

PARENTS' & TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT  
PRACTICES IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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## ABSTRACT

Research has shown the importance of parent involvement in a child's academic, psychosocial, and emotional well-being. While parent involvement has been increasingly encouraged over the past decades, the relationship between parents and teachers has become a source of great tension. This study examines the relationship between parents and teachers and the areas where it may be problematic or adversarial. A comparison of parent and teacher means was analyzed in examining parents' and teachers' perceptions of how well schools are performing each of the six parent involvement practices as identified by Joyce Epstein and the National Parent Teacher Association. Results indicated that teachers rate schools higher than parents on five of the six practices. Using Heider's Balance Theory, a comparison of parent and teacher means for each practice revealed whether the practice was balanced or imbalanced. Results indicated that five of the six practices were balanced leading to an emotionally pleasant relationship and satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship. Finally, multiple regression was used to analyze which of the parent involvement practices was the greatest predictor of satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship. While all six predictors were significant in contributing to the satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship, *Student Learning at Home* was the greatest predictor of parents' satisfaction in the parent-teacher relationship. It can be said from this study, that the greater the number of parent involvement practices that are implemented and functioning effectively coincides with greater satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*  
Philippians 4:13

It is with great honor that I dedicate the completion of this work to the most important person in my life, my husband, Dr. James Taylor. It was because of his tremendous support and never ending encouragement that sustained me through the last few years. James has always wanted nothing but the best for me, and most importantly, for me to fulfill my hopes and dreams. I will always be grateful for his unconditional love and support

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The partnership between families and schools is complex and fragile. Many believe that parents and teachers should be allies and partners, because the goal for both is to raise, guide, and teach children. In too many cases, participants in this partnership are often estranged, causing suspicion of one other. Such partnerships can become defensive and adversarial rather than collaborative and productive. Some sociologists believe this tension between parents and teachers is inevitable because of the different roles that each play in children's lives. Parents' concerns are individualistic because of the deep, passionate bond they have with their child. Teachers' concerns are more broadly focused because they have to meet the needs of many as they lead children in developing a classroom community in which children learn to be responsible and accountable to the group (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004).

Strained relationships between parents and teachers occur most frequently at the elementary level. During this period, "teacher" is everything to the child as mothers are constantly reminded of the teacher's authority by their children who talk frequently of the things that occur at school and away from home. Waller's (1968) words, even from the 1930's, still resonate today.

From the ideal point of view, parents and teachers have much in common, in that both, supposedly wish things to occur for the best interest of the child; but in fact, parents and teachers usually live in a condition of mutual distrust and enmity. Both wish the child well, but it is such a different kind of well that conflict must inevitably arrive over

it...The fact seems to be that parents and teachers are natural enemies, predestined each for the discomfiture of the other (p. 68).

### *Statement of the Problem*

Teachers hold many perceptions that contribute to strained family-school partnerships. Some of these include negative views of the socio-economic status of the family, the quality of the home environment, cultural differences, and parent's level of education. There may also be negative views held about how families support children's' learning, problematic communication due to language differences, and stereotypes about race and class. These views need to be examined so that teachers can be more receptive to building positive working relations with parents in support of children (University of South Carolina, 2002).

Likewise, parents may hold perceptions that impede a healthy, productive rapport with their child's teacher. These may include distrust of teachers, a feeling of not being included or rejected, lack of communication in their child's progress, and a feeling of embarrassment when their child is not doing well. In sum, educators and parents must work together in order to develop a healthy, collaborative partnership if children are going to develop optimally and be successful members of a democratic society.

While parents' and teachers' participation are both essential to positive family-school partnerships, the primary responsibility for developing this partnership rests with the teacher (Faust-Horn, 2003). Teachers should monitor the school climate and the messages they send to parents concerning their involvement. The collaborative process should be initiated by teachers with a systematic approach to offer opportunities for parents to be a part of this process. Recent studies show that

when families are involved in their children's education, the children achieve higher grades, have better attendance, complete more homework, and demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors (Izzo, *et al*, 1999, Lopez, *et al*, 2005, Nix, 2005, Lazar & Slostad, 1999, Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998). One way to foster children's learning is through the joint efforts of parents and teachers sharing responsibility for creating a positive partnership.

Assessing the perceptions held by parents and teachers regarding family-school partnerships is an essential first step in creating a successful partnership. This is important because misperceptions contribute to the "level of openness with one another, styles of engagement, and mutual expectations between parents and educators" (Lewis & Forman, p. 69, 2002). Since the primary focus of family-school partnerships is the student, parents and teachers need to put aside these misperceptions and the stereotypical thinking and work together to create a partnership that focuses on enhancing student learning through the supportive relations of both the primary adult caregivers, namely parents and teachers.

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Heider's Balance Theory (Monsour, Betty, & Kurzweil, 1993) focuses on the balance of interpersonal relationships, and in this case, between parents and teachers involved in parent involvement practices. In general, balance theory predicts that individuals seek relationships where agreement exists between them and another person on a mutually important issue. Agreement on these issues allows the participants to maintain a state of balance. In the school environment, it is believed that a greater state of balance leads to more quality parental involvement,

positive partnerships between parents and teachers, and potentially more positive outcomes for students.

Heider's conceptualization of relationships among a person (P), a second individual (O), and an object or issue (X) focuses on those relationships that are balanced, or imbalanced (See Figure 1). Balanced relationships are emotionally pleasant while imbalanced relationships are sufficiently unpleasant and lead to conflict (Baron *et al*, 1974). Parents and teachers who experience imbalanced relationships often suffer conflict and strained partnerships. These partnerships can only grow in a positive direction when there is mutual trust and respect for the other's values, perceptions, and experiences (Dunlap & Alva, 1999). With this in mind, Heider's Theory of Balance can be used to conceptualize the perceptions of parents' and teachers' that contribute to balanced or imbalanced relationships involving parent involvement practices.

Feather (1966) extended Heider's theory by showing how two given attitudes can predict the relationship between two subjects (See Figure 2). His research shows that where the attitudinal relations have the same sign (either both positive or both negative), a predicted balanced relationship can be assumed. If signs are different (positive and negative), a predicted imbalanced relationship can be assumed. The researcher in this study does not set out to predict the relationships between parents and teachers, but uses this theory as a basis for examining parents' and teachers' views of their school's parent involvement practices.

Through Heider's Balance Theory, each of the six family involvement practices can be evaluated as balanced or imbalanced depending on parents' and

Figure 1  
*Heider's Balance Theory*

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Heider's Balance Theory shows relationships among a person (P), another person (O), and either a third person or an impersonal entity (X). The + and - signs refer to positive and negative attitudes. Heider characterized balanced relationships as emotionally pleasant and imbalanced relationships as fraught with tension or indifference. *Source: Weist, W. (1965).*

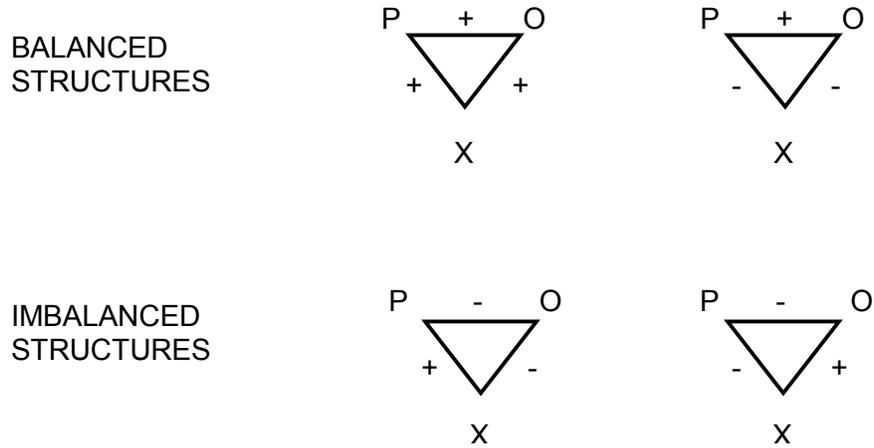
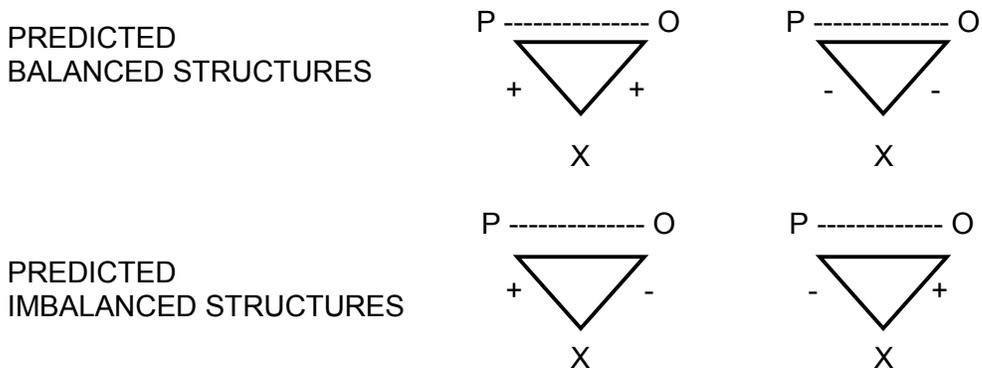


Figure 2  
*Feather's Prediction of Interpersonal Attraction*

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Feather's Prediction of Interpersonal Attraction shows the theoretical principle of when two relational attitudes are given, the relationship between the two subjects can be predicted. *Source: Feather, N.T. (1966).*



teachers' perceptions of each. Where parents and teachers evaluate a practice as both positive (above a mean score of three) or both negative (below a mean score of three), that relationship will be said to have balance for that practice. If parents evaluate a practice as negative (below a mean score of three) and teachers evaluate that same practice as positive (above a mean score of three), then that relationship would be imbalanced for that practice. If parents evaluate a practice as positive (above a mean score of three) and teachers evaluate that same practice as negative (below a mean score of three), then that relationship would also be imbalanced. The researcher is looking for those relationships where teachers and parents evaluate a practice in a positive manner which would indicate that the practice is in place and functioning effectively. Those practices that show balance in a negative manner also prove to be valuable in that it would indicate that both parents and teachers agree that the practice is lacking in their school setting. Therefore, Heider's Balance Theory serves as a way to conceptualize the relationships between parents and teachers as they evaluate parent involvement practices at their school.

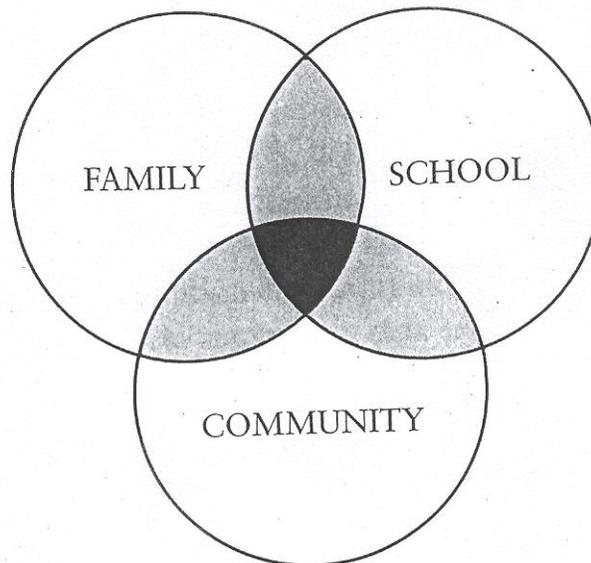
#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to explore the six parent involvement practices, as identified by Joyce Epstein and the National Parent Teacher Association, which contribute to a positive family-school partnership. The term "partnership" is represented in the theoretical model Overlapping Spheres of Influence developed by Joyce Epstein (See Figure 3). Epstein's model indicates that the more practices that are in place and functioning effectively, the greater the family-school partnership (Epstein, 2001).

