

Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

SITE ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO
PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN URBAN TITLE I CHARTER SCHOOLS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy

by

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October, 2015

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| LIST OF TABLES | vi |
| LIST OF FIGURES | viii |
| DEDICATION | ix |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | x |
| VITA | xii |
| ABSTRACT | xv |
| Chapter 1: Problem and Purpose | 1 |
| Background of the Study | 1 |
| Problem Statement | 5 |
| Purpose of the Study | 7 |
| Research Questions | 8 |
| Theoretical Framework Summary | 8 |
| Significance of the Study | 11 |
| Limitations of the Study | 12 |
| Delimitations | 12 |
| Study Assumptions | 12 |
| Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature and Research | 13 |
| Organization of Chapter | 13 |
| Overview | 13 |
| Theoretical Framework | 16 |
| Related Use of Epstein's Model and Parent Involvement | 22 |
| Brief History of Parent Involvement | 24 |
| Parent Involvement Legislation | 25 |
| Brief History of Charter Schools | 32 |
| Middle School Parent Involvement Introduction | 34 |
| Parent Perceptions of Barriers to Parent Involvement | 37 |
| Parent Perception of Enablers to Parent Involvement | 40 |
| Site Administrators Perceptions of Barriers to Parent Involvement | 41 |
| Site Administrators Perceptions of Enablers to Parent Involvement | 43 |
| Related Studies | 47 |
| Summary of the Review of Literature | 48 |
| Conclusion | 50 |
| Overview of Research Design | 52 |
| Research Design and Rationale | 53 |
| Human Subject Protection | 57 |
| Data Collection Procedures | 58 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Instrumentation | 61 |
| Data Analysis | 62 |
| Trustworthiness and Validity | 63 |
| Written Analysis | 64 |
| Chapter 4: Results | 65 |
| Introduction: Research Purpose and Study Questions | 65 |
| Overview of Research Design | 65 |
| Organization of Chapter | 69 |
| Responses to Research Questions and Findings | 70 |
| Research Question One Findings – Definitions of Parent Involvement | 70 |
| Research Question Two Findings – Parent Involvement Barriers | 84 |
| Research Question Three Findings – Parent Involvement Enablers | 93 |
| Research Question Four Findings – Parent Involvement Empowerment | 102 |
| Research Question Five Findings – Outreach Strategies that Increased Parent Involvement | 110 |
| Summary of Key Findings | 114 |
| Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations | 116 |
| Summary of Study | 116 |
| Discussion of Key Findings | 119 |
| Conclusions | 133 |
| Recommendations for Policy and Practice | 136 |
| Recommendations for Future Research | 138 |
| Final Summary | 139 |
| REFERENCES | 141 |
| APPENDIX A: Informed Consent For Participation In Research Activities | 164 |
| APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol for Charter Middle School Site Administrator | 167 |
| APPENDIX C: Site Administrator Demographic Information | 168 |
| APPENDIX D: Interview Questionnaire for Site Administrators | 170 |
| APPENDIX E: Pilot Interview Protocol Debriefing | 172 |
| APPENDIX F: Table F1 – Connection between Research and Interview Questions | 173 |
| APPENDIX G: IRB Approval | 174 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Table 1. National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs | 23 |
| Table 2. Parent Involvement Reality Shift..... | 25 |
| Table 3. A Brief Summary of the Literature on Parent Involvement | 49 |
| Table 4. A Brief Summary of the Literature of Principals (Site Administrators) and Parent Involvement | 50 |
| Table 5. Demographics of Site Administrator Participants | 67 |
| Table 6. Site Administrators' Interview Responses, Key Words, and Statements | 71 |
| Table 7. Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to Definition of Parent Involvement | 73 |
| Table 8. Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to The Role a Site Administrator Plays in Fostering Parent Involvement | 74 |
| Table 9. Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to Benefit of Parent Involvement in Middle School | 74 |
| Table 10. Collective Emerging Themes Related to Site Administrators Definition and View of Parent Involvement in Middle School | 74 |
| Table 11. Site Administrator Statements Regarding RQ1 Theme 1 – Parent Presence on Campus | 75 |
| Table 12. Site Administrators' Statements Regarding RQ1 Theme 2 – Home-School Connections | 76 |
| Table 13. Site Administrators' Statements Regarding RQ1 Theme 4 – Family Investment | 79 |
| Table 14. Site Administrator's Statements Regarding RQ1 Theme 7 – Critical Developmental Phase | 81 |
| Table 15. Site Administrator Concerns Regarding Communication, Volunteering, and Parent Decision Making | 85 |
| Table 16. Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to General Concerns Regarding Parent Involvement Related to Communication | 87 |
| Table 17. Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to General Concerns Regarding Parent Involvement Related to Volunteering | 87 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Table 18. Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to General Concerns Regarding Parent Involvement Related to Parent Decision Making..... | 87 |
| Table 19. Collective Emerging Themes Related to Site Administrators' Responses to General Concerns Regarding Parent Involvement Related to Communication, Volunteering, and Decision Making..... | 88 |
| Table 20. Probing Questions Related to Research Question Two | 91 |
| Table 21. Communication Methods that Make Parents Feel Comfortable Attending On-Site Meetings and Campus Events and Participating in Shared Decision Making | 93 |
| Table 22. Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to Communication Methods that Make Parents Feel Comfortable Attending On-Site Campus Meetings/Event and Participating in Shared Decision Making..... | 95 |
| Table 23. Probing Questions Related to Research Question Three | 98 |
| Table 24. Site Administrators' responses to Types of Involvement Structures Established to Empower Parents..... | 103 |
| Table 25. Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to Types of Involvement Structures Established to Empower Parents | 104 |
| Table 26. Probing Questions Related to Research Questions Four | 106 |
| Table 27. Site Administrators' Responses to Specific Outreach Strategies that Increased Parent Involvement in Urban Title I Charter Middle Schools | 110 |
| Table 28. Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to Specific Outreach Strategies that Increased Parent Involvement in Urban Title I Charter Middle Schools | 111 |
| Table F1. Connection between Research Questions and Interview Questions..... | 173 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Figure 1. Model illustrating Epstein's six types of involvement | 17 |
| Figure 2. Charter school growth in California. | 34 |

DEDICATION

To the relentless charter school site administrators who have made a commitment to educate urban minority students. Continue to seek meaningful opportunities to involve parents and families in an effort to ensure that their children have access to the most promising middle school experience.

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To my esteemed dissertation committee, Dr. Robert R. Barner, Dr. Jay Jackson, and Dr. Jennifer Rumack, thank you for your support, feedback, and expertise. I respect each of you for your contributions to the field of education and even more for your role in my success both personal and professional.

I look forward to the next phase of my professional journey!

VITA

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- Implemented cross curricular project based learning
- Managed and maintained state assessment requirements for STAR & CELDT
- Organized and facilitated weekly professional development schedule
- Analyzed student data outcomes and managed grade level and content team department data meetings
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2006-2008

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- Organized 5th grade end of year culmination ceremony
- Member of the Principals Advisory Council, provided insight on professional development opportunities
- BTSA Support Provider and Mentor teacher, observed non-credentialed teacher classroom instruction, provided feedback on instructional practice and lesson planning, facilitated monthly campus BTSA meetings
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore site administrators perspectives of barriers and enablers to parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools, specifically related to communication, volunteering, and decision making.

The study design allowed for in depth analysis of participants interview responses. A total of 10 charter school site administrators participated in the semi-structured interviews that informed this study. The semi-structured interviews consisted of six interview questions and nine probing questions. The participant interview responses to the interview protocol were coded to highlight key words and statements to extract themes that informed the study findings.

The findings of this study support the following six conclusions. Site administrators view middle school as an important developmental phase for involving parents. Study results also found that site administrators perceive language as a barrier in parent involvement. Further, responses from participants resulted in the need for site administrators to create meaningful structures for parent volunteering and shared decision making. In addition to these findings, it also surfaced that meaningful parent relationships increase parent involvement outcomes. Furthermore, results of this study found that parent education is a tool for empowerment. Lastly, study results established that technology based communication supports parent involvement.

Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that the following four policy and practice recommendations are implemented. It is recommended that local districts incentivize foreign language training to support communication between site administrators and parents. It is also recommended that site administrators create meaningful opportunities for parent volunteering. Further, based on the responses from study participants, site administrators must develop additional structures for parent decision making. Finally, as a result of the findings of

this research study, it is recommended that site administrators utilize technology to maintain two-way communication with parents and families.

Chapter 1: Problem and Purpose

Background of the Study

A significant body of research during the past 25 years supports the finding that children benefit from their parents' involvement in their educations (Barnard, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2001, 2010; Jeynes, 2005a; Lee & Bowen, 2006). In his classic study, Coleman (1990) noted that teaching and learning extend beyond the classroom and a child's academic success depends on external family forces; time and involvement. Current research builds upon this work (Henderson & Mapp, 2013; Hiatt-Michael, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey, 2010; Hutchins, Greenfeld, Epstein, Sanders, & Galindo, 2012) supporting the importance of a parent's role in their children's education. These scholars discuss a variety of factors that affect parent involvement. From their research, educators know that parent involvement also promotes student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Educators and parents agree that it is important for parents to spend time in their children's classrooms and closely monitor homework (Viadero, 2010). Further, this agreement is supported by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), which mandates parental involvement in education and family-school relations. NCLB defines parent involvement as, "the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities" (p. 4). Although federal policy requires parent involvement, there is a noticeable decline among parent participation in the classroom and with homework support during middle school years compared to early elementary school years (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Epstein, Simon, & Salinas, 1997).

Currently, site administrators in low-income public schools face numerous obstacles in creating sustainable structures to involve middle school parents at their school sites. These

obstacles include home-based parent involvement challenges such as parents' education level, socioeconomic status, perceptions of school, perception of cultural acceptance, and limited English proficiency (Marcos, Witmer, Foland, Vouga, & Wise, 2009). Due to the limited middle school structures created by administration and staff to overcome these home-based obstacles and support parent involvement, participation drops during adolescent years (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Various studies from the past decade address the specific challenges related to the home-based family conditions – education, socioeconomic status, perception, race and culture – that effect involvement.

Parent education level and socioeconomic status. Parents perception of being less able to assist with homework or provide at home learning experiences that increase their adolescents' knowledge or academic achievement prevent many parents from becoming involved (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Schools report lower participation levels in public schools of parents and families from high poverty low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Ravitch, 2000).

In 2012, forty-five percent of children living above the poverty line had a parent who volunteered or served on a committee at their child's school, compared with twenty-seven percent of children living at or below the poverty line. Parents of students living above the poverty line were more likely to be involved than parents of students living at or below the poverty line on all measures of involvement. (National Household Education Surveys [NHES], 2013, p. 14)

Less educated parents with lower level job status, limited social supports, and inconsistent financial resources have a higher likelihood of living in high-poverty neighborhoods (Davis-Kean & Eccles, 2005). Consequently, these parents tend to send their children to poorly funded schools (Desimone, 1999) with fewer resources than the schools of choice for middle- and upper class families (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). In addition to lacking physical campus resources, poorly funded schools often have sub-quality academic resources textbooks, desks, classrooms, and extracurricular facilities. These conditions remain pervasive in high poverty

communities because many parents with children in high-poverty neighborhood schools do not possess the skills necessary to navigate the system to advocate for school improvement for their children (Olivos, 2006).

Parents' perception of school and cultural acceptance. Similar to low parent education level obstacles, Oakes and Lipton (1999) found that low-income urban parents are reluctant to actively participate in their children's education due to their perceptions of schools faculty and staff. Urban parents tend to participate in schools more when they feel respected and valued by school staff (McDermott & Rothenburg, 2000). Further, parents' perception of cultural acceptance from school site administration and staff factor into parental comfort participating in school activities. Many times the history of discrimination in the United States sometimes creates a barrier preventing positive relationships from forming between urban parents (African American and Latino) and school personnel (Diamond & Gomez, 2004).

Historically educational institutions have mirrored the values of middle- and upper class White America (Cutler, 2000). Due to this, urban parents tend to express distrust toward local public schools because they feel faculty are culturally biased against African American and Latino children and their families. Past experiences of racial discrimination lead African American parents' to mistrust school officials (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Further, Diamond and Gomez (2004) state that, "African American parents' educational orientations are informed by their educational environments, their resource for negotiating these environments, and their prior social class and race-based educational experiences" (p. 387). Hutchins (2010) develops this further, stating that African American "parents who experienced negative involvement in their own upbringing will be more reluctant to participate in their own children's school-based activities" (p. 23).

Limited English proficiency. Along with cultural acceptance, parent's limited English proficiency is an obstacle to actively involving parents. Primary Spanish speaking parents are less likely than English speaking parents to attend campus events, primarily due to the discomfort with speaking English and disconnect with home-school communication (Kuperminc, Darnell, & Alvarez-Jimenez, 2008). For example, families with limited English proficiency tend not to understand commonly used educational jargon used throughout school newsletters, websites, and home-school communication (Moles, 1993). To overcome this communication challenge, schools could seek suggestions from parents regarding what methods of communication (e.g., websites, phone calls, letters) are most convenient and create home-school communications in languages (minus educational jargon) that parents are more apt to understand. Nonetheless, schools are often less like to employ these strategies in their communications with parents (Epstein et al., 2009).

In spite of these obstacles, in his meta-analysis of parent involvement research, Jeynes (2005b) found there is a positive correlation between parent involvement and academic achievement for minority students in high poverty low-socioeconomic urban schools. According to McDermott and Rothenburg (2000), parent involvement in the most poverty stricken urban schools can improve a building's psychological climate for learning (how students and staff think about the learning process) and children's academic performance.

Even with widely reported low levels of parent involvement in middle school, some administrators from urban public middle schools have experienced positive interactions with parents and families and report successfully high levels of parent involvement. To continue to increase the number of urban middle schools reporting successfully levels of parent involvement,

this study examined perceived barriers and enablers to parent involvement from the perspective of charter school site administrators in Title I charter middle schools.

Problem Statement

Much of the existing research regarding parental involvement has focused on its relationship to a student's academic achievement (Hallstrom, 2011). However, few studies exist on the subject of parent involvement in middle schools and even fewer from the site leaders perspectives of parent involvement in urban charter middle school.

Evolving as an answer to parent choice in urban public schools, charter schools are assumed to have fewer barriers to parent involvement than traditional public schools. Factors such as smaller school size, higher student-to-teacher ratio, mandatory student uniforms, and parent outreach practices targeted towards parent involvement with low-income minority families support this assumption. However, similar to traditional public schools, actively involved elementary school parents, in charter schools, become less involved when their children reach middle school (Epstein, 2005; Jackson, Andrews, Holland, & Pardini, 2001; Jackson & Davis, 2000; The National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2003, 2006). Various factors prevent parents from participating (Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Some, but not all factors include; parent's job schedules (Epstein, 2001), parental feelings of discomfort with participation (Gay, 2000), parents feeling incapable of assisting with middle level assignments, and parents need for more leadership and guidance from teachers (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Despite these factors, it is important for parents to model behaviors that demonstrate trust in the academic success of their children since parent participation throughout a child's educational career yields the most powerful effects (Joseph, 2008).

On-campus parent participation opens pathways for families to understand the school system better (Joseph, 2008). When parents effectively know strategies that show them *how* to support their child, they become more actively involved and provide more consistent support for their child's education (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2008). In addition to on campus participation, parents' being involved in their child's education varies, from staying informed with their child's educational progress and participating in school activities to talking with their child each day after school (Alvarez, 2009).

Besides on-campus and home involvement, an external contributing factor to successful parent involvement in schools is the allocation of funding. Funding is vital to support the site administration ability to foster positive communication between home and school (Cotton & Wikelund, 2005). In 2010 U.S. Secretary of State Arne Duncan applied a 1% increase to Title I dollars to carry out family engagement activities—roughly \$270 million—in exchange for districts and schools to use funds for parental involvement in a more comprehensive and systematic way (Duncan, 2010). Urban public schools, as a result of this increase, gained increased access to funding to improve plans for increasing parent involvement.

Even with specific categorical funding dedicated to parent involvement, percentages in middle school consistently remain low. Ten years ago the National Association on Elementary Principals (NAEP, as cited in U.S. Department of Education, 2004) reported, “nationally, 90 percent of fourth graders were in a school where a school official reported that more than half of parents participated in parent teacher conferences. Among eight graders, though, that proportion dropped to 57 percent” (p. 1). Current data shows similar results with parent volunteering during the middle school years. A recent meta-analysis on parent involvement conducted in 2012 found

that 51 percent of third through fifth grade students had parents who volunteered or served on a committee compared to 32 percent of students in sixth through eighth grade (Noel, Stark, Redford, & Zukerberg, 2013).

Cotton and Wikelund (2005) state that parent participation is an integral part of a child's education. According to the Michigan Department of Education (1997), 86% of the general public believe that parental support is the key factor in improving schools. Zins, Weissberg, Wang, and Walberg (2004) suggest that family involvement in school is twice as predicative as socioeconomic status in students' academic success. Nevertheless, the lack of parent involvement in urban public schools continues to be a problem.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to identify what similarities, if any, exist among the perception of site administrators of Title I, charter middle schools, regarding barriers and enablers to parent involvement. This study analyzed strategies used to establish and recruit parent involvement and analyze methods used to maintain involvement of recruited parents in Title I charter middle schools. Secondly, this study identified practices and strategies to improve communication between home and school that increase involvement at the middle school level.

It is anticipated that, the findings of this study will provide increased understanding of the needs, challenges, and successes of parent involvement at the middle school level. Identifying these strategies can provide similar schools with the necessary systems to reach parents and sustain involvement during the transitional years between elementary and high school. Although the positive outcomes from a strong relationship between school leaders and parent involvement seems clear; for many site leaders creating an atmosphere that fosters parent and family involvement can often be ambiguous and daunting. Thus, the information collected in this study

has the potential to help inform parent involvement structures for site administrators in Title I charter middle schools. Further, this study may provide a better understanding of barriers that contribute to low levels of involvement.

This qualitative study used a semi-structured long interview approach to gather descriptions of involvement from the participants. This objective of this qualitative study was to examine the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. How do charter middle school site administrators define and view parent involvement in urban Title I public charter schools?
2. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant barriers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision-making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools?
3. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant enablers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision-making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools?
4. What campus programs, workshops, and participation incentives do charter middle school site administrators offer parents to create positive outcomes for parent involvement on their public charter middle school campuses?
5. Which specific outreach strategies, if any, have increased parent involvement at the urban Title I charter middle schools?

Theoretical Framework Summary

The framework for this qualitative study is grounded in Epstein's (2001) Six Types of Parent Involvement. Epstein's typologies are widely used and referenced in numerous studies

worldwide (Hallstrom, 2011). The well-researched model is an example of parent involvement research and practice. Although all six types are important, to address site leaders perspectives of parent involvement this study focused on three specific levels of parental involvement as delineated by Epstein's framework: communicating (type 2), volunteering (type 3) and decision making (type 5).

Definitions of Key Terms

The key terms and operational definitions identified throughout this study are described subsequently:

Adolescent: A person in the transitional stage of physical and mental human development that occurs between childhood and adulthood. The transition involves physiological, biological, and social changes.

Charter School: Primary and secondary schools in the United States that operate off of public funds, and like other schools, also receive private donations. Charter schools are part of the public education system and do not charge tuition (California Charter School Association, n.d.).

Community: A group of people who are socially independent, who participate together in discussions and decision making, who share certain practices, and who are benefited by their relationships (Dwyer, 1998).

Middle School: A school that serves pupils between the age ranges of 9 to 14 usually grades 6 to 8, and represents the second of three stages of a three-tier system.

School Culture: Includes the elements of schedules, curriculum, demographics, and policies, as well as the social interactions that occur within those structures that give a school its look and feel (Raywid, 2001).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): This act signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, mandated changes to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), specifically regarding parent involvement, student achievement, and parental choice.

Site Administrator: The official school administrator responsible for pupil instruction and parent involvement programs within a specific school building. In California, charter school site administrators do not need hold an Administrative Service Credential granted by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (Calvert-Bertrand, 2012). For the purpose of this study site administrator will replace principal and vice principal.

Parent: An adult who is legally responsible for a child enrolled in a public school; which for the purpose of this study will include legal guardians who may not be biological parents (Calvert-Bertrand, 2012).

Parent Involvement: “The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student learning and other school activities including; assisting in their child’s learning and being actively involved in their child’s education at school” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 4).

Perception. Beliefs, feelings, and attitudes (Lim, 2009) related to a specific idea or experience.

Teacher: An individual in the middle school classroom who provides instruction, guidance, or training for students in an attempt to increase their knowledge, understanding, or skills in a specific content area.

Title I: A component of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requiring all schools and districts that qualify for federal money to engage in activities to build parent

capacity along with school staff in support of student learning (Turnball, Fiester, & Wodatch, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.a).

Urban school(s): According to the National Center for Urban Transformation an urban school or school district is one having the greatest percentage of non-white students, greatest proportion of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, and highest percentages of students in poverty (D. Hiatt-Michael, personal communication, October 7, 2012).

Significance of the Study

One of the primary responsibilities of a school beyond academic enrichment is to insure the overall positive educational experience of students. Increasing both the interactions and communication between parents and school personnel creates an environment that promotes success (Bensman, 1999).

The findings and recommendations of this study may assist middle school site administrators in fostering increased parent involvement on their campuses. More specifically, the following are the specific areas this study may influence: (a) administrators' perceptions towards involving parents on their campus (i.e., administration responsibilities in establishing parent involvement structures, having a realistic understanding of parent involvement responsibilities, meeting the diverse needs of parents in their schools, supporting a variety of parents, and the management of parent involvement structures); (b) the personal attributes and motives of school administrators that may influence parent involvement, as well as their reported comfort levels creating parent involvement structures for parents of different cultural backgrounds from their own; and (c) the perceived quality and comprehensiveness of parent involvement on their campuses.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the research is focused on site administrators' perspectives and does not explore staff and parents' perceptions. Second, data collection was exclusive to one-on-one interviews and was limited to the perceptions of the study participants. Thus the qualitative data collected is dependent on the availability and transparency of site administrators within the institutions studied. Third, the study's findings are limited to the institutions studied and therefore not representative of all urban charter middle schools.

Delimitations

Data were collected through conducting 10 separate 25-60 minute individual semi-structured interviews of middle school site administrators serving Title I charter middle schools in Los Angeles. Site administrators selected all serve in middle schools serving grades six through eight, with some serving grades five through eight. The researcher chose the schools for the study through purposive sampling and additional participants were identified through snowball sampling. Thus the findings of this study are limited to the site administrators in Los Angeles based schools. Results, therefore, should not be generalized to other populations or settings.

Study Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, it is assumed that data collection interview methods are valid measurement tools and that several types of parent involvement exist. Further, it is assumed that structures exist in charter middle schools to counterbalance barriers, thus enabling parent involvement. A final assumption is that participants were truthful in reporting the existing practice(s) to foster parent involvement on their school campus.

Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature and Research

Organization of Chapter

The review of literature and research draws from an extensive foundation to provide background on parent involvement in schools. This review of literature is organized into five major sections: (a) Epstein's typologies for parent involvement (b) parent involvement history and legislation (c) charter schools, (d) middle school parent involvement, and (e) related studies. The first section focuses on the conceptual perspective that informed this study. The second major section centers on the history of parent involvement including a review of parent involvement legislation. The third section summarizes the origination of charter schools as public school reform options in the United States. The fourth section considers the perspectives of parents and site administrators regarding barriers and enablers to middle school parent involvement. The fifth and final section provides a synopsis of research findings that influence this study and contains a summary of the literature before the chapter conclusion. To conduct this review of the literature on parent involvement, multiple sources of information were used including periodicals, professional journals, dissertations, and books. Resources were accessed via the Pepperdine Library web-portal using ERIC, ProQuest, JSTOR, and EBSCO.

Overview

There are gaps in the current research on parent involvement in middle school (Hutchins, Greenfield, Epstein, Sanders & Galindo, 2012), the most prominent being vague definitions of involvement, policy ambiguity in support of parent involvement, and a variance in elementary and secondary campus parent involvement practices. According to the National Committee for Citizens in Education (as cited in Child Trends, 2013), parents actively involved in their child's education during the elementary school years tend to become less involved once their children

start middle school. Middle school is widely accepted as being a highly transitional stage in students' academic and social development. Many students experience this academic transition yearly. Specifically, nationally US schools serve over 20 million 10-15 year old students enrolled in middle school each year (Hallstrom, 2011).

Understanding this stage in academic and behavioral development is challenging for students and parents. Students in this period typically experience a plethora of social challenges consistent with the characteristics of their developmental stage. Situational factors or circumstances associated with this developmental stage are likely to be related to

- social class;
- race and ethnicity;
- academic achievement;
- social concerns (e.g., dating, peer pressure, and harassment);
- the search for self-identity, and
- family situations (e.g., family strife, poverty, and health).

These situational factors can be multifaceted and make students social, behavioral, and academic success in middle school difficult (Xu, 2001). Most prominent of these factors for students is the spike in academic demands during middle school and a decline in motivation for academic achievement; these concerns may have a negative effect on middle school students' educational experiences (Abed, 2000).

Despite these mounting situational factors that call for increased parental support and awareness, when students transition from elementary to middle school parent involvement and family engagement decrease regardless of the widely accepted positive effects parent support can have during this transition (Constantino, 2007). During this transitional social and academic

phase middle school students need the most support from their parents. Nonetheless, some parents believe that after elementary school involvement in their child's education is not as important. As a result of this belief, parents mistakenly become less involved during the middle school years (NMSA, 2003). Even though during middle school parent involvement is just as an important factor in a child's academic success as it is in earlier years.

In addition to situational factors contributing to the decline of involvement from elementary to middle school, schools report larger gaps in parent involvement with minority student populations in urban settings. In particular, schools serving students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in large urban areas continue to report low participation from parents and families (Howard, 2009).

