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Shifting Parents from Respondents to Partners: New Paths to School Involvement

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Abstract

Consensus among researchers is that parent involvement strengthens student grades (Ross, 2016). The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore new strategies between parents and schools to foster continued parent involvement. Through qualitative design of surveys, focus-groups, and document review, this study explores strategies utilized of parent involvement at the high school level. The setting for this study is a suburb community in Minnesota. The high school has a student population that exceeds 2,300 (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). The sample for this study will consist of parents that have at least one current student at the high school. Data collected will come from survey questions. Included in the survey are open-ended questions to explore the importance of parent involvement in high schools from school stakeholders. Three methods are utilized to collect data in this study: a survey, focus interviews, and document review. Two themes emerged for RQ1: (1) parents read their school to home email and find it effective in communicating information and knowledge, and (2) less than half of families partner with the school in ways other than parent teacher conferences. Three themes surfaced for RQ2: (1) parents still want to utilize parent teacher conferences the most but would also like to increase their engagement in open house or curriculum night, school sponsored events, and forums with the principal and (2) parents have been provided with communication and opportunities to volunteer and be involved and (3) there is still room for growth and opportunities to connect parents to information and volunteer opportunities.

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Chapter I

High levels of parental involvement and school support helps to facilitate the development of high academic standards and expectations (Houston Independent School District, 2018). The National Center for Educational Statistics outlines that, ninety percent of parents attended conferences or a school-sponsored event for children of elementary age (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). By the time children are in secondary schools, the number drops to fifty-eight percent (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Parallel to lower attendance of school-sponsored events, parents indicated that the percentage of teachers that were considered "*very satisfying*" dropped from seventy-five percent in elementary years to forty-seven percent satisfaction of secondary educators (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Ross (2016) posits that methods to involve families at the elementary level may not be effective at the secondary level. A 2011 study was done that indicated that school receptivity was the strongest predictor of parental school involvement within parents (Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, & Efreom, 2011). Other predictors of high levels of parental involvement included educational aspirations for the child and community engagement behaviors on the school's behalf (Overstreet, Devine, Bevans, Efreom, 2011).

The term "parent involvement" is a multi-faceted term and provokes several different meanings (Fisher, 2016). Parent involvement often is limited to volunteering, and checking homework at home (Fisher, 2016). Academics, such as Fisher (2016), include involvement to include expectations for the child and communication between school and home. Through an extensive four-year study, researchers attempted to differentiate between parent involvement, and the relationships between schools and families (Kim, et al., 2016). To foster successful

parent involvement, all sides from the school personnel to families must define barriers that hinder good communication and work toward a solution to achieve the level of involvement desired ((Kim, et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of practiced strategies between parents and schools to foster continued parent involvement.

Problem Background

Consensus among researchers is that parent involvement strengthens student grades (Ross, 2016). Guiding students toward completing a high school diploma has many benefits (Ross, 2016). In a longitudinal study conducted by Lauff and Ingels (2013), twenty-six percent of sophomore students who did not finish high school were unemployed ten years later, compared to only fifteen percent of those who has obtained a diploma, and only five percent were unemployed ten years later that received a bachelor's degree. Several barriers exist that hinder parents' ability to be involved. Some of these barriers are cultural, social, and economic (Evans, 2017).

This study is based within a high school setting, which has not been the focus of many studies around parent involvement (Ross, 2016). Gonzales and Gabel (2017), suggest that counternarratives, such as perspectives from families, are an important factor of the study. Past studies have outlined the changing demographics of student populations and the lack of education or training educators have had with new families (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017). Fisher (2016) submits four foci to obtain parent involvement. These are activities that improve resources, activities that control school procedures and outcomes, pedagogy practices, and

activities that pertain to the school's well-being (Ross, 2016). Relationships between families

and school administration have not been able to separate, share, and sequence responsibilities of

families and schools (Ross, 2016). Where high expectations at home are not enough, parents

should supplement actively assisting their children in homework and college planning (Ross,

2016). These types of conversations should be offered in training from the school for effective

engagement in the education process (Ross, 2016).

Elementary schools see the highest levels of participation from families (McQuiggan &

Megra, 2017). The most common parent activity attended was participating in a general school

or a parent-teacher organization or association meeting (McQuiggan & Megra, 2017). Seventy-

eight percent of students had parents who reported attending a regularly scheduled parent-teacher

conference Ninety-three percent of elementary school parents received communication via

email, telephone call, newsletter, or memo from the school or teacher as opposed to eighty-five

percent of high school-aged parents (McQuiggan & Megra, 2017).

Commonly cultural and socio-economic barriers are reasons for lack of involvement

(Evans, 2017). Cultural norms that are not similar lead to mistrust, miscommunication, and even

tension between schools and families (Evans, 2017). Educators mistakenly homogenously group

parents of other cultures when they should be viewed as individual situations (Evans, 2017).

Schools over-rely on parents to fix factors outside of reasonable control such as race, gender, and

socio-economic status (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017).

Lastly, many barriers exist between parents and school personnel. Negative views of

each side hinder parent involvement such as parents' perceptions of school and past experiences

they had while in school (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017). Educators lack resources and training for

effective communication practices (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017). Both families and school staff

commonly agree to five themes that provide barriers to parent involvement: communication, actual opportunities for volunteering, welcoming families into the building, time constraints, and moving from involvement to engagement (Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba, 2016). Although common themes of barriers are recognized, solutions vastly differ and only add to the achievement gap (Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore new strategies between parents and schools to foster continued parent involvement.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided through Epstein's six types of parent involvement. The framework consists of six types of involvement (Epstein et al., 2002). The first ring is designed to help families support their children at home (Epstein et al., 2002). The second ring is designing effective communication about programs and progress of the students (Epstein et al., 2002). The third ring is the recruitment and organization of parents to help and support the school (Epstein et al., 2002). The fourth ring is information and ideas for supporting learning at home (Epstein et al., 2002). The fifth ring is information to include families as decision-makers and ultimately as parent leaders (Epstein et al., 2002). The sixth ring is a coordinated effort from families, the school, and the community to provide services to and from the community (Epstein et al., 2002). Through this framework, each category is defined, and examples of support are given to reach a partnership between schools and parents (Epstein et, al, 2002). This multi-faceted framework connects different areas for parents and educators to develop programs of partnership between groups (Epstein et al., 2002). More detail on this framework will be provided in chapter two.

Research Questions

The following research questions are used in this study:

RQ1: What strategies have schools used effectively to partner with parents? Which strategies were not effective?

RQ2: What new paths should schools employ to create a partnership between parents and school?

Definition of Terms

The following three terms are used a construct of levels or degrees of parent relationships with school personnel (Toso & Grinder, 2016).