Figure 3  
*Overlapping Spheres of Influence*

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Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School and Community on Children's Learning. *Source: Fagnano, C. & Werber, B.Z. (1994).*



As the spheres of influence overlap more and more, the greater the support for the child. The six parent involvement practices include areas of support from the family, the school, and the community. The research conducted by Epstein and her colleagues since 1980, has provided information about good practices of partnership. This data has led to the creation of a framework of six parent involvement practices that together form a comprehensive family-school partnership (Epstein, 1994). The study will focus on parents' and teachers' perceptions of how well schools are performing each of these practices, specifically those areas that interfere with supporting a family-school partnership. Data will be collected during the spring of 2006 through the use of a survey to be distributed to parents and teachers which will

assess their perceptions of each of the six practices. Once the results have been analyzed, school leaders could use the information to design staff development opportunities that focus on improving family-school partnerships.

#### *Research Questions*

1. What are parents' and teachers' perceptions of how well schools are performing each of the six parent involvement practices that contribute to a family-school partnership?
2. Do parents' and teachers' perceptions of each of these practices lead to balanced or imbalanced relationships?
3. What accounts for teachers' and parents' perceptions of this relationship?

#### *Definition of Terms*

1. **Family-School Partnership:** Family-school partnerships focus on the relationship between home, school, and community and how parents and teachers work together to promote the social and academic development of children (Epstein, 1987).
2. **School:** certified professionals in the school community involved in the education of students.
3. **Family:** any adult in the child's life who has principal responsibility as parent/guardian.
4. **Parent Involvement Practices:** the six practices identified by Epstein (1987) that contribute to a family-school partnership; communication, parenting, student learning, volunteering, school decision-making and advocacy, and collaborating with community.

### *Limitations to the Study*

The researcher in this study is a teacher, and even though there has been great effort to report the related research in an unbiased fashion, some bias may emerge as a result of the position of the researcher.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the current literature and research on the perceptions held by parents and teachers about family-school partnerships. The chapter will focus on the six parent involvement practices, established by Joyce Epstein, that contribute to a positive family-school partnership and how parents and teachers view these practices. The author will begin with a framework that many schools have followed that fosters positive family-school partnerships.

#### *A Framework for Schools*

Most teachers receive little, if any, training on how to effectively build partnerships with the parents of the children they teach (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1999). If teachers are asked about the most demanding part of their job, they often report dealing with parents. According to the Consortium for Policy Research in Education and the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, it is the number one reason why up to fifty percent of teachers have left the profession within the first five years (Gibbs, 2005).

The theoretical model, Overlapping Spheres of Influence (See Figure 3), includes influences from the family, school, and community that impact children's learning. A framework of six parent involvement practices that contribute to the family-school partnership has evolved from this theoretical model over many years from studies by educators and families in elementary, middle, and high schools (Epstein, 1995). This framework, identified by Joyce Epstein (1995) and instituted by the National Parent Teacher Association, is used to help schools and teachers build

positive and lasting partnerships with the parents of the children they teach. These six practices include:

1. **Communication:** Effective home-school communication is the two-way sharing of information vital to student success. Partnering requires give-and-take conversation, goal setting for the future, and regular follow-up interactions.
2. **Parenting:** School personnel and staff support positive parenting by respecting and affirming the strengths and skills needed by parents to fulfill their role.
3. **Student Learning:** Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curricular-linked activities and decisions.
4. **Volunteering:** Offer opportunities for parents to participate regularly in school or program events.
5. **School decision-making and advocacy:** Parents and educators depend on shared authority in decision-making systems to foster parental trust, public confidence, and mutual support of each other's efforts in helping students succeed.
6. **Collaborating with community:** Schools develop partnerships with local businesses to advance student learning and assist schools and families (National PTA, 1997).

According to Gettinger & Guetschow (1998), successful partnerships are collaborative in nature and based on mutual respect among individuals. Family-school partnerships, in particular, involve shared commitment, responsibility, and

accountability for outcomes, and are based on the belief that both parents and teachers are necessary for improving the education of children. Given the importance of shared understanding for successful partnerships, it is useful to know parents' and teachers' perceptions of this partnership.

### *Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions*

Researchers identify communication as one of the primary issues that contributes to an imbalanced relationship between parents and teachers. Teachers often comment that they feel their professionalism is being questioned when parents accept their child's version of events at face value, instead of hearing what the teacher has to say. This leads teachers to believe that parents don't have any respect for their training and experience (Miretzky, 2004). Teachers want parents to initiate communication to get to know the teacher personally, to learn the teacher's expectations, and to be a part of the child's learning experience. Responding to communication such as notes sent home, phone calls, or emails is an expectation of teachers (Boers, 2002). Teachers also ask that parents schedule meetings to discuss concerns, rather than showing up at the end of the day when both parties are tired and is probably not the best time for a discussion involving strong feelings (Katz, 1996).

Like teachers, parents want open lines of communication. Parents want to be informed about what is going on in their child's life, and to hear the good reports as well as the bad (Miretzky, 2004). Phone calls are often problem centered and have a blaming tone (Robinson & Fine, 1994). In fact, many parents reported they stayed clear of communicating with their child's teacher and instead sought out the counselor, for they felt they would receive a quicker and more productive response.

Some parents felt that if they challenged the teacher, their child would suffer the repercussions by lower grades, exclusion, and chastisement (Ramirez, 2001).

Another area in which perceptions differ is whether parents take the time and have the capability to succeed with student learning activities (Turner, 2000). In some cases, parents are reluctant to become actively involved, whereas in other instances parents may become more involved than is really helpful to the child (Robinson & Fine, 1994). Often times, parents are unsure on how to work with their child and need assistance from the teacher in understanding their child's homework. Parents complain that they do not have the content expertise nor can they create expectations for time spent on homework (Robinson & Fine, 1994).

However, many teachers feel parents don't offer the support needed to complete home activities and view this as a lack of involvement in their child's education. There is a further view among teachers that most parents aren't capable of supporting their child's learning because of their own poor education (Crozier, 1999). What most teachers would like is for parents to encourage their children to do their homework and provide them a place to do their homework. The ambiguities of these perceptions need to be clarified between parents and teachers concerning student learning if the child is to be successful.

Research on parent volunteers suggests that most teachers believe it is a good thing for parents to be seen by the students, but teachers' daily experiences with parents volunteering in the classroom are filled with ambivalence and sometimes resentment. Some teachers felt tied to a schedule and reported that they lacked flexibility in their daily routine when parent helpers were expected in their classrooms (Lewis & Forman, 2002). Teachers also commented on how the

dynamics in their classroom changed when parents worked directly with students on a daily basis. According to Craig (1998), a major concern for schools is the lack of time to train parents to teach, discuss ethics, or evaluate parents' work. "For teachers there is a tension between, on the one hand, seeking to involve parents, and on the other hand, controlling their interference or maintaining the professional boundary" (Crozier, 1999).

In a report by Miretzky (2004), parents felt teachers discouraged and disapproved of parent volunteers, while teachers saw themselves as being supportive. This report further described a discrepancy between what teachers perceived as positive attitudes regarding parent volunteers and what observers recorded, which did not support the teachers' perception of encouraging participation. Parents may feel unwelcome, or even intimidated by the school; therefore, their further involvement in the school or classroom is likely to be limited (McConchie, 2004). Many parents feel caught in a Catch-22. They are labeled as "nosey" if they are actively involved and "not caring" if they are not. For some, concern about being perceived as a "pushy parent" deterred their involvement (Crozier, 1999). Therefore, parents who seem uninterested or uninvolved in their child's education are really extremely concerned. They just don't know how to approach teachers (Mathis, 2003). According to Turner (2000), "Focus-group research has revealed that many parents feel schools don't want them to be involved—or at best, to be involved on the school's terms" (p. 3). For this reason, it is crucial to determine teachers' beliefs about parents' role in the classroom.

There are competing roles between teacher-as-professional and parent-as-participant. "On the one hand, teacher-as-professional implies that teachers will take

a more active role as decision makers in their classrooms” (Dodd & Konzal, 2000, p. 1). This allows them to use their own judgment about teaching and learning practices. This reform path leads teachers toward becoming experts in the field.

As teachers are gaining a greater voice in their classrooms, parents are also demanding an equal voice. One teacher expressed their feeling about this shift in family-school partnerships by saying, “I don’t give a tinker’s damn what parents think! That’s the problem with asking parents for their input. They think we will use it all—when they’re just thinking about what’s good for their kid. We have to think about what’s good for all kids” (Dodd & Konzal, 2000, p. 2). Bauch and Goldring (1998) reported that an increasing number of parents, particularly those who are well educated, are more inclined to criticize teachers, to undercut their authority, and hold them in low regard.

A parent who feels comfortable and valued will contribute willingly to a school’s success, but often times, parents feel teachers discourage and disapprove of parental involvement when it comes to school decision-making. When schools keep parents in the role of visitor, parents never feel that they have a real voice that contributes to a democratic public education (Miretzky, 2004). Some schools further perpetuate the divide between home and school by excluding parents altogether from education decision-making (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). According to Turner (2000), one survey indicated that 76% of administrators thought parents did not have the training to make qualified school decisions concerning curriculum development and instruction, while 66% of parents felt they were qualified.

Miretsky (2004) suggests, “If we are truly serious about schools being sites of democracy, and about encouraging Dewey’s ‘interests held in common,’ then family-

school partnerships cannot be overlooked.” The significance of this statement extends beyond the classroom and into educational policy and deserves attention from teachers, parents, and administrators.

### *Balance Theory Studies*

While Heider’s Balance Theory has not been tested on the parent-teacher relationship, the concept behind the theory has been applied to other areas of interpersonal relationships. Through the analysis of the following studies, it is clear that this theory can be used to test the relationship between any two people/groups and their attitudes toward a common issue.

Feather (1966) reformulated Heider’s Balance Theory to show that when two attitudes are given, the relationship can be predicted based on the sign of the given attitudes. In a study about interpersonal attraction, three questionnaires were constructed to test the hypothesis that a relation could be predicted between two individuals when attitudinal relations were known about a specific factor. The questionnaires were randomly distributed among a class of 178 male students attending a vacation school at the University of New England in August 1964. Each questionnaire was designed in three different forms involving different random orders of the items to control for possible sequence and fatigue effects.

The instructions were the same for all three questionnaires. The study focused on social psychology and explained that people in general are pretty good at making guesses and predictions about the behavior of other people and the relationships between them. Subjects were asked to provide information about two people given the pseudo names “Joe” and “Jack.” Subjects were asked to answer the question, “Does Joe like Jack?” based on various relationship questions.

Subjects ranked questions on a seven-point scale with higher numbers representing a more positive rating. Subjects were asked to treat each question independently and to work as quickly as possible. Most subjects completed the questionnaire within forty minutes.

Subjects were randomly deleted until an *N* of 17 was achieved for each form of the questionnaire. Since there was not evidence of order effects, the three forms were combined for each questionnaire, and the analysis was therefore based on an *N* of 51 subjects.