In 2012, eighty-five percent of Black, and eighty-six percent of Latino students had parents attend a general meeting, compared to eighty-nine percent of White students. Sixty-eight percent of Black, and sixty-four percent of Latino students had a parent who attended school events, while eighty-two percent of White students had a parent attend events. Further, thirty-two percent of Latino students and thirty-one percent of Black students had parents volunteer, compared to fifty percent of White students. (NHES, 2013, p. 14)

When it comes to involving low-income urban families in their children's education, there are additional factors (diverse family structures and socio-cultural differences among teachers and children] that contribute to barriers to involvement (Oakes & Lipton, 1999). Diverse family structures include children being raised by their grandparents, single parent households, and foster parents. Additionally, many students being raised in diverse family structures are often also in low socioeconomic environments. Still, with the additional barriers to involvement present in low socioeconomic urban areas, literature on parent involvement indicates that parent participation during the middle school years promotes achievement with older students (Hallstrom, 2011; Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Understanding the extraneous factors that contribute to

barriers and positive systems that create enablers to parent involvement is important in urban education (Robles, 2011). Further, continued research on the factors that contribute to parent involvement in their child's schooling during middle school may aid in the development of calculated intervention strategies for site administrators to increase overall campus involvement (Adams, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

Varying conceptual models discuss parent challenges to participation (Epstein, 2001; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hoover & Dempsey, 2002). However, fewer focus on the barriers to parent participation in adolescent schooling. Ideally having one model, as a universal lens to assess parent involvement throughout elementary and secondary school, would better facilitate discussion between school leaders and parents. To date such a model is near impractical because of increased diversity among families and teachers (Hutchins et al., 2012). Consequently this lack of one clear model makes the ways in which parents are and should be involved less clear. Numerous researchers have identified the methods by which parents participate in an attempt to understand and describe parent involvement (Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2001, 2010; Jeynes, 2005a). As a result involvement models differ fundamentally in their philosophy and reason for involving parents. Yet models exist that explain successful parent involvement in middle school (Comer, 1984; Epstein, 1984; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Among the most prevalent models to emerge in parent involvement literature is that of Joyce Epstein. One of the most common methods for differentiating types of parent involvement is Epstein's (1992) typology, which delineates six types of parent involvement. Specific components of this model support the research questions of this study.

Epstein's six types of parent involvement. Since 1984 Epstein and colleagues (Epstein et al., 2002) have worked to establish a framework to identify structures that most appropriately identify the major categories that define existing types of parent involvement. The results of this research identify six major types of parent involvement along with multiple practices schools can use to create programs and maintain partnerships that engage all families. Building upon years of extensive research spanning elementary, middle, and high schools, Figure 1 shows the model to illustrate the six types of involvement. Out of the following six types of involvement, communication (type 2), volunteering (type 3), and decision-making (type 5) shaped the focus of this study (see Figure 1).

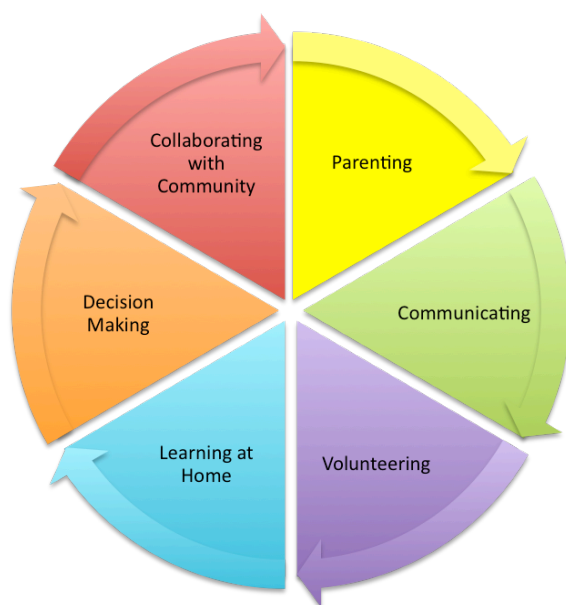


Figure 1. Model illustrating Epstein's six types of involvement. Adapted from *Family, School, Community Partnerships*, by J. L. Epstein, 2001, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Copyright 2001 by the author.

Parenting. Parenting activities and workshop on parenting aid in families' ability to understand and support their child's growth and development. These activities can help parents better understand children's health, safety, nutrition, childhood and adolescent development, and conditions to support student learning across every grade levels (Alvarez, 2009). Beyond being

informative, parenting activities also improve schools understanding of parents and families by promoting opportunities for open dialogue between teachers, parents, and other caregivers about goals and concerns for children (Epstein et al., 2002).

Workshops on parenting provide information and resource to deepen families understanding of child development and strategies to support student learning. Beyond these, parent workshops can cover many different topics, such as language development, K-12 learning styles, strategies for parent nurturing, positive behavior strategies and interventions, and child abuse prevention.

In addition to activities and workshops to support parent involvement, schools can also build parents skills by supporting them in continued education. Through partnerships with local community colleges, parents can gain access to adult education courses. Earning a General Education Development (GED) credential or college credit has the potential to support parents in developing job-related skills and attaining access to advanced career options. Parents that reach their own academic and vocational goals are more equipped with the tools necessary to support their children in achieving academic success in school (Smith et al., 1997).

Communication. According to Epstein (2002), home-to-school and school-to-home communication is essential. Modern parents desire a constant communication stream from schools. Parents want to be informed about things happening on campus so that they can make the best decisions about how to meet their child's needs. Similarly school administrators want to create open pathways for positive home-school communication. However modern parent demands for constant communication lead school personnel to feel that parents do not fully appreciate the mounting extraneous factors with which school officials are struggling to managing (Alvarez, 2009).

School personnel and administrators wrestle with what kind of communication is necessary or appropriate to share with families (Kaplan, Lui, & Kaplan, 2000). This hesitance can lead to a gap in communication between home and school. Without the information and skills for effective home-school communication misperceptions and mistrust can develop between parents and schools. In Title I schools, most parents and school staff report receiving little training on effective home-school communication. Nearly half (48%) of administrators serving in K-12 Title I schools shared that a lack of training in parent/family communication contributes to a barrier to parent involvement (Smith et al., 1997).

Volunteering. On-campus volunteering allows families to contribute their time and talents to support the school, teachers, and students. Parent volunteers support on-campus activities in the classroom as well as school related events in the community. In addition to parent volunteers, family members may also assist by providing support in the library, campus family rooms, the playground, the computer room, during lunch and recess, and in the after school program. Families also lend support and time during sports activities, student performances, assemblies, and other events (Epstein et al., 2002).

Parent and family volunteers strengthen school programs by assisting and contributing to school events and special classroom projects. Their presence relays the message to students, faculty, and community that they care about both the quality of the school program and the success of all students (Alvarez, 2009). School administration and staff create a welcoming environment that values parents by organizing events for parents and families to volunteer. Training volunteers to assist during the academic day gives parents a sense of belonging (Epstein et al., 2002).

To increase the number of parent volunteers, schools must look past the parents and families who are regularly in attendance towards the parents that rarely participate. Additionally, schools have to seek support beyond the stay-at-home parents with more flexible schedules and look to involve parents with more traditional schedules that can volunteer on the weekends. Although these volunteer strategies require effort they yield many rewards: for the school, the students, and the parents (Indiana Department of Education, 2005).

Learning at home. The practice of regularly involving families in their children's learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum related activities is essential (Epstein, 2002). According to the National PTA's (1997) *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*:

In today's changing economy the need for advanced skills and technical knowledge are growing. Showing children that we value learning and education is important and will pay off in the long run as they mature. When you are involved in your child's education, your child achieves more. You can help your child succeed by providing a home that encourages learning and supports your child's physical, mental, and emotional development. (p. 1)

Regardless of income level, family structure, or cultural background, all parents provide learning experiences for children in the home. Although vast differences exist in the quality and quantity of learning provided in home, children learn emotional, social, physical, and intellectual cues from their home environment. Parental interactions, role expectations, domestic responsibilities, and the physical environment children are raised in also affect home learning (Barbour, Barbour, & Scully, 2005). Despite the variance in these factors, every family has the potential to encourage student learning at home by establishing behaviors to support student academic achievement at home. Parents that provide well-organized environments with realistic rules and clear expectations create learning structures at home that foster academic achievement (Alvarez, 2009).

Decision-making. Participation in decision-making involves parents and families in the school community in a leadership capacity. Further, decision-making contributions allow parents to be seen as school activist within the community. Involvement in the parent-teacher association/organization (PTA/PTO), advisory councils, Title I programs, and school groups gives parents governance roles and responsibilities.

The term *governance* in decision-making pertains to activities that provide parents and families' opportunities to have a choice, share opinions, and draw conclusion about school programs. These roles may include being a member of the school board, participation on a parent advisory committee, a seat on the local school council, or being an active member of the campus PTA. With these roles parents set program goals, develop and implement program activities, assist with assessment of programs, aid in personnel decisions, and share in decisions for yearly funding allocations (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Schools contribute to this type of parent leadership by training parent leaders in decision-making skills, giving parents communication strategies to foster clear communication with all the parents represented on campus, and by providing the necessary information for school improvement activities (Epstein, 2001).

Community collaboration. The aim of community collaboration is to build strong long-lasting relationships between schools, families, and the surrounding neighborhoods. This type of collaborating with the community builds pathways that lead to connections and partnerships. Further, community sponsored activities generate extra resources, programs, and services for the school. Fostering connections with neighborhood and corporate businesses, local government agencies, and colleges or universities, benefits the entire school community. These community collaborations also allow students, families, and staff to in turn offer their services to the community (Epstein, 2001).

Schools with successful community collaboration look at parents as community partners. Administrators understand that to encourage collaboration they must look to create relationships with business where parents are employed and other local agencies for potential linkages for involvement. These parents can help make connections and businesses can become visible partners for education and models for other community businesses (School-Parent-Community Partnership Resource Book, 2005). Beyond connections with businesses, schools with successful parent partnerships view student academic success as a shared responsibility. Administrators believe that all community stakeholders – parents, teachers, and community leaders - play important roles in support student learning (Smith et al., 1997).

Related Use of Epstein's Model and Parent Involvement

Using Epstein's typologies as the foundation, the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has implemented a framework with specific standards to create a clear model for parent involvement (National PTA, 1997). According to the National PTA (1997), effective parent involvement programs include activities that are addressed by Epstein's six typologies. In 1997 the National PTA in collaboration with prominent parent involvement researchers and various national leaders developed the *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs*. This established a set of standards for parent/family involvement, over thirty years of parent involvement research and more than one hundred years of successful school practices helped develop the standards (Alvarez, 2009). To date nearly 100 parent/family involvement organizations, numerous state departments of education, and various local school districts endorse these standards widely. Consequently, many states and local districts ask schools to complete the parent involvement portion of their Title I report using Epstein's framework. Table 1 illustrates the standards and activities developed by the National PTA adapted from Epstein's

work. The standards clearly delineate specific activities that have proven to lead to high-quality successful parent involvement programs.

Table 1

National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

| National PTA Standard | Epstein's Typology | Activity |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Standard I | Communication | Communicating between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful |
| Standard II | Parenting | Parenting skills are promoted and supported |
| Standard III | Student Learning | Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning |
| Standard IV | Volunteering | Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought |
| Standard V | School Decision Making and Advocacy | Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families |
| Standard VI | Collaborating with Community | Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning |

Note. Adapted from *National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs* (p. 5), by the National Parent Teacher Association, 1997, Chicago, IL: Author. Copyright 1997 by the author.

Epstein's model has shaped how school leaders and policymakers both design and implement parent involvement programs (Epstein et al., 2002). The six typologies offer schools a unique model to follow and are widely used to examine parent involvement across school settings. Her model acts as a guide for family-school-community partnerships based on her theory of "overlapping spheres of home, school and community influences that shape children's learning and development" (p. 7). Within her model she recognizes the various dimensions within which parents participate in their children's education. Even among families labeled difficult to reach, identified as low-income, minority, and single-parent families, well organized activities and outreach programs increase involvement (Epstein, 2001). According to Chen and Chandler (2001), Epstein's typology is the "primary framework to study parent involvement" (p. 4).

Out of the six types of involvement identified by Epstein; the framework for this study focus on three specific types of parent involvement as delineated by Epstein; communicating (type 2), volunteering (type 3), and decision making (type 5).

Brief History of Parent Involvement

In 1918, the United States passed laws making school attendance mandatory (Hallstrom, 2011). Along with the expectation for elementary school aged children to attend school, the phenomenon of parental involvement evolved and with it the development of the new school establishment (Griffiths-Prince, 2007). To support the mandated school laws, truancy laws were enacted requiring parents to send their children to school or face severe fines (Hiatt-Michael, 2008). By the 1900s, the PTA was established as a national organization to create a link between parents and teachers. This establishment formalized the importance of parent involvement nationally (Hallstrom, 2011). To date parental involvement in the education of their children is viewed as vital and is credited with positive student achievement (Epstein, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hiatt-Michael, 2009; Jeynes, 2003). Resultantly, it is often called an *institutionalized standard* (Laureau, 1989; Wheeler, 1992).

San Diego State University, the California Network of Partnership Schools, and the June Burnett Institute for Children, Youth, and Families point to a perspective shift regarding the perspective of parent involvement since the early 1900s (Alvarez, 2009). At the 2007 California Network of Partnership Schools Leadership Development Conference on School, Family, and Community Partnerships held in Norwalk, CA attendees received materials that illustrated the shifting perspective (D. Hiatt-Michael, personal communication, October 7, 2012). Table 2 depicts the shift from the old reality of parent involvement to the new standard of parent involvement.

Table 2

Parent Involvement Reality Shift

| Old Reality | New Reality |
|--|---|
| 1. “Parent Involvement” | School-family-community partnerships |
| 2. A few people making some things happen sometimes | An organized team of teachers, and administrators working together |
| 3. No set plan of activities – going with the flow – haphazard program planning | Activities planned to support student achievement and goals and meet NCLB requirements |
| 4. Participation of preschool/elementary parents – mostly moms | Participation of all parents preschool – grade 12 (including fathers, grandparents, foster parents) |
| 5. Sporadic workshop ineffective outreach strategies | Ongoing efforts and a plan to reach those who can’t/don’t attend school functions |
| 6. Concentration on barriers to parent involvement | Seeking solutions, focused on promising practices |
| 7. Results focused on parent attendance and attention given to a few parent leaders | Results focused on student and connected to school goals |
| 8. Schools and districts working with different levels and expectations for parent involvement | Parent involvement standards at state level set expectations for family-community partnerships |

Note. Adapted from the California Network of Partnership Schools Leadership Development Conference on School, Family and Community Partnerships (p. 10), 2007.

Parent Involvement Legislation

Parental involvement is defined by the U.S. Department of Education (2001) “as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student learning and other school activities including; assisting in their child’s learning and being actively involved in their child’s education at school” (p. 4). Federal, state, and local mandates recognize parental involvement as an essential component of learning by requiring schools to include parental involvement goals in their educational programs and processes (Epstein, 1995;

Nakagawa, 2000). Removed from state and federal participation mandates, parents rely on the school system to be compliant with legal expectations regarding involvement. Still, while legislative and court mandates exist for parent involvement in middle school few parents are aware of its many expectations (Fix-Turkowski, 2003). Because of this it is argued that federal, state, and local district mandated parent involvement is not likely to encourage change (Hutchins et al., 2012). Past educational reform efforts meant to bolster student performance, have scarcely recognized the power of parents when seeking to change schools and improve students' academic outcome. Thus parent involvement remains a major component in school reform.

According to Hutchins et al. (2012) "One reason why parent involvement policy has difficulty bringing about positive parent involvement change rests in its many ambiguities" (p. 19). To date multiple legislations have been put into place that legally mandate schools to establish relationships with parents. Title I, Goals 2000: Educate America Act, and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 place an emphasis on involving parents in schools.

Title I. President Clinton signed the Improving America's School Act into law on October 20, 1994. This legislation reauthorized Title I and rewrote the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The reauthorized Title I, Part A is designed to both aid in closing the achievement gap between minority and white students and to change the culture of success in America's schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Established in 1965 to provide additional educational services to the poorest and lowest-achieving students in the nation, Title I remains the largest single program of federal aid for elementary and secondary education and is the biggest component of the ESEA (Conley, 2012). Currently Title I funding, with an over \$7 billion dollar federal fiscal allotment, provides administrators and parents in urban communities with tools for school improvement.

The focus on involving parents in schools is also reflected in Title I under Part A: Non-Regulatory Guidance on Parent Involvement. All school and local education agency are required to have a written parent involvement policy that is both developed and approved by parents outlining how parents and families will be involved in all facets of planning and review of Title I programs (Alvarez, 2009). Further, this school-level policy is required to have a school-parent component outlining the schools, parents, and students responsibility for ensuring students academic success (Center for Law and Education, 2007). Schools are also required to assist parents in understanding the National Education Goals along with the annual standards and assessments used annually to determine children's academic progress.

Despite the positive focus Title I places on involving parents, one complication of federal program is the responsibility of funding. Annually school districts, with the smallest being exempt, are required to allocate 1 percent of Title I funds towards parent training/education. Further, parents must be included in the decisions about how money is spent. Schools that use Title I funding from the federal government are legally mandated to involve parents. Yet those schools risk losing the money if they do not meet parent involvement criteria set by Title I, Part A. This is problematic because schools identified as Title I typically struggle involving parents on campus. When funding is lost as a result of low parent participation, the loss is detrimental both to the school and the students. Even with the possibility that funding may be lost, parent involvement remains low in urban schools identified as Title I. To counter these low levels of involvement despite government funding, school leaders implementing Title I programs continue to work to increase parent participation on campus using parent advisory councils as a way to ensure better parent involvement reflective of individual campuses. Still schools receiving Title I funds typically report low rates of parent participation and high rates of poverty (Conley, 2012).

Goals 2000: Educate America Act. At the federal level the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* includes parent involvement as *National Goal 8*, mandating all schools to establish parent partnerships in support of children's academic achievement and shared school site educational decision making. This act, signed by President William Clinton in 1994, specifically stated that every school would increase parent involvement and participation (National Education Goals Panel [NGEP], 1999), and enhanced support for actions that promote parent involvement in school activities and in their children's schoolwork (Education Commission of the States, 2000). The Goals 2000 Act mandated parent representation on both state and local school improvement design plan teams and encouraged parent to act as collaborative partners in fundamental efforts to improve schools and student learning (Stedman, 1994). Embedded in this mandate, exists a series of essential components of education legislation focused on promoting parent involvement and strengthening school and family partnerships. More recent school reform efforts continue the discourse surrounding these initiatives set by Goals 2000 to increase parent participation, create partnerships between parents and schools, give parents power to effect change, and empower parents to play key decision-making roles in schools' daily operations (Fege, 2006).

No Child Left Behind Act. Another significant wave of school reform began in 2001 when President George W. Bush signed NCLB into law. NCLB passed with tremendous bipartisan support by Congress and became a major landmark in education reform (Alvarez, 2009). The act was designed to change the culture of American schools by improving student achievement using the President's four basic principles:

- Accountability for academic results
- Local control and flexibility

- Expanded parental choice
- Implementation of research based effective programs

Accountability for academic results. NCLB established the goal of ensuring that every child scored proficient or above on state-defined education standards by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. To accomplish this goal, states created benchmarks and designed programs to measure student progress periodically each year. To ensure that no child falls through the cracks, states are mandated to collect data from the local districts and disaggregate student achievement results. Until 2014 schools that did not meet the state requirements for “adequate yearly progress” (p. 3) or AYP for 2 consecutive years were considered school “in need of improvement” (p. 3) and labeled Program Improvement (PI) schools (U.S. Department of Education 2003, p. 3).

Local flexibility and control. In accordance with the NCLB principle, states have local control and flexibility with interpreting and implementing parent involvement programs. Section 1118(b) through 1118(g) of the NCLB Act allows states to maintain local flexibility and requires states to implement policies that are in accordance to the following principles:

- Parent involvement requires multilevel leadership.
- Parental involvement is a component of school and classroom organization.
- Parental involvement recognizes the shared responsibility of educators and families for children’s learning and success in school.
- Parental involvement programs must include all families, even those not currently involved, not just the easiest to reach. (p. 179-180)

According to Epstein (2005), these principles represent more equitable and effective parental involvement practices representative of a complete school, family, and community partnership. Granting schools local control to implement parent involvement programs to serve

their students and engage all parents creates a welcoming environment where parents feel valued by educators and become involved because of school and classroom partnership practices (Epstein, 2001; Sheldon, 2003; Simon, 2004; Van Voorhis, 2001).

Expanded parental choice. One of the main principles of the comprehensive reform is the legislative provision of expanded parent options (Fix-Turkowski, 2003). Under NCLB parents gained access to more resources and information pertaining to their child's school and surrounding schools. Because of this provision parents better understand how well their neighborhood schools are performing. This knowledge gave parents the opportunity to seek other school options and resources for helping their children if their schools weren't meeting AYP or labeled PI. Further, according to the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.b), NCLB contains 10 specific components that support parent's rights to ensure that their child is not left behind academically:

1. NCLB provides extra money to schools to help educate students.
2. Under NCLB all schools and districts are held accountable.
3. Parents, schools, and students must agree to work together.
4. Money exists for parent involvement programs.
5. Parents have the right to request copies of district's parent involvement policies.
6. Parents have the opportunity to learn about teacher's credentials.
7. School Site Councils shape the Single Plan for Student Achievement.
8. Parents may be eligible to request to transfer their children to another school.
9. Parent may be eligible to obtain free tutoring for their children.
10. Parents are encouraged to ensure that NCLB laws are followed.

Implementation of research-based effective programs. NCLB requires schools to establish mechanisms to increase parent involvement in their child's education and support parents efforts to become more involved in their child's schooling. NCLB legislation further supports parental involvement by requiring schools to inform parents of the ways to be involved during the school year which may include volunteering their time, attending parent-teacher conferences, or being a resource to get other parents involved in the school community (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Under this law schools are expected to determine barriers to increased parent participation and design a more responsive set of parent involvement strategies. Further, NCLB of 2001 placed emphasis on the importance of parent involvement during adolescence as strategy to support children during this transition period and to ensure that middle school students are successful academically (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007).

Although comprehensive and well funded proper implementation of federal, state, and local parent involvement legislations are still a challenge to monitor. The divergence in parent involvement implementation from one school site and another and the varied definitions of parent involvement between schools impact involvement (Hutchins et al., 2012). Further these "challenges related to parental involvement definitions [and perceptions] and strategies for implementation [practices] are further compounded when one considers the inherent developmental differences between students at elementary, middle, and secondary schools" (Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010, p. 28). Even more, policy definitions that attempt to define involvement through actively involved families, meaningful two-way communication, and the integral role of parents in schools are difficult to monitor (Davies, 1987). However, of these mentioned, two-way communication is regularly cited as an effective approach to increase parent involvement at every level (Elish-Piper, 2008; Epstein, 1995; Ferguson & Rodriguez, 2005).

Even with this strategy being among the most successful, specifically defined and outlined characteristics of this type of communication are limited. Nonetheless, researchers agree that properly implemented legislation built around creating meaningful relationships with parents work best when expectations are specific and responsibilities are clearly defined (Baker & Soden, 1997; Brannon, 2007; Epstein, 1990; Sanders & Epstein, 2000).

Brief History of Charter Schools

Overview. Numerous studies exist that focus on the positives of parent involvement, however the literature regarding parent involvement in urban middle schools is limited (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). When charter schools, specifically those in urban environments, are considered as part of the analysis the body of literature decreases. In consideration of this gap in the literature, this research is focused on parent involvement in urban charter middle schools.

The U.S. Department of Education (1996) defines charter schools as public schools governed by parents, teachers, administrators or other stakeholders who want to establish and manage a public school. Charter schools are authorized by state law to govern their budget, staffing, instructional methods, school structure and curriculum. Every 3 to 5 years the school's performance is reviewed and remains open only as long as it maintains or exceeds established performance benchmarks (Abed, 2000). The overall success of the charter is determined by the academic outcomes of students.

As a response to the demand for education reform, those in favor of public school improvement embrace charter schools as a promising advance in school choice options for parents. Proponents suggests charter schools may not only increase school choice options for parents, but also revitalize public education, and improve student achievement (Kelley-Laine, 1998). Abed (2000) stated that charter schools are a "promising way to raise academic standards,

empower educators, involve parents and communities, and expand choice and accountability in public education” (p. 46). Additionally, Urahn and Stewart’s (as cited in Abed, 2000) study of parents of children enrolled in charter schools found that parents primary reason for enrolling their children in charter middle schools were: (a) the school’s curriculum; (b) small classes, school location and environment; (c) good teachers; (d) greater opportunity for parental involvement; and (e) positive effects on their child such as educational and developmental progress and enthusiasm with school involvement in school decision.

Charter school legislation. To provide better academic options for students in urban, rural, and crowded district schools the California Alternative School Association, LEARN, in 1985 originally proposed the idea of a state legislature to establish another option in public education. The Charter Schools Act of 1992 allowed public charter schools in California. By 1993 California was the nation’s second state after Minnesota to pass a charter school law authorizing up to 100 charter schools (Abed, 2000). The California Charter Schools Act under sections 47600-47664 of the Education Code governs California charter schools. Initially legislations limited California to 100 charter schools. As of fall 2014 California has more charter schools than any other state in the country with 1,130 schools serving over 500,000 students (California Charter School Association, n.d.). Figure 2 illustrated this increase in charter school numbers. Further, in Southern California there are more charter schools than any other district in the state with the largest district, Los Angeles Unified, serving 136, 778 students in 248 schools (Los Angeles Unified School District, n.d.).



Figure 2. Charter school growth in California. Adapted from *California Charter Schools by the Numbers*, n.d., by California Charter School Association, retrieved from <http://www.ccsa.org/understanding/numbers/>. Copyright 2015 by the authors.