Parent Involvement- The first level of the relationship between school and parents (Toso & Grinder, 2016). Characteristics of involvement include demonstratable actions such as attending school events and reading to a child at home (Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba, 2016). Dr. Epstein discusses involvement through six categories: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community (Epstein, 2002). The research revolves around the Epstein framework and will be the definition most used.

Parent Engagement- The second level of parent involvement (Toso & Grinder, 2016). Position parents to have a voice on topics centering on their children, their schools, and the issues that involve them as adults and community members (Toso, Grinder, 2016). Parents are not considered merely volunteers and helpers, rather a partner of education (Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba, 2016).

Parent Leadership- The highest level of parent involvement (Toso & Grinder, 2016). Parents are given an opportunity to participate in the creation of school policy (Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba, 2016). Parents and school personnel are engaged in collaborative and involved decision-making processes through structure and guidance from the school (Toso & Grinder, 2016).

Parent Participation in school- Having a physical connection with the school as it allows parents to better understand their child and their child's high school experience. Examples of parental participation at school included picking up their child's report card, impromptu visits to monitor their child, being a chaperone on a field trip, attending extracurricular events, and visiting to talk to school personnel (Williams, Sanchez, 2012).

Parent Participation outside of school- Is composed primarily of four ideas: basic needs, family activities, educational assistance, and life lessons. Although physical items (e.g., computers, uniform accessories and allowances) were important, students were also influenced by the knowledge and values instilled in them at home (Williams, Sanchez, 2012).

School Communication- Two types of communication will be used: (1) communication between adults and (2) children and communication among adults within the school (Williams, Sanchez, 2012).

Student Achievement- Students are achieving when they acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will prepare them to future success in the workforce (Gershenson, Thomas, 2020). This is measured through graduation rates.

Significance of the Study

Results of this study may be significant to three groups: parents, school administrators, and ultimately the scholars. The results of this study may help inform parents about the perspectives of school administrators and benefits of parent involvement to students. The outcome of this study could help school administrators identify strategies that have been proven for successful parent involvement. School administrators will also gain valuable insight from parents' opinions and thoughts on involvement. Finally, school-aged scholars might benefit from this study as parents and school administrators work together to create partnerships to enhance learning at home and school and policies to keep parents informed.

Limitations

Limitations to this phenomenological study include dishonesty of the participants due to the researcher's presence (Creswell, 2018). Limitations aid other researchers to replicate or build upon the study (Creswell, 2018). Participants may provide fabricated answers to satisfy the researcher. Participants control the depth of responses and may or may not choose to elaborate on interview questions. This study is also limited to willing participants and availability to conduct the interview within the allotted timeframe. Volunteers to this study are limited to parents that are involved in some manner currently and may not represent all factions and beliefs of the parent population. This study is limited by the sample population. Parents surveyed are from Minnesota, mostly located in suburban areas. Parents who are willing to participate in the research are more likely to be parents who are already involved with the school and school community. The study is also limited by the experience of the parent. The family may have had several students through the school, and some may have this one and only student. Some study participants have only attended the same school district, and some have moved in or transferred from other school districts which vary socio-economic statuses as well as school

populations and demographics.   Using administrative support, research can be properly aimed at parents who are uninvolved with the school. All participants to this study are volunteers that chose to respond to the inquiry.

Delimitations

The respondents to this study are members of the same school district and the subjects' students attend the same school. Each of the study participants has a currently enrolled scholar within the school. Past experiences that are negatively or positively linked to the family give background to the attitude in which a family responds to the study.

Summary and Overview of the Study

Chapter one introduced related research to the phenomenon being examined and emphasized the need for further exploration of the challenges between parents and school to reach a partnership. The chapter outlined the background of the problem, significance of the study. Purpose of the study, limitations, and delimitations. Key terms have been defined and given some context as to future use in this study. Further, this chapter introduced the research questions and theoretical framework that guide the study. Chapter two discusses the relevant literature in creating new paths to parent involvement. Chapter two also contains historical background to the phenomenon. Chapter three offers the methodology and research findings to this study. The chapter also outlines the process of data collection, sample, selection of the participants, and setting of the study. Chapter four presents the findings and the discussion of the results. Chapter five provides conclusions about the data and recommendations for further research regarding parent involvement.

Chapter II

This study explores new strategies between parents and schools to foster continued parent involvement through six common themes. This chapter presents a summary of the literature related to explore a partnership of parental involvement. Historical perspective literature is first, followed by empirical studies on parent involvement. Current literature is presented in three themes within the parent involvement realm: elementary school involvement, the effect of socio-economic status on involvement, and barriers to engaging parents. Epstein's six types of parental involvement is discussed within this theoretical connection to the study.

Historical Perspective

Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed to ensure all students, regardless of environmental factors, were able to receive the same education (Florida Department of Education, 1966). One important factor of this legislation was involving parents in education. The Florida Department of Education held a conference in 1966 to embolden the role of parent involvement (Florida Department of Education, 1966). The conference stressed that parents are in fact interested in their children's education but are often uninformed about their role in their child's education (Florida Department of Education, 1966). To partner the parents and the schools, the conference outlined procedures to create unity amongst the two entities. Teachers, volunteer parents, or school social workers should make periodic home visits to families to ensure communications are received (Florida Department of Education, 1966).

Organizations, such as parent-teacher organizations, should be tasked with bringing in parent issues to alleviate the school's strife in involving parents (Florida Department of Education, 1966).

The National Conference on Education furthered the ideals of the importance of recognizing parent involvement (Asbell & Office of Education, D.W.D., 1966). Onus on educators was stressed in creating resources to entice parents into the schools (Asbell & Office of Education, D.W.D., 1966). Often parents were only called in times of peril with their student instead of creating a relationship via positive communications (Asbell & Office of Education, D.W.D., 1966). The conference also prescribed that there is a third party that could be tapped into, the greater community and businesses (Asbell & Office of Education, D.W.D., 1966). This group offers a buffer or a release for scholars to learn new skills (Asbell & Office of Education, D.W.D., 1966).

By the 1970s, the focus remained on partnering parents and schools (Gordon, 1970). During this decade, the family structure was paired with socio-economic status (Gordon, 1970). In a 1970 study, Gordon recognized that members of the middle class, regardless of their race, expected higher achievement than those in lower class statuses (Gordon, 1970). The study considers patterns that were discovered amongst the lower levels of socio-economic status. These patterns include disorganization, inconsistency in discipline and routine, and low expectations with school (Gordon, 1970). Gordon presented four levels of parent involvement. The first was as an audience member (Gordon, 1970). Parents will either listen to messages from their homes or physically observe materials and procedures in school (Gordon, 1970). The second level is to educate their own student by teaching them at home (Gordon, 1970). The third parallel involves parents taking an active role in the schools as volunteers (Gordon, 1970). The

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fourth layer of parental involvement is to train the parent to become as an active worker in the system (Gordon, 1970).