The results of the study indicate that on all three questionnaires the mean rating was above four. All three questionnaires showed that there was a general tendency for subjects to predict a positive attitudinal relation, which would balance the relationship. If the ratings above four are treated as positive and the ratings below four treated as negative, it is apparent that the data provided very convincing support for a principle of structural balance by the attitudinal relation that subjects predict.

Theory has shown us that interpersonal communication usually assumes that people maintain their relationships voluntary and they like their relational partners. Heider's Balance Theory predicts that when people dislike their relational partners, there will be stress and discomfort and people will try to attenuate this discomfort by increasing psychological distance between themselves and their partners. Hess (2000) completed a study that investigated this theory of distancing behaviors. He hypothesized that people in nonvoluntary relationships with disliked partners would experience more discomfort than people in relationships with liked partners.

Hess recruited 185 students at the University of Minnesota from introductory communication classes by offering extra credit for their participation. Students arrived at specific research times to complete a questionnaire and were randomly assigned to two groups. Half of the sample responded to questions about a liked partner and half responded to questions about a disliked partner. The participants were asked to report the emotions and feelings that they experienced in specific relationships. Both open-ended and closed-ended questions were used to learn about what types of behaviors people used to maintain the relationship. The results from the study support Hess's hypothesis. Three of the 91 participants who answered questions about liked partners reported feelings of stress, whereas 42 of the 94 participants who answered questions about disliked partners reported feelings of stress when describing how they felt around the other person. Based on these results, balance theory predicts that nonvoluntary relationships with disliked partners will cause stress and that stress can be bothersome if that relationship is important to the actor. If the relationship is unimportant, the discomfort can be easily ignored.

#### *Family/School/Community Partnership Studies*

Starting with a statewide study of teachers, parents, students, and administrators of 600 elementary schools, Becker and Epstein (1982) began to learn about practices of partnership that were used by teachers, desired by families, and responsive to students. Through this study, parents and teachers were asked various questions about teacher practices and what teachers thought about parent involvement strategies. The researchers studied the results of partnerships on the attitudes and practices of teachers, the actions and behaviors of parents, and the attitudes and achievements of students. Overall, the survey results indicated a very

positive view of parent-oriented teaching strategies. This study led to the development of the theory of overlapping spheres of influence and the framework of six parent involvement practices.

While the data revealed that teachers clearly support the use of interaction with parents, there was considerable variation in the ways that teachers conducted these standard interactions with parents. Only a minority of teachers initiated interactions that went beyond what was traditionally expected of them. The study found that teachers initiate parent interaction based on a number of variables; grade level of students, educational level of parents, school subject taught, and school support for parent involvement. While the study focused primarily on teacher practices to initiate parent involvement, there was no conclusion on the effects of parent involvement on student learning.

Ideas about the opposing views of school and family relations have most often been discussed from the teacher's perspective. Through her studies at Johns Hopkins University, Epstein (1986) sought to gain the parent's perspective by examining the various parent involvement activities that contribute to a positive parent-teacher partnership. In the spring of 1981, parents of 1,269 students in 82 first through fifth grade classrooms in Maryland completed questionnaires on parent involvement practices of their children's teachers. A response rate of 59% was reported.

While parents' attitudes toward the public elementary schools and teachers were remarkably positive, parents reported that teachers could do more to involve parents. The results of the parent involvement activities were reported with descriptive statistics. While communication is considered "parent involvement," it is

sometimes referred to as “parent information.” Of the parents who responded to the questionnaire, 60% reported to have never spoken to the teacher on the phone while 16% reported to never have received memos from their teacher. Volunteer activities revealed that 70% of parents never helped in the classroom. Only 4% of the respondents were very active, spending 25 days per year at the school. Many parents (42%) worked outside the home during the school hours, while others (12%) simply had not been asked. In the area of Student Learning, teachers who requested learning activities at home had more parent involvement than those teachers who did not solicit parent involvement with home activities.

These findings suggest that those teachers who encouraged parent involvement maximized cooperation and minimized antagonism between teachers and parents and enhanced teacher’s professional standing from the parent’s perspective. Parents with children in classrooms of teachers who built parent involvement practices into their regular teaching were more aware of teachers’ efforts, knew more about their child’s instructional program, and rated teachers higher in interpersonal skills and overall teaching quality.

The National Network of Partnership Schools was initiated in 1996 to assist schools in developing comprehensive programs of school/family/community partnerships. Sanders and Epstein (2000) outlined the research and studies that laid the foundation for such a program. In 1987, Johns Hopkins University and the Fund for Educational Excellence began a collaborative project with eight elementary and middle schools in the Baltimore City Public School System to implement successful practices of school/family/community partnerships. The project used Epstein’s (1987) framework of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and six practices of family

and community involvement developed by Epstein and her colleagues at the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. Field studies revealed that in districts that implemented the project, parents became more involved, stronger relationships were developed between parents and teachers, and students' academic achievement increased.

Based on the knowledge gained from these studies, 24 elementary and middle schools in the Baltimore public system became part of the school/family/community partnership program. From 1987 to 1995, knowledge grew from field experiences with schools in Utah and Wisconsin. To enable schools across the country to study these advances in research and practice, the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University initiated the National Network of Partnership Schools in 1996. Analysis of data collected from schools in 1997 and 1998 indicate that the project has helped schools build more comprehensive programs for partnerships.

#### *Parent-Teacher Relationship Studies*

Much of the research has shown that parental involvement is a key predictor of a student's academic, social, and emotional success. A study by Barge and Loges (2003) examined parents' and teachers' perceptions of parent involvement and communication. As part of an ongoing grant under the United States Department of Education GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs), Barge and Loges conducted a study in a mid-sized city in the Southwestern United States focusing primarily on students labeled at-risk. For four months, information was collected through a qualitative study utilizing parent and teacher focus groups. Two major themes emerged from the groups: a) building

positive relationships between parents and teachers, and b) monitoring student academic progress. Both groups identified a variety of communication strategies for developing positive parent-teacher relationships such as parents attending formal scheduled events like PTA meetings, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences as well as spontaneous contacts such as pop-in visits, calling teachers to monitor progress, and responding to report cards.

Groups also mentioned the importance of monitoring academic progress as a key form of parental involvement. Monitoring progress through report cards and personal contact with teachers proved to be an important aspect of parental involvement and maintaining the parent-teacher relationship.

Results conclude that a discourse is important to create opportunities to build partnerships and community, help construct relationships among key stakeholders, and develop opportunities for public participation about school policy and pedagogy. This study reveals that by exploring the opportunities and constraints of creating a relational configuration, developing a community-minded approach to parental involvement where all interested parties become aware of how they fit into a community of support for children is more likely.

In a statewide study conducted by the Alabama Education Association (2000), anecdotal data suggest that there are perceived problems in the relationship between parents and public schools. Capital Survey Research Center (CSRC) conducted a statewide survey of parents and other adults who had responsibility for children in public schools. CSRC also conducted a statewide survey of Alabama public school teachers. The study included 447 parents and 504 teachers. A computer-assisted telephone interviewing system was used to conduct the survey.

The sample of parents was selected using computerized random digit dialing methodology, while the sample of teachers was randomly selected from a computerized file of all Alabama Education Association member-teacher telephone numbers. The survey asked various questions about the quality of Alabama public schools in relation to the partnership between teachers and parents. Teachers were questioned about their perceptions of parents' participation in the family-school relationship, and parents were questioned about their perceptions of teachers' participation in the family-school relationship. Descriptive statistics reveal that both scales differed greatly on how well these relationships have been implemented. Most items differed by more than 20 percentage points.

The data strongly suggest that there was disagreement between what parents and teachers do and do not do in public schools. The results state that the differing perceptions could be a result of inadequate communication, or a lack of public schools and teachers clearly presenting the accurate status of parental and public school relationships. In either case, perceptions exist that the family-school relationship needs to be strengthened.

Currently, the majority of school climate studies focus primarily on the perspective of the teacher or administrator. While parent involvement has been a key component to the student's educational and social-emotional outcomes, the parent perspective has been largely ignored. Through a qualitative study conducted by Godber (2002), the parents' perspectives and how these perspectives are linked to other variables was explored. Participants were recruited through a research project named SC:OPE (School Climate: Obtaining Parents' Expertise) in which a sample of 66 parents was selected. Student names were randomly selected from a

student accounting database. With a goal of recruiting 30 families (30 parents and 30 students), 27 of the 66 families agreed to be interviewed. The study focused on data from the 27 parents that agreed to be interviewed. The data collection process included both interview and survey questions pertaining to parents' beliefs and experiences related to school. The interview procedure and survey focused on the following 12 domains: academic expectations, student attitude about school, safety, welcoming, leadership, communication, opportunities for parent involvement, student-student relationships, student-teacher relationships, parent-teacher relationships, school building, and quality of education.

Through descriptive data, results about parent-teacher relationships included levels of respect and the degree to which the partners value each other's efforts and expertise. Most of the comments described whether or not teachers conveyed a belief in the parent-teacher partnership. Families emphasized that the parent-teacher relationship takes time and effort and requires meaningful and frequent contact. Many of the comments through the interview process revealed parents' dissatisfaction with the way their child's academics progress was communicated. They also felt that teachers often times had an "agenda" when it came to parent involvement issues. This, parents felt, created a ripe area for disagreement.

The collaborative relationship between parents and teachers in terms of their ability to bring together the systems of family, school, and community to form a working alliance was the focus of a study conducted by Sawyers (1996). The purpose of her research was designed to assess the importance of the parent-teacher partnership in relation to parental involvement and student academic achievement.

The participants in this study consisted of parents and teachers of children in elementary grades pre-K through fifth in 23 elementary schools. Through random selection, surveys were mailed out to families with a response rate of 399 (25%) participants. The Working Alliance Inventory developed by Horvath (Sawyers, 1996) was used to assess the client-therapist relationship on the basis of mutuality and collaboration. According to Sawyer, the same issues of mutual trust, acceptance, and confidence are present in the parent-teacher relationship.

The descriptive data analyzed three factors in the educational process: the relationship between parents and teachers, parental involvement in education, and student academic achievement. To examine the relationship between the establishment of a working alliance between teachers and parents and the level of parental participation in schools, the analysis involved Pearson correlations between the parental perception of the parent-teacher relationship (as measured by the Working Alliance Inventory and the Teacher Effort Grade by Parents) and the various indicators of parental involvement. The results of this study indicate that the establishment of a working alliance is significantly related to exactly the kinds of parental involvement activities which were found to enhance student academic achievement. Further results from this study indicate that the relationship between parent and teacher, as perceived by the parent, is related to levels of parental involvement in the school.

Lawson (2003) set out to understand school-family relations in context. What he discovered in the course of two years of fieldwork is that to understand school-family relations, the cultural and sub cultural meanings of parent involvement needed close examination. As a result, ethnographic interviews, including focus groups,

were conducted for the purpose of this study. The setting of the study was located in a largely poor urban community in a midwestern city. The teachers who agreed to be part of the study included teachers in grades three to six with experience ranging from three to 22 years. The parents represented in this study were divided into two groups: “involved” and “uninvolved.” This sampling included six parents in the “involved” group and seven parents in the “uninvolved” group.

The interview consisted of 13 questions derived from field notes; informal conversations with teachers, administrators, and parents; as well as the literature. Each session lasted an average of one hour and 15 minutes. The impact of race, culture, structure, socioeconomic standing, and community context on the lives of the participating teachers and parents were weighed by the investigator throughout data analysis.