President Clinton proposed a program to provide start-up funds for charter schools. In 1994 as part of the Reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act the program was enacted and now provides start-up funds to charter schools. The law enacting the program required that parent and students have choice among public schools in an effort to promote comprehensive education reform and give more students the opportunity to learn.

Middle School Parent Involvement Introduction

The existing body of literature has made it profusely clear that there is much higher incidence of parent involvement in preschools and elementary schools than in middle schools or at the high school level (Colson, 2010; Hallstrom, 2011). Wheeler (1992) states “parent involvement at the middle and secondary school levels is vital if teenagers are to become stable and productive adults” (p. 28). During this time parents with children in middle school are often faced with the complicated challenge of trying to balance between their adolescents’ developing independence and their quest as parents to nurture (McGrew-Zoubi, as cited in Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010). Further, middle school parents have a smaller social network to draw from to support involvement compared to elementary parent networks (Sheldon, 2002). Eccles and Harold (1993) found that urban minority parents have an even smaller network and are less

involved due to the fact that they are not as knowledgeable about middle and high school curriculum.

In response to numerous studies on parent involvement various initiatives have been developed to boost parent involvement as part of an overall strategy to improve students academic performance (Epstein, 2002; Henderson, 2007; Hiatt-Michael, 2010). Still, according to Hutchins et al. (2012), “relatively little is known about successful practices to involve parents in middle school” (p. 5) and there is no singular clearly defined recommendation to establish a replicable model of parent involvement at the middle school level. Resultantly, parent involvement findings are inconsistent after the elementary years (Robles, 2011). That said, numerous theories have been proposed that attempt to define, explain, and increase involvement of parents during the middle year (Epstein, 1984; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

According to Lloyd-Smith and Baron (2010), parent involvement is multifaceted, not only do children learn the value of education through their parents involvement, it stimulates cognitive development and enables parents to gain knowledge about how schools operate along with a better understanding of what opportunities are available for their children. Further, it fosters communication between parents and school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010). Likewise the most recent research from the National Committee for Citizens in Education (2008) illustrates that when parents of middle school students become involved, students’ academic grades and test outcomes are higher; students’ scholastic outlook and school behavior are more positive; success of academic programs increase; and schools, as a whole, are more effective.

Parent involvement in middle school. As children grow, many parents—particularly minority and low-income parents—experience feelings of inadequacy (Drummond & Stipek,

2004). At the onset of secondary school parents begin to believe less in their ability to aid in the successful academic outcomes of their children; either because they had negative experiences in their own education or they do not understand an increasingly complex curriculum (Mulhall, Mertens, & Flowers, 2001). In addition to parents perceived lack of ability, adolescents' need for social autonomy (Bauch, 1993) and perceived desire to not have their parents involved on campus (Williams & Chavkin, 1989) also lead many parents to question their role in their children's education (Hutchins et al., 2012). Unique due to the structure and focus on the parent perspective, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) model of family involvement also attempts to describe the parent rationale for participation and to explain parent involvement mechanisms (Robles, 2011). Outlined in the first level in their model, parent perception of campus involvement is an important factor in their overall willingness to participate at the school (Anderson & Minke, 2007).

In addition to these perceptions Cutler (2000) states that conflict may exist between the practice and policy of a school and what a parent wants for his or her child. Sometimes the school's policies and practices contribute to the inhibition of parental involvement. Further, low-income urban parents are generally unaware of middle level involvement practices. In her review of parent involvement, De Carvalho (2001) established that most of the policy and research discourse on parent involvement identifies partnerships as ideal but fails to consider the perspective of a diverse range of parents. Parents that reported higher levels of familiarity with middle level practices were more likely to report having had positive outlooks on involvement and were more likely to be involved at their child's school. As Becher (1986) points out, students of parents actively involved in their schooling showed an increase in both overall cognitive development and academic performance.

Parent Perceptions of Barriers to Parent Involvement

Notwithstanding the positive effects of parent involvement on students' academic achievement, parent involvement must sometimes be urged, coaxed, supported by initiatives, legislated, or mandated (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993) to adequately ensure parents have pathways to become involved. While there are ways for parents to contribute to their children's education barriers exist preventing parental involvement that schools need to address to increase involvement (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008). These barriers adversely affect parent involvement and the structures that support parents becoming engaged in their children's education are yet to be clearly understood (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993). Furthermore, literature suggests that educators and parents often have opposing views regarding roles for parents in schools (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Nonetheless parent involvement is beneficial to children, schools, and families (Epstein, 2002; Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Thus, it is important to explore how parents of urban students in middle school perceive parent involvement in schools.

Several prominent factors contribute to parents' perceptions of diminished levels of parent involvement in middle school (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hiatt-Michael, 2010; Nichols-Solomon, 2001). A few factors include (a) parents' schedule and time, (b) cultural barriers and language barriers, (c) expectations of administrators, and (d) parent educational/academic levels (Trotman, 2001). Theories suggest that the most common of these is parents' time due to its multi-layered variables effecting parents ability to participate including most prominently a parents work schedule (Griffin & Galassi, 2010). As a result of this factor urban schools experience lower levels of parent involvement from working-class parents particularly those from ethnic and racial minority groups. According to Sheldon (2003), "The

time and economic constraints on working and low income parents put students from these families ‘at risk’ of experiencing less parental involvement in their education” (p. 150). Furthermore time barriers to involvement may exist for low-income parents that include logistical limitations, such as lack of childcare, energy, and transportation (Kaplan et al., 2000; Keys, Bemek, Carpenter, & King-Sears, 1998; Plevyak, 2003; Wanat, 1997). In particular, working single parents with multiple jobs have difficulty participating during events scheduled by the school during working hours both before and after school (Epstein, 1995; Kaplan et al., 2000; Keyes, 2002; Keys et al., 1998; Muller & Kerbow, 1993; Plevyak, 2003). This conflict between participation and work creates an increased stress associated with their financial situations (Reynolds, 1991).

Another barrier preventing minority parents from on campus participating in urban communities is language. Understanding this disconnect between parents language and parental involvement is a critical element of schools’ efforts in creating meaningful partnerships with families. When non-English speaking parents visit their child’s school and attempt to speak English, it is difficult. Parents who do not speak English or are uncomfortable speaking a language other than their own may not gain access to what is available to them or understand what is expected of them (Conley, 2012). Moreover, even if they are comfortable speaking another language, they may not feel as comfortable when approached by staff at their child’s school that does not speak their same home/native language (Crosnoe, 2010; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Yoshikawa, 2005). Further, when parents are invited to campus meetings, back-to-school nights, and conferences often the school does not provide translation, and their child is the only available option. Although willing to translate, the child lacks the vocabulary to meet the level of sophistication used by school staff

and communication with parents is limited (Arzubiaga, Noguerón, & Sullivan, 2009). This awareness of the role language plays in parents feelings of comfort participating on campus empowers school staff to ensure translation is available to families (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Diminishing levels of parental involvement in middle school may also be tied into some parent's negative experiences with school and administration in the past (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Some negatives experiences may include (a) school administration only contacting parents for negative student reports, (b) parents not feeling welcomed on campus by school administration, and (c) school personnel treating parents with hostility (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Kaplan et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Wanat, 1997). Past negative experiences in school, such as poor communication between school and home, have led some parents to mistrust the existing school structures (Harlan & Rowland, 2002). Furthermore parents who may not know how to best initiate involvement feel out of place and intimidated due to a lack of understanding the school system. Similarly some minority parents feel a lack of awareness of their role in the school due to having language and cultural differences from their children's teachers and school administration (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Kaplan et al., 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Wanat, 1997). As a result of these factors schools frequently lack the ability to understand how to effectively involve parents and how to get parents interested in participating (Eccles & Harold, 1993).

Along with time, language, and cultural low-income parents in urban areas have barriers to academic involvement including a scarcity of instructional resources to support parent access to the curriculum and a lack of social support and parent groups (Reynolds, 1991). Limited resources contribute to parents in low-income urban environments view of schools as systems

designed primarily for average, middle-class, and upper class families (Howard, 2009). This makes it difficult for low-income families to believe school officials truly care about their children and, therefore, make it difficult for parents to trust the school system (Inger, 1992). Nevertheless, one of the most effective methods to reduce barriers to parent involvement remains parent education, most specifically around the importance for and strategies for family involvement in schools (Chavkin, 1991). Essentially, urban parents need to be instructed how to become more involved and provided with strategies for involvement. According to Bloom (1992) the effects of the home environment (parent perceptions of school at home) alone account for more variations in student learning than school curriculum or the quality of instruction in the schools.

Parent Perception of Enablers to Parent Involvement

Urban parents tend to participate more when they feel respected by faculty and staff and when they felt that their children are valued (McDermott & Rothenburg, 2000). Gay (2000) in *Culturally Responsive Teaching* explains, “Even without our being consciously aware of it, culture determines how we [educators] think, believe, and behave” (p. 9). In order to increase the level of parent participation in a school it is important to understand the culture and values of the serving community along with the perceptions each brings about school (Lindsey, Graham, Westphal, & Jew, 2008). Parents are inclined to be involved (a) when they are sure that they can assist their child academically, (b) when they hold the belief that their child is able to do well in school, and (c) when they hold high educational expectations for the child (Abramovitch, as cited in Lamb, 1997). Further, Nweze (1993) discovered that parents more aware of their parental roles in the educational process felt encouraged to participate in their child’s educational process.

Site Administrators Perceptions of Barriers to Parent Involvement

Middle school administrators face the challenge of overcoming a variety of factors that contribute to lower levels of involvement. According to Lloyd-Smith and Baron (2010), middle school leaders are less likely to advocate for on campus parent involvement. School leaders that may support on campus parent involvement can display actions that do not reflect their beliefs. “Administrative practices frequently serve to defeat and discourage parental involvement, although not intentionally” (Peiffer, 2003, p. 12). Meloth, Good, and Sugar (2008) suggest that most parent activities spend time educating parents instead of soliciting their support and facilitating involvement. According to Ferrara (2009) other barriers to parent involvement that are common among middle school administrators are (a) staff (teaching and clerical) perception of parent involvement, (b) establishing and communicating learning opportunities for parents, and (c) the ability to conceptually understand how to enroll parents as an essential resource at the school.

Staff perception of parent involvement. Administrators have a pivotal role in shaping the staff culture around parent involvement on campus. Ensuring staff responsiveness to students and families is a critical component in creating parent involvement. Because of this, school leaders must develop staff comfort levels working with parents. Ultimately, the school leader’s attitude toward parent involvement determines staff willingness to invest in parent involvement outreach on their campus (Lebahn, 1995; Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010; Peiffer, 2003). Van Voorhis and Sheldon’s (2004) parent involvement study on a broad school sample with diverse locations, 37% large urban, 28% suburban, 17% small urban, and 18% rural, found that when school leaders neglect to support involvement efforts, teachers and staff are likely to shift their focus away from parent involvement and invest their time elsewhere. To overcome this barrier,

site administrators must address both their personal assumptions and staff assumptions and attitudes related to parent involvement. Administrators that communicate openly with teachers and staff about their assumptions related to involving families can better identify potential barriers to parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, Shenker, & Walker, 2010). In the end, school leaders beliefs regarding parent involvement effect overall staff involvement levels of staff.

Establishing and communicating learning opportunities for parents. Nearly 3 decades ago, Menacker, Hurwitz, and Weldon (1988) found that another major barrier urban schools serving minority students face is the lack of effective open parent-school communication. This lack of communication continues to create a barrier that negatively affects parents being involved (Epstein, 2007). Further, as a result of schools using poor communication strategies opportunities to encourage parent involvement on campus are often missed or not fully understood by families (Kerbow & Berhhardt, 1993). While site administrators may use multiple communication methods, most are common types of one-way communication such as “newsletters, websites, prerecorded phone messages, and Internet parent portals” (Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010, p. 41). Although these method of communication work to disseminate school information they are not successful in increasing active parent involvement. While it may be convenient to communicate with middle school parents using one-way communication strategies due to school size and multilingual populations it is not the most effective. Instead high-tech digital (Twitter and Facebook) and low-tech (flyers, campus marquee updates, and phone calls home) communication methods for disseminating information should be used to meet the diverse needs of parents (Epstein, 2007).

Enrolling parents. Further, the literature suggests that parents and school leaders frequently hold conflicting perspectives regarding the roles and expectations for parents in

schools (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Thus another barrier to involvement is the clear identification of parent roles in middle school. Because parent roles are more concrete and defined in elementary school (Brough & Irvin, 2001), middle school leaders need to create specific meaningful campus roles for parents to increase collaboration. As a child enters middle school and later high school, the roles for parents must change, not become overlooked (Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010).

One practice occasionally employed in charter schools is mandated involvement. However, participation mandates as a method to involve parents on campus “have proved unable to generate parent involvement to any great extent. Norm-based pressures—those that are tied to the incentives, values, and priorities that influence the behavior of teachers and administrators—may prove more effective in encouraging parent involvement” (McLaughlin & Shields, 1987, p. 159). Therefore, voluntary programs or partnership activities attached to incentives rather than mandates may be more successful in encouraging parents to take on campus roles because they are not as compulsory. The challenge is for school leaders to identify parental involvement roles that parents deem meaningful. Clearly defined roles and expectations foster better parent participation.

Site Administrators Perceptions of Enablers to Parent Involvement

Griffith (2001) in his quantitative study of principal leadership styles that encourage positive parent school relationships found that a supportive school environment is especially helpful in creating positive parent interactions on campus. Beyond leadership styles other enablers to parent involvement in middle school from the perspective of school administration include having an active parent involvement policy, creating a welcoming school office,

employing a parent outreach program, having a parent center, and maintaining on-going professional development to meet parent needs (Berla, Henderson, & Kerewsky, 1989).

Positive staff and family interactions. Site administrators play an integral role in developing and implementing a positive school culture for students and families. According to Eccles and Harold (1993), “school factors are the primary influence on parent involvement” (p. 576). Site administrators who allocate resources and encourage social interaction between school personnel and families report higher levels of parent involvement (Griffith, 2001).

Parent involvement policy. California schools have parent involvement policies to help families understand their rights and responsibilities. Adhering to NCLB and Title I guidelines, the California Department of Education (CDE, 2014) provides parent fact sheets in its *Parent Involvement in Title I Schools* brochure. In accordance with Section 1118, Parental Involvement of NCLB, Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) receiving Title I funds under the leadership of the site administrator must:

- Develop a parental involvement policy with the participation of parents. This policy becomes a part of the LEA Plan and establishes the LEA’s expectations for parental involvement.
- Involve parents in helping to develop the LEA plan.
- Involve parents in the process of school review and improvement.
- Provide schools with the assistance necessary to plan and implement effective parental involvement activities that will improve student achievement and school performance.
- Help parents understand state and academic content standards and state assessments.

- Provide materials and training to help parents work with their children to improve their children's academic achievement.
- Involve parents in school activities, especially academic related ones.
- Recognize the value and usefulness of parents' contributions.
- Reach out to communicate with and work with parents.
- Implement and coordinate parent programs.
- Build ties between parents and the school.
- Provide reasonable support for parental involvement activities under Title I.
- Conduct, with the help of parents, an annual evaluation of the parental involvement policy and its effectiveness in improving the academic quality of Title I schools.
- Identify barriers to greater participation by parents in activities authorized by Title I.
- Submit parents' comments to the CDE if the LEA Plan is not satisfactory to parents (CDE, 2014).

Established parent involvement policies support family and community involvement efforts. Site administrators that follow the guidelines set by the state and encouraging meaningful opportunities for parents to volunteer create a team approach to parent partnerships in their schools (Lloyd-Smith & Baron, 2010; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

Welcoming school office. Creating a diverse staff reflective of the student population contributes to clearer communication between home and school. Further this establishes a comfortable environment for parents thus enabling them to feel at ease when visiting campus. "The goal is to create an environment that says, 'We all belong here'" (Hoover-Dempsey, Shenker, & Walker, 2010, p. 34).

Parent outreach program. Creating flexible schedules for parents unable to attend morning parent meetings along with providing childcare during meetings may enable participation in low-income minority schools. Increasing formal invitations to campus from school to parents creates a feeling of belonging and a welcoming environment. Parents participate more when they feel personally invited by school personnel. Prominent programs focused on urban families underscore the benefits of school efforts in making parents feel welcome and comfortable on campus (Comer, as cited in Hoover-Dempsey, Shenker, & Walker, 2010).

Parent center. Established parent centers allow families a space to learn and collaborate. Site administrators who support parent involvement initiatives designate funds for parent activities and provide a space for parents and community members to meet, learn, collaborate, and plan activities (Hutchins et al., 2012). In 2008, Flynn and Nolan completed a study of the leadership methods of 144 principals. They reported that school leaders support parent involvement through resources and communication. Providing a functioning parent center is a valuable campus resource. According to the LAUSD (2012) *Title I Parent Involvement Policy*, operating a well-equipped parent center welcoming of all parents, including working parents, disabled parents and immigrant parents, provides families access to learning resources and opportunities that assist in supporting classroom and home learning (math, reading, homework, etc.).

Professional development. Additionally, an administrators' commitment to professional development for staff is another factor that ultimately enables parent participation. Providing ongoing, school wide training to equip teachers and school personnel with effective strategies for parent outreach increases the likelihood for increased levels of parent involvement. Specifically,

in schools where personnel represent a different cultural background from students and families, ongoing training and teacher development enables staff to better relate to students families.

Related Studies

Many studies exist that focus on the relationship of principals and parent involvement. In 1991, a research grant from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education (NIE G-83-002) funded Epstein's work that describes principal's roles in supporting parent involvement. The report describes how principals should support parent involvement:

- Maintain parent involvement through high school;
- Understand and work with all types of families;
- Select types of parent involvement based on school demographics;
- Use administrative tools to build better programs. (p. 129-133)

In another study, Griffith (2001) examined the relationship between principal behaviors and building consensus among parent groups specifically with regard to decision-making. The research indicated that 60% of the principals studied self-identified as principals, and 66% described their leadership behavior as managerial. According to Griffith, the managerial leadership behavior trait was least effective in building consensus among parent groups.

In their research on parent involvement, Sanders and Harvey (2002) describe a case study that reveals the relationship between parents and communities. The research indicates that the principal's perception of community involvement is significant. In a related qualitative study, Richardson (2009) required principals to reflect on their roles. The researcher examined principals' perceptions of their roles in facilitating parenting involvement in school processes. The results of the research indicate that principal's perceptions and levels of success with parent involvement differ based on school level, type, and demographic.

Summary of the Review of Literature

Parent involvement varies in definition and implementation depending on the school, families, and community. As a vital component to overall school success, parent involvement affects many aspect of a schools culture. Literature and research also support the idea that parent involvement positively affects student achievement.

Table 3 presents a brief overview of the literature on parent involvement. Parent involvement is affected by various factors all of which present problems for schools in varying degrees. Hoover-Dempsey (1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, 2005) examined parent motivations for involvement. Epstein (2001) explored types of parent involvement. Carreón, Drake, and Barton (2004) explored immigrant parents and their experiences with parent involvement.

The research also noted that parent involvement promotes student achievement. Fan and Chen (2001), Henderson and Mapp (2002), and Jeynes (2005a) examined the association between parent involvement and student achievement. Meanwhile, Hiatt-Michael (2010) explored fathers and their experiences with parent involvement and concluded that parent involvement (specifically fathers) in school promotes student achievement.

The role of the site administrator is a critical component in studying parent involvement. Table 4 reveals literature which points to principals' influence on parent involvement. Lloyd-Smith and Baron (2010) revealed that principal's perceptions and beliefs of parent involvement shape staff perception of involvement. Sanders and Harvey (2002) show the significance of a school leaders role in community involvement. Griffith (2001) examined principals' behaviors while attempting to build consensus with parents. Auerbach (2007) examined factors that facilitate or inhibit leadership traits that support parent engagement. Flynn and Nolan (2008)

surveyed 144 principals to determine what supports principals offer teachers to encourage parent involvement. Gordon and Louis (2009) used the factor analysis and regression model to examine the effect principal leadership style has on community involvement. Richardson (2009) examined principals' roles as facilitators in parent involvement and their beliefs regarding parent involvement.

Table 3

A Brief Summary of the Literature on Parent Involvement

| Year | Researcher | Findings |
|--|------------------|---|
| 1995, 1997 (with Sandler), & 2005 (with Sandler) | Hoover-Dempsey | Focused on parent's motivations to become involved in their child's education. |
| 2001 | Epstein | Identified six types of involvement to describe parent participation in their child's education. |
| 2001 | Fan | Positive effects of parent involvement exist across racial groups. |
| 2002 | Henderson & Mapp | Published a comprehensive literature review of 51 studies that describes the influence of parent and family involvement related to student outcomes. |
| 2004 | Barton et al. | Non-English speaking parents struggle trying to negotiate with the various aspects of parent involvement. |
| 2005b | Jeynes | Found a positive correlation between parent involvement and academic achievement for minority students in high poverty low-socioeconomic urban schools. |
| 2010 | Hiatt-Michael | Parent involvement in secondary school promotes student achievement. |

Table 4

A Brief Summary of the Literature of Principals (Site Administrators) and Parent Involvement

| Year | Researcher | Findings |
|------|---------------------|---|
| 2002 | Sanders & Harvey | School leaders create welcoming programs to connect with families, invite involvement, and address specific parental needs. |
| 2001 | Griffith | Encourages creating positive parent relationships on campus. |
| 2007 | Auerbach | Principals (site administrators) perceived parent involvement less as a tool for empowerment and more as a strategy for improvement. |
| 2008 | Flynn & Nolan | Principals support teachers with technology based parents involvement communication methods; with the primary method being the Internet. |
| 2009 | Gordon & Louis | Principals are the leaders responsible for creating shared leadership roles and responsibilities in the school community. |
| 2009 | Richardson | Principals facilitate parent involvement more than become partners in the process of decision making. |
| 2010 | Lloyd-Smith & Baron | Principal's (site administrator) attitude toward parent involvement shapes staff perspectives on parent outreach and fostering involvement. |

Conclusion

Parent involvement is important (Conley, 2012) and a school's success is often determined by the successful implementation of parent involvement by the school leader (Cotton & Mann, 1994). Educators, politicians, and policy reformers agree of the importance of parent involvement and have made parental involvement a national agenda item (Cutler, 2000). Still, increased awareness of the specific pathways to implement a successful parent involvement program are necessary to establish, maintain, and empower parents in urban schools. In the review of the literature on parent involvement evidence shows that students perform better when

parents are involved K-12 (Griffiths-Prince, 2007). Therefore, increasing levels of parent involvement in urban school can positively effect student achievement. Knowing that participation decreases in middle schools, the challenge to maintain parent involvement throughout middle school is great for secondary school leaders. Because of this, schools must employ strategies to increase parent involvement during middle school, especially in urban middle schools due to the extraneous factors and the barriers parents face with involvement.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview of Research Design

This qualitative study explored site administrators' perceptions of parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools and identify parent involvement practices and strategies that improve communication between home and school. Qualitative research refers to the “systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 364). According to Creswell (1998), research questions should be restatements of the essential purpose of the study. To answer the research questions, this qualitative study explored the perceptions of a maximum of 20 charter school site administrators in Southern California, primarily Los Angeles County. This qualitative study utilized the semi-structured long interview process (McCracken, 1988; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006). The objective of this qualitative study is to answer the following research questions:

1. How do charter middle school site administrators define and view parent involvement in urban Title I public charter schools?
2. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant barriers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools?
3. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant enablers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools?
4. What campus programs, workshops, and participation incentives do charter middle school site administrators offer parents to create positive outcomes for parent involvement on their public charter middle school campuses?

5. Which specific outreach strategies, if any, have increased parent involvement at the urban Title I charter middle schools?

This study represents a collection of interviews of site administrators relating to their current perceptions of parent involvement on their middle school charter campus. The primary instrument in qualitative research data collection according to Creswell (2003) is the researcher. The researcher collected and analyzed administrators' perceptions regarding parent involvement at their current middle school. Data was collected via in-depth individual interviews with site administrators. Participants' openness and willingness to describe their leadership experiences related to parent involvement is the core value of this qualitative study. "The distinctive point of view is that human behavior is best understood in its real world context" (Isaac & Michael, 1997, p. 219).

Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative research method shaped this study due to the subjective nature of the participant's responses. This approach is most appropriate as it allows the researcher to comprehend the real meaning of the participants' perspectives about the phenomenon (Lim, 2009). Participants' perceptions were obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Study participants describe their definitions, ideal roles, structures, barriers, and enablers in their own words. The researcher explored responses and probe for clarification to support emergent themes of enablers and barriers that existed around parent involvement and empowerment. Through understanding the perceptions of site administrators, and by understanding the multiple perceptions held by the participants, we can capture a more detailed sense of the benefits and challenges surrounding parent involvement at the charter middle school level. Isaac and Michael (1997) emphasize the benefits of the qualitative method asserting: "Qualitative methods

normally are preferred to quantitative ones because they adapt more readily to multiple realities; ...And are more adaptable and sensitive to the variety of influences and value patterns encountered” (p. 220).

The purpose of this study is to identify what similarities if any exist among the perception of school leaders regarding barriers and enablers to parent involvement in low income Title I charter middle schools. Subsequent to identifying the barriers and enablers to parent involvement, recommendations will be provided to middle school administrators to better assist them in the process of fostering parent involvement on their campuses. More specifically, the following are the specific aims of this study: (a) understand the views of site administration in regards to their ability to involve parents on their campus (i.e., administration responsibilities in establishing parent involvement structures, having a realistic understanding of parent involvement responsibilities, meeting the diverse needs of parents in their schools, supporting a variety of parents, and the management of parent involvement structures); (b) recognize the personal attributes and motives of school administrators that may influence parent involvement, as well as their reported comfort levels creating parent involvement structures for parents of different cultural backgrounds from their own; and (c) identify the perceived quality and comprehensiveness of parent involvement on their campuses.

The following sections describe the setting, sample population, procedures, interview protocol, and procedures in detail.