In a 1972 report from the Office of Education, parent involvement in respects to Title I was observed (Office of Education, D.W.D., 1972). The report lists the major misconceptions of parent involvement, including areas of depressed or low socio-economic status yields smaller numbers of involved parents (Office of Education, D.W.D., 1972). The Office of Education's plan to action includes a large amount of time be spent on preparing for equal footings for the three stakeholder groups of parents, schools, and community members (Office of Education, D.W.D., 1972). Through this amount of time trust is to be earned and communication lines are to remain open and clear about the goals of the stakeholders (Office of Education, D.W.D., 1972).

In 1973, Berlin and Berlin published a handbook for schools to train parents. The manual shared numerous findings from studying parent involvement. Even cases in which parents were originally seen as uncooperative changed their views after participating in learning at home with their children (Berlin & Berlin, 1973). Conclusively, the manual calls attention for the nation-wide need for parents to be teachers at home (Berlin & Berlin, 1973).

By the 1980s, the United States found itself behind many developed countries in education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The 1983 Federal government report proposed that American students were unprepared for higher education and the professional work world ((National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This decade provided a new definition of parent involvement (Fehrmann, Keith, Reimers, 1987). Parent involvement consisted of verbal encouragement, direct reinforcement for positive behavior and achievement, and general guidance for future planning after high school

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(Fehrmann, Keith, Reimers, 1987). By the end of the decade, it was thought that socio-economic status did not play a role in student achievement, but the role of the parent in the home and in the school, environment was most important (Eagle, 1989). As parents were more involved with their children's education, the more likely the student was to enroll in postsecondary opportunities after high school (Eagle, 1989).

In the 1994 *State of American Education* address, Secretary Riley delivered a paradox in which parents felt left out of the education process and teachers wished that parents were more involved (Bauch, 1994). The 1990s was preceded by decades of research and had discovered that still over 70% of parents in schools are not involved in any capacity at schools (Bauch, 1994). Despite students having less discipline problems, increased achievement, and improved attendance a fundamental breakdown still existed in harboring relationships between parents and school personnel (Bauch, 1994). Four new paths to parent involvement were addressed: the basic parenting and school obligations, learning at home, and being involved as an advocate or joining a governance board with the school (Bauch, 1994). The United States Congress created a multi-faceted school-improvement plan for the nation; Goal 8 was parental involvement (Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, 1997). Among new pathways in this decade included creating agreements between parents and schools to agree upon learning outcomes, frequent communications by both parties, and an office at the district level to help educate both teachers and families about how to better serve the other (Bauch, 1994, Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, 1997). Over a decade after the government had outlined issues in closing the achievement gap, breakdowns still existed in levels of participation (Lauderdale and Bonilla, 1998). High participation was found form parents with children in elementary schools, financially stable households, and educated parents (Lauderdale and Bonilla, 1998). This led to

students being suspended or expelled much less frequently and partnerships between the school and home about behavioral issues (Lauderdale and Bonilla, 1998).

The federal government yet again tackled these disparities in its No Child Left Behind legislation (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 2004). The legislation was created to increase grant opportunities and impose more strict standards on schools (National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 2004). By the end of this decade, mutual responsibility for learning was the foundation to family involvement (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglalll, & Gordon, 2009). These partnerships are characterized by shared values of the parents and schools, ongoing communication from both parties, and a level of mutual trust (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglalll, &Gordon, 2009). The most involved parents are found at the elementary school level (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglalll, & Gordon, 2009).

Parental involvement is Elementary

Parents are readily involved in their children's primary schooling. Two main factors to this are proximity of elementary school buildings to the actual home and elementary-aged scholars are in more need of adult help (Li and Fischer, 2017). Teachers at these levels are more likely to elicit parent participation compared to secondary educators (Li and Fischer, 2017). The goal of engaging parents at primary levels is to focus on facilitating parents' interaction with the curriculum and interactions with the teacher (Li and Fischer, 2017).

Elementary schools often use parent networks to cast a wide net of parent involvement (Li and Fischer, 2017). These peer networks help parents to gain pivotal information about school policies and practices (Park and Holloway, 2017). The most common forms of parent networks include parent-teacher organizations or parent-teacher associations (Park and

Holloway, 2017). Schools utilize these networks to gain greater participation amongst parents

(Li and Fischer, 2017). Li and Fischer indicate that high levels of parent involvement lead to

high levels of participation by third grade with parents (Li and Fischer, 2017). Engaged

elementary families are four times as likely to grow reading scores and ten times more likely to

garner better math scores (Hives, 2017).

These parent networks are mostly filled with highly involved parents (Li and Fischer,

2017). Roadblocks to involvement still exist for many parents (Hives, 2017). Access to

technology, work commitments, and larger immigrant populations stand as these barriers (Hives,

2017; Li and Fischer, 2017). Low socioeconomic status parents provide that their everyday

realities still hinder their ability to be involved at school (Li and Fischer, 2017).

Socioeconomic and Cultural Effects on involvement

Families of low-income households, ethnic or racial minorities are less likely to be

involved in their children's schooling (Park, Holloway, 2013). Parents with larger disparities

form the school itself tend to be less involved (Rosenquist, 2013). Language or cultural barriers

hinder the efforts of parents from being able to be involved (Rosenquist, 2013). Perceptions of

schools or parents that are not familiar with the United States school system hinder participating

in schools (Park, Holloway, 2013). Numerous studies have been done about the correlation

between socio-economic status (SES) and parent involvement (Park, Holloway, 2013). Results

of these studies have varied by many factors (Park, Holloway, 2013). In a 2015 study, Renth,

Buckley, and Puchner articulated four main themes for parents to be less likely to be involved in

schools (Renth, Buckley, Puchner, 2015). The first factor was limited resources and availability

of technology such as telephones and computers with reliable internet (Renth, Buckley, Puchner,

2015). Many schools utilize phone calls and emails to update families about grades and

upcoming events (Renth, Buckley, Puchner, 2015). Second, parents felt limited in their options (Renth, Buckley, Puchner, 2015). Limited financial and educational resources hindered parents from helping their scholar at home (Renth, Buckley, Puchner, 2015). Theme four brought a dimension of blame to the government and the lack of adequate funding and assistance for low SES families (Renth, Buckley, Puchner, 2015). Parents reported that even when they had positive interactions with the school, they did not feel they could change their economic situation to better their students' lives (Renth, Buckley, Puchner, 2015).

Researchers suggest that the first step to create involvement amongst these groups is create a welcoming environment (Park, Holloway, 2013). Further, communications must be frequent and effective between home and the schools (Park, Holloway, 2013). Many of these efforts have been done at the elementary level but studies indicate that sustained involvement and outreach programs in high schools can have a significant impact (Park, Holloway, 2013).