The findings were divided by the study’s two constituents: parents and teachers. Both constituents’ narratives reflected a constant tension between structure and agency manifested in parents’ and teachers’ struggles to assert their own worldviews and experiences as legitimate within community and institutional contexts. Parents’ narratives were structured around five predominant themes: blocked pathways, changing times, teacher-parent communication, parents’ trust in children’s schooling, and parents’ aspirations for the school to become a community-serving institution. Teachers’ narratives were structured around three central themes: parents’ involvement as defined by teachers, teachers’ beliefs and attributions, and teachers’ lack of ownership in the school reform process. These differing perceptions implicate diverse knowledge, differential power, and competing purposes. Lawson concluded from his study that “the impetus for improving school-

family relations may continue to fall on teachers, who in spite of important preservice training and improved time to work with parents may find themselves without the time or resources needed to transform the most challenged school-family histories and relationships” (p. 128).

Many parent-teacher partnership studies have focused on teachers’ perceptions of parent involvement, while few have examined parents’ perceptions of teacher practices. Studies have shown that parents are more likely to be actively involved in their child’s education if they perceive schools to have strong parent outreach programs. Patrikakou and Weissberg (1998) conducted a study that focused on urban public schools in an effort to gather information about the nature and extent of parent-involvement attitudes and to investigate the relationships among sociodemographic factors and parent perceptions of teacher practices.

Participants in this study included parents from three inner-city elementary schools in a large midwestern city. Two of the schools serve a predominantly African-American population while the third serves primarily Latino students. Parents of children attending pre-K through third grade were surveyed. The parent sample consisted of 246 parents, and the average return rate was 64%.

The measure used in this study was developed collaboratively by the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Mid-Atlantic Laboratory of Student Success at Temple University. English and Spanish versions of the survey were created. The questionnaire included 37 items covering areas such as parent involvement at home, parent involvement at school, and parent perceptions about teacher outreach programs. The variables explored included sociodemographic and background variables, a measure of parents’ perception of student outreach, and two measures

of actual parent involvement. Frequencies as well as regression analysis were used to collect information about the descriptive and predictive nature of the variables under investigation.

Results for parents' perceptions of teacher outreach indicated that 80% of parents reported that the teacher notified them of their child's poor behavior, while 71% reported that the teacher let them know when their child had done something well. Less frequent forms of outreach included encouraging parents to come to school (55%), and offering assistance to parents to help their child at home (64%). When predicting parent involvement at school, parents' perceptions of teacher outreach was the most influential variable. Parents who felt that teachers were encouraging a collaborative partnership were more likely to participate in a variety of school activities. Findings also indicated that in spite of adverse conditions such as low education and socioeconomic status, parents whose children attended inner-city public schools made significant efforts to be involved in their child's education, both at home and at school.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) fulfills a congressional mandate by collecting and analyzing data on the condition of education in the United States. In a 2001 report by Chen, the NCES conducted a study on the efforts to involve parents in children's education. The study set out to answer two questions: 1) Do children's parents acknowledge the efforts that schools reportedly are making? and 2) Do schools report the same level of parent participation in school programs as parents do?

Through the responses of two surveys; the Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, and the Parent and Family Involvement of the

National Household Education Surveys Program, this report studied the level of agreement between parents' and teachers' views of how schools involve parents in their children's education and how parents respond to opportunities for involvement. Since the purpose of the report was to determine the level of agreement, it was essential that the relevant survey items be comparable between the two surveys. The survey items selected for comparison corresponded to Epstein's six types of parent involvement practices.

Descriptive statistics reported apparent discrepancies between the schools' and parents' reports. While discrepancies were found in all types of schools, the magnitude of the discrepancies increased with school level, size, and minority concentration. On all six practices, the comparison between teachers' and parents' reports indicated that there were differences between schools and parents regarding whether or not schools used various practices to increase parent involvement. While most schools claimed that they used various practices to encourage parent involvement, lower proportions of parents acknowledged these efforts. The largest discrepancy appeared in the area of school decision-making (schools 98%; parents 75%). Communication between school and home, particularly pertaining to students' school performance, revealed the next largest discrepancy (schools 100%; parents 89%). Information about parenting reported schools 82% and parents 73%; volunteer activities, schools 99% and parents 90%; providing information about community services, schools 88% and parents 72%; and student learning at home, schools 89% and parents 76%.

The school-parent discrepancies suggest that despite schools' reported efforts, some parents were not aware of what schools were doing to encourage

parent involvement. This report suggests that it is possible that schools have not done enough to effectively reach out to every parent in implementing various practices. It is also a possibility that some parents simply may not set aside enough time to pay attention to the information or opportunities provided by the school due to demanding work schedules and other family and work obligations.

As part of a national study by the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), 16 focus groups were selected to generate in-depth and rich information about the perceptions and experiences of parents. As reported by Baker (1997), the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) has made parent involvement in their children's education a national priority. Through this study, participants were invited through random selection representing various ethnic groups, socioeconomic status, and educational levels. Audiotapes of the groups were transcribed resulting in six major questions raised by parents; how are parents involved? Why do parents become involved? What are the barriers to parent involvement? What are the facilitators of involvement? What ways do schools promote school-home communication? How do parents want schools to be different?

Results from the study show that parents feel they have little input into the national debate on parental involvement. In many circumstances, parents felt they were not welcome, and many felt the school did not appreciate their initiative. Many parents felt guilty when they could not be involved in ways encouraged by the school and angry when the school was not accommodating to their initiatives of involvement. This study offers a glimpse into what parents really think and feel and

offers fruitful avenues for refining practices to be more in line with the realities of parents' lives.

In examining parental participation, Lewis and Forman (2002) conducted a study of two elementary schools and the effects of social class and school culture on parent teacher relationships. A multilevel ethnographic approach was used to study the two schools including social stratification (race, class, and gender) and normative behavioral transactions in all settings where learning occurs (i.e., home, classroom, and playground). Through this multilevel approach, the researchers highlight factors that contribute to the positive development of home-school relationships as well as those that seem to get in the way.

Research over a four month period of time was conducted as the authors observed in classrooms, faculty lunchroom, the main office, and other parts of the school campus. Informal interviews with numerous school community members were also conducted.

Observation results differed greatly between the two schools. Even though one school had a history of academic success and a great deal of parent involvement, there was still difficulty in creating cooperative relationships between school staff and parents.

Teachers reported that parents' efforts to help made their jobs more difficult, which caused strained relations. The main problem was that the parents were at school whether they were wanted or not. The case with this school highlights the dynamics of social class and power. Parents put their collective economic, social, and cultural capital to work as they saw best.

The atmosphere experienced at the second school presented a different picture. There was a sense of community as parents and teachers worked together. Negotiation, accommodation, and cooperation were prominent themes. Parents were respectful of the many demands teachers faced in doing their jobs, and the exchange reflected a mutual respect in which each person recognized the other's work life and tried to make the home-school connection work around competing demands. The authors attribute this positive relationship to the idea that parents were seen as partners rather than simply clients or consumers.

The authors of the study conclude that several factors contribute to the development, or nondevelopment, of collaborative relationships between parents and teachers. In the case of the first school, social class played a role in some parents to act as effective advocates for their children no matter what—whether in concert with or in opposition to the school. The second school showed how the ability to build strong collaborative relationships with parents and empowering them with full membership in the school community allowed the school to prosper. The authors conclude that with regard to social class or race, the lesson here seems to be that for school personnel and parents to develop strong and meaningful relationships, they must begin from a base of mutual respect and caring.

In a study conducted by Izzo, Weissberg, Kaspro, and Fendrich (1999), researchers studied how children's education changes over time and how it relates to social and academic functioning in school. In a longitudinal study of three years, teachers provided information on parent involvement and school performance for 1,250 urban, kindergarten through third grade children. They rated four dimensions of parent involvement: frequency of parent-teacher contact, quality of the parent-

teacher interactions, participation in educational activities at home, and participation in school activities.

The researchers discovered that these four dimensions of parent involvement declined from years one to three. Results of the study also showed a decline in quality of parent-teacher interactions. However, participation in educational activities at home showed non-significant changes over time. Each of the parent involvement variables correlated moderately with school performance and parent involvement in years one and two, and accounted for a small variance in year three performance after controlling for initial performance level.

Conclusions from the study suggest that activities requiring parents to come to school (i.e., parent-teacher conferences and other school activities) are more difficult to maintain as children get older. This also supports the findings by Becker and Epstein (1982) that teachers' efforts to work with parents also decline as children get older. Researchers conclude that schools need to engage in more proactive outreach efforts to foster parent participation and constructive parent-teacher interactions as children become older and to evaluate programs that promote parent involvement.

Research on parent-teacher relationships tends to relegate parents to visitor roles in schools. In a study by Miretzky (2004), she argues for the recognition of the importance of talk among parents and teachers in creating and sustaining democratic communities that support school improvement. Using a qualitative approach that incorporated interviews and focus groups, interviews with fourth through eighth grade teachers and parents determined the issues to be explored. Together, teachers and parents discussed issues such as defensiveness,

communication, and alliances. Values of importance that emerged from these discussions included investment in the school community, direct and honest communication, trust, mutual respect, and mutual goals.

A study of parent-teacher relationships in three Chicago elementary schools sought to create a process by which parents and teachers, through participation in interviews and focus groups, could identify and explore what they perceived as the issues and themes of their relationships. The research design was meant to create an environment for frank discussion among parents and teachers. The data were collected through interviews of 17 parents and 21 teachers of fourth through eighth grade students. One parent group and one teacher group then met to refine agendas for two mixed parent-teacher groups. These mixed groups discussed issues such as defensiveness on the part of both parents and teachers, obstacles to effective communication, and potential alliances.

The resulting evidence strongly suggests that, given the opportunity, parents and teachers may find a lot to talk about if they get past their initial suspicions and may create foundations for democratic communities in their schools. Some of what parents and teachers seem to be saying reflects what we already know through the research. They believe stronger relationships are important and would like to see opportunities for connections and closer working relationships. Other comments offer a perspective that has been overlooked. They don't know how to nurture the kind of community that would support these relationships. Miretzky concludes that the best of what parents and teachers have to offer to students, to each other, and their school community will not be fully realized until they learn to talk to each other.

The purpose of a study conducted by Gettinger and Guetschow (1998) was to examine role preferences, perceived effectiveness, and perceptions of opportunities and barriers to parental involvement. Using a sample of teachers and parents of children in grades kindergarten through grade twelve, teacher and parent self-reports addressed the following questions: 1) What are preferences among parents and teachers of children in kindergarten through grade twelve, 2) To what extent do parents and teachers perceive that parents are effective through their involvement, and 3) What do parents and teachers view as barriers to parent involvement?

Parallel forms of a questionnaire, one worded specifically for parents and another for teachers, were developed for this study. Results indicate that, overall, teachers rated parents as being more effective in helping children through their participation in activities than did parents themselves. Teachers also reported that parents have more barriers and fewer opportunities for involvement than parents actually reported. Consistent with the current research, communication between parents and teachers regarding individual preferences, perceived effectiveness, and barriers to involvement are discussed as prerequisites for establishing effective home-school partnerships.

Bandura's work on personal efficacy is the focus of a study conducted by Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1992). The researchers found that teacher efficacy was significantly related to teacher reports of parents' involvement in conferences, volunteering, and home tutoring, as well as teachers' perceptions of parent support. This study involved four elementary schools in a large public school

district varying in geographic location, size, and mean annual family income. Three hundred ninety parents and 50 teachers participated in the study.