Setting. Participants in this study were current charter middle school site administrators (i.e., principals and assistant principals) serving in schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) boundaries. Data for the district was derived from the most recent survey, most specifically from the 2013-2014 school year, from the Department of Education

website. LAUSD serves a population of more than 640,000 students Grades K-12 spanning an area of 720 square miles including all of the greater Los Angeles area and 31 surrounding smaller cities. Currently, 241 charter schools exist in the district and 84 are charter middle schools; 81 have a Title I classification.

Of the different types of middle schools represented in LAUSD, the researcher focused on urban Title I charter middle schools because of the small school environment and focus on parent involvement and community development. This study explored the perceptions of site administrators who have experienced barriers and enablers to parent involvement on their campuses. Administrators were selected as participants because of their commitment to working with parents of students in Title I charter schools. Small Title I charter schools, in particular, were selected for this study to establish homogeneity within the sample size. The study took into consideration the variation among parent involvement across schools and acknowledges the many types of involvement.

Description of sampling methods. Critical in qualitative research is the purposive selection of participants. From the total population of approximately 81 charter middle schools serving populations classified as Title I, a purposive sampling of 10 site administrators were selected for the study. The rationale for purposefully choosing 10 participants is that this number provided enough variety and rich data to truly represent the population. Purposeful sampling “increases the likelihood of uncovering the full array of multiple realities as well as maximizing the investigator’s accounting for the nature of conditions, interactions, and values that might be useful in assessing transferability” (Isaac & Michael, 1997, p. 220).

To arrive at a purposeful sample, participants for this study were identified through a multi-step process using criterion sampling and snowball sampling. The technique of criterion

sampling focuses on individuals who meet a specific criterion (Creswell, 2007). Participants are enlisted based on common middle school site leadership experiences and school type. In the initial stage of inquiry, individual participants were identified that met the specified criteria according to the follow attributes: (a) site administrators working in California charter middle schools, (b) school site administrators with at least one year leadership experience, (c) site administrators who worked in charter schools that had been in operation 10 years or less, (d) administrators working within a similar student demographic and (e) currently administrators at a school site with a population of 500 middle school students or less. Recruitment of these participants was facilitated by the researchers professional position as a former school site administrator in a low-income charter middle school. Thereafter, the researcher was introduced to participants by snowball sampling; meaning all successive participants named by a preceding individual (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The rationale for selecting this group is that emerging themes and patterns can lead to meaningful conclusions and thus provide meaningful generalization within the population of middle school site administrators.

Snowball or chain sampling was used through networking to locate information-rich key informants (Patton, 2002). Participants to be identified fit all the site administrator criterion requirements although they did not necessarily subscribe to the same opinions and experiences about the topic as the referring individual. The researchers professional reputation and experience as a site administrator in charter middle schools facilitated the introductions and all participants agreed to participate in the study. The researcher asked identified participants for additional people of interest. Prospective participants identified through this sampling method were contacted and invited to participate in the study via electronic mail or by phone call.

The research used the long interview method of inquiry with charter middle school site leaders. This semi-structured interview protocol was used with school leaders from the selected charter schools to find out more about: barriers and enablers to parent involvement, potential resources needed to sustain structures that enable involvement, and the impact of strategies currently being employed that lead to parent empowerment. The final study sample included 10 school leaders from different Title I charter middle schools, to ensure that the sample for this qualitative study was, “not too large that it became difficult to extract thick, rich data” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 242). School leaders include Principals and Assistant Principals.

Description of sample participants. A total of 10 site administrators representing various charter middle schools participated in this study. The sample size contained no more than 10 site administrators ranging from experience of 1 year to 5 years of charter school site leadership experience. The 10 participants were drawn from schools serving urban populations, specifically those qualified as predominantly Title I in metropolitan Los Angeles.

Human Subject Protection

This qualitative study was completed in accordance with guidelines and regulations established by Pepperdine University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and presented minimal risk to participants.

Informed consent. Site administrator participants were given an informed participant consent form (see Appendix A). Forms distributed, approved by the university’s institutional research review board, fully disclosed the intent of the study and specified that participants can withdraw anytime without penalty. Further all forms specified that the participant is not required to participate.

Risk minimization and benefit maximization. There were very minimal risks for participants in this study. The probability and magnitude of the risk expected in the research was no greater than those regularly experienced in the day to day leadership experiences of the site administrators. There were no medical procedures, drugs, or medical devices involved in this study. Participation is voluntary and at will. Site administrators benefit from this study and the findings associated with this research by understanding essential themes that emerge as a result of the study. The findings from this study contribute to the limited research conducted in the area of perceptions of parent involvement in title I charter middle schools. Participants were not compensated; however, to show appreciate, the researcher sent written thank you cards to each participant.

Confidentiality and data management. Administrator data will be kept confidential so no publically shared information will be linked to the participant. All identifying information of the participant will be kept confidential. Some of the practices for maintaining participant confidentiality include: the use of pseudonyms, anonymous school names, using codes, and storing data on password protected files. All instruments used including digital recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed or deleted five years post study completion.

Data Collection Procedures

Preliminary matters. The researcher obtained approval from the IRB of Pepperdine University, prior to the collection of data. Data collection through open semi-structured interviews occurred in the natural setting, the campus of the site administrator being interviewed. Interviewing creates a space for the participant and interviewer to “work together to arrive at the heart of the matter” (Tesch, 1994, p. 147). All interviews were conducted face-to-face. Participants were asked to reflect on their experiences as site administrators at Title I charter

middle schools at the respective school where they lead. The researcher scheduled data collection location and time individually for each participant according to the participant's availability and convenience. Schedule conflicts were rescheduled. Site administrators interviews lasted between 25 - 60 minutes; all interviews were recorded. This length of time is considered appropriate since site administrators have limited time during the academic day to take on tasks outside of their leadership responsibilities. Allowing a sufficient window of time for the interview ensured that there was ample time for the study participant to be detailed so that the essence of the study is captured. All site administrators were interviewed during the 2014-2015 calendar school year. The rationale for choosing to do the interviews at this specified period is to capture the perceptions of current practice and strategies administrators are actively using with their parent population. An interview schedule for each participant was created. Site administrator interviews were conducted during the academic day between 8:00 am and 4:00 pm. For site administrators with schedule conflicts, the weekends were used to schedule interviews. In order to avoid distractions and to be able to obtain honest responses about his or her feelings, only the participant along with the researcher was present in the interview. Further limiting the interview to the participant and interviewer ensures research confidentiality.

Assignment to groups. There were no group assignments. Data were collected individually from intact groups. Site administrators were drawn from various Title I charter middle school campuses.

Convening participants. Once the participants were identified, the 10 site administrators were given consent forms as well as interview appointment forms to complete. Appointment forms were issued for participants to fill in their interview time and location preference. These forms were sent electronically via email to all participants identified. Once all forms are received,

the researcher created an interview schedule. The researcher notified the participants by phone of their scheduled interview dates. A reminder email was sent a week in advance of the interview date.

Interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face in person with the researcher and participant present. Before the interview an interview preparation sheet was sent electronically, via email, to all participants. The interview preparation sheet advised the participants of the structure and process they could expect during the interview. The preparation sheet also included the general topic and questions to be covered during the interview so that the participant can prepare in advance. Since all participating site administrators are English speaking no translator was needed during the interviews.

On the day of the interview, the researcher asked the participant for the best private room on campus (either the administrators office, empty classroom, conference room, or any other space that may be applicable) to conduct the interview. The researcher requested that the participant be in a place free from distractions and other individuals. To ensure the room is kept quite and free from distractions all doors, windows, and blinds were be closed. The participant received a copy of the interview preparation sheet and adequate time to read and to ask any questions he/she may have before the interview. During face-to-face interviews phone calls were not be taken. The researcher did not take calls during the interview and requested that the participant not take phone calls during the time of the interview. The researcher reviewed the purpose of the interview and reminded the participant to share his/her honest thoughts, perspectives, and responses. The confidentiality of the participant's responses was reassured and maintained private and secure by the researcher.

The researcher collected data through semi-structured, open-ended interviews. The rationale for the researcher conducting interviews is to gain insight into perspectives and experiences of administrators, “in a way that is unobtrusive, but within a manageable methodological context” (Calvert-Bertrand, 2012, p. 59). As someone who knows the expectations of a site administrator related to parent participation, as well as the operational and academic responsibilities, the researcher is skilled in separating “significant from the superfluous as well as identifying salient features and noteworthy events” (Isaac & Michael, 1997, p. 222).

In order to acquire the most detailed description of site administrator’s perceptions, a semi-structured interview with probing questions were used. The interview protocol consisted of six semi-structured questions (see Appendix B). In the semi-structured face-to-face interviews participants were asked questions to gather information about: the role of administration in involvement, general concerns about involvement, existing communication methods being employed on campus, parents perception of campus activities, and opportunities for empowerment training.

During the interview the researcher requested permission to digitally record the interview. Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed. The researcher also took notes during the interview in case of recording equipment failure. Participants were told that they can signal to request for the recording to be stopped at any time during the interview.

Instrumentation

For this qualitative study the interview is the singular instrument of data collection.

Development of interview instrument. Qualitative research questions should be open-ended and non-directional (Creswell, 2003). The researcher reviewed multiple model structures prior to the creating the instrument for this study. The researcher has developed questions

appropriate to the context of the perception being studied. While most questions were developed before the interview, some follow-up questions were impromptu for the purpose of clarifying or eliciting questions from the participant. Two experts reviewed the interview instrument used for the study to check for content quality and validity. The experts were former administrators with experience in qualitative research studies.

Pilot testing. The interview instrument was pilot tested to ensure its clarity and effectiveness. Lim (2009) states the goals of pilot testing are to ensure that the questions, “elicit responses that correspond to the questions” (p. 23) and “are clearly understood and interpreted by the interviewee” (p. 23). Problems that surface during pilot testing were related to question sequence and question ambiguity. The instrument went through pilot testing (mock interview) with two administrators not a part of the study. The pilot testing in the mock interview took place in a similar environment to the actual study. After the mock interview the researcher followed up with participants and asked the administrator to provide feedback on the questions asked. For problems that surfaced, questions were revised to improve clarity and ambiguity.

Measuring demographics. Demographic information on the administrators’ gender, age, ethnicity, and years as a site administrator, was collected during the interview (see Appendix B). The researcher informed the participants that the demographic information is needed for statistical or information purposes only. The demographic data collected helped familiarize the researcher of the background of the participants.

Data Analysis

Collected data was systematically organized throughout the study. Upon the completion of all interviews conducted for the study, the researcher submitted each interview to an outside person skilled in transcribing. Once transcriptions were returned to the researcher, notes were

sorted and arranged to organize data for analysis. Next, key themes were determined from each set of data sets. Finally, the researcher analyzed the themes identified from the data.

Trained coders. Two doctoral students from the Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology were trained in coding procedures by the researcher. The training and coding process was completed in one day. The coders were professionals with teaching credentials or Tier II administrative credentials. Both coders were fluent in English.

Coding. The researcher and two unbiased trained coders with experience in qualitative research encoded data sources. Unbiased coders completed data coding using a tiered analysis to capture all the specific ideas discussed by the participants. First, coders reviewed transcripts to highlight key statements and phrases. After highlighting segments coders grouped like statements and phrases into categories, “labeling these categories with a term, often a term used by the participant” (Creswell, 2003, p. 92). Each coder worked independently. Following this step, terms were grouped into themes that were separated further into universal themes, secondary themes, unique themes, and outliers. Next, the researcher reviewed the themes alongside the established categories to ensure accurate representation of the data. Finally, to eliminate researcher bias and ensure accuracy the researcher and both coders compared coding notes. The researcher does not use computer qualitative software programming to support coding and data analysis.

Trustworthiness and Validity

The researcher removed researcher bias to ensure trustworthiness and validity. Validity, defined by Creswell (2005), is: “the means that researchers can draw meaningful and justifiable inferences” (p. 600). The researcher also established trustworthiness and validity in two ways. First, a panel of administrators reviewed the interview questions to ensure that questions both

measure the intent of the qualitative study and are aligned to the research questions. The administrators were colleagues of the researcher not participating in the study. These administrators currently work in similar schools to those being studied and better understand the challenges associated with Title I charter middle schools. Secondly, the pilot study revealed both how effectively research questions were answered and potential adjustment to make to clarify research questions.

Written Analysis

After deriving meaning from the data the researcher completed the written analysis. Thorough coding and analysis assisted the researcher in extracting themes from the data and summarizing them for the analysis. A qualitative narrative is the most effective style for the research to share the surfacing themes from the data. According to Creswell (2003) using a narrative to express the results of analysis is commonly used in qualitative research. The qualitative narrative is best to represent the analysis for this study, as it is a “detailed discussions of several themes,” and represents “multiple perspectives from individuals” (p. 194). The written analysis narrative of the researcher presented in Chapter 4 details the emerging themes through critically synthesis of the data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction: Research Purpose and Study Questions

This study explored middle school site administrators perceptions of barriers and enablers to parent involvement in urban title I charter middle schools. The following five research questions guided this study:

1. How do charter middle school site administrators define and view parent involvement in urban Title I public charter schools?
2. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant barriers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision-making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools?
3. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant enablers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision-making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools?
4. What campus programs, workshops, and participation incentives do charter middle school site administrators offer parents to create positive outcomes for parent involvement on their public charter middle school campuses?
5. Which specific outreach strategies, if any, have increased parent involvement at the urban Title I charter middle schools?

Overview of Research Design

This study implemented a qualitative approach. The researcher interviewed Title I site administrators working in urban charter middle schools all located in Los Angeles County. Data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews, containing six questions aligned with nine probing questions; interviews were conducted at the school site with individual subjects.

Interviews were analyzed using a method similar to the data analysis spiral identified by Creswell (2007), thoroughly reviewing interview transcripts multiple times to extract significant statements and key quotes using memos and researcher notes to categorize themes. The transcribed interviews were analyzed and coded to extract themes and identify categories for the purpose of analyzing and identifying existing barriers and enablers to parent involvement in urban title I charter school settings.

Subjects. The 10 site administrators identified to participate in this study were purposely selected because they met the following criteria as described in Chapter 3:

1. Current site administrators working in California charter middle schools,
2. School site administrators with at least one year leadership experience,
3. School Site administrators who worked in charter schools that had been in operation 10 years or less,
4. Administrators working with a similar student demographic, and
5. Currently administrators at a school site with a population of 500 middle school students or less.

The sample population represents a diverse perspective based on age, ethnicity, years of service, and credential program attended.

Site administrator profiles. For the purpose of confidentiality and to maintain anonymity, site administrator's names were not used in any oral or written notes or transcriptions. Instead, each site administrator was given a code consisting of two letters and two numbers to ensure that no one would be able to trace their responses back to them or know that they participated in the study. Table 5 provides a detailed profile of each study participant.

Table 5

Demographics of Site Administrator Participants

| Site admin. | Age | Ethnicity | Do you live in the community you work in? | Years as site admin. at current site | Years as site admin. in current org. | Years as site admin. at other charter middle school sites | Hold an admin. credential (Yes/No) | What admin credentialing program attended | Credentials granted by California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) | Interim positions held prior to becoming a site administrator |
|-------------|-------|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| MSO1 | 25-30 | Caucasian | Yes | 1.5 | 1.5 | N/A | Yes | Loyola Marymount University | Administrative Services Credential (Preliminary) | Data Specialist |
| SA02 | 25-30 | Multiracial White & Mexican | Yes | 3.5 | 3.5 | N/A | Yes | Cal State University Dominguez Hills Loyola Marymount University | Single-Subject Teaching Credential (Clear) Administrative Services Credential | Grade Level Chair Principal Teacher in Residence |
| SA03 | 25-30 | Latino | No | 5 | 5 | N/A | Yes | Loyola Marymount University Cal State University Dominguez Hills | Administrative Services Credential (Pending) Multiple Subject Teaching Credential (Clear) | Grade Level Lead Assistant Principal |
| MSO4 | 31-35 | African-American | No | 2 | 2 | N/A | No | N/A | Single Subject Teaching Credential (English) | English Language Arts Content Lead Teacher |
| SA05 | 31-35 | African-American | Yes | 5 | 5 | N/A | Yes | Loyola Marymount University | Administrative Service Credential (Clear) Single Subject Teaching Credential (English) w/ CLAD | Grade Level Leader Instructional Specialist Literacy Coach |

(continued)

| Site admin. | Age | Ethnicity | Do you live in the community you work in? | Years as site admin. at current site | Years as site admin. in current org. | Years as site admin. at other charter middle school sites | Hold an admin. credential (Yes/No) | What admin credentialing program attended | Credentials granted by California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) | Interim positions held prior to becoming a site administrator |
|-------------|-------|------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| SA06 | NS | NS | No | 2 | NS | NS | Yes | Cal Poly Pomona | Administrative Services Credential (Clear) | Assistant Principal |
| | | | | | | | | | Multiple Subject Teaching Credential (Clear) | Coach |
| | | | | | | | | | | Teacher |
| | | | | | | | | | | Director of New Teacher Support |
| SA07 | 25-30 | Multiracial | Yes | 1 | 1 | 3 | No | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| SA08 | 46-50 | Hispanic | No | 2 | 2 | 2 | Yes | Cal State University Dominguez Hills | Tier I Preliminary Administrative Service Credential | Academy Coordinator |
| SA09 | 30-35 | African American | No | 5 | 5 | N/A | Yes | UCLA | Administrative Services Credential (Clear) | Content Lead Chair |
| | | | | | | | | | Single-Subject Teaching Credential (Math) | Coach |
| | | | | | | | | | | Principal Teacher in Residence |
| SA10 | 36-40 | Asian American | No | 5 | 11 | N/A | Yes | CPACE | Administrative Services Credential (Clear) | N/A |
| | | | | | | | | Cal State University Dominguez Hills | Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential w/ CLAD | |

Note. *NS – Not stated.

Age and ethnicity. Site administrators ranged in age between 25 and 50, four were between the ages of 25-30, two were between the ages of 31-35, one marked 30-35, one recorded 36-40, one was between 46-50, and 1 declined to state. Participants represented a diverse population with 3 African-American, 2 Hispanic/Latino, 2 Multiracial, 1 Asian American, 1 Caucasian, and 1 declined to state.

Years of service as a site administrator. In response to “Years as a site administrator at your current site,” 4 participants responded that they were in their fifth year, 3 responded that

they were in their second year, 1 responded that they were in their 1 first year, 1 responded one and a half years, and 1 responded three and a half years.

Administrative credentials held. The majority (7 of 10) of the charter middle school site administrators interviewed held an Administrative Services Credential granted by CCTC. Of these administrators 4 earned their credential from Loyola Marymount University. One participant was granted state licensure by passing the California preliminary Administrative Credential Examination (CPACE). Two respondents did not hold administrative service credentials.

Organization of Chapter

This chapter is organized following the five guiding research questions presented in Chapter 1. The first section addressed guiding research question one and presents the findings related to site administrator's views and definitions of parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools. The second section addresses guiding research question two and presents the findings related to site administrators perceptions of barrier to parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools. The third section addressed guiding research question three and presents the findings related to site administrators perceptions of enablers to parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools. The fourth section addresses guiding research question four and presents strategies implemented by site administrators to empower parents and families in urban Title I charter middle schools. The fifth section addresses guiding research question five and presents the most successful outreach strategies implemented by site administrators to increase involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools. The final section of this chapter summarizes that essential findings and themes from each research question.

Responses to Research Questions and Findings

The five research questions served as a framework for the semi structured interview questions asked of the study participants. Individual interviews ranged in length from 25 minutes to 60 minutes based on the response of the study participants. Nine of the 10 interviews were conducted at the school site of the site administrator, and 1 was conducted in an off campus location to accommodate the availability and schedule of the study participant. The interviews took place during the academic day. The following sections include a through analysis of the participants responses related to the five research questions. Highlights from participant statements during one-on-one interviews are presented in each section below and identified by Site Administrator (SA) number. These are direct quotes from participants that were collected between the dates of January 2015 and March 2015. All identified themes are categorized to represent participant's responses to each of the five research questions. Each research question contains the overall themes that surfaced based on participant responses. Themes containing like responses from six or more participants are organized in tables with quotes and statements from site administrators. Surfacing themes that represent the perspectives of five or less participants are bulleted and summarized in each of the sections below.

Research Question One Findings – Definitions of Parent Involvement

The first question explored charter middle school site administrator's definitions and views of parent involvement in urban Title I public charter middle schools. Using the participants responses to the two interview questions and one probing question aligned to research question one several definitions emerged. From the 10 verbatim transcripts collected, 86 significant statements were extracted. The extracted statements were then analyzed and categorized to comprise Table 6.

Table 6

Site Administrators' Interview Responses, Key Words, and Statements

| Site Admin. | Definition of Parent Involvement | Role of Administrator in Fostering Parent Involvement | Benefits of Parent Involvement in Middle School |
|-------------|--|---|--|
| SA01 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A student having family support, and engagement and encouragement in pursuing academics whether that's on campus, at home. Somebody who's invested in their education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively reach out and involve parents Have a robust communication strategy Create opportunities for families to engage with school staff Providing them resources on how they can support their students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middle school is like make it or break it. We only have them for 8 to 10 hours a day and so I think having the family on our team is so important. |
| SA02 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent involvement has multiple tiers. Parents come into the school. Parents being involved at home. Supporting the classrooms, Coming to meetings Being involved in their kid's life and education. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a warm and welcoming environment for parents Establish two-way communication with mutual respect, Making sure there is a scope and sequence to parent involvement Being present really. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middle school is such a tricky age. At this age, it is just super powerful to have family invested. |
| SA03 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being an active participant in your child's education. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set the tone for the school culture Be present and available for parents on campus before, during, and immediately after school hours. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is extremely critical. Parents need to be involved as much or more then in elementary. |
| SA04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents taking an active role in what happens with their children academically Interacting with teachers Helping them with their work when they come home, Being an active participant in whatever activities that we have on campus or fundraisers that may add to what we can offer here. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We haven't really figured out this piece. I think that we need to improve by making sure that we are setting very clear parameters, very clear expectations for what we want parents to do and then figure out ways to hold them responsible to those. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The parents working with us is key. |
| SA05 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents being involved in their kid's education It takes several different forms. Helping their kids with their homework Supporting what's happening at the school site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have communication with parents on a weekly basis. Encourage our teachers to have regular involvement. Our teachers are also required to make a phone call to the home at least once | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When it comes to middle school, it's just an awkward phase for kids because they're going through adolescence and they're trying to really negotiate who they are in the world. It's important for parents to |

(continued)

| Site Admin. | Definition of Parent Involvement | Role of Administrator in Fostering Parent Involvement | Benefits of Parent Involvement in Middle School |
|-------------|---|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking questions of their child's teacher • Asking their kids questions about what's happening in school. • On-site engagement • A phone call. It might be an email. It might be them coming to report card pick-up. • Complete volunteer hours at the school site • Be a room parent. • I think it could be external or it could be internal at the school site | <p>every other week - giving parents updates about how their kid is performing at school.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • help kind of usher their kids through that process and to be involved even when their kids probably don't want them to be. • I think it benefits the kids all the way around, both academically, socially and when it comes to accountability at the school site. |
| SA06 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many kinds. • There's involvement in the children's lives. • There's involvement in the school community life. • There's involvement in the community around the school. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well, the role is to do it. We can't work without our parents. • Communicate with the parents • To listen to the parents • To help the parents • To teach the parents. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oh, it's huge. Absolutely huge. • There's this misperception that children need you less as they get older. It's just the opposite. They need you more because the consequences are more permanent as they get older. |
| SA07 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coming to the school and being part of the school and volunteering. • Being involved in knowing what their child is like and what their child is doing day-to-day. • Be willing to take their kids to new experiences, to museums, to anything that betters their lives for their student and for themselves. • Knowing what your child is, who your child is and how to help them or, by helping yourself too, as a parent. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My role is to bridge the gap between the teachers, student and the parent. • Make sure that they have the resources to be able to foster that involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a very crucial time especially since students are not little anymore, but they're not adults. • So parent involvement is very crucial at this point, especially guiding them. It's more of a guiding, having the parent to be able to be there to guide them – the student into the right direction |
| SA08 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe parent involvement works on different levels. • Helping parents to support their students as they go through the learning process and learning what it is to be a support provider for your own child. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating multiple opportunities to develop relationships with the students, with the parents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel like by bringing in genuine opportunities for parents to participate and feel welcome in their school, we can collectively have an impact on the student's development, given the crazy nature of the middle school age level. |

(continued)

| Site Admin. | Definition of Parent Involvement | Role of Administrator in Fostering Parent Involvement | Benefits of Parent Involvement in Middle School |
|-------------|--|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's about creating genuine opportunities for not only parents to support their children, but also have a voice in the development of the school. | | |
| SA09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaching out to the teacher if you have issues Contacting the school if there are problems. Being able to feel comfortable on the school campus. To do anything that you can in your power to make sure your child is successful. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We require 16 volunteer hours for parent to be involved in our school. Provide them every opportunity to be involved. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's definitely critical. It is really critical because this is the time in their lives where they're trying to figure out which direction they should go, either to the left or to the right. Parent guidance is huge because middle school is the time where they get to really understand where they fit in. |
| SA10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making sure your child comes to school and wears their uniform. Attend parent meetings when we ask you to come. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Things people don't realize, as a start-up charter school is you're not just a principal. You do everything. Hold parent meetings at least once a month | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is really, really hard and it gets harder starting in middle school in my experience. Parents just are no longer involved and that's been our hardest thing. |

Arranging the key words and statements from the participant's responses resulted in four themes that emerged for definition of parent involvement, three themes for the role site administrators play in fostering parent involvement, and two themes related to the benefit of parent involvement in middle school. Tables 7-9 display the emerging themes from the 10 site administrators' responses regarding their definitions and views of parent involvement.