Barriers to Involvement

The most common barriers to parent involvement are socioeconomic status, poor communication from all parties, an unwelcoming school environment, and a shortage of resources (Luet, 2017). Hornby and Lafaele created a model of factors that hinder parents from being involved in schools (Hornby, Lafaele, 2011). Individual parent and family factors are discussed first. The view of parents in their role of educating their student is vital (Hornby, Lafaele, 2011). Not every parent has a positive image of schools from their past experiences as students or issues with the school (Hornby, Lafaele, 2011). Parents are also apprehensive to be involved, especially in homework if they feel that the material is above their own ability (LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling, 2017). Parents with mental or physical disabilities also find it difficult to join an effective parent network (Hornby, Lafaele, 2011). The second category from

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) is factors related to the children themselves. Examples of these include parents with children with learning disabilities or those who are deemed gifted and talented (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Parent and teacher factors are third in the model. Examples of these include parents and teachers not by synched with goals and agendas about the classroom as well as language and attitudes that differ between the two parties (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Lastly, societal factors play a role in barriers to parent involvement in the model form Hornby and Lafaele (2011). These factors include socioeconomic status, political climates, and historical context (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011).

Remedies to these barriers are plentiful and for them to work, the parents and school need to be flexible in their stance (Turney and Kao, 2011). In order to avoid the physical barriers to involvement such as disabilities or hectic work schedules, teachers may go on a home visit to deliver updates on student progress (LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling, 2017). Parents that live far away from school or have transportation issues, school busses can be used to bring them to the school free of charge (LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling, 2017).

Six Types of Parent Involvement: Theoretical Framework

In 2001, Epstein created a framework with six types of parent involvement. This framework has been developed through early work done by Fullan (1985) and Purkey and Smith (1983). Fullan advanced the initial work of Purkey and Smith (1983) in which eight factors of the school organization create improvement in schools (Fullan, 1985). These eight factors include: focused leadership at the school-level, strong district support, an emphasis on content in the classroom, clear expectations for students, strong grading systems, development and training for staff, parental involvement, and a safe school environment (Fullan, 1985). Accompanied w along these eight factors are four processes to lead you to improvement in schools (Fullan,

1985). A feel for the process of improvement, an agreed upon value system, strong

communication, and collaborative planning are the four factors to guide school improvement

(Fullan, 1985).

In 2001, Epstein evolved a framework for schools to develop school and family

partnerships. The goal of these partnerships is to garner higher student achievement (Epstein,

2001). Students are best served when schools support families to establish supportive home

environments, provide communication to and from, and involve all parents from different races

and socio-economic backgrounds (Ross, 2016).   Sphere one revolves around parenting (Epstein,

2001). The role of this sphere is to help families create home environments to foster children as

students outside of the classroom (Epstein, 2001). Epstein (2001) provides that courses for

parents in areas such as college credits, family literacy, or obtaining a GED should be provided

(Epstein, 2001). Other services that assist parents in nutrition or health programs could be

included (Epstein, 2001). Home visits to help families in transitions from elementary, middle,

and high schools also harbor a level of trust within the district (Epstein, 2001). The second

sphere is communication or creating effective means of messaging from home-to-school and

school-to-home about scholar's progress (Epstein, 2001). Means to achieve this goal include

conferences with parents, the use of translators when necessary, and regular communications via

phone calls, newsletters, and memos (Epstein, 2001). Volunteering or using organized parent

help in classrooms and at school are the third level (Epstein, 2001). A trained family coordinator

should be used to aid in organizing parent involvement (Purkey and Smith, 1983). Providing

information to families about helping their student at home with schoolwork, decision-making,

and college and career readiness are the foundations of the fourth sphere; learning at home

(Epstein, 2001). Clear information for families about curriculum and how to help with

homework are focuses for schools to create success in this category (Epstein, 2001). Sphere five

is the parent as a decision maker (Epstein, 2001). The ability to be active members of the

PTO/PTA councils suffice this level of commitment (Epstein, 2001). Lastly, sphere six is

collaboration with the community (Epstein, 2001). Enrichment for families and students on this

level include summer programs for students, community health, cultural, recreational, and social

support programs that are offered in the community and surrounding areas (Epstein, 2001).

When this framework is utilized, the depth of engagement in the school and community (Ross,

2016).

Fan (2001) tested this theory through exploratory factor analysis to determine the

existence of multiple and distinct dimensions of parent involvement (Ross, 2016). Through this

work, Fan identified seven dimensions of parent involvement. These dimensions include

television rules at home, communication with the school, contact with the school, volunteering at

school, joining the PTA, supervising a school event, and educational aspirations for students

(Fan, 2001). Significantly, levels of parent involvement across racial or ethnic groups and

aspirations for their children's educational attainment was consistent and a predictor of student

achievement and growth in core subject areas (Fan, 2001, Ross, 2016).

Summary

Chapter two presented a summary of the literature related to explore a partnership of

parental involvement. Historically school administrators have utilized several methods and

theories to gain more parent involvement in respective schools. Research has pointed to issues

that remain with involving parents. The literature review shared aspects of advancing the

phenomenon through a myriad of research. Chapter three presents the methodology of the

qualitative study.

Chapter III

The purpose of this study is to explore school strategies between parents and schools to foster improved parent involvement.   Chapter three provides methodology and rationale for the study. This chapter also provides a description of the setting, participants, methods for collecting data, and a summary.

Research Design

A phenomenological approach is utilized to inform the study of school administrators', parents', and teachers' lived experiences in involvement in high schools. Phenomenological research hails from philosophy and psychology where a researcher describes lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon that is described by participants (Creswell, 2018). Researchers actively strive to accurately depict the phenomenon that is being studied (Groenewald, 2004). Wilson (2015) attests that students in the discipline of phenomenology attach meaning, such as thoughts and feelings, to all lived experiences.

Through qualitative design of surveys, focus-groups, and document review, this study explores strategies utilized of parent involvement at the high school level. Qualitative research design offers open-ended questions and responses, mostly done via interview methods (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research explores meaning individuals accredit to a problem, either social or humanistic (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research methods include data collected from a natural setting, evolving questions, data analysis scaffolded from information to general themes, and interpretations from a researcher through data usage (Creswell, 2018).

Rationale for the Method

The method for inquiry is a phenomenological study. Phenomenological research describes lived experiences in common of a group of people (Giorgi, 2009; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This research study emphasizes common experiences of parents and administrators at a suburban Minnesota high school. Creswell (2018) articulates that qualitative research is calculated to better understand a humanistic problem or phenomenon.

Giorgi (2009) states that the aim of a researcher is to describe phenomena as accurate as possible while abstaining from any pre-conceived information and holding true to facts provided. The inherent motives of parents being involved in their child's high school career is the phenomenon in this study. Qualitative research allows a researcher to explore different groups involved in this phenomenon and their experiences that add to the problem.