The parent questionnaire asked participants to give specific information about themselves as well as estimates of their levels of involvement in various forms of parent-school activities. The teacher questionnaire asked specific information about teachers and their classes as well as the number of students in their classes whose parents participated in parent-school activities.

Results indicate that teacher efficacy and teacher perceptions of parents' efficacy were both positively linked to teacher reports of parent involvement in homework, educational activities, volunteering, and conference participation. Teacher efficacy was also linked to teacher perceptions of parent efficacy. The finding that parent efficacy is related to volunteering, educational activities, and telephone calls suggests that the constructs may contribute to an understanding of variables that influence parents' involvement in decisions and choices. Classroom volunteering may be linked to efficacy because the decision to volunteer requires some sense that one has educationally relevant skills that can and will be used effectively.

Results for teachers revealed a general pattern: higher efficacy teachers reported high levels of parent participation to help with homework, educational activities, volunteering and conferences. This suggests that higher efficacy teachers may invite and receive more parent involvement. The findings suggest the possibility that high-efficacy parents are more likely than those with low efficacy to believe that their efforts pay off. Therefore, schools would be better served by designing parent

involvement approaches that focus specifically on increasing parents' sense of positive influence in their children's school success.

### *Summary*

Both parents and teachers bring important knowledge to the discussion about what contributes to a family-school partnership. Many teachers have a growing, in-depth understanding of knowledge about teaching and learning. Parents know their own children, their community, and their culture. Unless efforts are made to bring these two together in some way, the competing teacher-as-professional and parent-as-participant views will block meaningful reform (Dodd & Konzal, 2000). Without the connection to families, schools will miss out on the opportunities that enhance student learning (Christenson, *et al.*, 2003). Parents and teachers see themselves as connected, like it or not, and sometimes this connection is not very positive. Both feel misunderstood and under appreciated and find it hard to see the benefits resulting from extending themselves to one another. They both agree that stronger partnerships are important but don't feel that they have the power to foster these partnerships (Miretzky, 2004). As reported by Dunlap and Alva (1999), it is critical for teachers and parents to understand their interconnectedness as a key contributor to student success and other positive family and community benefits. As John Dewey (1900) put it, "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy" (p. 7).

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes information related to the subjects studied, a description of the school district included in the study, and the instrumentation. A description of how the data was collected as well as the methods utilized to analyze the collected data is also included.

#### *Selection and Description of Sample*

The researcher first sought and received approval from the University Human Subjects Committee. Once approval was granted, the researcher completed the necessary process for obtaining approval from the school district providing the sample population. Individual approval from each elementary principal was sought in the final step of the approval process. Of the district's fifteen elementary schools, six elementary schools from the selected school district volunteered to participate in the study.

The research was designed to assess the perceptions held by teachers and parents regarding their evaluation of the six parent involvement practices that contribute to a family-school partnership and whether these perceptions are balanced or imbalanced. This was accomplished by examining responses of parents of K-6 students in the participating elementary schools compared with responses of teachers in the participating elementary schools. The study sample for this research was comprised of parents and teachers from a mid-size district in a mid-western state. The schools represented are public elementary schools only with no grade higher than grade six. The parent sample selected had the following characteristics:

- 1) children were enrolled in the district's public elementary schools that offered no

grade higher than grade six, and 2) children were not home schooled at the time of the survey. The teacher sample selected had the following characteristics: 1) certified professionals involved in the education of students in the districts' public elementary schools in grades K-6, and 2) personnel who meet the emotional, medical, and psychological needs of students in grades K-6.

The participating schools being surveyed have a total elementary enrollment of approximately 1,700 students attending six elementary schools. The sample size for the study was 325 families (sample size represents 20% of total participating population), and 58 teachers (sample size represents 36% of total participating population). Complete demographic information for parents can be found in Table 1 and demographic information for teachers can be found in Table 2.

### *Instrumentation*

The survey instrument used for the study was adapted, with permission, from Joyce Epstein's *School and Family Partnerships Surveys* (1993). Both the parent and the teacher surveys asked paired questions related to the six parent involvement practices so that a comparison of these responses could be analyzed. The six practices analyzed were *Communication, Parenting, Student Learning at Home, Volunteering, School Decision-Making and Advocacy, and Collaborating with Community*. Each area of emphasis included three to four indicators, as developed by Epstein and the National Parent Teacher Association (1997), relating to the six practices identified for this study. The National Standards of Parent/Family Involvement Programs and their quality indicators are research based and grounded in both sound philosophy and practical experience (National PTA, 1997). A seventh section asked questions surrounding parents' and teachers' overall satisfaction of the

parent-teacher relationship. The items on the survey were coded on a five-point Likert scale rating questions from “Excellent” to “Poor.” The mean for each domain was calculated to create the six dependent variables used in the *t* test analyses and the independent variables in the multiple regression analysis.

Teacher surveys were distributed on each campus and returned to the researcher via school mail. Parent surveys were sent home with the oldest child in the family and returned in a self-addressed, stamped envelope provided by the researcher. A three-week window was allowed for the return of surveys. The instrumentation documents and cover letters used in the study are located in the appendices.

The reliability scales for the proposed instrument were examined. The survey developers reported Cronbach’s alpha for scale reliability as high: *Communication* = .78, *Parenting* = .85, *Volunteering* = .79, *Student Learning at Home* = .86, *School Decision Making and Advocacy* = .84, *Collaborating with Community* = .82 (Epstein, 1993). In adapting the instrument for this study, inter-item analysis was conducted to evaluate internal consistency. Cronbach’s alpha was calculated on each of the seven domains of the Parent-Teacher Survey. This coefficient has a range of zero to one, where one represents perfect internal consistency. An alpha of above .70 is interpreted as high scale reliability. The alpha coefficients for each of the seven domains are: *Communication* = .82, *Parenting* = .88, *Student Learning* = .87, *Volunteering* = .78, *Student Decision Making* = .83, *Collaborating with Community* = .86, *Satisfaction with Parent-Teacher Relationship* = .87. *Student Decision Making* revealed an initial alpha of .67. To increase the reliability of the instrument, item 5c

of the survey was deleted increasing the alpha to .83. These correspond highly with the alpha coefficients reported by Epstein (1993).

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Surveys were administered in the spring of the 2005/2006 school year to assess perceptions of the six parent involvement practices. Participation was voluntary. SPSS, a computerized statistics application, was used to analyze the collected data using the respondents (parent or teacher) as the independent variable and each of the six practices to be measured as the dependent variables. Through a correlation analysis of the six practices, the data show that the six practices are significantly interrelated with correlations ranging from  $r=.303$  to  $r=.569$ . The underlying factor that contributes to this correlation is the fact that they are all parent involvement practices. However, the researcher has learned through studies conducted by Epstein and her colleagues that factor analysis showed that the six practices are orthogonal and therefore separable. (Epstein, 1994, 2001). Each of the six practices leads to some different result or outcome for students, parents, and teachers. Therefore, independent samples  $t$  tests were computed for each of the practices being examined with an alpha level set at .05. A comparison of teacher and parent means was made to determine if there was a difference in perceptions of each of these practices. Interpretation of the  $t$  tests determined if there was a significant difference between the means. Multiple regression was conducted to determine the strength of the six parent involvement practices in predicting parents' and teachers' overall satisfaction in the parent-teacher relationship. In this analysis, the six parent involvement practices were the independent variables and parents' or teachers' overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship was the dependent

variable. This information gave the researcher three vital pieces of information: 1) if parents and teachers agree on how well schools perform the six practices that contribute to a family-school partnership, 2) in what areas do schools need further development if a family-school partnership is to be achieved, and 3) which practices are the greatest predictors of parents' and teachers' overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship.

Table 1  
*Parent Demographic Information (N=325)*

Demographic Information	N	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	42	12.9
Female	271	83.4
Missing	12	3.7
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	25	7.7
Single w/ partner	13	4.0
Married	248	76.3
Divorced	36	11.1
Missing	3	.9
<b>Race</b>		
Native American	4	1.2
Asian	7	2.2
Black	12	3.7
Hispanic	8	2.5
White	282	86.8
Other	7	2.2
Missing	5	1.5
<b>Education</b>		
Less than High School	3	.9
High School Graduate	39	12.0
Some College	101	31.1
Undergraduate Degree	105	32.3
Graduate Degree	75	23.1
Missing	2	.6
<b>Household Income</b>		
<25,000	40	12.3
25,001-50,000	81	24.9
50,001-100,000	152	46.8
100,001-150,000	39	12.0
>150,000	6	1.8
Missing	7	2.2
<b>Parents at Home</b>		
Single Parent	52	16.0
Two Adults-Married	242	74.5
Two Adults-Not Married	23	7.1
Missing	8	2.5
<b>Age</b>		
20-29	27	8.3
30-39	151	46.5
40-49	135	41.5
50-59	8	2.5
60+	1	.3
Missing	3	.9

Table 2  
*Teacher Demographic Information (N=58)*

<i>Demographic Information</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Male	2	3.4
Female	56	96.6
Race		
Hispanic	1	1.7
White	55	94.8
Missing	2	3.4
Grade Level		
Kindergarten	2	3.4
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	8	13.8
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	9	15.5
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	8	13.8
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8	13.8
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	4	6.9
6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	5	8.6
Missing	14	24.1
Teacher Responsibility		
General Education	43	74.1
Special Education	9	15.5
Counselor	1	1.7
Other	4	6.9
Missing	1	1.7
Education		
Bachelors	24	41.4
Master's	11	19.0
Master's +	22	37.9
Missing	1	1.7
Age		
20-29	7	12.1
30-39	12	20.7
40-49	13	22.4
50-59	24	41.4
60+	1	1.7
Missing	1	1.7

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings for each of the three research questions and the analyses that were conducted to answer each research question.

#### *Research Question #1*

*What are parents' and teachers' perceptions of how well schools are performing each of the six parent involvement practices that contribute to a family-school partnership?*

Parents' and Teachers' perceptions of each parent involvement practice were measured using a five-point Likert scale. After all the data for parents and teachers was entered for each question in the seven domains, means were calculated for each domain. To analyze research question one, a comparison of parent and teacher means for each domain was conducted. This comparison revealed that teachers rated schools higher than parents in all domains except one, *Student Decision Making*. Teacher means ranged from 2.65 for *Student Decision Making* to 4.35 for *Communication*. Parent means ranged from 2.81 for *Student Decision Making* to 3.93 for *Communication*. The means and standard deviations (in parenthesis) for each domain are shown in Table 3. A graphic comparison of these means is shown in Figure 4.