Table 7

Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to Definition of Parent Involvement

| Definitions of Parent Involvement Themes | Coded Responses |
|--|-----------------|
| Parent Presence on Campus | 8 |
| Home-School Connections | 7 |
| Involvement Structures Vary | 4 |
| Family Investment | 3 |

Table 8

Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to The Role a Site Administrator Plays in Fostering Parent Involvement

| Role of Site Administrator in Fostering Parent Involvement Themes | Coded Responses |
|---|-----------------|
| School Culture | 5 |
| Home-School Connections | 4 |
| Communication | 4 |

Table 9

Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to Benefit of Parent Involvement in Middle School

| Benefit of Parent Involvement in Middle School Themes | Coded Responses |
|---|-----------------|
| Critical Developmental Phase | 8 |
| Family Investment | 6 |

Table 10 displays the seven collective emerging themes from Research Question One (RQ1) regarding site administrators definition and view of parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools.

Table 10

Collective Emerging Themes Related to Site Administrators Definition and View of Parent Involvement in Middle School

| RQ1 Themes | Definition of Involvement | Site Administrator Role in Fostering Parent Involvement | Benefit of Parent Involvement in Middle School |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|---|--|
| Parent Presence on Campus | X | | |
| Home-School Connections | X | X | |
| Involvement Structures Vary | X | | |
| Family Investment | X | | X |
| School Culture | | X | |
| Communication | | X | |
| Critical Developmental Phase | | | X |

Themes emerging from site administrator responses to definition of parent

involvement. The following four themes: *parent presence on campus, home-school connections,*

involvement structures vary, and *family investment* emerged when participants were asked, “How do you define parent involvement?”

Parent presence on campus. Table 11 displays each site administrator’s key statements in regards to theme one, Parent Presence on Campus. In multiple transcripts site administrators expressed the value of a parent volunteering directly related to the theme of parent presence on campus when responding to the question, “How do you define parent involvement?” This was illustrated in statements from site administrator SA05 and SA07:

- Parents are very hands-on on-site. They complete volunteer hours at the school site (SA05).
- Coming to the school and being part of the school volunteering (SA07).

Table 11

Site Administrator Statements Regarding RQ1 Theme 1 – Parent Presence on Campus

| Site Admin. | Related Statements |
|-------------|---|
| SA01 | • No response connected to theme |
| SA02 | • Parents come into the school...supporting the classrooms, understanding like logistics of what’s happening at all times, coming to meetings. |
| SA03 | • No response connected to theme |
| SA04 | • Being an active participant in whatever activities that we have on campus or fundraisers that may add to what we can offer here. |
| SA05 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are supporting what’s happening at the school site • It could take the form of on-site engagement • Parents are very hands-on on-site. They complete volunteer hours at the school site. • They want to be a room parent. |
| SA06 | • Involvement in the school community life |
| SA07 | • Coming to the school and being part of the school volunteering |
| SA08 | • No response connected to theme |
| SA09 | • Being able to feel comfortable on the school campus |
| SA10 | • Attend parent meetings when we ask you to come |

Three of the seven site administrators made points about the importance of campus support and participating in parent meetings. SA02 states “Parents come into the school -

supporting the classrooms, understanding like logistics of what's happening at all times, coming to meetings." SA04 also mentioned campus participation, "Being an active participant in whatever activities that we have on campus or fundraisers that may add to what we can offer here." SA10 stated "Attend parent meetings when we ask you to come."

Home-school connections. Table 12 displays each site administrator's key statements in regards to theme two, Home-School Connections.

Table 12

Site Administrators' Statements Regarding RQ1 Theme 2 – Home-School Connections

| Site Admin. | Related Statements |
|-------------|--|
| SA01 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursuing academics whether that's on campus or at home I think also providing them resources on how they can support their students. Try to make more of a concerted effort throughout time to involve – to actively reach out and involve parents. |
| SA02 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents being involved at home |
| SA03 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No response related to theme |
| SA04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helping them with their work when they come home |
| SA05 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think it could be at home meaning that they are helping their kids with their homework They're gathering information, they're asking questions of their child's teacher in order to better help at home, they're asking their kids questions about what's happening in school. |
| SA06 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No response related to theme |
| SA07 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My role is to bridge the gap between the teachers, student and the parent. Make sure that they have the resources to be able to foster that involvement. So I go out and look for new resources for them to better themselves, college opportunities, anything that can help the student in the long run. |
| SA08 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating multiple opportunities to develop relationships with the students, and with the parents. |
| SA09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being able to reach the teacher if you have issues, contacting the school if there are problems. Our goal is to provide them every opportunity to be involved. So not necessarily in the classroom because this is middle school, but if we have – we need chaperones on field trips, dances, clothes to be washed, sporting events, things like that. We look for ways for parents to be involved. |
| SA10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No response related to theme |

The theme of Home-School Connections arose when participants were asked the question, “How do you define parent involvement?” Three sub-themes related to Home-School Connections surfaced when participant’s responses were coded: (a) homework, (b) involvement at home, and (c) staff interactions with parents.

Homework. Site administrator’s comments about homework directly related to the theme of home-school connections. This was illustrated in statements from SA04 and SA05:

- Helping them with their work when they come home (SA04).
- I think it could be at home meaning that they are helping their kids with their homework (SA05).

Involvement at home. Site administrators also mention involvement at home. Site Administrator SA01, SA02, and SA05 shared similar statements related to home involvement:

- Pursuing academics whether that’s on campus or at home (SA01).
- Parents being involved at home (SA02).
- They’re gathering information, they’re asking questions of their child’s teacher in order to better help at home, they’re asking their kids questions about what’s happening in school (SA05).

Staff interactions with parents. The participants responses about staff interactions with parents directly relates to the theme of home-school connections. Site administrator SA07 shared, “My role is to bridge the gap between the teachers, student and the parent.” SA08 shared the value in “creating multiple opportunities to develop relationships with the students, and with the parents.”

Involvement structures vary. Site administrators’ key statements in regards to theme three, Involvement Structures Vary illustrate a perception of the importance of recognizing more than one type of parent involvement. The four site administrators that shared responses connected to this theme identified that involvement structures vary by using the phrases;

“multiple tiers,” “different forms,” “many kinds,” and “different levels.” SA02, SA05, SA06 and SA08 stated:

- I think parent involvement has multiple tiers. Parents come into the school, parents being involved at home, supporting the classrooms, understanding like logistics of what’s happening at all times, coming to meetings, just being involved in their kid’s life and education. Whatever that looks like, but there’s definitely tiers to it (SA02).
- To me parent involvement is parents being involved in their kid’s education and to me that takes several different forms. I think it could be at home. I also think it could take the form of on-site engagement, but as an administrator I know that sometimes parents aren’t able to make it to the school site all the time. And so their participation might be a phone call. It might be an email. It might be them coming to report card pick-up two or three times a year or it might be them picking their child up from school. So I know it can take different shapes and forms. So I think it could be external or it could be internal at the school site (SA05).
- There are many kinds. So there’s involvement in the children’s lives. There’s involvement in the school community life. There’s involvement in the community around the school. So all of those have to be touched to make things work (SA06).
- I believe parent involvement works on different levels. And what I mean by that is there is parent involvement in terms of helping parents to support their students as they go through the learning process and learning what it is to be a support provider for your own child. But also parent involvement works in the development of the school as a system. And so that when we’re making decisions from the administrative view or even a teacher view, we’re not doing so in isolation or separate from what parents would hope to see in a school as well. So it’s about creating genuine opportunities for not only parents to support their children, but also have a voice in the development of the school (SA08).

Family investment. Table 13 displays each site administrator’s key statements in regard to theme four, Family Investment. The theme of Family Investment arose when participants responded to the question, “How do you define parent involvement?” Responses suggested that site administrators view every family member as a valuable resource in overall involvement structures as stated by SA01, “Parent involvement would be a student having family support, and engagement and encouragement. Even more broadly if it’s a brother or sister, uncle, or coach, but somebody who’s invested in their education.”

The responses also suggest that site administrators see benefits in off campus exposure that enhances students overall. For example, SA07 states, “They should come to school, they should participate, but at the same time they should be willing to take their kids to new experiences, to museums, to anything that betters their lives for their student and for themselves.” Further, SA09 shared family invested is the willingness, “To do anything that you can in your power to make sure your child is successful.”

Table 13

Site Administrators’ Statements Regarding RQ1 Theme 4 – Family Investment

| Site Admin. | Related Statements |
|-------------|---|
| SA01 | • Parent involvement would be a student having family support, and engagement and encouragement. Even more broadly if it’s a brother or sister, uncle, coach, but somebody who’s invested in their education. |
| SA02 | • Being involved in their kid’s life and education. |
| SA03 | • Being an active participant in your child’s education. |
| SA04 | • I define it as parents taking an active role both in what happens with their children academically |
| SA05 | • No response related to theme |
| SA06 | • Involvement in the children’s lives. |
| SA07 | • I tell parents that part of the involvement is not just coming to the school. It’s just being involved in knowing what their child is like and what their child is doing day to day. • They should come to school, they should participate, but at the same time they should be willing to take their kids to new experiences, to museums, to anything that betters their lives for their student and for themselves. • So parent involvement is, knowing what your child is, who your child is and how to help them. |
| SA08 | • No response related to theme |
| SA09 | • To do anything that you can in your power to make sure your child is successful. |
| SA10 | • No response related to theme |

Themes emerging from site administrator responses to the role a site administrator plays in fostering parent involvement. The following two themes—School Culture and

Communication—emerged when participants responded to the question, “What is your opinion of the role of administrators in fostering parent involvement at your current school site?”

School culture. Site administrator’s key statements related to theme five, School Culture arose when participants responded to the probing question, “What is your opinion of the role administrators in fostering parent involvement at your current school site?” In several of the transcripts participants responses revealed the importance of the administrator’s role in establishing a positive school culture, For example, SA02 stated, “I think definitely the administrator’s job is to provide a warm and welcoming environment for parents (SA02). SA08 also echoed the same sentiments. The participant shared,

I feel like one of the biggest inhibitors is the parents don’t necessarily see administrators as somebody that they would naturally connect to. And so by creating opportunities where I can look them in the eyes and they shake my hand and talk to me and give me an opportunity to find out who they are, that’s hopefully creating a paradigm where they’re – they see me as a human being before a principal. Thus opening up an opportunity for conversation and dialogue.

Responses also suggested that being present is an expectation of site administrators. SA03 shared site administrators, “Set the tone for the school culture and must be present and available for parents on campus before, during, and immediately after school hours.” Similar to SA03, SA02 mentioned being present and the role of forward planning,

But definitely the administrator’s job is, one, making sure there is a scope and sequence to parent involvement and then making sure that any meetings or workshops or trainings that are held have mutual respect and understanding going on. And, two, of course being present. You have to be there at all those things or else you don’t have that face time with your community and your stakeholders.

Communication. Site administrator’s key statements in regards to theme six, Communication arose when participants responded to the probing question, “What is your opinion of the role of administrators in fostering parent involvement at our current school site?”

Five of the study participants mentioned communication in their responses; SA01, SA02, SA05, SA06, and SA07:

- I think it's important to have two-way communication with mutual respect (SA02).
- My role is to communicate with the parents, to listen to the parents, to help the parents, and to teach the parents (SA06).

Participants also mentioned the importance of creating structures for parents and families to communicate:

- Have a robust communication strategy and then also opportunities for families to engage with school staff, not only us, but teachers as well (SA01).
- We encourage our teachers to have communication with parents on a weekly basis. They send home regular reports. In that report, it shares their current grade, their attendance, and any missing assignments that they have. Our teachers are also required to make a phone call to the home at least once every other week to give parents updates about how their kid is performing at school (SA05).
- I facilitate connecting either the parent to the teacher, or connect the teacher to the parent, whichever way meets the communication needs (SA07).

Theme emerging from site administrator responses to benefit of parent involvement

in middle school: Critical developmental phase. The theme Critical Developmental Phase emerged when participants responded to the question, “What do you feel are the benefits of parent involvement in middle school?” Table 14 displays each site administrator’s key statements in regard to theme seven, Critical Developmental Phase.

Table 14

Site Administrator’s Statements Regarding RQ1 Theme 7 – Critical Developmental Phase

| Site Admin. | Related Statements |
|-------------|---|
| SA01 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Middle school is like make it or break it. • We only have them for 8 to 10 hours a day and so I think having the family on our team is so important. I mean we see outliers obviously on either end, but for the majority when the family’s involved, invested, we know that we’re on the same team. And so when we say, “You need to read at home,” they’re |

(continued)

| Site Admin. | Related Statements |
|-------------|---|
| SA02 | <p>to read at home. Or, “You need to go to bed early to get some rest.” They’re going to do those kinds of things.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think middle school is such a tricky age. • I think when you look at parent involvement even for like a 5th through 8th grade, obviously in the 5th grade, there’s a lot more involvement and then it starts to go down the older a student gets. And I think especially in 7th and 8th grade when students are getting those hormones coming through and they’re changing and identity is such a huge issue for a student, that’s when they need the parents the most. • I think because middle school is all about identity and family is such a big part of your identity that particularly at this age – I mean parents – a lot of the social, emotional stuff or even academics – and I do know middle school students are trying to be more independent from their families, there’s a lot of stuff that there needs to be that two-way communication. And so I think at this age, it’s just super powerful to have family invested. |
| SA03 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is extremely critical. • Parents need to be involved as much or more than in elementary. |
| SA04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No response related to theme |
| SA05 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So when it comes to middle school, it’s just an awkward phase for kids because they’re going through adolescence and they’re trying to really negotiate who they are in the world. And they struggle with identity issues and so it’s important for parents to help kind of usher their kids through that process and to be involved even when their kids probably don’t want them to be. • I know that it has an impact on a kid’s academics. And so when parents aren’t involved, it shows through their kids’ grades. It also holds school leaders and teachers accountable because it’s something about that parent that you know will come up there or give you a phone call when something’s not right or even when something’s going well that really kind of heightens your awareness about that particular kid. • So I think it benefits the kids all the way around, both academically, socially and when it comes to accountability at the school site. |
| SA06 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oh, it’s huge. Absolutely huge. • There’s this misperception that children need you less as they get older. It’s just the opposite. They need you more because the consequences are more permanent as they get older. • It’s like in kindergarten, all the parents want to stay all day and come visit and do their little thing. And then by middle school, it’s like, “Okay, bye, honey” and out the car. And that does not work. And so that’s why we encourage the parents to come, to sit in the classes, to have parent conferences – not when things are going badly, but also when things are going well. |
| SA07 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s a very crucial time especially since students are not little anymore, but they’re not adults |

(continued)

| Site Admin. | Related Statements |
|-------------|---|
| SA08 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's a time when they're trying to find themselves, and a time when they start trying to experiment on things. And if parents are not involved in some decisions that they make, because they hear other peers talking about it, it might not be the correct one. • So parent involvement is very crucial at this point, especially guiding them. It's more of a guiding, having the parent to be able to be there to guide them – the student into the right direction. • So middle school is one of those rare ages where students have a lot of ideas and energy and impulses, and they don't always know how to handle them. There is no one stakeholder who is going to be able to manage all those complex driving forces of a middle schooler by his or herself. And so I feel like in terms of a parent, it's one more person within the community that's helping to cultivate the type of character and student that we hope our students would be, that no one in isolation could do. So like there's no way parents could possibly do this by themselves. There's no way a teacher could, but collectively I feel like by bringing in genuine opportunities for parents to participate and feel welcome in their school, we can collectively have an impact on the student's development, given the crazy nature of the age level. |
| SA09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's definitely critical. • It is really critical because this is the time in their lives where they're trying to figure out which direction they should go, either to the left or to the right. And with them swaying back and forth, parent guidance is huge because middle school is the time where they get to really understand where they fit in. And by that I mean, is it, "My parents allow me to do this so I should – if I'm allowed to do this, I need to hang out with kids who also can do that. I'm not allowed to hang out with people who do the opposite of me." Which is hard for middle schoolers because everyone wants to try to fit in, but ultimately what happens is they find like-minded students. So with that being said, with the parent's guidance, it helps direct them in the right path. |
| SA10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the majority of us know and see the benefits of the parents who get involved. There seems to be a direct correlation, the kids with involved parents seem to be better behaved in the classroom. They understand the importance of school. They understand the importance of listening to grown-ups on campus. They understand the need to do their homework because they have an end goal of not only is it important because it's important to my parents. • And so if parents can get involved and come to the workshops to get this kind of information so that they understand and buy in why it's important for them to get involved, why it's important for them to talk to their children about these things. Then there's definitely a direct trickle effect that we see in the kids' behaviors and attitudes. |

This theme emerged when site administrators discussed their view of middle school parent involvement. Four of the nine site administrators that shared responses connected to this

theme stated the importance of parent involvement in middle school using the phrases; “make it or break it,” “critical,” “huge,” and “crucial.” SA08 stated:

There is no one stakeholder who is going to be able to manage all those complex driving forces of a middle schooler by his or herself. And so I feel like in terms of a parent, it’s one more person within the community that’s helping to cultivate the type of character and student that we hope our students would be, that no one in isolation could do. So like there’s no way parents could possibly do this by themselves. There’s no way a teacher could, but collectively I feel like by bringing in genuine opportunities for parents to participate and feel welcome in their school, we can collectively have an impact on the student’s development, given the crazy nature of the age level.

Responses suggest that involving parents is essential during middle school, SA09 shared:

It is really critical because this is the time in their lives where they’re trying to figure out which direction they should go, either to the left or to the right. And with them swaying back and forth, parent guidance is huge because middle school is the time where they get to really understand where they fit in.

Despite the decline in participation from elementary to middle school SA06 stated, “There’s this misperception that children need you less as they get older. It’s just the opposite. They need you more because the consequences are more permanent as they get older.”

Responses suggest that parent participation in middle school is also related to student’s academic success as stated by SA05 “I know that it has an impact on a kid’s academics. And so when parents aren’t involved, it shows through their kids’ grades.”

Research Question Two Findings – Parent Involvement Barriers

The second research question explored charter middle school site administrator’s view of the predominant barriers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision making in urban Title I charter public middle schools.

The interview questions aligned to question two focused on general concerns regarding parent involvement related to three specific areas: communication, volunteering, and parent decision making. Table 15 lists administrator response to question two.

Table 15

Site Administrator Concerns Regarding Communication, Volunteering, and Parent Decision Making

| Site Admin. | Communication | Volunteering | Parent Decision Making |
|-------------|--|---|--|
| SA01 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'd say concerns are definitely the language barrier. The majority of our families don't speak English and the majority of our staff – at least our teaching staff doesn't speak Spanish. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We actually don't have a lot of parent volunteering. And part of that I think is that we don't ask for a lot of it. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Figuring out that balance of how much engagement, how much input, how much decision-making power to give families. We don't have a formalized body or structure for parent decision making outside of the state mandated parent bodies, like SSC. |
| SA02 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The language barrier is huge. The larger parent community doesn't speak the same language as the teachers or administrators Lacking frequent communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing multiple different types of opportunities for parents to volunteer. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel like it's great to invest parents in that, but then some parents may start to believe that they're entitled to making those types of decisions for the school. |
| SA03 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language barrier/bilingualism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited volunteering opportunities. Making volunteering more meaningful for parents. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My main concern is how to effectively involve parents more in campus decision making. Outside of SSC there is no structure or involving parents in decision making. |
| SA04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our communication is fairly one sided | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't think it's necessarily clear the direction of the volunteering that we have. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have the SSC and parents can bring in ideas, but to be honest, based on the ideas they're bringing in, I don't know if they really know the scope of the effect of the SSC |

(continued)

| Site Admin. | Communication | Volunteering | Parent Decision Making |
|-------------|---|--|--|
| SA05 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I always tell staff to over-communicate because I don't care how many ways you slice it, somebody's always going to come back and say, "I didn't know" or "Nobody told me." | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When it comes to volunteering, I think we have to also be clear about what our expectations are and what volunteering looks like for parents in the middle school as kids grow through their adolescent phase. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adversarial relationships between school leadership and parents. |
| SA06 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't have any communication concerns | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No concerns expressed</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No concerns expressed</i> |
| SA07 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A communication gap between teachers and parents. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No concerns expressed</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not a lot of parents want to be like active leaders. It's a little harder to get parents to be that leader and share in decision making. |
| SA08 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I feel we have a diverse communication audience. We have some parents who tweet, some who check the Internet, some who can't read English. And we as a school have to find ways to effectively communicate to all them. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the biggest challenges we have is finding meaningful, relevant ways for parents to get involved that actually highlights the skill set that they bring to the table. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need to explore systems to make sure that the time we're spending together is actually translating into change and action. One of my biggest challenges is ensuring that not only do we provide for them a voice, but then we have systems in place for following up on some of their suggestions that we know would actually benefit the school |
| SA09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More teachers for parents to communicate with. Now instead of an elementary school setting where they only have teacher, now they have seven. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's hard when you have families who work all the time who are unable to be here during regular school hours or sometimes on the weekend. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The place where most parents are able to make decisions is at the board level. Our parents always feel that they have a lot of opinions about things that need to be. |

(continued)

| Site Admin. | Communication | Volunteering | Parent Decision Making |
|-------------|---|--|---|
| SA10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am not bilingual Parents not reading the newsletters, not listening to the voicemail messages, not returning phone calls, not coming to workshops or meetings or seeing the value of that, and then not communicating to their own children let alone to the adults on the campus. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We don't ask for that at all. The reality is we don't really have a bunch of parents in the middle school lining up to volunteer. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a SSC and ELAC committee but the reality is the number of parents that get involved and are engaged is really low. We try to extend the decision-making opportunities, but we're having a hard time getting them involved at that level. |

Separating the key words and responses into groups resulted in six themes. Tables 16-18 highlight the emerging themes captured from the responses of the 10 study participants.

Table 16

Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to General Concerns Regarding Parent Involvement Related to Communication

| Communication Themes | Coded Responses |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Language Barrier | 5 |
| Messaging to Parents & Families | 5 |
| Parent Teacher Communication Gap | 4 |

Table 17

Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to General Concerns Regarding Parent Involvement Related to Volunteering

| Volunteering Themes | Coded Responses |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Clear and Meaningful Expectations | 5 |
| Limited Volunteering Opportunities | 3 |

Table 18

Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to General Concerns Regarding Parent Involvement Related to Parent Decision Making

| Parent Decision Making Themes | Coded Responses |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Lacking Structures outside of SSC | 4 |

These six themes related to site administrator concerns regarding parent involvement specifically related to communication, volunteering, and parent decision making provide an overall essence of site administrators perceptions of potential barriers to parent involvement.

Table 19 displays the collective emerging themes related to research question two.

Table 19

Collective Emerging Themes Related to Site Administrators' Responses to General Concerns Regarding Parent Involvement Related to Communication, Volunteering, and Decision Making

| RQ2 Themes | Communication | Volunteering | Parent Decision Making |
|------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|------------------------|
| Language Barrier | X | | |
| Messaging to Parents/Families | X | | |
| Parent Teacher Communication | X | | |
| Clear and Meaningful Expectations | | X | |
| Limited Volunteering Opportunities | | X | |
| Lacking Structures outside of SSC | | | X |

Themes emerging from site administrator responses to general concerns regarding parent involvement related to communication.

Language barrier. Four of the participants reported that not being fluent in Spanish was a communication concern. SA02 stated, “The language barrier is huge. The larger parent community doesn’t speak the same language as the teachers or administrators.” Similar to SA02, SA01 stated, “I’d say concerns are definitely the language barrier.” Both SA03 and SA10 expressed concerns with not being bilingual when responding during the interview; “Language barrier/bilingualism” (SA03) and “I am not bilingual” (SA10).

Messaging to parents and families. Five of the participants reported a communication concern with messaging to parents for a variety of factors: SA01 stated, “Lacking frequent communication,” while SA04 stated, “Our communication is fairly one sided.” Another communication concern expressed was parent response. SA05 stated, “I always tell staff to over-

communicate because I don't care how many ways you slice it, somebody's always going to come back and say, "I didn't know" or "Nobody told me." Similarly, SA10 mentioned, "Parents not reading the newsletters, not listening to the voicemail messages, not returning phone calls, not coming to workshops or meetings or seeing the value of that, and then not communicating to their own children let alone to the adults on the campus." SA08 described the unique situation of the need to diversify communication. He stated, "I feel we have a diverse communication audience. We have some parents who tweet, some who check the Internet, some who can't read English. And we as a school have to find ways to effectively communicate to all them."

Parent-teacher communication. Three of the study participants expressed the barrier between parent home language and teacher language. SA01 stated, "The majority of our families don't speak English and the majority of our staff – at least our teaching staff doesn't speak Spanish." Similarly SA02 stated, "The larger parent community doesn't speak the same language as the teachers or administrators." Like SA01 and SA02, SA07 expressed a similar concern stating the, "Communication gap between teachers and parents." In addition to language, the expectation to interact with more teachers in middle school was also a concern mentioned regarding parent-teacher communication. SA09 responded, "More teachers for parents to communicate with. Now instead of an elementary school setting where they only have one teacher, now they have seven."

Themes emerging from site administrator responses to general concerns regarding parent involvement related to volunteering.

Clear and meaningful expectations. The site administrators in this study believed that current volunteering structures were lacking clarity and meaning. SA03 shared the desire to for the school to, "Make volunteering more meaningful for parents." SA04 expressed, "I don't think

it's necessarily clear the direction of the volunteering that we have." Similar to both SA03 and SA04, SA05, responded, "When it comes to volunteering, I think we have to be clear about what our expectations are and what volunteering looks like for parents in the middle school as kids grow through their adolescent phase. SA08 shared the challenge he had with creating more meaningful systems for parent volunteering: "One of the biggest challenges we have is finding meaningful, relevant ways for parents to get involved that actually highlights the skill set that they bring to the table."