Research Questions

The following survey questions are used in this study:

RQ1: What strategies have schools used effectively to partner with parents?

RQ2: What new paths should schools employ to create a partnership between parents and school?

Setting

The setting for this study is a suburb community in Minnesota. Oak Forest Senior High School has a student population that exceeds 2,300 (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). The school is one of three high schools in the Hiawatha School District, one of the five largest school districts in the state (Hiawatha School District, 2019). US News & World Report named Oak Forest as a top high school in America from 2015-2017 (Hiawatha School District, 2019).

In 2018, Oak Forest Seniors scored above all state benchmarks on the ACT test (Hiawatha School District, 2019). The current population of students consists of 74.4% White, 9.4% Black or African American, 7.7% Asian, 3.7% Hispanic or Latino, 3.9% of two or more races, and .8% American Indian or Alaskan Native (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). The student population at Oak Forest encompasses 2% English Language Learners, 7.4% receiving Special Education services, 14.3% receiving Free or Reduced Lunch Prices, and .3% are considered homeless (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). Students that attend school for 90% of the school year or more at Oak Forest is 77.3%, which is below the district average of 81.4%, and below the statewide average of 85.6% (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019).

Teachers at Oak Forest has 72.38% of current staff with advanced degrees in their field (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). The ratio of licensed staff to students is 23 students to every one licensed educator (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). Staff at the school that have been teaching for three or more years is 87.62% (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019).

Sample

The sample for this study will consist of parents that have at least one current student at Oak Forest High School. School personnel are involved in the sample. School employees participating in this study are a) current administrators at Oak Forest High School, b) licensed teachers or c) the individual currently listed as the parent coordinator at Oak Forest High School.

Creswell (2018) describes a successful qualitative study to contain three to ten participants selected based on a set of chosen criteria and are conveniently accessible. Purposeful sampling is used to select participants. Purposeful sampling is employed to

intentionally select participants with direct knowledge and application to the study's

phenomenon (Palinkas, et al., 2013). The purpose of utilizing purposeful sampling in a

qualitative research study is to provide robust reasoning to the results (Patton, 2014).

Selection of Participants

Creswell (2018) posits that up to ten participants should be used in a phenomenological

study. Participants of the study are parents that have at least one current high school student that

attends Oak Forest High School. Up to ten of these parents are randomly selected barring gender

or ethnic qualifications. Participants are not limited to specific cultural, ethnic, or gender quotas.

Two school administrators who currently work at Oak Forest will also be asked to complete the

survey and share their experiences. Two teachers of different subject areas will be asked to fill

out the survey. Lastly, the Parent Coordinator of Oak Forest High School is a component of the

survey group.

Role of the Researcher

Researchers immersed in a qualitative inquiry are the primary instrument of data

collection for the study (Creswell, 2018). Consequently, the researcher can display bias with the

participants due to relationships (Patton, 2014). Subsequently, the role of the researcher is to

diminish bias and provide strong methods in relaying data (Patton, 2014).

Qualitative research requires that all personal or professional information be disclosed

that will impact the study (Patton, 2014). The researcher in this study is employed by the

Hiawatha School District but does not work at the school described in the setting for the study

and has not worked for administration or previously known the parents sampled in this study.

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Instrumentation

This study is comprised of original survey questions. The survey questions for this study are originally designed by the researcher. Data collected will come from survey questions. Included in the survey are open-ended questions to explore the importance of parent involvement in high schools from school stakeholders. School administrators will have different interview questions than those of parents.

To address these limitations, participants are informed that answer are given in anonymity and are kept confidential. Interview times are agreed upon and conducted via the telephone or email correspondence in case of availability.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Process

Institutional Review Boards (IRB) exist to protect participants of research studies against human rights violations (Creswell, 2018). Since this qualitative research study involves human subjects and meets the definition of research, approval from the Winona State University Institutional Review Board is required (Winona State University, n.d.). The IRB approval process at Winona State University involves completing an educational module, determining the type of review necessary, completing required protocol package, following recommendations of the IRB, and submitting all necessary reports (Winona State University, n.d.).

Data Collection

Qualitative phenomenological research exercises interviews, recordings, and materials to explore lived experiences from participants that have lived the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). Three methods are utilized to collect data in this study: a survey, focus interviews, and document review. Triangulated data confirms the results.

Surveys

Surveys involve any measurement procedures that invoke asking questions of respondents (Creswell, 2018). This survey uses open-ended questionnaire which will be administered electronically. As suggested by Creswell (2018), online surveys are designed to allow for quick turnaround and provide participants time to formulate answers.

Focus Interviews

Focus groups provide opportunity for participants to share their lived experiences in a group setting, rather than one-on-one (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, Chadwick, 2008). In this study, the researcher will utilize a focus group to learn perspective from participants about parent involvement in high schools. Focus group questions should also remain open-ended as personal interviews (Creswell, 2018). The focus group will consist of current administrators, teachers, and parents from Oak Forest high school. This method will be used if follow-up is necessary.

Document Review

The Hiawatha School District provides a plethora of public documents, which Creswell (2018) asserts is an acceptable method of document review. Pertinent documents include School Board proceedings and the district's *Reach for Excellence Family Engagement Program* (Hiawatha School District). These public documents serve as an integral part of the triangulation of data.

Triangulation

Data that is collected through multiple sources to include interviews and document analysis is called triangulation (Creswell, 2018). The purpose of using triangulation is to add validity to the qualitative study (Creswell, 2018). Cohen, Mannion, and Morrison (2018) promulgate that techniques in triangulation attempt to create a map, or fully explain richness and complexity of individuals by examining more than one point-of-view. For this study, the following diagram provides three criteria for triangulation: focus-group interviews, one-on-one interviews, and document review as in Figure 1.

Figure 1-Triangulation of Data

Focus-Group Interviews

Document Review

Surveys
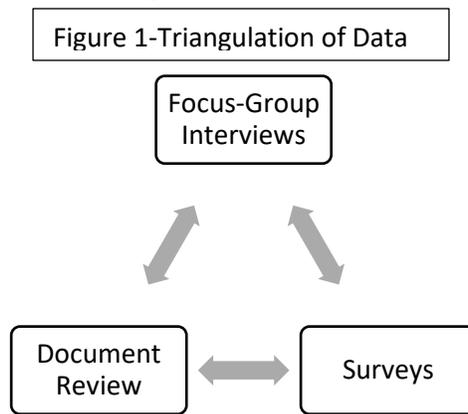
Data Analysis

Data analysis from qualitative research combines all data collected and identifies themes that address the phenomenon (Green, et al.,2007). In this study, the researcher will analyze data through transcribing interviews in search of common terms and phrases and categorize those to determine patterns that emerge (Green et al., 2007). Creswell (2018) stresses the responsibility of the researcher to disclose all data that is collected in the study. Bracketing, a method used in qualitative research to alleviate harmful effects of biases that hinder the research process, is used in the data analysis of this study (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Summary

Chapter three provides methodology for the research study. The qualitative research study uses a phenomenological approach to discover new strategies between parents and schools to foster continued parent involvement. The methodology and procedure for carrying out the study are offered. Chapter four offers results of the study explained in chapter three.