Independent-samples *t* tests were conducted to evaluate the difference between parents' and teachers' perceptions of each parent involvement practice. The test for *Communication* revealed a significant result,  $t(103.39) = -4.89, p = .000$ . Parents ( $M = 3.93, SD = .80$ ) rated schools lower than teachers ( $M = 4.35, SD = .56$ ) on how well schools provide information to parents, conduct conferences, and disseminate information. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means

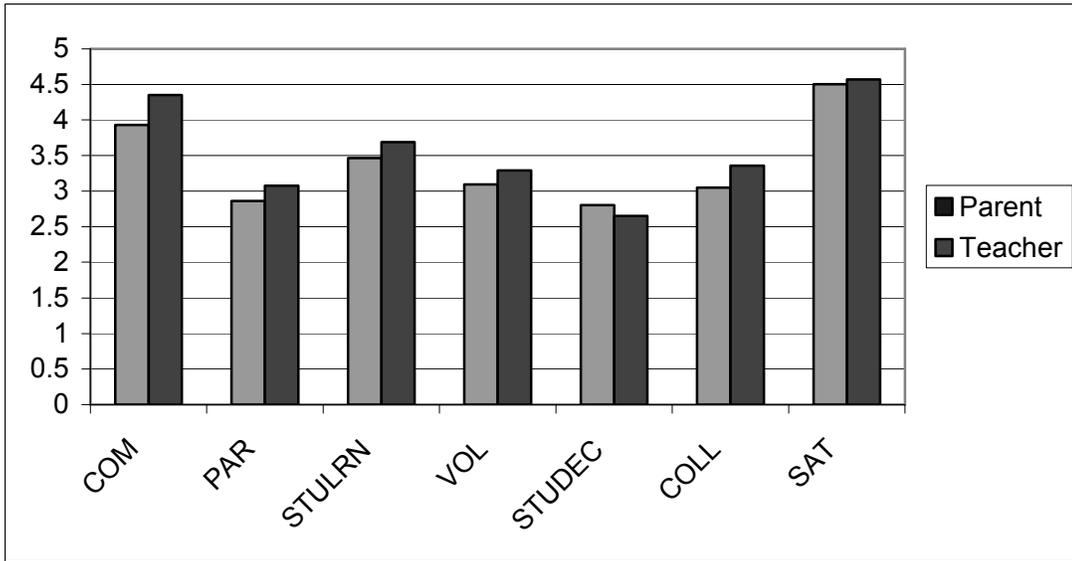
Table 3

*Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions of Parent Involvement Practices;  
Means and Standard Deviations*

Parent Involvement Practice	Parents N=325 M (SD)	Teachers N=58 M (SD)
Communication	3.93 (.80)	4.35 (.56)
Parenting	2.86 (1.05)	3.07 (.83)
Student Learning at Home	3.46 (.91)	3.69 (.63)
Volunteering	3.09 (1.12)	3.29 (.90)
Student Decision Making	2.80 (1.01)	2.65 (.85)
Collaborating with Community	3.05 (1.01)	3.36 (.86)
Satisfaction with Relationship	4.51 (.78)	4.57 (.51)

Note: 5-point Likert scale, 1=Poor, 5=Excellent

Figure 4  
*A Graphic Comparison of Means for Parent's and Teacher's Perceptions of Parent Involvement Practices.*



KEY:

COM = Communication

PAR = Parenting

STULRN = Student Learning at Home

VOL = Volunteering

STUDEC = Student Decision Making

COLL = Collaborating with Community

SAT = Satisfaction with Parent-Teacher Relationship

ranged from -.64 to -.21. The test for *Parenting* revealed a non-significant result,  $t(92.84) = -1.73, p = .086$ . Parents ( $M = 2.86, SD = 1.05$ ) rated schools lower than teachers ( $M = 3.07, SD = .83$ ) on how well schools link parents to resources, provide easy access to information on parenting, and offers workshops on parenting skills. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from -.50 to .07. The test for *Student Learning at Home* revealed a significant result,  $t(105.69) = -2.35, p = .021$ . Parents ( $M = 3.46, SD = .91$ ) rated schools lower than teachers ( $M = 3.69, SD = .63$ ) on how well schools provide information regarding expectations of students and how to foster learning at home, assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, and regularly assign interactive homework. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from -.47 to .02. The test for *Volunteering* revealed a non-significant result,  $t(381) = -1.28, p = .202$ . Parents ( $M = 3.09, SD = 1.12$ ) rated schools lower than teachers ( $M = 3.29, SD = .90$ ) on how well schools survey parents regarding their interests, offer other options to parents who are unable to volunteer in the building, and organize a program utilizing parent volunteers. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from -.50 to .11. The test for *Student Decision Making* revealed a non-significant result,  $t(380) = 1.09, p = .278$ . Parents ( $M = 2.80, SD = 1.01$ ) rated schools higher than teachers ( $M = 2.65, SD = .85$ ) on how well schools provide workshops for parents to teach them to influence decisions, encourage formation of PTAs, give equal representation to parents on committees, and provide training for staff and parents in how to be partners in decision making. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from -.12 to .43. The test for *Collaborating with Community* revealed a significant result,  $t(377) = -2.19, p = .029$ . Parents ( $M = 3.05, SD = 1.01$ ) rated

schools lower than teachers ( $M = 3.36$ ,  $SD = .86$ ) on how well schools distribute to parents information on community resources, develop partnerships with local businesses, and collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from  $-.59$  to  $-.03$ . Overall, the findings show that teachers rate schools higher than parents on five of the six parent involvement practices supporting their perception of higher school performance of these practices, though these findings are not statistically significant.

#### *Research Question #2*

*Do parents' and teachers' perceptions of each of these practices lead to balanced or imbalanced relationships?*

The means for each parent involvement practice were compared. Since the instrument used in the study utilized a five-point Likert scale, those means above three were defined as a positive perspective and those means below three were defined as a negative perspective. Of the six parent involvement practices, four of the practices were positively balanced (both teacher and parent means were above three) and one practice was negatively balanced (both teacher and parent means were below three): *Communication* – Teacher  $M = 4.35$ , Parent  $M = 3.93$ ; *Student Learning* – Teacher  $M = 3.69$ , Parent  $M = 3.46$ ; *Volunteering* – Teacher  $M = 3.29$ , Parent  $M = 3.10$ ; *Student Decision Making* – Teacher  $M = 2.65$ , Parent  $M = 2.81$ ; and *Collaborating with Community* – Teacher  $M = 3.36$ , Parent  $M = 3.06$ . The only practice that was not balanced was *Parenting* – Teacher  $M = 3.07$ , Parent  $M = 2.86$ . While *Parenting* showed an imbalanced relationship, the independent-samples  $t$  test was not significant,  $t(93) = -1.73$ ,  $p = .09$ . A further analysis was conducted by performing an independent-samples  $t$  test for each question within the *Parenting*

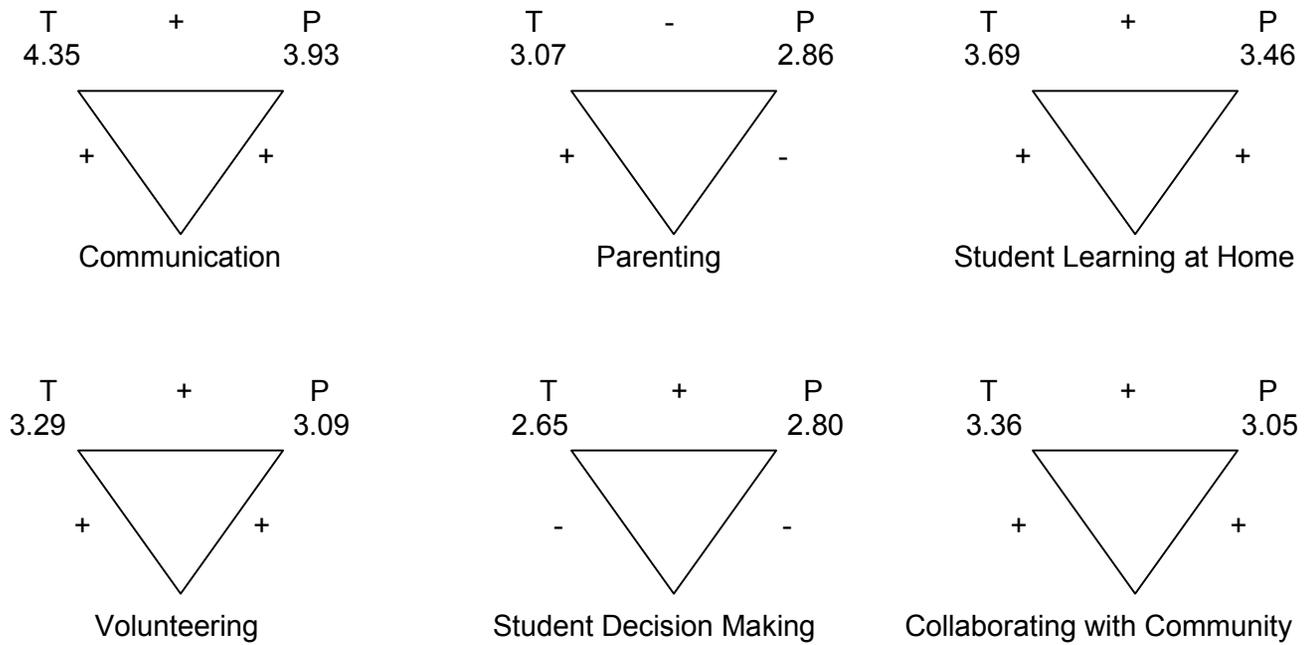
domain. Question 2a was significant,  $t(377) = -3.66, p = .000$ . Parents ( $M = 3.13, SD = 1.10$ ) rated schools lower than teachers ( $M = 3.69, SD = .92$ ) when asked how well schools link parents to programs and resources within the community. Question 2b was significant,  $t(373) = -2.07, p = .039$ . Parents ( $M = 2.99, SD = 1.14$ ) rated schools lower than teachers ( $M = 3.33, SD = 1.08$ ) when asked how well schools provide a central location where parents have access to resources. Question 2c was non-significant,  $t(371) = 1.23, p = .219$ . Parents ( $M = 2.41, SD = 1.17$ ) rated schools higher than teachers ( $M = 2.21, SD = 1.04$ ) when asked how well schools offer workshops on parenting skills. In addition, a comparison of parent and teacher means for *Satisfaction with the Parent-Teacher Relationship* suggests a high level of satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship (Teacher  $M = 4.57$ , Parent  $M = 4.50$ ). Overall, these findings support Heider's Balance Theory of Interpersonal Relationships. With five of the six practices showing balance, the results suggest an emotionally pleasant relationship between parents and teachers as characterized by Heider (Weist, 1965). The balance of parent involvement practices is illustrated in Figure 5.

### *Research Question #3*

*What accounts for teachers' and parents' perceptions of this relationship?*

The seventh domain of the instrument asked parents and teachers parallel questions regarding their overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship. Parents' ( $M = 4.51, SD = .78$ ) level of satisfaction was slightly lower than teachers' ( $M = 4.57, SD = .51$ ) level of satisfaction. However, both parents' and teachers' level of satisfaction was very high when ranked on a five-point Likert scale. Also, five of the six parent involvement practices revealed balanced relationships between

Figure 5  
Balance of Parent Involvement Practices




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Key:

T = Teacher  
P = Parent

parents and teachers. Therefore, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate which of the six parent involvement practices were the greatest predictors of parents' and teachers' satisfaction of the parent-teacher relationship. The predictor variables were the six parent involvement practices and the criterion variable was the overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship.

The linear combination of the parent involvement practices was significantly related to parents' overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship,  $R^2 = .24$ , adjusted  $R^2 = .22$ ,  $F(6, 312) = 16.32$ ,  $p < .01$ . The multiple correlation coefficient was .49 indicating that approximately 24% of the variance of parents' overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship can be accounted for by the linear combination of parent involvement practices.