Limited opportunities for volunteering. Responses from three study participants revealed the perception that there are "Limited volunteering opportunities" (SA03) to involve parents on campus. SA01 states, "We actually don't have a lot of parent volunteering. And part of that I think is that we don't ask for a lot of it." SA09 described these limitations. She shared, "It's hard when you have families who work all the time who are unable to be here during regular school hours or sometimes on the weekend."

Themes emerging from site administrator responses to general concerns regarding parent involvement related to parent decision making.

Lacking structures outside of School Site Council (SSC). Several of the participants reported that their campus was lacking structures to include parents in decision making outside of the SSC. Statements below highlight responses from site administrators:

- We don't have a formalized body or structure for parent decision making outside of the state mandated parent bodies, like SSC. (SA01)
- My main concern is how to effectively involve parents more in campus decision making. Outside of SSC there is no structure or involving parents in decision making. (SA03)
- We have the SSC and parents can bring in ideas, but to be honest, based on the ideas they're bringing in, I don't know if they really know the scope of the effect of the SSC. (SA04)

- We have a SSC and ELAC committee but the reality is the number of parents that get involved and are engaged is really low. We try to extend the decision-making opportunities, but we're having a hard time getting them involved at that level. (SA10)

Probing questions for RQ2. The interview question contained two probing questions that were related to the research question (see Table 20).

Table 20

Probing Questions Related to Research Question Two

| Potential Barriers to Involvement | Probing Questions |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Concerns Regarding Involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have your concerns regarding parent involvement influenced your comfort level participating with parents on campus? |
| Personal Cultural Barrier | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you experienced a personal cultural barrier specifically related to communication, volunteering, or involving parents in decision making on campus? |

Concerns regarding involvement. Participants responses to the probing question, “Have your concerns regarding parent involvement influenced your comfort level participating with parents?” indicate that the majority of the site administrators interviewed have not let concerns influence their participation with parents. Six of the participants responded, “No” to the question. This was illustrated in a statement from SA10: “No. I mean overall I don’t think it has negatively impacted me or my staff’s willingness and efforts to want to reach out to parents. If anything, we’ve been trying to beef up what we currently do to involve them.”

However SA01 and SA02 replied, “Yes,” stating:

- It is unfortunate sometimes when you’ve had an interaction with a family in particular and then you feel the need to phrase this way or that way or be careful about x. y. or z which I mean is just getting to know how to communicate with that family. Every family is going to be different just like every student is different. And some you’ve got to treat a little more lightly than others. But I mean there are always uncomfortable conversations when things don’t go well. (SA01)
- When you do have a group of parents who get very, very upset with you then it’s going to create a barrier to wanting to have an open, respectful, frequent, ongoing dialogue. (SA02)

Personal cultural barrier. Four of the participants reported having experienced a cultural barrier related to parent involvement on campus, specifically due to not speaking Spanish.

Participant SA01, SA02, SA05, and SA08's responses below illustrate this sentiment:

- Language has been a big barrier. I've been working on it. I can do some meetings in person in Spanish. Phone calls are terrifying. (SA01)
- Spanish is definitely a barrier. I've actually tried to learn to speak Spanish. I am part Mexican, but I don't – I never learned the language. So I know that's been I guess a personal barrier, like a personal challenge. And I do feel like if I was able to speak Spanish, I probably would be able to connect with some of the parents who have these different mindsets. I think that would be a nice thing for me to be able to do. I think the Spanish speaking barrier is one that like I internally know that I need to be able to do, but I think it is difficult. For example, if I do have an angry parent come in and of course I'm going to have them come in, then, instead of saying, "Oh, let me get a translator," it would be nice if I was able to build those ties. (SA02)
- Not cultural for me, but more of a language barrier. (SA05)
- I feel sometimes there's still a barrier because Spanish is my second language and so I can't speak to the same level that I can in English. And I find it sometimes very frustrating because I'm trying to speak to a parent sometimes, a very – around a very delicate situation and I feel that I don't necessarily have the skill set to communicate the way that I would want to. And it's an area that I'm continuously working on. (SA08)

Contrary to language being a barrier, SA10 shared:

I do not think my not being able to speak Spanish fluently has affected my ability to still interact and run the school. I feel like overall parents have told me they appreciated my hard work with learning the language. Some of them have even said, "I appreciate that you're not even Latino and you're helping to serve our community. You're not from this community. You're not the same ethnicity and yet we see how hard you work for our kids. Thank you." So parents have said that to me on multiple occasions and noticed and that kind of blows them away even more. They have more respect because they see me trying. They've said, "Wow, you care this much and like you're not even of a similar background."

However, SA01 and SA04 shared different perspectives as site administrators being from a cultural background different from students and families:

- I don't share the same background, as 99% of our students, so it's definitely been a barrier – I think it was a bigger challenge when I started but it is still present. And so I think building individual relationships is key (SA01).
- I think parents find me intimidating. I don't feel like I'm rude to people or like I feel like I'm a scary person. I just think that I'm a 6'2" black guy. And so it's just a little bit harder to approach me than it is to approach most of the other people who work here who don't look anything like me (SA04).

Another barrier expressed was that of family composition related to decision making. SA01

stated:

One concern that's voiced often is parents will say, "Well, you don't have kids." Which is not cultural but I guess it could be semi-cultural or just like an interesting presumption of because you don't have kids, you don't know what's best for kids.

Research Question Three Findings – Parent Involvement Enablers

The third research question explored what charter middle school site administrators view as predominant enablers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision making in urban Title I public charter middle schools.

The interview question related to research question three asked site administrators about current communication methods being used on campus that make parents feel comfortable attending on site campus meetings and events and participating in shared decision making on site.

Table 21 lists site administrator responses.

Table 21

Communication Methods that Make Parents Feel Comfortable Attending On-Site Meetings and Campus Events and Participating in Shared Decision Making

| Site Admin | Related Statements |
|------------|---|
| SA01 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a lot of walk-ins. I'd say parents like to meet in person. I mean we had three drop in today asking, "Can we meet with you?" I don't know if it's a cultural barrier or if it's a communication – but we've found that families aren't as apt to set appointments. And so we have a lot of walk-ins. They're like, "I need to meet with you now." And we'll say, "I can see you at 1:30. I have an opening." And we get a |

(continued)

| Site Admin | Related Statements |
|---------------|--|
| | little pushback on scheduling an appointment; “You should be available to meet with me in this moment.” It’s difficult sometimes, but I mean nothing replaces face to face. |
| SA02 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have about 150 students per grade level and they have their own individual counselor connector. They’re almost like that first step in that sequence of communication where if a parent has a question, they can always reach out to the student’s connector |
| SA03 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translating all communication sent home inviting parents to attend events. Providing Spanish translation during parent meetings. Interactions with parents during drop-off and dismissal |
| SA04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think that it all starts with just having – I think parents just kind of want an access point. And if there’s only one access point and that access point doesn’t appeal to you, then you just don’t come in. So now we have several access points to make it a little bit easier for a parent to say, “Okay, I’ll come on campus and ask how I can help.” |
| SA05 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have our parent group and they meet every other month and then alternating months, we have three committees that meet. So they have their committee meetings on alternate months and then they report out on their committee’s work at the whole group that happened the following month. That’s been a way for them to get involved and also kind of serves as a school site council, too. So we have parent officers and each one of those officers also leads a committee. |
| SA06 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> So the personal one. I’m always out in front of school in the morning and in the afternoon. We have a website, which also does Google Translate on it so there’s the calendar and the agenda. Also on our website, we’re all listed so the parents can click to email us so they don’t have to do anything interesting to email us. I have a parent liaison. We make tele-parent calls. We have a calendar that we send out all the time. And every time someone comes in, I give them my card so my email’s on there. So they email us, they call us, and we call them. They come – just come by, drop in without appointments. |
| SA07 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I go out outside, and talk to the parents. Say, “Here – here’s a flyer. How are you? Have you gotten all the flyers?” Just trying to see, like, “Okay, have you received everything?” We have an open door policy. They can always come in and any questions they have, they can express them with an administrator face-to-face. We do phone blasting in addition to newsletters and flyers. We have a town hall. That’s where we inform all the parents that they have a voice. We let them know that if they have any questions or concerns, they can come let us know. |

(continued)

| Site Admin | Related Statements |
|------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We also have a parent meeting every month and that's where the leadership parents come and they get to interact with other parents and participate in decision-making. We have two parents that are on the board that make most of the decisions regarding but then we communicate that with the leadership committee so they have an opportunity to hear that to share with other parents. |
| SA08 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recently developed a paradigm where our parents now come to the monthly parents meetings in their own language |
| SA09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The website. We have what's called School Reach. This particular program emails and sends voicemail messages and text messages to parents about any event that we have on campus for those parents who don't necessarily have computer access but have a phone. |
| SA10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We send weekly newsletters that are sent home with the kids We use the One Call system to blast information. Either parents pick up the phone and they'll hear the recorded message about an event coming up or it'll get recorded on their voicemail if they have a voicemail. We stand out there when the kids are being picked up or dropped off and we pass out flyers or we have a big sign out there, "Reminder! Parent meeting tonight." We have the required ELAC – English Language Advisory Committee. |

Responses from study participants resulted in four themes. Table 22 represents the four emerging themes related to communication methods that support parent campus attendance and participation in decision making.

Table 22

Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to Communication Methods that Make Parents Feel Comfortable Attending On-Site Campus Meetings/Event and Participating in Shared Decision Making

| Communication Methods that Support Campus Attendance and Shared Decision Making Themes | Coded Responses |
|--|-----------------|
| Interactions During Arrival and Dismissal | 4 |
| Technology | 4 |
| Spanish Translations | 3 |
| Open door policy | 3 |

These four themes related to site administrator concerns regarding parent involvement specifically related to communication methods that enable parent involvement on campus and support decision making provide an overall essence of site administrators perceptions of

potential enablers to parent involvement. The sections below highlight key statements from the participants related to each theme.

Interactions during arrival and dismissal. These responses from SA03, SA06, SA07, and SA10 illustrate the perception of the importance of the role that the site administrator's presence plays in communicating with parents:

- Interactions with parents during drop-off and dismissal. (SA03)
- So the personal one. I'm always out in front of school in the morning and in the afternoon. (SA06)
- I go out outside, and talk to the parents. Say, "Here – here's a flyer. How are you? Have you gotten all the flyers?" Just trying to see, like, "Okay, have you received everything?" (SA07)
- We stand out there when the kids are being picked up or dropped off and we pass out flyers or we have a big sign out there, "Reminder! Parent meeting tonight." (SA10)

Technology. Several site administrators mentioned the use of various types of technology (school website, phone blast systems, and texting services) to communicate with parents:

- We have a website, which also does Google Translate on it so there's the calendar and the agenda. Also on our website, we're all listed so the parents can click to email us so they don't have to do anything interesting to email us. We also make tele-parent calls. (SA06)
- We do phone blasting in addition to newsletters and flyers. (SA07)
- The website. We also have what's called School Reach. This particular program emails and sends voicemail messages and text messages to parents about any event that we have on campus for those parents who don't necessarily have computer access but have a phone. (SA09)
- We use the One Call system to blast information. Either parents pick up the phone and they'll hear the recorded message about an event coming up or it'll get recorded on their voicemail if they have a voicemail. (SA10)

Spanish translation. Two site administrators expressed the importance of Spanish translation when hosting parent meetings on campus. SA03 stated, "Translating all

communication sent home inviting parents to attend events, and recently providing Spanish translation during parent meetings” in response to the question regarding predominant enablers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication. SA08 also confirmed the importance of Spanish translation in their response:

We recently developed a paradigm where our parents now come to the monthly parents meetings in their own language. Before, we started off with the English presentation and then the Spanish translator would repeat or translate to the general audience. But we found that just to truly honor parents for the language and their time that we decided to divide it up. So now we have an English meeting, and we have a Spanish meeting. One of the things that I think has become evident is the comfort level of the Spanish speaking parents. They seem like they’re now more open to voicing their questions or their concerns, because they’re saying it in Spanish and everybody in their room is speaking Spanish and they’re – it just seems like it’s a different feeling than when they’re necessarily saying it in English. It’s not that they would – they were uncomfortable. I just feel like I’m seeing or witnessing a greater level of comfort.

Open door policy. In three of the transcripts site administrators mentioned being available for parents to stop by without appointments. Responses suggest that maintaining an open door policy supports parents preference for face-to-face communication with administrators:

- We have a lot of walk-ins. I’d say parents like to meet in person. I mean we had three drop in today asking, “Can we meet with you?” I don’t know if it’s a cultural barrier or if it’s a communication – but we’ve found that families aren’t as apt to set appointments. And so we have a lot of walk-ins. They’re like, “I need to meet with you now.” And we’ll say, “I can see you at 1:30. I have an opening.” And we get a little pushback on scheduling an appointment; “You should be available to meet with me in this moment.” It is difficult sometimes, but I mean nothing replaces face-to-face. (SA01)
- They come – just come by, drop in without appointments. (SA06)
- We have an open door policy. They can always come in and any questions they have, they can express them with an administrator face-to-face. (SA07)

Probing questions for RQ3. Three probing questions related to research question three allowed site administrators to describe what school based factors contributed to parent

involvement practices that fostered parent comfort levels visiting, participating, and volunteering on campus (see Table 23).

Table 23

Probing Questions Related to Research Question Three

| Types of Involvement | Probing Question |
|----------------------|---|
| Communication | • Which methods of communication do parents use to interact with teachers and staff? |
| Volunteering | • What approaches are in place to recruit and support parent volunteering? |
| Decision Making | • What structures exist to support and involve parents in shared decision making on site? |

Site administrators' responses to the three probing questions related to question three resulted in the following themes: technology, weekly reports, dedicated staff, missing structures to support volunteering, and parent surveys.

Communication. Participants' responses to the probing question related to communication resulted in two surfacing themes. The first theme to emerge from the probing question on communication was the use of technology as a primary method of parent to teacher communication. The second was weekly reports.

Technology. Eight of the participants mentioned the use technology: email, phone calls, texting, or school website.

Email. SA01, SA03, SA08, and SA09 highlight the use of emails as a primary method of communication between parents and teachers.

- I'd say email is popular among some of our families (SA01)
- Email (SA03)
- I do know that parents utilize emails (SA08)
- Parents email (SA09)

Not all of the participants believed email was a successful method of communication, SA05, SA07, and SA10 mentioned parent lack of access to technology and limited English proficiency as a deterrent to the use of email for parent-teacher communication:

- I don't know of a lot of parents that use email at our school site. I think just their confidence with the written language it, 'cause we do have a high population of Spanish speakers. And just access to technology may be reasons why they don't use electronic communication. (SA05)
- Parents know they can email a teacher, but usually the language barrier kind of influences the emails so they communicate with me and I'll set up a conference and translate for them. (SA07)
- A small percentage of parents do send emails to teachers and staff if they have email and feel comfortable, but the majority of our families either because they don't have technology or they don't feel comfortable with it or don't have personal email addresses and they also don't speak English usually don't use email. Also a lot of our teachers do not speak Spanish. So that affects the ability for parents to communicate with them so most of the time they'll call or come in person because our office staff are all bilingual. (SA10)

Phone. Four of the participants reported the use of phone calls as a method of communication SA02, SA03, SA05, and SA08 stated:

- I think most families are way more comfortable picking up the phone and calling the front office than checking our calendar online. (SA02)
- Calls (SA03)
- They will call them on their cell phones (SA05)
- Parents call and leave voice mails, messages for teachers. And then there are a number of our teachers who have shared out their cell phones then our parents actually reach out to them using that as well. (SA08)

Texting. Four of the participants mentioned texting. SA02, SA03, AND SA04 shared:

- Texting is another one that parents have gotten used to especially because we have the Remind 101 and the texts go home – homework is missing. (SA02)
- Texting. (SA03)

- Remind 101 text message system that we have it set up for each grade level so we can text out grade level lists to parents, receiving updates from us. (SA04)

School website. SA01 and SA04 mentioned the use of the school website, “We have our website which we kind of think of as like the golden ticket to everything. It’s in one place and it’s all clear and the calendar’s there.” (SA01) Similarly, SA04 responded, “We have our school website and teacher websites where they can send message to teachers and they use that pretty frequently.”

Weekly reports. Two site administrators stated the use of weekly academic and behavior reports as a method of parent teacher communication.

- We send home student weekly communication and student updates each Friday. Families know, “That’s what I need to look at. That has everything that’s pertinent.” And so that’s actually hand delivered. There’s no, “I didn’t get the phone call. I don’t have internet.” But then it takes it back to relying on the student to deliver that information. There is also a place where parents can reply and ask questions on the report. (SA01)
- We actually send out weekly progress reports (SA04)

Volunteering. Three themes surfaced from site administrators’ responses to the probing question related to volunteering. The first theme to emerge from the probing question on volunteering was the role of staff on site dedicated to involving parents and providing volunteering opportunities. Second was the mention of technology as a tool to recruit and involve parents. Last was the theme, missing structures to support volunteering.

Dedicated staff. Specific staff position on campus dedicated to parent volunteering and outreach. Both SA06 and SA09 stated having staff on campus responsible for involving parents:

- I have a parent liaison who actually does a really, really good job with that. She runs Saturday academies, which are different types of – not necessarily parenting classes, but like topics of interest to parents. So maybe like drug awareness, bullying, nutrition. Just the whole – computer use, computer safety, the whole gamut of things. Often she’ll say, “Bring a friend. Tell a friend.” We have sort of the parent – not

necessarily a phone tree, but a parent tree you know, telling one parent to tell another parent. We have to activate what I call the mommy network. (SA06)

- We have a parent coordinator whose strict job is to go out to the parents to say, “These are our needs.” And so, for example, if we have a field trip, she’ll send a sign up ____ for parents who may be interested in that. And parents contact her directly about any other opportunities that may exist within the school. So instead of communicating with the whole entire parent body, we communicate with this particular parent coordinator who trickles down the information to the rest of the parent body. (SA09)

Technology. The use of school-based websites surfaced when participant SA04 stated, “We’re actually making better efforts at keeping everything more updated and open. Like making sure everything’s on the website, making sure we have a lot of ways the parents know they can interact with the school.”

Similar to SA04, SA08 mentioned the use of technology via Facebook:

When we need volunteers for an activity we always post on Facebook. When we had our turkey bowl, where we literally walked 480 students to the park down the street, we put something on Facebook and we had like five parent volunteers who stood as crossing guards on every street crossing along the way. It was effective.

Missing structures to support volunteering. Two of the site administrators reported having missing structures to recruit and involve parents in volunteering. SA03 stated, “We can work to improve in area,” and SA10 responded, “Currently, no specific structures exist.”

Decision making. Two themes emerged from participant responses to the probing question, “What structures exist to support and involve parents in shared decision making on site?” The first theme to emerge from the probing question regarding structures to support and involve parents in decision making was the mention of limited structures for decision making. Second was the use of parent surveys to support decision making.

Limited structures for decision making. Four of the participants reported not having existing structures outside of School Site Council (SSC) and ELAC.

- Essentially we only have SSC. We have an election among families and they elected two parent representatives. And so they sit on the council with principals and two teachers. (SA01)
- We have a school site council, which we're required to have with Title I funds. That's a great way to talk about school wide data, school wide goals. What are we seeing? What are some trends? What's the input that you have? (SA02)
- Single plan for student achievement (SPSA). So the parents right now are helping us establish our goal for that. So we've been collaborating with parents who attend meetings and give their opinions. We're sharing our data, they're giving their input, and then we're creating goals together. (SA03)
- We currently only have structures in place for our mandated parent committees as required of through Title I – SSC and ELAC. (SA10)

Parent surveys. Two of the participants mentioned decision making as an outcome of responses from parent surveys. SA02 and SA04 shared:

- We have school wide surveys so not only with students, with parents. And so we give it twice per year. We're able to look at that and disaggregate the data and say okay, we see parents are seeing a concern here. Let's talk about that. What can we do? What are our next steps? (SA02)
- We did a school wide survey that we administered at report card pick-up so we got a 90% participation rate where parents identify what they think our strategic priorities should be. (SA04)

Research Question Four Findings – Parent Involvement Empowerment

The fourth research question explored campus programs, workshops, and participation incentives charter middle school site administration serving urban Title I populations offer parents to create positive outcomes for parent involvement on their campus.

The interview question aligned to research question four asked site administrators, “What involvement structures have the school site administration established to empower parents?”

Table 24 lists site administrators' responses.

Table 24

Site Administrators' responses to Types of Involvement Structures Established to Empower Parents

| Site Admin. | Related Statements |
|-------------|--|
| SA01 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think we've really tried to focus on education, which I think is a form of empowerment |
| SA02 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honestly, we have no structures at present. |
| SA03 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's the whole idea of like family night. We want to give them things that they can do to better support their students. We try to build capacity with our parents to support learning at home. So like we did a huge Common Core workshop series with them. We want to increase the skill and capacity of our parents. We believe that we're empowering parents because we're keeping them up to date with the times and changing educational landscape. |
| SA04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent ambassadors College knowledge academy Connectors Spanish classes for parents Making sure that parents have all the information possible so they can ask the right questions is another part. |
| SA05 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working alongside with the school leaders as co-chairs on committees |
| SA06 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I don't know that we have that structure because the way we run the school is that we're all in one community. |
| SA07 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly parent academies Parent Leadership Network ELA classes for parents |
| SA08 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent Ambassador Program Creating diverse two-way communication streams for parents |
| SA09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents have 24/7 access to real-time grades and teacher comments Email access to administration with an immediate response from admin |
| SA10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School Site Council ELAC Committee Parent meetings Created an on-line Parent Portal with real-time feedback on student academics and behavior Established a Parent Coordinator |

Table 25

Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to Types of Involvement Structures Established to Empower Parents

| Involvement Structures Established to Empower Parents Themes | Coded Responses |
|--|-----------------|
| Parent Leadership | 3 |
| Academic Transparency | 3 |
| Parent Education | 2 |

These three themes identified in Table 25 related to site administrators' responses to types of involvement structures established to empower parents provide an overall essence of site administrators perceptions of potential enablers to move parents beyond campus involvement towards empowerment. Six of the 10 participants interviewed shared responses that directly related to the themes below.

Parent leadership. Participant responses to the theme, Parent Leadership reveal the success from involving parents in parent involvement outreach. SA05 summarized this best with the comment:

I think working alongside the school leaders as co-chairs on various committees empowers parents because it fosters a relationship where in some cases parents might not feel comfortable saying things to an administrator that they may have heard on campus. But when they have a one-on-one relationship with them because they're planning their meetings every other month and they have a standing appointment with an administrator it changes things. They have direct access so if they hear something they can have a voice. I've had an example of a parent who heard something from another parent and the parent was very upset. Well, the parent that they spoke to was a committee chair and that committee chair brought it to an administrator and said, "Hey, this parent said this and she's afraid to come and talk to you. Is it okay if I sit in on – if we schedule a meeting and I sit in on that meeting with her?" So that parent is looked on as a leader from the other parents.

SA07 shared:

We have a group that's called the Parent Leadership Network and they meet once every two months. Once every two months on a Tuesday when we're off for PD, they're meeting. And they go over strategies and anything that has to do with rights and for the school, for the charter schools or anything, overall rights for parents.

Participant SA08 added,

We created a parent ambassador program so that each one of our homerooms has one to two parent ambassadors who work or function kind of like a team mom, so to speak. So that we know we have that person who's in charge of communications from us to the parents, but they're also there to help serve as a parent steering committee for us to share with us information they're getting from their parents who may be much more open to sharing with them than they would, say, knocking on the principal's door.

Academic transparency. Coded responses revealed Academic Transparency as a key factor to empower parents. SA10 shared “We implemented the parent portal so they can see live at any time – real time how their kids are doing academically.” SA09 also noted, “As far as empowering our parents, we give them 24/7 access to real time grades and comments from their teachers.”

SA04 highlights the connection to weekly academic progress reports and parent communication during student led conferencing:

Our ability to make sure that parents regularly have all the information possible so they can ask the right questions about their child's academic success is another part. I think that a parent before wouldn't know exactly how their kid was doing academically so they came to this building and they would be ill prepared to speak to a teacher about it and likely wouldn't get the answer they were looking for. And then they turn to administration and say, “I talked to this teacher. I'm not getting this.” Whereas now parents are equipped with the right tools so by the time they come in for student led conferences, there shouldn't be anything you don't already know. So the student led conferences are actually just a chance for you to talk to your kid. And we get a lot more parents talking throughout the year about.

Parent education. Two of the site administrators interviewed shared the benefits of Parent Education as an empowerment strategy, SA07 shared:

We have Parent Academies once a month. During those parent academies, we teach parents about anything that has to do with college, bullying, anything that will help them better parent or better improve their quality of life. So we also do the ELA classes for them. Anything that helps gives them a voice.

SA01 stated,

I think we've really tried to focus on education, which I think is a form of empowerment. We have quarterly family nights, which include an educational component. The first one was all about how to read a prep report and how to read a report card, and where to go to check a student's grades. The second one was how to support your student at home and focused on the different study strategies they might use – Cornell Notes. We also covered how to use the Internet to find resources? Ultimately, pointing them in that direction.

Probing questions for RQ4. Three probing questions related to research question four allowed site administrators to describe what involvement structures exist on campus that allow parents to participate beyond the realm of campus volunteering (see Table 26).

Table 26

Probing Questions Related to Research Questions Four

| Empowerment Structures | Probing Questions |
|------------------------|--|
| Trainings & Workshops | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are trainings and workshops currently and regularly available for parents? If yes, who leads the trainings and workshops |
| Parent Center | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your campus have a parent center or similar functioning location for parents? |
| Family Interactions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what ways do parents and families interact with each other on campus? |

Site administrators' responses to the three probing questions aligned to research question four revealed specific trainings and workshops implemented on site to empower parents as well as various types of family interactions that exist on urban Title I charter middle school campuses. Responses also revealed the availability and access to parent centers on urban Title I charter middle school sites.