Chapter IV

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of practiced strategies between parents and schools to foster continued parent involvement. The study looks to identify effective and ineffective methods of communication to parents, and what opportunities parents look to be involved in with the school. The method of the study was presented in chapter three. Chapter four presents a description of the sample, the method of data analysis used, and introduces the findings.

Description of the Sample

A survey was conducted for a random sample of parents with students at Oak Forest Senior High. The parent completing the survey has at least one student in grades 9 through 12. Seventy-seven percent of the parents have only 1 student attending the senior high, and 68% have no previous graduates. Seventy-seven percent have students in another school in the district. Figure 2 and Figure 3 summarize the participant demographics.
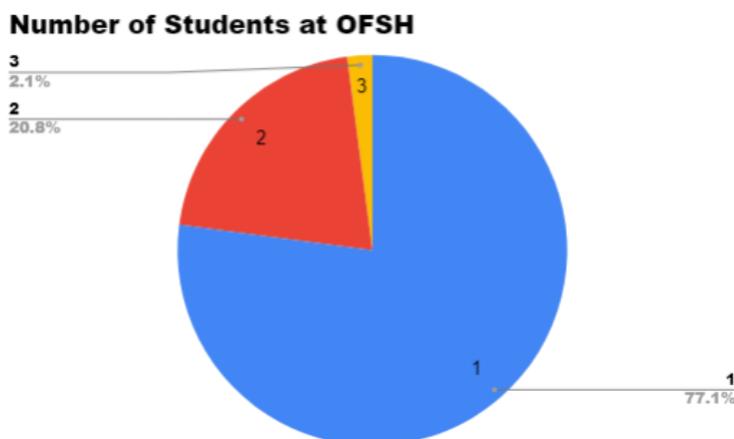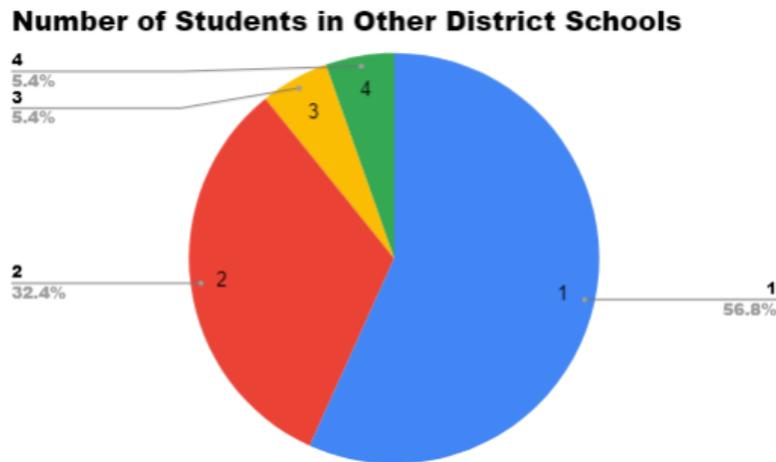
Figure 2

Number of Students at OFSH

3
2.1%

2
20.8%

1
77.1%

Figure 3

Number of Students in Other District Schools

4
5.4%
3
5.4%

2
32.4%

1
56.8%

Data Analysis

The findings of this research study were driven from electronic surveys. Each survey

was delivered via the Internet and taken individually by computer. The survey took participants

roughly five minutes to complete and contained fifteen multiple choice questions. Data analysis

included calculating the percentage of participants who selected each method of effective and

preferred communication from the school district. Likewise, percentages were found for each

given method of parent involvement with the school. If a participant did not answer a particular

question, the total sample size was still used to calculate each percentage. Each method of

communication will be considered effective if selected by 70% or more

participants. Commonalities were grouped based upon responses. Through this collection,

themes emanated. The following section will provide the determined themes for each research

question.

RQ1 Effective Partnership with Parents

Research question 1, "What strategies have schools used effectively to partner with parents? Which strategies were not effective?", Figure 4, 5, and 6 represent current school communication and parent involvement.
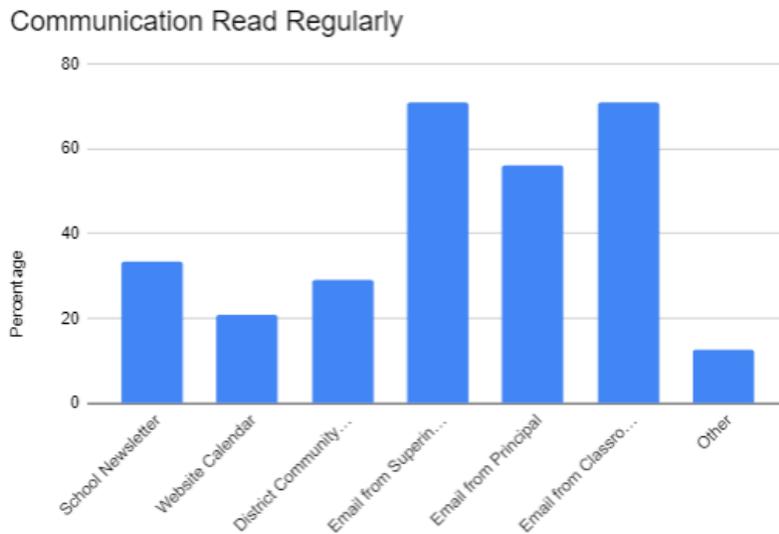
Figure 4

Communication Read Regularly

Figure 4 shows parents more regularly read emails from the superintendent, principal, and classroom teacher. The school and district newsletter are read less often. Only 1 out of 5 parents looks at the school website calendar for information. From figure 5 below, 87% of parents rated the school districts communication as somewhat effective or better. The first emerging theme throughout the multiple-choice survey is many parents read their school to home email and find it effective in communicating information and knowledge. Parents are receptive to receiving new types of communication methods, such as social media accounts, the still preferred method of receiving communication is via email (Laho, 2019).