Table 4 presents the relative strength of the individual predictors. Three of the six practices were statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). On the basis of these correlation analyses, it could be concluded that the only useful predictor of parents' overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship is *Student Learning at Home*. *Parenting* revealed a negative  $\beta$ . It may be that while parents scored the *Parenting* practice low on the survey, it did not negatively influence their overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship. In fact, it could be that parents do not believe that *Parenting* should even be a role of the schools. However, the judgments about the relative importance of these predictors are difficult because they are correlated. The correlations among the parent involvement practices ranged from .216 to .718. A correlation matrix for parents is presented in Table 5.

The linear combination of the parent involvement practices was significantly related to teachers' overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship,  $R^2 = .23$ ,

Table 4  
*Strength of Predictors to Overall Satisfaction*

Parent Involvement Practice	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Communication	.171	2.32	.021
Parenting	-.273	-3.33	.001
Student Learning at Home	.405	5.10	.000
Volunteering	.028	.37	.715
Student Decision Making	.066	.76	.450
Collaborating with Community	.074	.97	.334

adjusted  $R^2 = .14$ ,  $F(6, 51) = 2.60$ ,  $p < .05$ . The multiple correlation coefficient was .48 indicating that approximately 23% of the variance of teachers' overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship can be accounted for by the linear combination of parent involvement practices. However, the individual weights were not strong enough to reveal any significant predictors. This may be due to the relatively small sample size for teachers ( $N = 58$ ). Multicollinearity may have occurred indicating that one of the variables may have been completely redundant with the other predictors. When two predictor variables are highly correlated, they both convey essentially the same information. In this case, neither may contribute significantly to the model after the other one is included; but together they contribute a lot. If both variables were removed from the model, the fit would be much worse. So the overall model fits the data well, but neither predictor variable makes a significant contribution when it is added to the model. The correlation among parent involvement practices ranged from .256 to .740. A correlation matrix for teachers is shown in Table 6.

Overall, the findings show that the combination of all six predictors contributes to satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship. Of these six variables, *Student Learning at Home* is the greatest predictor of satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship while *Parenting* contributes the least.

Table 5  
Correlation Matrix for Parent Responses

	SAT	COMM	PAR	STULRN	VOL	STUDEC	COLL
SAT	1						
COMM	.379**	1					
PAR	.216**	.624**	1				
STULRN	.444**	.661**	.646**	1			
VOL	.353**	.653**	.593**	.690**	1		
STUDEC	.314**	.590**	.743**	.657**	.654**	1	
COLL	.298**	.585**	.675**	.595**	.606**	.718**	1

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Key: SAT=Satisfaction, COMM=Communication, STULRN=Student Learning, VOL=Volunteering, STUDEC=Student Decision Making, COLL=Collaborating with Community

Table 6  
Correlation Matrix for Teacher Responses

	SAT	COMM	PAR	STULRN	VOL	STUDEC	COLL
SAT	1						
COMM	.337**	1					
PAR	.273*	.491**	1				
STULRN	.429**	.688**	.587**	1			
VOL	.370**	.485**	.371**	.584**	1		
STUDEC	.256	.350**	.641**	.478**	.392**	1	
COLL	.347**	.465**	.740**	.535**	.312*	.691**	1

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Key: SAT=Satisfaction, COMM=Communication, STULRN=Student Learning, VOL=Volunteering, STUDEC=Student Decision Making, COLL=Collaborating with Community

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The partnership between families and schools has been characterized as stressful and fraught with tension. There have been efforts by school districts in recent years that encourage parent involvement to foster a collaborative partnership between families and schools. However, this partnership can become defensive and adversarial rather than collaborative and productive. Some sociologists believe this tension between parents and teachers is inevitable because of the different roles that each play in children's lives. Parents' concerns focus primarily around their own child while teachers' concerns are more broadly focused because they have to meet the learning needs of many children.

The purpose of this study was to explore the six parent involvement practices, as identified by Joyce Epstein and the National Parent Teacher Association, to determine if they contribute to a positive family-school partnership. Through the use of Epstein's theoretical model, Overlapping Spheres of Influence, the researcher was able to show that the more practices that are in place and functioning effectively, the greater the family-school partnership (Epstein, 2001). As the spheres of influence overlap more and more, the greater the support for the child and the more positive the relationship between family, school, and community. Through Heider's Balance Theory, each of the six family involvement practices was evaluated as balanced or imbalanced depending on parents' and teachers' perceptions of each. The researcher was looking for those relationships where teachers and parents evaluate a practice in a positive manner, which would indicate that the practice is present and functioning effectively. Therefore, Heider's Balance

Theory served as a way to conceptualize the relationships between parents and teachers as they evaluate parent involvement practices at their child's school. Chapter Five presents a summary of the research, discussion of how the findings relate to the purpose of the study, conclusions, implications for preservice and practicing teachers, and recommendations for future study.

### *Summary of the Research*

The research conducted by Epstein and her colleagues since 1980 has provided information about what contributes to a positive family-school partnership. The results of Epstein's research have led to the creation of a framework of six parent involvement practices that together form a comprehensive family-school partnership (Epstein, 1994). The theoretical model, Overlapping Spheres of Influence, includes contributions from the family, school, and community that influence children's learning. A framework of six parent involvement practices that contribute to the family-school partnership has evolved from this theoretical model over many years from studies by educators and families in elementary, middle, and high schools (Epstein, 1995). This framework, identified by Joyce Epstein and instituted by the National Parent Teacher Association, is used to help schools and teachers build positive and lasting partnerships with the parents of the children they teach. Through the use of Heider's Balance Theory and Epstein's theoretical model, Overlapping Spheres of Influence, the researcher was able to analyze parents' and teachers' perceptions of each of the parent involvement practices that contribute to a positive family-school partnership.

### *Discussion of the Findings*

This study focused on parents' and teachers' perceptions of how well schools are performing the six parent involvement practices as identified by Joyce Epstein and the National Parent Teacher Association. Data was collected during the spring of 2006 through the use of a survey that was distributed to parents and teachers of students in grades K through six to assess their perceptions of each of the six practices. The following research questions were analyzed: 1) What are parents' and teachers' perceptions of how well schools are performing each of the six parent involvement practices that contribute to a family-school partnership? 2) Do parents' and teachers' perceptions of each of these practices lead to balanced or imbalanced relationships? and 3) What accounts for teachers' and parents' perceptions of this relationship?

The results of this study provide a number of important contributions to the literature on family-school partnership and its relation to the parent-teacher relationship. In comparing parents' and teachers' perceptions of each of the six parent involvement practices, all practices, except for *Student Decision Making*, revealed a higher teacher mean than parent mean. This finding may be due to the fact that teachers are more aware of what practices are in effect because they are involved in the development and implementation of these practices. This may also indicate that parents don't feel that schools do enough to reach out to parents in implementing various practices. This finding is supported by the research reported by Chen (2001), indicating that parents may not acknowledge the efforts that schools reportedly are making. The practices *Communication*, *Student Learning at Home*, and *Volunteering* are the direct result of teachers' initiation. The remaining practices;

*Parenting, School Decision Making, and Collaborating with Community* are initiated by either the school or district, but information about these practices are generally disseminated by the teacher. This may include information about parent workshops on how to assist children with homework or notes informing parents about community resources. Parents, however, often receive information about these practices second hand, through their child. Students often don't give the information to their parents or may lose the information before they make it home. Because of parents' busy work schedules, they may not have the time to read all of the information that is sent home each week; thus, are not informed about the parent involvement practices offered through the school.

The practice that ranked the highest with both parents and teachers was *Communication*. This is the easiest practice to implement (Epstein, 1986) as schools utilize newsletters, phone calls, emails, and parent-teacher conferences. The practice that ranked the lowest was *Student Decision Making and Advocacy*. This is the most difficult practice to implement as schools struggle with relinquishing some of their control to parents. Because school personnel feel that they are the ones with the expertise, parents are often not included in decisions about personnel hiring, developing curriculum, and implementing new programs. Parents, on the other hand, are demanding an equal voice as these decisions directly affect their child's emotional, social, and academic needs, but they don't know how to initiate this involvement (Baker, 1997). According to Turner (2000), one study found that 76% of administrators thought parents did not have the training to make qualified school decisions concerning curriculum development and instruction, while 66% of parents felt they were qualified.

In applying Heider's Balance Theory, the results of this study show that the more practices that are balanced, the greater the satisfaction of parents and teachers leading to an emotionally pleasant relationship between parents and teachers. Of the six practices, four were positively balanced and one was negatively balanced. While one practice, *Student Decision Making*, was negatively balanced, parents and teachers were in agreement that the practice was not currently effective in their school; thus, creating satisfaction between parents and teachers. The seventh domain of the survey asked specific questions related to the satisfaction between parents and teachers revealing high means for each (Parents,  $M = 4.51$ ; Teachers,  $M = 4.57$ ), findings that are consistent with Heider's Balance Theory of Interpersonal Relationships. While one of the relationships, *Parenting*, revealed an imbalanced relationship, the follow-up  $t$  test was not significant. In the multiple regression analysis, the *Parenting* practice revealed a negative  $\beta$  indicating that parents may feel that this practice should not even be a role of the schools. In fact, some respondents wrote comments on the survey in regards to this domain suggesting that this is not really a parent involvement practice; and thus, should not be included in the survey. It is apparent that this imbalanced relationship did not contribute to the satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship; therefore, this relationship could be characterized as non-balanced according to Heider. In this type of relationship, both subjects view the third entity in differing ways, but the relationship between the two subjects is still positive (Baron, Byrne, Griffitt, 1974).

In the seventh domain of the survey, parent and teacher means revealed a high level of satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship. Multiple regression revealed that all six predictors were significant in both the parent and teacher

analyses. The greatest predictor of parents' satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship was *Student Learning at Home* ( $\beta = .405$ ). This may be due to the fact that 85% of the parents who responded reported having some college background. This would contribute to their feelings of self-efficacy in helping their child with homework and preparing for tests and projects. "Parents' feelings that they can help (i.e., that they have adequate training to help their children with reading and math) are based primarily on their own education and their children's grade level" (Epstein, 1986). Parents want to feel that they are contributing to the educational success of their child. In studying the correlation matrix for both parents and teachers, *Student Learning at Home* had a moderate correlation with *Satisfaction with Parent-Teacher Relationship* (Parents,  $r = .444$ ; Teachers,  $r = .429$ ). However, this practice correlated highly with *Communication* (Parents,  $r = .661$ ; Teachers  $r = .688$ ) indicating that there is a relationship between teacher communication and student learning activities at home. This would make sense in that teachers often communicate with parents via newsletters, emails, and student planners about upcoming tests, projects, and other assignments giving parents the opportunity to work with their child prior to the designated task due date. Through parent-teacher conferences, teachers often share with parents ways that parents can contribute at home to their child's educational success by emphasizing reading together, practicing math facts and other foundational skills that are often neglected at school due to lack of time during the school day. The results of this study show that by teachers including student learning activities at home, parents feel a greater satisfaction in the parent-teacher relationship as they are able to contribute to the educational success of their child.

## *Conclusions*

While parents' and teacher's perceptions of how well schools are performing the six parent involvement practices were generally high, teachers rated schools higher than parents on all but one practice, *Student Decision Making*. These perceptions are consistent with research in that teachers generally believe that schools perform these practices well (Alabama Education Association, 2000; Chen, 2001). After all, this perception is a reflection of them. If parents believe schools aren't performing well, then it is possible they hold the teachers themselves are not performing well. Even if schools were falling behind in one or more of these practices, teachers would be reluctant to report this in that it would be a condemnation of self in addition to school.

