental engagement, identify ways parental engagement practices are successful, areas of improvement, and potential barriers to parental engagement. If you are willing to participate or know someone who would be a great fit, please complete the initial Google form, <https://forms.gle/5EtuZaJKdM1kRN519>. I will contact you to provide more information regarding your participation in the study.



RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

I am seeking parents of students currently attending a Title I Elementary School or educators currently working in a Title I Elementary School for my dissertation study on Parental Engagement.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is for parents and educators to define parental engagement and how it impacts a student's achievement and relationships are created between the teacher and parents of the students in their classrooms.

Participant Requirements: Must be a parent of a student currently enrolled in a Title I Elementary School or must currently teach in a Title I school.

If you are a parent or educator who meets these qualifications, or know someone who might, please complete the Google form at <https://forms.gle/66e9mNFqxmdbEEH7> or use the QR code below.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me, Alex Rogers, at arogers3@bellarmine.edu.