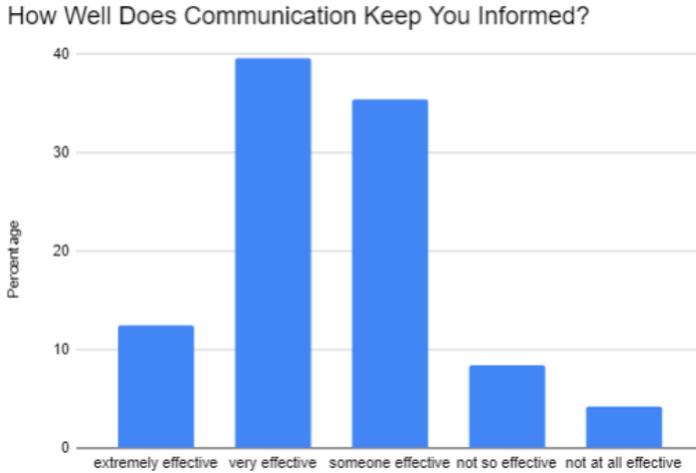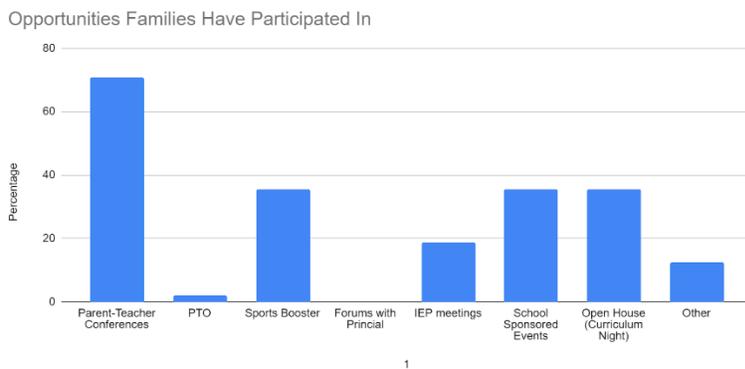Figure 5

How Well Does Communication Keep You Informed?

Figure 6 demonstrates parent volunteering and participation in partnership with the school. Parent teacher conferences remain the highest chosen method of involvement at 71%. No parents who completed the survey have attended a Forum with the principal or school district and only 2% of families are involved with PTO. The second emerging theme is that less than half of families associate with the school in aspects other than parent teacher conferences. The larger a district is in population, the less likely people are to partner with schools (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Further, as students' ages raise, the less likely parents participate in school events outside of conferences (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

Figure 6

Opportunities Families Have Participated In

RQ2 New paths to creating partnerships

Research question 2, "What new paths should schools employ to create a partnership between parents and school?", figure 7 provides statistical data representing how schools can better communicate and involve families.

Two parents shared the following comments about other effective forms of communication:

> Parent A: "Texts direct from teachers to mobile."

> Parent B: "Email with IEP manager, auto schoology messages that come via email."

Figure 7

What Would You Like to Utilize or See More Of?
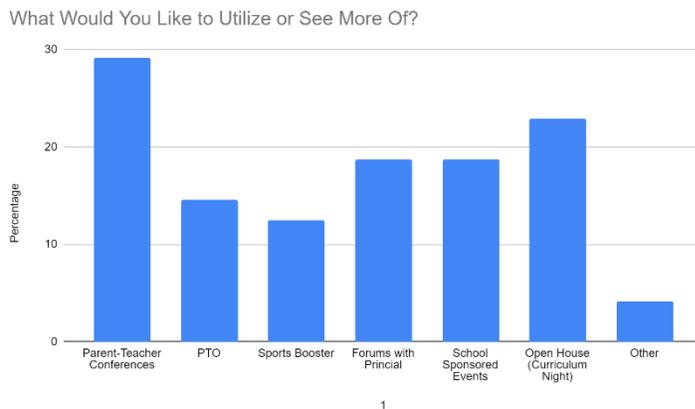
There is more variation in what means parents would like to see more of or utilize more. No category had more than 30% of the participants indicate a need. In the comments section of the question, several parents noted they were unaware of a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) at the senior high level. The third emerging theme from this data is parents still want to utilize parent teacher conferences the most but would also like to increase their engagement in open house or curriculum night, school sponsored events, and forums with the principal. Parents

indicated that the school has provided all or some opportunities to be involved. This percentage, 80.5% indicates the acknowledgement of opportunities. Emerging theme four is that parents are aware of opportunities to be involved and 63% of responders report these opportunities have been effectively communicated with them.

Four participants shared frustrations from volunteering.

Parent A: "I filled out a form with wide open availability and was never contacted - I had to search high & low for a contact number to the Booster organization."

Parent B: "I signed up for volunteering and was never contacted."

Parent C: "I am unable to volunteer."

Parent D: "I am on several booster club boards and volunteer multiple times per week because others do not volunteer."

Some survey questions allowed for participants to give typed answers and additional information. These range in topics and ideas, but a theme started to emerge. Emerging theme five is parents' indication that there is still room for growth and opportunities to connect and partner the school and parents.

Survey question 15: Please provide any additional information you wish to share about parent involvement.

Parent A: "I know parent involvement is tough, especially for a district with a broad socio-economic range. As a supporter of one of the booster clubs we saw a handful [of] parents regularly doing all the work, with little-to-no input from the majority of parents. Again, I understand that not every family has the flexibility of work

schedules/time that some do. I'd love to see the district work in a way to make involvement easier for those who have work/life challenges."

Parent B: "There are many opportunities. Parents need to volunteer as they are able. I have found that the more I [do] such as band boosters, attend conferences, read the communications, the better I understand the education my child is receiving. I like to know who his teachers are and how they think."

Parent C: "The only things we have heard about are conferences, curriculum nights and freshman open house. We do attend those. Son came from charter school in 8th grade. We have never been in the loop regarding fundraisers or parent organizations."

Parent D: "Love when teachers text. Much easier form of communication."

Parent E: "Repetitive communications that are long, emails, text messages, sent by phone [and] the numerous important communications that are sent. Parents should be able to select a single mode of communication which they prefer."

Summary

Chapter four presented the data collected from the electronic survey for this study. Answers to the survey were provided by parents of current Oak Forest senior high school students. Emerging themes for RQ1 were as follows: (1) parents read their school to home email and find it effective in communicating information and knowledge, and (2) less than half of families partner with the school in ways other than parent teacher conferences. The emerging

themes for RQ2 are (1) parents still want to utilize parent teacher conferences the most but would also like to increase their engagement in open house or curriculum night, school sponsored events, and forums with the principal and (2) parents have been provided with communication and opportunities to volunteer and be involved and (3) there is still room for growth and opportunities to connect parents to information and volunteer opportunities. Chapter five includes interpretation of the results, implications for creating new partnerships between schools and families, and recommendations for future research in parent involvement.

Chapter V

This qualitative study explored parent perception of school to home communication and opportunities for parent involvement with the school. Previous chapters discussed background information on parent involvement, the research questions and methodology, and the findings of the study. The goal of this study is to identify effective strategies currently used by schools in partnering with parents. It also looks to identify new paths the school should employ to communicate with and involve parents. Chapter five presents the discussion and conclusions of this study, implications in leadership, and provide recommendations for future research.