Trainings and workshops: Parent education. Every site administrator stated that they offer regular parent workshops. Of the 10 participants, four stated that campus administrators facilitated trainings and workshops, four mentioned school counselors, one mentioned teachers, and one stated parent led. The most common types of trainings and workshops fell into the

category of Parent Education. SA02, SA03, SA05, and SA06 mentioned workshops that center around educating parents and families.

SA06 stated that they offer specific learning classes for parents and families, “So during the school day, we have English classes and computer classes for the parents.” SA03 stated that they, “Have the Common Core workshops.” In addition to these two site administrators, SA05 states offering parents monthly workshops:

There’s a workshop about once a month. And they can range from academic or social around like – some of the things that parents might experience with their teenager. And we educate them about cyber-bullying, how to monitor their kids when it comes to being on the Internet. We educate them about proper child rearing – what they can and cannot do, what’s legal, what’s not. So parents have found that to be really helpful because a lot of our parents struggle with how to interact with their adolescents.

SA02 shared two commented related to providing parent education workshops and trainings:

- We have an actual manual where parents go through and they learn different strategies and they talk about what does positive discipline look like in the home. What does it look like at school? It’s very scenario-based so parents can come there and they bring a concern like, “My student did this this week.” And then the other parents can chime in and be that support system for the parents. (SA02)
- Our College Knowledge Academy in the evenings trains parents on the process of applying to college. So parents who really want to figure out what does a college plan look like for their student, they come to those meetings and it’s a 12-week series. So they have to like opt into it and then agree to show up to every single one. But it culminates with them actually presenting the college plan with their student and saying these are the resources we would need. This is what my student would like to major in. This is public versus private schools, etc. (SA02)

Parent center. All of the study participants interviewed shared that limited space restricts them from having an active parent center on campus. Participant SA10 shared, “We don’t [have a parent center] because we don’t have the space. Yeah. So that’s always hard for charter schools since you’re limited with campus space restrictions, co-locating, or simply have to use all the available rooms for instruction.”

One of the site administrators stated using an alternative location as the parent center.

SA01, shared, “We don’t have like a dedicated [parent] center. I’d say the closest thing to that is the connector’s office. It’s the biggest space that families gather in, but there’s no resource center per se.” SA08 echoed this idea of using alternative spaces on campus to serve as a parent center, stating,

The one thing that we were able to gain this year is we rented out an additional conference room upstairs, which has served to a degree as a parent center in that some of the classes we talked about earlier have been held up there because we literally had no other place to hold them.

Three of the 10 participants are in the process of building new campus locations. SA04, SA06, and SA08 refer to their goals for having a parent center on their new middle school campus:

- We are in the process of building a new campus and that space will have a parent center. (SA04)
- We don’t have a parent center. We don’t have the structure for it, but next year we probably will have one on the new site. (SA06)
- At this time, we don’t. And that’s one of the reasons that we’re really excited about the new site is because in the schematics, it actually says Parent Center. It’s something that we shared out at the last family meeting – I mean parent meeting because we wanted to ensure that they understood that it’s something that’s important to us. (SA08)

Family interactions. Of the 10 administrators interviewed, five shared responses related to the probing question regarding types of family interactions that occur most often on their campus. The two most common types of interactions occurred during organized parent events and under the guidance of parent leadership.

Organized parent events. SA02, SA05, and SA07 shared that the most common type of interactions occur during organized parent events. These site administrators shared:

- We have monthly events and we need lots of parent volunteers. So they're always interacting with each other while the kids are having fun. And it also shows that we aren't strictly – always strictly business at the school site, but we have fun activities for kids to engage in. So they see that part of the school. If we have outings – so we've had them go bowling or go to a roller rink or something like that. Parents engage in that way. (SA05)
- We do cultural things, too. We've also done a Thanksgiving potluck. We do events for the families to come together and to just be together and start interacting with each other. We're going to one for Mother's day and Father's day. Little activities so they can bond and get to know one another. (SA07)

SA02 shared two statements related to parent interactions, one related to organized events and the other to parent created leadership that influenced interactions: “Interacting on campus when we have parent conferences, when we have back to school night, we have a lot of parents traveling from different rooms together is when I see the most parent and family bonding.”

Parent leadership. In relation to parent leadership creating interactions, SA02 stated:

Obviously we have some of our parents who are more like big advocates of the school and they work like a grassroots organization, to work with other parents to kind of call them or see them at the bus stop and tell them, “There's a meeting on campus. Did you hear about this?”

SA04 also mentioned parent leadership:

The parent ambassadors kind of serve as the person who relays information to the other parents in the homeroom. They also organize – like if we have an event, they help organize the parents who volunteer at events. They are available to answer questions if necessary. So we kind of put the parent ambassadors there so parents could feel like they could have someone to go to. They're here most of the time and they can kind of gather information that they feel is important to parents that we may not see.

However, SA06 shared that not all parent interactions occur during school-sponsored events.

You always have what I call the “sidewalk committee” out in front in the morning. We all, “¡Hola!” You know, we all talk about things in the morning. They talk to each other in the morning. Again there's no specific meet and greet on it. It's more just the structure that they all came up with, they all have a similar interest, and they all go away happy.

Research Question Five Findings – Outreach Strategies that Increased Parent Involvement

The fifth research question explored specific outreach strategies that increased parent involvement at urban Title I charter middle schools. The interview question aligned to research question five asked site administrators, “Of all the parent involvement practices currently being used on campus, what outreach strategies have been most effective in increasing parent involvement?” Table 27 lists site administrators’ responses.

Table 27

Site Administrators’ Responses to Specific Outreach Strategies that Increased Parent Involvement in Urban Title I Charter Middle Schools

| Site Admin. | Related Statements |
|-------------|--|
| SA01 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our strongest program is the Parenting Partners. • Providing more options tailored to parents needs |
| SA02 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I’d say having workshops for parents to attend as opposed to a parent meeting where we’re kind of more going over logistical stuff. • College knowledge academy • Parenting partners • Individual phone calls |
| SA03 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentivizing it for the child or the family • Getting the kids invested in whatever the event is usually yields higher turnout on the parent end |
| SA04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The parent meetings are extremely helpful • The newsletter • Facebook • The connectors and the things they’ve put in place and have gone a long way of making us feel like a community school. |
| SA05 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have monthly <i>Cafecitos</i>. It’s coffee with the director. • When it comes to parents and like their own kids, that’s when they show up the most |
| SA06 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just the direct contact – by phone, by tele-parent, and by text messaging service. • We also communicate with parents regularly about student’s assessment results, missing assignments, and academic progress. |
| SA07 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using students as the outreach to invest parents in events • One-on-one communication, talking to the parents via phone or in person |
| SA08 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevancy. Making sure that when we ask a parent to do something that they walk away feeling it was meaningful use of their time. |
| SA09 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strategy of email. |

(continued)

| Site Admin. | Related Statements |
|-------------|--|
| SA10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is probably the combination of the newsletters, the <i>One Call</i> reminders and then standing outside with the signs during drop off and pick-up, like constantly reminding them. |

Table 28

Themes Emerging from Site Administrator Responses to Specific Outreach Strategies that Increased Parent Involvement in Urban Title I Charter Middle Schools

| Outreach Strategies the Increased Parent Involvement Themes | Coded Responses |
|---|-----------------|
| Technology Based Outreach | 7 |
| Relevancy | 3 |
| Student Investment | 3 |
| Newsletters | 2 |

Arranging key statements and phrases into categories resulted in 4 themes (see Table 28).

These themes related to specific outreach strategies that increased parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools provide an overall essence of site administrators perceptions of the most successful strategies that increased the level of parent involvement on their campus.

Technology based outreach. Four of the participants reported that the use of technology based outreach added value to their parent involvement program. Text messages (SA06), email (SA09), Facebook (SA04), and One-Call call systems (SA10) were mentioned as specific methods of outreach. SA09 stated success with, “The strategy of email. So when an event is coming up, we would describe the event as well as we could, as detailed as we could, and provided slots for parents to be able to sign up. It is the most effective way.” Within this theme of Technology Based Outreach, a subtheme emerged; Phone calls. Three of the participants in the study mentioned making personal phone calls to parents.

Phone calls. In addition to the four technology based outreach strategies mentioned to communicate with parents, three participants shared success with the strategy of calls home.

Participants SA02, SA06, and SA07 mention the use of phone calls:

- Individual phone calls (SA02).
- Just the direct contact – by phone (SA06).
- So it's just building the communication. So, one-on-one, talking to the parents through voice. I think that's the most successful. Really building that rapport with them because they're more loyal, more committed to coming when you get a personal response from them during a one-on-one call (SA07).

Relevancy. Three participants stated the importance of relevancy. SA01 stated, "I think the more options we have for them to engage in a way around things that are useful to them and their children, and that are tailored to their needs the more success the program." SA08 shared two comments:

- Relevancy is key. Making sure that when we ask a parent to do something that they walk away feeling it was a meaningful use of their time. And I feel like our numbers for every month have remained consistent in terms of who's coming out once a month. I just think the greatest characteristic of strong parent involvement is relevancy and meaning.
- Using our parent survey results to make events more meaningful worked. The things that we had control over in terms of providing meaningful experience for parents, I think that we did a good job on. And again, once they see, for example, that the response they left on the survey actually manifests itself in an actual professional or a family development opportunity for them, I think it's even going to grow more. They will continue to feel that their voices were heard.

SA02 stated:

Having workshops for parents to attend as opposed to a parent meetings where we're kind of more going over logistical stuff has been most successful. Actually engaging a parent and allowing them to kind of own part of that workshop and work with us in building that out and then work with each other in offering suggestions or discussing things has been extremely powerful.

Student investment. Participant responses to the theme Student Investment reveal the perceived benefits from involving students in parent involvement outreach. SA03 stated:

I think a lot of success is in incentivizing it for the child or the family. When we tell children if their parents come to parent conferences, they get a free-dress ticket, the student then is kind of our recruiter because they're like, "Come on, Mom. You have to come, you have to come." So incentivizing those things in a lot of ways has been really successful. So I guess maybe just getting the kids invested in whatever the event is usually yields higher turnout on the parent end. It's working, but I feel like it's a little extrinsic, but I mean if it gets families here, I guess the end goal kind of is met.

SA05 shared the connection of student investment with fun themed events and academic reporting:

When it comes to parents and like their own kids, that's when they show up the most. So for reporting periods and like fun events. So if we have a fun play themed night event like Science Night or Game Night, oh, it's packed! If we have report card pick-up, oh, they're going to be there. So we have to tailor our events to the students and we'll have like 90% turnout for a family night, and like 93% turnout for report card pick-up day. Those – they're coming for that.

Similarly, SA07 stated:

For outreach, the most effective was students – using students as the outreach. So getting to know the students and being able to interact with them more. The more that the students like you, I would say, the more they are willing to go and tell their parents to come to the events. Because they want to come.

Newsletters. The final theme to emerge from participant responses related to research question five highlights the use of newsletters as a specific strategy that increased parent involvement. Two site administrators mentioned newsletters in combination with other outreach methods, SA04 and SA10.

- It is probably the combination of the newsletters, the *One Call* reminders and then standing outside with the signs during drop off and pick-up, like constantly reminding them. Like the constant messaging – you really just need to constantly remind them, and remind them, and remind them (SA04).
- I think both the newsletter and use of Facebook help us reach many of our busy parents (MS10).

Summary of Key Findings

The 10 site administrators who participated in this study ranged in experience from one year to eleven years. All of the participants worked in urban Title I charter middle schools and had aspirations of improving the level of parent involvement on their campus because of their perception that middle school was an important time for parents to participate.

In response to question one, the administrator viewpoints suggest that there are various perceptions of what defines parent involvement in middle school. These perceptions include the following themes: parent presence on campus, home-school connection, involvement structures vary, family investment, school culture, communication, and middle school being a critical developmental phase. The views of the participants suggest that one of these factors alone does not define parent involvement, but when combined they can create a robust definition of the term.

In response to question two, the transcripts of the participating site administrators revealed six themes that they felt contributed to barriers to parent involvement. The themes that emerged were language barrier, messaging to parents, parent-teacher communication, the absence of clear and meaningful messaging related to volunteering, limited volunteering opportunities, and lacking structures for decision making outside of School Site Council (SSC). The two probing questions related to question two each revealed one theme. The majority of the site administrators concerns regarding parent involvement did not influence their interactions with parents. However, participant's responses related to having experienced a cultural barrier related to involving parents revealed that many of the participants experienced a barrier related to language or ethnicity

In response to question three, statements from study participants related to their perception of enablers to parent involvement revealed four overall themes interactions during

dismissal, technology, Spanish translation, and maintaining an open-door policy. The three probing questions related to question three revealed six themes; technology, weekly reports, dedicated staff, and parent surveys. However, two themes that surfaced from administrators' responses to the probing questions revealed barriers to involvement; missing structures for volunteering and limited structures for decision making.

In response to question four, the participants discussed structures that exist to empower parents. Site administrator's response revealed three themes parent leadership, parent education, and academic transparency. As a result of participant's responses to the three probing questions related to question four organized parent events surfaced as a new theme. Similar to the study question related to question four, parent leadership and parent education also surfaced as themes to the probing question. Limited space for a campus parent center surfaced as a barrier to parent empowerment.

In response to question five, site administrators discussed what they believed to be the most successful outreach strategy implemented to increase parent involvement at their current school site. Their perspectives revealed four themes technology based outreach, relevancy, student investment, and newsletters.

Chapter 4 detailed the findings from 10 urban Title I charter middle school site administrators regarding barriers and enablers to parent involvement. The responses from each participant described the unique perspectives and campus based factors that contribute to or prevent parent involvement on their respective school sites. The next chapter will contain a discussion of these results linked to present literature, implications of the study, and ideas for future research based on the results identified in this research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The final chapter of this study will present a summary of the study along with a discussion of key findings, study conclusions, recommendations for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Study

Problem statement. Few studies exist on the subject of parent involvement in middle schools and even fewer from the site leaders perspectives of parent involvement in urban charter middle schools. Evolving as an answer to parent choice in urban public schools, charter schools are assumed to have fewer barriers to parent involvement than traditional public schools. Factors such as smaller school size, higher student-to-teacher ratio, mandatory student uniforms, and parent outreach practices targeted towards parent involvement with low-income minority families support this assumption. However, similar to traditional public schools, actively involved elementary school parents, in charter schools, become less involved when their children reach middle school (Epstein, 2005; Jackson et al., 2001; Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2003, 2006). Various factors prevent parents from participating (Hiatt-Michael, 2012). Some, but not all factors include; parent's job schedules (Epstein, 2001), parental feelings of discomfort with participation (Gay, 2000), parents feeling incapable of assisting with middle level assignments, and parents need for more leadership and guidance from teachers (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Despite these factors, it is important for parents to model behaviors that demonstrate trust in the academic success of their children (Joseph, 2008) since parent participation throughout a child's educational career yields the most powerful effects.

Purpose statement. The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify what similarities, if any, exist among the perception of site administrators of urban Title I, charter

middle schools, regarding barriers and enablers to parent involvement. This study looked at strategies used to establish and recruit parent involvement and sought to analyze methods used to maintain involvement of recruited parents in urban Title I charter middle schools. Secondly, this study identified practices and strategies to improve communication between home and school that increase involvement at the middle school level.

It is anticipated that, the findings of this study will provide increased understanding of the needs, challenges, and successes of parent involvement at the middle school level. The identified strategies will provide similar schools with the necessary systems to reach parents and sustain involvement during the transitional years between elementary and high school. Although the positive outcomes from a strong relationship between school leaders and parent involvement seems clear; for many site leaders creating an atmosphere that fosters parent and family involvement can often be ambiguous and daunting. Thus, the information collected in this study has the potential to help inform parent involvement structures for site administrators in urban Title I charter middle schools. Further, findings from this study provide a better understanding of barriers that contribute to low levels of involvement.

Research questions. This qualitative study explored middle school site administrators perceptions of barriers and enablers to parent involvement in urban title I charter middle schools. Along with examining the practices and strategies implemented to improve communication between home and school that increase involvement at the middle school level. The following five research questions guided this study:

1. How do charter middle school site administrators define and view parent involvement in urban Title I public charter schools?

2. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant barriers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision-making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools?
3. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant enablers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision-making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools?
4. What campus programs, workshops, and participation incentives do charter middle school site administrators offer parents to create positive outcomes for parent involvement on their public charter middle school campuses?
5. Which specific outreach strategies, if any, have increased parent involvement at the urban Title I charter middle schools?

Overview of research design. A qualitative approach guided this research study. The researcher developed an interview protocol consisting of six semi-structured interview questions and nine probing questions. The intended outcome of the study was to determine the barriers and enablers to parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools based on the perceptions of site administrators. Based upon a review of the literature as noted in Chapter 2, Epstein's (2001) six types of parent involvement, specifically communication (type 2), volunteering (type 3), and decision-making (type 5) served as the theoretical framework that guided this study.

The research methodology that shaped this study was designed to determine the specific barriers and enablers to parent involvement, specifically its impact on communication, volunteering, and decision making in urban Title I charter middle schools. In addition, the study attempted to identify to what extent specific strategies and programs created positive outcomes and increased parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools.

The population in this study was a purposeful sample of 10 charter school site administrators, ranging in experience between one to five years in their current position. Participants ranged in age between 25 and 50 and represented a diverse population with 3 being African American, 2 Hispanic/Latino, 2 Multiracial, 1 Asian American, 1 Caucasian, and 1 declined to state. Information collected from the participants was obtained using one-on-one interviews. Data was transcribed, coded, and analyzed to answer each of the five research questions.

Discussion of Key Findings

The findings from this study demonstrated that site leaders share similar views related to the positive benefits of parent involvement in middle school and have experienced common barrier related to establishing and maintaining parent involvement on their campus. This section is organized by key findings related to each of the research questions and probing questions that shaped this study. The discussion related to the surfacing themes are integrated within the findings for each research question.

Research question one: Definitions of parent involvement. How do charter middle school site administrators define and view parent involvement in urban Title I public charter schools?

The site administrators' responses to the interview questions related to research question one indicate that there are multiple definitions to parent involvement. Four defining themes emerged parent presence on campus, home school connections, involvement structures vary, and family investment.

Parent presence on campus. Seven of the 10 participants cited the presence of parents on campus as a quality that defines parent involvement. Participants shared that parents active

participation in activities and fundraisers add to the value on campus. For two of the participants parents coming to school and volunteering or completing volunteer hours was important. Additionally, three of the study participants mentioned the significance in parent attendance at campus meetings.

Home school connections. This theme, home school connections, surfaced as a result of participant's responses to their definition to parent involvement as well as their responses to their view of the administrator's role in fostering involvement. Three subthemes merged from their responses: homework, involvement and home, and staff interactions with parents. One trend that was evident and clearly expressed by study participants was involvement at home. Two participants referred to the parental role of helping with homework at home as an illustration of involvement. Three of the 10 respondents cited parents focus on academics at home as an indicator of involvement. Participants were also able to determine the role of staff interactions with parents as an example that defines parent involvement. Two participants' responses reflect their belief that the site administrator's role is to create multiple opportunities to develop relationships with students and families in addition to bridging the gap between teachers and parents.

Involvement structures vary. Participant responses reflect that they recognize the value in multiple types of parent involvement. Four of the 10 site administrators stated variations to involvement including parents coming to campus, being involved at home, attending meetings, calling to check in, sending emails to teachers, attending parent conferences, participating in community activities that support the school, and having a voice in the development of the school.

Family investment. Urban students come from a variety of family structures. Some students are from traditional family homes while some are raised in single parents homes, others by grandparents or relatives, and some in foster and adopted families. Site administrator responses to the interview question and related probing question reflect the understanding that every family member is a valuable resource, despite family structure. One participant summarized parent involvement as; a student having family support and encouragement from any family member; a brother, sister, uncle, or coach as long as they are supported.

Probing question for RQ1. Responses to the probing question, “What is your opinion of the role of administrators in fostering parent involvement at your current school site?” resulted in two independent themes: school culture and communication.

School culture. In several of the transcripts participant’s responses revealed the belief that school culture is an essential component to the role of the site administrator. Three of the 10 site administrators shared responses that highlight this theme. These site administrators believed that the administrator’s job is to provide a warm and welcoming environment for parents. From participants responses it is clear that they perceive the administrators presence on campus as fundamental in relationship building between staff and community. Furthermore, participants remarked that the administrator sets the tone and culture by ensuring that there is a scope and sequence for the year that focuses on parent involvement activities, meetings, and trainings, and workshops. This pre-planning makes parent involvement goals clear to all stakeholders and holds the school accountable for involving parents.

Communication. Five of the study participant responses included the theme communication. For two of the participants having two-way communication between parents and staff was considered vital. Participants mentioned the role of the site administrator in creating

structures to facilitate the connection between parents and staff. Essentially, having robust communication strategies in place encourages teachers to communicate with parents frequently.

Critical developmental phase. Four of the participants responses to the question, “What do you feel are the benefits of parent involvement in middle school?” revealed their belief that parent involvement in middle school is important. These site administrators believe that in spite of the decline in participation during middle school compared to elementary school, students need parental guidance more because the consequences of not having parents involved to monitor academics and behavior are more severe as students get older compared to when they are younger. Additionally, participant responses reflected the need for involvement from all stakeholders to help shape student behavior and support them academically during the middle school years. Furthermore, site administrators were able to determine the benefits of parent involvement in student’s academics, stating, when parents are involved it shows.

Research question two: Parent involvement barriers. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant barriers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision-making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools?

Five independent themes emerged language barrier, messaging to parents and families, parent-teacher communication, clear and meaningful expectations, limited volunteering opportunities, and lacking structures outside of the SSC.

Messaging to parents and families. Creating clear two-way communication systems for families is paramount in maintaining open dialogue between home and school. The findings from five participant responses suggested that a variety of factors influence communication concerns. Specifically, lacking frequent communication between home and school, one-sided

communication, and parents not reading the newsletter or listening to school messages contribute to the collapse in open dialogue. Further, one participants response suggest the difficulty of having a diverse communication audience represented by parents who only speak Spanish, bilingual parents, tech savvy parents, parents who are technology deficient, and parents that are non-readers.

Parent-teacher communication. Participant responses suggest that a barrier exist due to parent home language and teacher language. One hundred percent of the site administrators lead teaching populations of staff that are not bilingual; although each participant has at least one teacher on site that is bilingual the majority do not speak Spanish. With the larger parent community not being able to speak the language of the instructional staff a barrier exist that is difficult to overcome. In addition to the language barrier, in middle school parents have to navigate communicating with multiple teachers representing a variety of subjects and communication styles instead of just one (elementary) teacher who teaches all subjects. This increase in staff members for parents to communicate with during the middle school years results in less frequent interactions between parents and teachers.

Clear and meaningful expectations. Several of the participants responded that volunteering structures did not exist on their campus or existing structures lacked clarity and meaning. Consequently, site administrators expressed the need to create structures that established clear expectations for what volunteering looks like on campus.

Limited volunteering opportunities. The responses from the site administrators also suggested there are limited opportunities to involve parents on site. Participants were able to determine that parent and family schedules contribute to limited opportunities for involvement.

One site administrator sited working family structures as a predominant barrier to parent campus volunteering.

Lacking structures outside of School Site Council (SSC). Participant responses reflected that they do not have adequate structures to support parent decision making outside of the SSC.

Probing questions for RQ2. Participant responses to the two probing questions related to research question two reveal how prior interactions with parents, culture, and language barriers shape site administrators interactions with parents.

Concerns regarding involvement. In response to the probing questions, “Have your concerns regarding parent involvement influenced your comfort level participating with parents?” the findings from six of the 10 participants revealed that the majority of participants have not let parent involvement concerns influence their participation with parents. However, for two participants previous interactions with parents resulted in a barrier in communication that resulted in the site administrator creating distance between themselves and the parent. Additionally, responses suggested that barriers are created to open, respectful, and frequent dialogue when site administrators perceive parents to be upset with their campus decisions and actions.

Personal cultural barrier. The interview responses to the probing question, “Have you experienced a personal cultural barrier specifically related to communication, volunteering, or involving parents in decision making on campus?” provided an in-depth look at participants views of cultural barriers in urban Title I charter middle school administration. Interview responses revealed that of the 10 site administrators studied, seven were not bilingual although 100% of study participants worked in schools that served majority Latino/Spanish speaking populations. Four of the participants reported having experienced a cultural barrier related to

parent involvement, specifically related to not being bilingual. However, one participant stated although she could not speak Spanish fluently language was not a barrier. Her response indicated that parents and families valued her pursuit to become bilingual and her willingness to attempt communication. Further probing of this question revealed two of the participants concerns with culture, one Caucasian male and one African American male. Both stated how being from a different background from the majority of the students and families created a barrier related to approachability and building relationships with families.

Research question three: Parent involvement enablers. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant enablers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision-making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools?

Four themes surfaced as a result of participant responses to question three interactions during arrival and dismissal, technology, Spanish translation, and open door policy.

Interactions during arrival and dismissal. Administrator presence is essential to establishing meaningful interactions with parents and families. Respondent's perceptions indicated that an administrators' involvement during the morning routine contributes to a positive school climate. Being in front of the school during drop off and pick up gives parents the opportunity to see the school leader as approachable and present thus eliminating barriers to communication and opening the possibility for parents and administration to establish meaningful relationships.

Technology. Four site administrator responses to the interview question revealed the importance of using various types of technology when communicating with parents. From these responses it is evident that the use of school websites, Facebook, Google Translate, texting

services, and One Call systems, broaden the methods of communication between home and school.

Similarly, eight participants mentioned technology in their responses to the probing questions related to both structures that enable communication and volunteering. The majority of site administrators identified email as a primary method of communication between parents and teachers, however three respondents believed email was a less successful method of communication due to parents lack of access to technology and limited English proficiency. Four participants stated that parent phone calls and texting serve as effective methods to inform parents about events on campus and as a method to communicate student updates to parents. Additionally, the use of the school website was influential in creating a place to communicate campus events and share teacher contact information to parents on one platform.