A qualitative research design was employed to explore parent involvement in a public secondary school. The research was phenomenological in nature, which provided the ideal approach to explore parent and school involvement. The research questions guiding this study were the following:

RQ1: What strategies have schools used effectively to partner with parents? Which strategies were not effective?

RQ2: What new paths should schools employ to create a partnership between parents and school?

An electronic survey was used to collect data and an analysis of the results was conducted. Five total themes emerged. Two themes emerged for RQ1: (1) parents read their school to home email and find it effective in communicating information and knowledge, and (2) less than half of families partner with the school in ways other than parent teacher conferences. Three themes surfaced for RQ2: (1) parents still want to utilize parent teacher conferences the most but would also like to increase their engagement in open house or curriculum night, school

sponsored events, and forums with the principal and (2) parents have been provided with communication and opportunities to volunteer and be involved and (3) there is still room for growth and opportunities to connect parents to information and volunteer opportunities.

Discussion and Conclusions

After analyzing the results of the electronic survey, examining the literature, and integrating the findings in chapter four, the researcher elicits the following conclusions from the study:

Conferences are still integral to building relationships with parents. Parents view this time as valuable in terms of building relationships with teachers and gaining critical insight into the class structure, classroom expectations, and upcoming events.

The school has not utilized monthly forums with administration and teachers. As indicated in the results, these have not been utilized but contact and a chance to voice opinions provide opportunities to build partnerships with the school and community. The school in the study does not currently offer parent forum meetings with the principal, but 1 out of 5 parents in the survey would be interested in attending these forums if available to increase their involvement.

By the senior high level, less parents attend conferences, but many feel it is one way to become more involved with the school. In the comments section of the survey, a few parents expressed not knowing about the PTO at the senior high. More information about joining the PTO and the monthly updates from the PTO should be sent to families to increase communication and engagement. Many parents have worked with this group in younger grade levels and leads to more parent involvement opportunities.

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, where school was predominately hybrid and distance learning. Due to the nature of education being delivered online, parents received many more emails from teachers, principal, and the school district than a typical year. According to data and comments left, the communication process should be streamlined and shrunk. Parents reported their desire to connect with the school but often felt the lines of communication too broad and too coming from too many methods and message senders.

Due to the pandemic, parents may have expressed a lower interest in volunteering within the school than they would have in previous years. Only 19% of parents expressed interest in increasing their involvement in school sponsored events, and 22% would like to better utilize the curriculum or open house night.

Leadership Implications

The results of this study clarify that partnerships between schools and parents exist and that there is room for improvement from both sides. The results highlight the importance of interactions between parents and schools for effective communication and adaptations to previous sought methods or involvement. Study participants identified lasting methods that have proven effective while raising new ideas for partnership. Several implications for leadership and opportunities for growth appear.

Conclusion 1: Conferences are still integral to building relationships with parents. Parents view this time as valuable in terms of building relationships with teachers and gaining critical insight into the class structure, classroom expectations, and upcoming events.

Implication: Parent-teacher conferences continue to hold an important place in the school year. The pandemic of 2020 has caused for many of these events to shift in the way they are delivered.

There is value in the new method of electronically meeting between parents and schools. This allows for flexibility in scheduling and providing more availability of parents and teachers to meet.

Conclusion 2: The school has not utilized monthly forums with administration and teachers. As indicated in the results, these have not been utilized but contact and a chance to voice opinions provide opportunities to build partnerships with the school and community

Implication: The opportunity to meet with parents is an opportunity for both sides to share their concerns and communicate an agenda. This open forum provides an opportunity to reach families with current and relevant information. Parents may then provide a current pulse to the frustrations and concerns from their end. Forums like this can exist live and be recorded to provide all the opportunity to add value and gain knowledge.

Conclusion 3: By the senior high level, less parents attend conferences, but many feel it is one way to become more involved with the school. In the comments section of the survey, a few parents expressed not knowing about the PTO at the senior high. More information about joining the PTO and the monthly updates from the PTO should be sent to families to increase communication and engagement. Many parents have worked with this group in younger grade levels and leads to more parent involvement opportunities.

Implication: The literature has indicated the importance of parent organizations, such as the PTO. Secondary level parents indicated in the survey that they are willing to participate in this type of organization. Many of these families were involved in past years with this organization at different schools. From this organization, a large ripple of involvement can occur.

Conclusion 4: This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, where school was predominately hybrid and distance learning. Due to the nature of education being delivered online, parents received many more emails from teachers, principal, and the school district than a typical year. According to data and comments left, the communication process should be streamlined and shrunk. Parents reported their desire to connect with the school but often felt the lines of communication too broad and too coming from too many methods and message senders.

Implication: Technology has added layers of communication. Parents do find value in checking their school to home email. At the secondary level, students see multiple teachers daily. This may also include supports and extra curriculars. Parents have felt overwhelmed with the amount of communication. Communications should be precise and streamlined. Weekly and monthly overviews come from administration and a template should be provided for teachers to provide feedback.

Conclusion 5: Due to the pandemic, parents may have expressed a lower interest in volunteering within the school than they would have in previous years. Only 19% of parents expressed interest in increasing their involvement in school sponsored events, and 22% would like to better utilize the curriculum or open house night.

Implication: The survey results indicate that leadership should look at existing events and examine the value those events hold. Leaders must be able to adapt to feedback given. These results highlight a change in current processes to make them more valuable of a service to those who utilize them.

Recommendations for Future Research

More research is necessary with a larger sample size to validate the findings of this study. Future research studies may investigate effective and ineffective aspects of parent teacher conferences. More research may be needed to identify why particular modalities are not effective in engaging parent involvement. This research was done during the COVID-19 pandemic and further studies may need to be done to see how the results may change.

Additional research is needed from areas of urban and rural settings. Along with further research in the suburban setting, the area for expanding demographics and socio-economic levels needs to be further researched. Further study of areas outside the suburban realm should be explored. This school did not have high rates of socio-economic backgrounds and further studies should be done with those in mind. This includes areas with higher special education students and English as a second language population.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of practiced strategies between parents and schools to foster continued parent involvement. The study looks to identify effective and ineffective methods of communication to parents, and what opportunities parents look to be involved in with the school. Using electronic surveys, data was collected and analyzed. Five themes emerged. Two themes emerged for RQ1: (1) parents read their school to home email and find it effective in communicating information and knowledge, and (2) less than half of families partner with the school in ways other than parent teacher conferences. Three themes surfaced for RQ2: (1) parents still want to utilize parent teacher conferences the most but would also like to increase their engagement in open house or curriculum night, school sponsored events, and forums with the principal and (2) parents have been provided with communication and

opportunities to volunteer and be involved and (3) there is still room for growth and

opportunities to connect parents to information and volunteer opportunities.

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