Spanish translation. 100% of study participants work in schools with high Spanish speaking populations, yet only two of the 10 site administrators expressed the importance of Spanish translation as an enabler to higher levels of parent involvement. These respondents identified the importance of translating all communication sent home and any information posted on the website inviting parents to attend events. Further, participants mentioned the positive results of implementing structures to support dual language parent meetings. Developing a system that offers monthly parent meetings in both English and Spanish creates an environment where parents have choice. Providing parents with an option to attend the Spanish speaking parent room gives them a place to express their questions and concerns in an environment where they feel most comfortable speaking in their home language.

Open door policy. Maintaining a campus culture that supports parents presence on campus includes ensuring site administrator availability. Three of the participants referenced

being available for parents to stop by without appointments as a structure that supports parent preference for face-to-face communication with administrators. These responses suggest that parents in urban communities favor meeting in person instead of emailing and phone conferencing and are less apt to call ahead to schedule an appointment.

Probing questions for RQ3. As a result of further probing related to research question three, seven themes surfaced: communication, weekly reports, volunteering, dedicated staff, missing structures to support volunteering, limited structures for decision making, and parent surveys.

Communication. The theme weekly reports surfaced when probed about methods of communication parents use to interact with teachers and staff.

Weekly reports. Two respondents mentioned sending home weekly academic and behavior reports to parents as a method of parent teacher communication.

Volunteering. Respondents' statements in response to the probing question, "What approaches are in place to recruit and support volunteering?" resulted in two independent themes: dedicated staff and missing structures to support volunteering.

Dedicated staff. Creating parent involvement structures that meet both the need of the school while also being meaningful to parents requires constant monitoring and reshaping. Ensuring that there is a dedicated staff member responsible for parent outreach surfaced as a tool to support involvement. When parents have a specific person on campus they can reach out to regarding upcoming family events and opportunities for involvement communication methods are strengthened.

Missing structures to support volunteering. Within the probing question related to parent involvement enablers, volunteering structures surfaced as a barrier to involvement. While many

site administrators welcome the idea of having parents and families on campus to volunteer, they expressed not having adequate systems in place to meaningfully involve parents on campus. As a result of participant responses to the question, “What structures exist to support and involve parents in shared decision making on site?” limited structures for decision making and parent surveys surfaced as themes.

Limited structures for decision making. Four site administrators reported not having enough structures to involve parents in decision making. For example participants discussed the need for more structures to support parent decision making outside of mandated structures that accompany being a Title I school. Although site administrators have active SSCs and monthly parent meetings participants expressed the need for more robust meaningful opportunities to engage and empower parents.

Parent surveys. The use of results from regular parent surveys provides feedback that assist site administrators in creating programs and opportunities that meet the needs of parents and families. Two participant responses referenced better decision making as a result of disseminating parent surveys. Respondents statements revealed the use of surveys to determine strategic campus priorities related to activities, systems, and parent workshops. Further, surveys give administrators a candid impression of parents concerns and areas to improve as well as an idea of what systems to maintain based on positive responses from parents and families.

Research question four: Parent involvement empowerment. What campus programs, workshops, and participation incentives do charter middle school site administrators offer parents to create positive outcomes for parent involvement on their public charter middle school campuses?

The three themes parent leadership, academic transparency, and parent education emerged as a response to research question four. Six of the 10 participants shared responses related to the theme below.

Parent leadership. Cultivating a campus culture that empowers parents to take on leadership roles moves beyond involving parents toward engaging them. This theme surfaced in response to both the interview question related to research question four and the probing question about family interactions on campus. Three respondents expressed the benefits from working with parents in shared leadership roles. Creating opportunities to co-chair committees with parents empowers them by giving them a voice on campus that they can use to inspire other parents to lead. Further, offering parenting classes and workshop led by parents results in greater parent attendance. Parents glean more from other parents because they feel a similar connection due to having children in the same school, the shared experience of being a parent of a middle school aged students, and the comfort of common home language. Responses also indicate that parents are more open to sharing ideas and concerns with other parents than with school administration. Parents often view school administration as removed from their immediate access however view other parents as easier to approach. Sharing ideas and concerns with a parent seen as a campus leader gives other parents and families alternative avenues for communication.

Academic transparency. The data revealed that regular communication of students academic progress and strategies for how to help with school assignments at home are key factors in parent empowerment. Three study participant statements revealed how providing parents 24/7 access to students grades and comments from teachers gives parents real time access to how their kids are doing academically. Providing parents with a window into the academic progress of their child gives them the opportunity to ask the right questions about their child's

academic success. When parents are better prepared to speak to teachers about their child's classes and grades they leave campus with the exact answers they were seeking to best help their child at home. Equipping parents with tools to communicate about academic success is the greatest empowerment tool.

Parent education. Of the variety of trainings and workshop implemented across urban Title I middle school campuses site administrators' responses revealed those focused on parent education as the most empowering. This theme surfaced in response to both the interview question related to research question four and the probing question about trainings and workshops offered to parents. One site administrator expressed the emphasis on parent education through educational family nights focused on Math and Reading strategies as a way to give parents tools to use at home to reinforce standards and lesson taught on campus. Additionally, one respondent stated the benefit of offering Common Core workshops for parents to give them the language of the new standards as well as assessment examples to practice at home with their child. Similarly, one trend expressed by two site administrators was that of Parent Academies (PAs) focused on helping parents improve their quality of life. The on-campus PA sessions allow parents the choice to attend English classes, computer classes, early college prep classes to provide them with tools necessary to navigate the college application process post middle school, or bullying sessions to help them better understand the types of bullying that are most prevalent in middle school. Providing parent education gives parents the opportunity to develop skills and gain relevant knowledge that increases their capacity to be involved and support their child.

Probing questions for RQ4. Two independent themes emerged: access to campus parent center and organized parent events.

Parent center. 100% of participants reported limited campus space restricts them from having an active parent center. One site administrator referred to campus space restrictions and the need to use all available rooms for instruction as a plight of many charter schools. This lack of space resulted in urban Title I charter middle schools not offering parent centers or using alternative campus locations (counselor's office, main office) as parent centers. However, many charter schools start off in rented building or on shared campus location before purchasing, building, or moving onto their own campus. Three of the 10 participants anticipate having parent centers on their new campuses. Two of these three participants plan to move into their new campus location with a functioning parent center in the 2015-2016 school year.

Organized parent events. Four respondents stated the most common type of family interactions happen on campus during school based events. Statements from site administrators suggest that parents interact during parent conferences, monthly community building events, and on family nights. Participants revealed that hosting campus events gives parents an opportunity to have fun with other families and creates an atmosphere that shows the school as not strictly business but as connected to the community. Fostering an environment where parents feel part of the school empowers them to want to be present on campus more frequently and encourages them to build relationships with other families and staff.

Research question five: Outreach strategies that increased parent involvement.

Which specific outreach strategies, if any, have increased parent involvement at the urban Title I charter middle schools? Findings reveal urban Title I charter school administrators view technology based outreach, relevancy, student investment, and newsletters as the most successful outreach strategies that increased parent involvement at their middle school campus.

Technology based outreach. Participants were able to determine the use of text messages, email, Facebook, and One-call systems elevated their communication outreach to parents. Implementing structures that supported the use of technology to increase two-way communication strengthened site administrators parent involvement programs because they were able to reach more parents and families. A major finding was the use of personal phone calls to directly communicate with parents as the most successful strategy of outreach. Building the rapport with families through personal calls results in parents being more committed to participating and attending campus events.

Relevancy. Creating opportunities for parents to attend school events and leave with the positive feeling they have learned new information or spent their time wisely results in families attending more campus events and activities. Respondents expressed, when parents are provided opportunities to engage on campus that are relevant to their personal needs and wants they are more open to participate. Site administrators also expressed the positive outcomes from using the results of parent surveys to drive the creation of workshop themes and family development topics fostered an environment where families felt that their voices were heard.

Student investment. Three participants indicated that involving students in parent involvement outreach increased the likelihood that parents would attend meetings and events. Using incentives related to campus culture and academics to encourage students to inform their parents of events gave site administrators leverage in influencing parents to attend. Offering rewards linked to free dress days and homework passes invests student and in-turn yields higher turnout. This is a direct result of the connection that parents have with their own child. Parents are more willing to attend events when their child is excited about them, especially in middle school when students often start to distance themselves from their parents to become more

attached to peers. Further, when site administrators build relationships with students and interact with them on a regular basis they develop a rapport. Resultantly, students are more willing to share information with their families about campus events when they feel invitations to attend are coming from a person they respect.

Newsletters. In combination with other communication methods, the use of the campus newsletter was viewed as a resourceful tool. Recognizing that not all parents have access to technology is critical in outreach. Tailoring communication methods to meet the needs of the parents and families is essential when developing structures for parent involvement. Regular dissemination of parent newsletter ensures that all families have access to upcoming events and important campus information. Site administrators noted using the newsletter in conjunction with phone calls home, texting, posting to the school website, and Facebook provides parents multiple options for accessing campus based information.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher drew the following six conclusions. The conclusions are related to the view of middle school as an important developmental phase for involving parents, language is a barrier in parent involvement, the need to create meaningful structures for volunteering and decision making, meaningful parent relationships increase parent involvement outcomes, parent education is a tool for empowerment, and technology based communication supports parent involvement.

Conclusion one. Site administrators view middle school as an important developmental phase for involving parents. Based on the comments from study participants, one can conclude that middle school is a critical time for parents to participate in their children's schooling. This finding is consistent with the research of Hallstrom (2011) on parent involvement that indicates

that parent participation during the middle school years is essential for both academic and behavioral success in middle school students. This study found that urban Title I charter middle school site administrators view family investment as an essential component in student middle school success.

Conclusion two. Site administrators perceive language as a barrier in parent involvement. The overall trend from the research showed that seven of the 10 administrators were not able to directly communicate with parents without translation. This gap in communication is concerning for both site administrators and parents. This finding is consistent with the work of Conley (2012), who states that parents who do not speak English or are uncomfortable speaking a language other than their own may not gain access to what is available to them or understand what is expected of them, when a language barrier exists between parents and staff. Thus it can be concluded that the language barrier does influence parents' willingness to participate on campus.

Conclusion three. Site administrators need to create meaningful structures for parent volunteering and shared decision making. This study found that the majority of the site administrators lead campuses void of options for parents to volunteer or participate in campus based decision making. The School-Parent-Community Partnership Resource Book (2005) concluded that while these volunteer strategies require effort to establish and maintain they yield many rewards: for the school, the students, and the parents. Because parent roles are more concrete and defined in elementary school (Brough & Irvin, 2001), middle school leaders need to create specific meaningful campus roles for parents to increase collaboration. Specifically, school administration need to create a welcoming environment that values parents by organizing

events for parents and families to volunteer. Training volunteers to assist during the academic day gives parents a sense of belonging (Epstein et al., 2002).

Conclusion four. Meaningful parent relationships increase parent involvement outcomes. Administrator presence on campus helps establish a positive rapport with parents. Resultantly, parents become more open to participating in campus events. The administrators' presence is essential in ensuring that parents feel welcomed on campus and is the first step in establishing relationships with parents and families. The belief that all community stakeholders – parents, teachers, and community leaders - play important roles in support student learning (Smith et al., 1997) creates a positive campus culture.

Conclusion five. Parent education is a tool for empowerment. This is evident based on site administrator responses to research question four. Further, it is supported by Chavkin's (1991) finding that one of the most effective methods in reducing barriers to parent involvement remains parent education. Essentially, urban parents need to be instructed how to become more involved to support their child academically. Providing opportunities for workshop and trainings that support building parents knowledge and skills increases their capacity for supporting their child and equips them with tools for self improvement.

Conclusion six. Technology based communication methods support parent involvement. While it may be convenient to communicate with middle school parents using one-way communication strategies due to school size and multilingual populations it is not the most effective. As a result of participants responses to research question three and five it is evident that technology is an essential component fostering two-way communication with parents. The use of high-tech digital (Facebook, One-call, text services) and low-tech (flyers and phone calls

home) communication methods for disseminating information should be used more to meet the diverse needs of parents (Epstein, 2007).

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The recommendations made in this study are significant because they have the potential to increase parent involvement in urban Title I charter schools, specifically at the middle school level. The researcher believes that results of this study can also be applied with modifications across academic levels in both charter elementary and charter high schools. The four policy and practitioner recommendations below are a result of the surfacing conclusions from the research.

Policy recommendations: Foreign language training. It is recommended that local districts incentivize foreign language training to support communication between site administrator and parents. Site leaders should receive specific foreign language training to better communicate with the parents in the community they serve. It is recommended that local district policy create structures to provide incentives for charter school site administrators and staff to take foreign language professional development, in the cases of the schools studied; Spanish. This recommendation is supported by the findings in research question two, which evolved into conclusion two. Of the 10 participants interviewed, 70% of the site administrators reported that language was a barrier in communicating with parents and families. Several researchers have concluded that even if parents are comfortable speaking another language, they may not feel as comfortable when approached by staff at their child's school that does not speak their same home/native language (Crosnoe, 2010; Lopez et al., 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Yoshikawa, 2005). Because of this is it paramount that school site administrators have access to language based professional development that increases their ability to communicate with parents and families.

Practitioner recommendations. The following practitioner recommendations are suggested by this study.

Parent volunteering. It is also recommended that site administrators create meaningful opportunities for parent volunteering. This is supported by the research of Epstein (2002) and colleagues that found the need for school administration and staff to create a welcoming environment that values parents by organizing events for parents and families to volunteer. Ultimately, training parents to assist during the academic day gives parents a sense of belonging and purpose thus making volunteering systems meaningful for both parents and the school community. Therefore, it is recommended that schools offer workshops and trainings to instruct parents on how to best support classroom learning.

Decision making. Based on the responses from study participants, site administrators must develop additional structures for parent decision making. Schools contribute to parent leadership by offering them opportunities to share in campus based decision making. Site administrators can build structures for parent decision making by training parent leaders in decision-making skills, giving parents communication strategies to foster clear communication with all the parents represented on campus, and by providing the necessary information for school improvement activities (Epstein, 2001). Examples of campus decision making structures include involvement in the parent-teacher association/organization (PTA/PTO), advisory councils, Title I programs, and specific school groups that gives parents governance roles and responsibilities. With these roles parents set program goals, develop and implement program activities, assist with assessment of programs, aid in personnel decisions, and share in decisions for yearly funding allocations (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Further, decision-making contributions allow parents to be seen as school activist within the community.

Technology. As a result of the findings of this research study, it is recommended that site administrators utilize technology to maintain two-way communication with parents and families. Two-way communication is regularly cited as an effective approach to increase parent involvement at every level (Elish-Piper, 2008; Epstein, 1995; Ferguson & Rodriguez, 2005). Further, modern parents desire a constant communication stream from schools. Parents want to be informed about things happening on campus so that they can make the best decisions about how to meet their child's needs. Integrating the use of technology creates open pathways for positive home-school communication.

Recommendations for Future Research

Findings from this study provide some insight into barriers and enablers to parent involvement in urban Title I charter schools at the middle school level. However, these findings have some limitations. Thus, there is a need to further explore this topic. The researcher proposes the following recommendations for future research:

1. Replicate this study with a larger number of study participants to produce more findings that could be used to make greater generalizations regarding parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools.
2. Conduct this study with urban Title I charter school site administrators having more than five years experience at their current campus to gain an understanding of how parent involvement practices have evolved over time at the school site.
3. Replicate this study in urban Title I traditional public middle schools with similar populations to compare and contrast parent involvement strategies between school types (traditional public and charter public).

4. Broaden the participants of the study to include teachers in urban Title I charter middle schools in an effort to gain a wider perspective of barriers and enablers to parent involvement. The results of this research design would provide insight from both the administrative and teaching staff perspectives.

Final Summary

As charter schools continues to grow as an option for parent choice in urban areas, it is imperative that site administrators focus on establishing and maintain effective systems for parent involvement. Prior to this study, limited research existed related to site administrators perspectives of parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools. Therefore, the opportunity and need surfaced to explore the perceptions of parent involvement specifically those related to barriers and enablers to communication, volunteering and parent decision making from the view of charter school administration.

The benefits of parent involvement have been well documents (Epstein, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hiatt Michael, 2010), as well as the decline in involvement as students matriculate through school from primary to secondary (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Epstein et al., 1997). Despite facing lower levels of parent involvement in middle school (NMSA, 2003), some schools successfully implement strategies to overcome barriers to involvement and empower parents. Schools that have created structures to enable parent involvement implement strategies that foster regular two-way communication, have established structures for parent volunteering, and encourage parent decision making (Epstein, 2001). Yet, minimal research exist that explores the perspectives of site administrators serving urban Title I populations working in middle schools that have overcome barriers to involvement.

To address this gap in the research, the current study explored the perspectives and views of site administrators working in urban Title I charter middle schools to reveal the barriers and enablers to parent involvement. These site administrators shared their observations, experiences, and perspectives to provide a deeper understanding of existing parent involvement practices that contribute to successful parent involvement practices.

The study adds to the research on parent involvement by contributing the shared perspectives of the 10 urban Title I charter middle schools site leaders who are currently implementing successful strategies for parent involvement in their schools despite existing barriers. Now that the findings of this study have provided examples of practices to implement for parent involvement outreach, it is necessary to continue regular research on this topic to provide current, concrete examples of successful parent involvement practices to site administrators working with similar urban student populations.

The researcher concludes that by identifying existing barriers to parent involvement and providing examples of successful outreach strategies to involve parents, site administrators gain tools to enrich their entire school community. As the leaders of the school, site administrators set the tone and culture for the entire campus. When we cultivate the ability for site administrators to establish systems to involve and empower parents meaningful change transpires. My experience as an educator has shaped my belief that when we teach the students we teach the entire family; and when we empower the parents we change the entire community.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent For Participation In Research Activities

Participant: _____

Principal Investigator: Jessica T. Boro

Title of Project: Site Administrators Perceptions of Barriers and Enablers to Parent Involvement in Urban Title I Charter Middle Schools

1. I _____, agree to participate in the research study being conducted by Jessica T. Boro a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Robert R. Barner from the Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy doctoral program at Pepperdine University, Graduate School of Education and Psychology, to include me in the research project entitled "Site Administrators Perceptions of Barriers and Enablers to Parent Involvement in Title I Charter Middle Schools." I understand my participation in this study is strictly voluntary.
2. The purpose of this research study is to examine the perceptions of barriers and enablers to parent involvement in urban Title I middle schools as well as the structures that exist to improve parent involvement related to communication, volunteering, and decision making in urban Title I charter middle schools.
3. The study will require my participation in a semi-structured interview and possible follow-up question as needed. I acknowledge that I have been asked to participate in this study because I am a charter middle school site administrator working in an urban Title I school.
4. My participation in the study will be a one time interview between 60min to 90min. The study shall be conducted on my charter middle school campus in a location free from distraction and interruptions.
5. I understand that any direct benefit from participation in this study is beneficial to the field of education and myself as a school administrator. These may include: (1) recognizing potential barriers to parent involvement in Title I charter middle schools; (2) further understanding enablers to parent involvement in title I charter middle schools; and (3) identifying successful strategies employed in charter schools to involve parents at the middle school level.
6. I understand that this is a safe study and the potential risks of participating in this study are minimal to none. However potential risk may be negative exposure to the school being studied and/or a potential breach of confidentiality during the interview should parties not involed in the research interrupt the interview. Additionally, in an event that I do experience fatigue or need to take a short break, one will be granted to me.

7. I understand that my estimated expected recovery time after participating in the study will be immediate as there is no potential risk that will deter my normal day to day functions or alter my daily routines.
8. I understand that I may choose not to participate in this research.
9. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.
10. I understand that the investigator(s) will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others. I understand there is a possibility that my medical record, including identifying information, may be inspected and/or photocopied by officials of the Food and Drug Administration or other federal or state government agencies during the ordinary course of carrying out their functions. If I participate in a sponsored research project, a representative of the sponsor may inspect my research records.
11. I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Dr. Robert Barner at [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED]@[REDACTED]. if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Kevin Collins, Chairperson of GSEP Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University, at [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED]. Written correspondence can be sent to Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education 6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045.
12. I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research, which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in the study.
13. I understand that in the event of physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatment may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer, which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.
14. I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form, which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

Participant's Signature

Date

Witness

Date☐ I consent to be recorded.☐ I do not consent to be recorded.

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

Principal Investigator

Date

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol for Charter Middle School Site Administrator

My name is Jessica Taylor Boro. I am working on an approved research study at Pepperdine University under the direction of Dr. Robert R. Barner. This study is designed to gather data from site administrators on their perceptions of barriers and enablers to parent involvement in urban Title I charter middle schools.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project. Before we begin the interview, I would like to reassure you that this interview is confidential. The interview is being recorded to use as data for coding and analysis. The electronic audio file and transcripts will only be available to me. Do you mind if I record the interview? If at anytime there is anything you don't want me to record inform me and I will turn off the recorder.

Excerpts from this interview may be part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report. Do you have any questions at this time? Is it fine for me to turn on the recorder so that we can begin?

APPENDIX C

Site Administrator Demographic Information

Date _____ Time _____ Location _____ Code _____

Name _____ Position _____

School Name _____ District _____ County _____

Background

I would like to collect some background information regarding you and your current administrative position. Your answers are confidential and will only be used for the purpose of the study. No personal information identifying you or linking you to your current school site will be included in the study. You can choose not to answer any questions below.

What is your age?

25-30 31-35 36-40 41-45 46-50 51-55 56+

What ethnicity do you identify with most?

Do you live in the community (city/county) you work in?

Yes or No

How long have you been a middle school site administrator? Please answer below:

At this school site? _____

In this charter organization? _____

At other charter middle school sites? _____

In other State(s)? _____

Do you currently hold an administrative credential?

What administrative credential program did you attend?

What credentials do you hold granted by the California Commission on Teaching Credentialing (CCTC)?

What educational interim positions (Title I Coordinator, etc.) have you held prior to your position as site administrator?

APPENDIX D

Interview Questionnaire for Site Administrators

Question 1: How do you define parent involvement?

Probing Question:

- (a) What is your opinion of the role of administrators in fostering parent involvement at your current school site?

Question 2: What do you feel are the benefits of parent involvement during middle school?

Question 3: What, if any, are your general concerns regarding parent involvement on your campus related to communication, volunteering, and parent decision making?

Probing Questions:

- (a) Have your concerns regarding parent involvement influence your comfort level participating with parents on campus?
- (b) Have you experienced a personal cultural barrier specifically related to communication, volunteering, or involving parents in decision making on campus?

Question 4: What communication methods currently exist to make parents feel comfortable attending on site meetings and campus events and participating in shared decision making at your school site?

Probing Questions:

- (a) Which methods of communication do parents currently use to interact with teachers and staff?
- (c) What approaches are in place to recruit and support parent volunteering?
- (b) What structures exist to support and involve parents in shared decision making on site?

Question 5: What involvement structures have the school site administration established to empower parents?

Probing Questions:

- (a) Are trainings and workshops currently and regularly available for parents? If yes, who leads the trainings and workshops?
- (b) Does your campus have a parent center or similar functioning location for parents?
- (c) In what ways do parents and families interact with each other on campus?

Question 6: Of all the parent involvement practices currently being used at your campus, what outreach strategies have been most effective in increasing parent involvement?

APPENDIX E

Pilot Interview Protocol Debriefing

1. Was the research purpose clearly explained to you?
2. Did the interviewer build a rapport with you prior to the start of questioning?
3. Were the interview questions clear?
4. Did any questions contain terminology you did not understand?
5. Were the questions in a logical order?
6. If you had to ask for clarification, was the explanation provided by the interviewer clear?
7. During the interview were you given enough time to think and answer each question?
8. Did the interviewers note-taking bother you?
9. At any time during the interview did the digital recording bother you?
10. What, if any, changes would you like to make in terms of the interview questions, the protocol, and the debriefing?
11. Did you feel comfortable about the interview process?
12. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

APPENDIX F

Table F1 – Connection between Research and Interview Questions

Table F1

Connection between Research Questions and Interview Questions

| Research Question | Interview Question |
|---|--|
| 1. How do charter middle school site administrators perceive, define, and view parent involvement in urban Title I public charter schools? | 1. How do you define parent involvement? 2. What do you feel are the benefits of parent involvement during middle school? |
| 2. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant barriers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools? | 3. What, if any, are your general concerns regarding parent involvement on your campus related to communication, volunteering, and parent decision making? |
| 3. What do charter middle school site administrators view as the predominant enablers to parent involvement, specifically regarding communication, volunteering, and decision making, in urban Title I public charter middle schools? | 4. What communication methods currently exist to make parents feel comfortable attending on site meetings and campus events and participating in shared decision making at your school site? |
| 4. What campus programs, workshops, and participation incentives do charter middle school site administrators offer parents to create positive outcomes for parent involvement on their public charter middle school campuses? | 5. What involvement structures have the school site administration established to empower parents? |
| 5. Which specific outreach strategies, if any, have increased parent involvement at the urban Title I charter middle schools? | 6. Of all the parent involvement practices currently being used on your campus, what outreach strategies have been most effective in increasing parent involvement? |

APPENDIX G

IRB Approval

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

January 15, 2015

Jessica Boro

Protocol #: E0115D02

Project Title: Site School Administrators Perceptions of Barriers and Enablers to Parent Involvement in Urban Title I Charter Middle Schools

Dear Ms. Boro:

Thank you for submitting your application, *Site School Administrators Perceptions of Barriers and Enablers to Parent Involvement in Urban Title I Charter Middle Schools*, for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dr Barner, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - <http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html>) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) states:

(b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact Kevin Collins, Manager of the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) at gpsirb@pepperdine.edu. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Thema Bryant-Davis".

Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives
Mr. Brett Leach, Compliance Attorney
Dr. Robert Barner, Faculty Advisor