Balance Theory revealed satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship consistent with Heider's findings. While much of the literature discussed the tension between teachers and parents (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004; University of South Carolina, 2002), this particular study was contrary to such literature. This may be due to the fact that parents and teachers were analyzed as a whole. If case studies examining individual parent-teacher relationships had been conducted, the results may have been different. It is possible that the teachers surveyed in this study actually have strained relationships with individual parents, but these isolated relationships do not appear to diminish their overall satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship.

In determining the greatest predictor of satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship, *Student Learning at Home* ranked above the other practices. Of these practices, *Student Learning at Home* requires the greatest shared participation

between parents and teachers. Parents are well aware of the fact that teachers control the flow of information to parents. Therefore, if teachers are willing to work collaboratively with parents on learning activities at home, this could lead to greater student achievement as well as other benefits to children. By openly collaborating with parents on learning activities, teachers can diminish or reduce the boundaries that separate these two institutions (Epstein, 1986).

#### *Implications for Preservice Teachers*

Knowing that the implementation of parent involvement practices leads to greater satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship, it is important that teacher educators provide resources on how teachers can work effectively with parents. When new teachers complete exit surveys from their universities, they often report that the one missing component from their experience was courses and seminars that prepared them to work with families, particularly the diverse families with which new teachers are coming in contact (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). As a result, many teachers entering the classroom today are encouraging universities to include family-school partnership work as part of the teacher preparation program.

Until recent years, most state teacher certification programs have not mandated that teacher education programs include a family-school partnership component. Shartrand (1997) reported in a Harvard Family Study that only 22 states had family-school involvement as part of their credentialing standards. During the 1990s, the number of states requiring standards related to family-school involvement had significantly increased (Hiatt-Michael, 2001). To examine the extent to which family-school partnership issues were included in teacher education programs, Pepperdine University surveyed 147 universities. The survey included questions

related to the types of courses, topics, and classroom methods included in their program. Hiatt-Michael (2001) reported that of the 96 who responded, seven indicated that family-school partnership issues were not included at all. Twenty-two of those stated that the school offered a parent involvement course, but it was not part of the degree requirements and was developed primarily for early childhood teachers. Most of the respondents reported that family-school partnership issues were woven into existing classes such as special education, methods classes, and especially early childhood programs.

Epstein (2001) reported similar findings indicating that early childhood and special education receive a great deal of parent involvement emphasis as compared to other K-12 programs. Overall, research indicates that although teachers agree that developing partnerships with families is important in forming positive family-school relationships, they receive little formal training in how to form such relations. Unfortunately, if teachers do not receive this training prior to entering the classroom, there is little opportunity to acquire training within the school setting (Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

#### *Implications for Practicing Teachers*

Knowing that *Student Learning at Home* is the greatest predictor of satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship, it is important that teachers include this parent involvement practice as part of their daily activities. Parents of younger children tend to feel that they can help, but as students get older parents may need clear and sequential guidance from teachers. Many parents do help, whether or not they are asked to help. So, teachers who are not already using this parent involvement practice should consider how to utilize this available resource.

Because parents say they could help more if shown how, teachers should consider ways to organize home learning activities to help more parents make productive use of their time (Epstein, 1986).

Teachers may design daily or weekly activities for parents to do with their children at home. These skills may include individual skills, general skills for review, or special activities that extend learning. In order to prepare parents in feeling confident that they can help at home, teachers could organize and conduct workshops for parents in how to help in reading, math, and other subjects including materials that are clear and easy to follow. For children in upper grades, special assistance to build and maintain confidence of parents is especially important. Basic features of this training should include clear objectives for short- and long- term projects and information that tells parents how the activity fits into the teacher's instructional program. Procedures should permit parents to call or contact the teacher to ask questions about how to help the child with the activity. There should also be opportunities for parents to suggest activities or changes in the parent involvement techniques. Teachers should encourage home learning activities that build on the common goals that parents and teachers hold (Epstein, 1986).

#### *Suggestions for Future Research*

This study focused on parents' and teachers' perceptions of six parent involvement practices and what contributes to this perception. The results of this study showed that parents and teachers are in agreement (are balanced) on many of these practices and that this leads to overall satisfaction in the parent-teacher relationship. The greatest predictor of satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship was *Student Learning at Home*. While this study reported 85% of

parents having had some level of college education, it may be that parents with a college education have greater self-efficacy in contributing to their child's learning at home. Research shows that those parents without a high school diploma often don't feel that they have the necessary skills to help their child with many learning activities at home (Hoover-Dempsey, et al, 1992). This current study included a high number of educated parents, which influences not only the amount of assistance at home, but also the quality. Therefore, a relevant topic of study might be to research parents without college education to determine if *Student Learning at Home* is the greatest predictor of their satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship. If parents and teachers are in agreement (are balanced) on many of these practices leading to satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship, further research of non-college educated parents may reveal a different predictor of this satisfaction. This information would be particularly important in districts with a high population of disadvantaged students in that they may need to focus on other parent involvement practices to increase the satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship.

Further research should conduct more detailed assessments of the parent-teacher relationship and the specific parent involvement practices through direct observation as well as reports from parents and teachers. Experimental studies are needed in order to move from descriptive research about the parent-teacher relationship to assessing more directly its influence on children's school performance. Specifically, research needs to evaluate programs that promote parent involvement practices and how the parent-teacher relationship benefits children. It is also evident from this study that there was an over sampling of experienced

teachers. Future studies might include research with a more stratified sampling of teacher experience.

### *Summary*

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' and teachers' perceptions of how well schools are performing the six parent involvement practices as identified by Epstein (1994). A review of the literature revealed that teachers have many perceptions that contribute to strained family-school partnerships, and that parents have perceptions that impede a healthy, productive rapport with their child's teacher. The three research questions developed for this study were: 1) What are parents' and teachers' perceptions of how well schools are performing each of the six parent involvement practices that contribute to a family-school partnership? 2) Do parents' and teachers' perceptions of each of these practices lead to balanced or imbalanced relationships? and 3) What accounts for teachers' and parents' perceptions of this relationship? Methods for exploring each of the research questions were discussed as well the analyses to be used in the study. Results of the comparison of means, independent samples *t* tests, and multiple regression were examined. Discussion of the research questions, implications of the study, and future directions for research was included.

A comparison of parent and teacher means revealed that teachers rated schools higher in all but one of the six parent involvement practices. Heider's Balance Theory showed that five of the parent involvement practices were balanced, leading to an emotionally satisfying relationship between parents and teachers. Through multiple regression, *Student Learning at Home* proved to be the greatest predictor of parent satisfaction with the parent-teacher relationship. It can be said

from this study, that the greater the number of parent involvement practices that are implemented and functioning effectively coincides with greater satisfaction within the parent-teacher relationship.

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APPENDIX A  
Parent Cover Letter

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee  
University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus (HSCL).  
Approval expires one year from 10/20/2005.

January 5, 2006

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The Department of Teaching and Leadership at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand the relationships between parents and teachers. This will entail your completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire is expected to take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

The content of the questionnaire should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of what contributes to a strong family-school partnership. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or mail.

Completion of the survey indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are over the age of eighteen. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email [dhann@ku.edu](mailto:dhann@ku.edu) or [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu). **PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN THE SURVEY IN THE ATTACHED SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE BY FRIDAY, JANUARY 27, 2006.**

Sincerely,

Cynthia R. Taylor  
Principal Investigator  
Department of Teaching & Leadership  
Joseph R. Pearson Hall  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
(785) 864-9666  
[ctaylor@usd497.org](mailto:ctaylor@usd497.org)

Dr. Marc Mahlios, Ph.D.  
Faculty Supervisor  
Department of Teaching & Leadership  
Joseph R. Pearson Hall  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
(785) 864-9666  
[mahlions@ku.edu](mailto:mahlions@ku.edu)

APPENDIX B  
Parent Survey

**PARENT SURVEY**

School-Family-Community Partnerships Survey (adapted from Joyce Epstein, 1993)

This survey is designed for parents of elementary children in the Lawrence Public Schools. While you are not required to respond, your cooperation is needed to make the results of this survey comprehensive, accurate, and timely. The top portion of the survey is for statistical purposes only and will remain solely in the hands of the researcher. The researcher is conducting this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**MARKING INSTRUCTIONS**

- Use a No. 2 pencil only.
- Do not use ink, ballpoint, or felt tip pens.
- Make solid marks that fill the response completely.
- Erase cleanly any marks you wish to change.
- Make no stray marks on this form.

CORRECT: ● INCORRECT: ☒ ☓ ○

**School**

- Broken Arrow
- New York
- Schwegler
- Sunset Hill
- Woodlawn
- Deerfield

Please describe yourself. (For each item below, please choose the most accurate answer.)

**Gender**

- Male
- Female

**Marital Status**

- Single
- Single with partner

**Race**

- Native American
- Asian
- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- Other

**Highest level of education**

- Less than high school
- High school
- Some college
- Undergraduate degree
- Graduate degree

**Household Yearly Income**

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,001 to \$50,000
- \$50,001 to \$100,000
- \$100,001 to \$150,000
- More than \$150,000

**Parents living in the home**

- Single parent
- Two adults-married
- Two adults-not married

**Your Age**

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

Please respond to each of the following statements using the scale provided.

-Please choose only one answer.

EXCELLENT    VERY GOOD    GOOD    FAIR    POOR

**1. Communication**

How well does your school...

- a) provide information to parents in a variety of ways (i.e., newsletter, email, home visits, phone calls)?..... ● ● ● ● ●
- b) conduct conferences with parents at least twice per year, with follow-up as needed? ● ● ● ● ●
- c) disseminate information on topics such as school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school grades?..... ● ● ● ● ●

**2. Parenting**

How well does your school...

- a) link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families?..... ● ● ● ● ●
- b) provide a central location where parents/families have easy access to information and resources on parenting?..... ● ● ● ● ●
- c) offer workshops, seminars, or training on parenting skills?..... ● ● ● ● ●

EXCELLENT    VERY GOOD    GOOD    FAIR    POOR

**3. Student Learning**

How well does your school...

- a) provide clear information regarding the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level?.....
- b) provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home and monitor homework?.....
- c) assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments?.....
- c) regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents?.....

**4. Volunteering**

How well does your school...

- a) survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability to volunteer?.....
- b) ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given options for helping in other ways?.....
- c) organize a program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training?.....

**5. School Decision Making and advocacy**

How well does your school...

- a) provide workshops for parents that teach them to influence decisions and resolve problems at the school?.....
- b) encourage formation or activities of PTAs that respond to issues of interest to parents?.....
- c) include and give equal representation to parents on decision-making and advisory committees?.....
- d) provide training for staff and parents in how to be collaborative partners and share decision-making in areas such as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform, safety, hiring personnel and other personnel issues?.....

**6. Collaborating with Community**

How well does your school...

- a) distribute to staff and parents information on community resources that serve the cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other needs of families within the community?.....
- b) develop partnerships with local business, community organizations, and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families?.....
- c) collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education?.....

**7. Satisfaction with Parent-Teacher Relationship**

Agree    Neutral    Disagree

- a) I am satisfied with the relationship with my child's teacher.....
- b) I feel I am valued in the relationship with my child's teacher.....
- c) The relationship with my child's teacher is NOT pleasurable.....
- d) I feel comfortable in the relationship with my child's teacher.....
- e) The relationship with my child's teacher is tense and stressful.....

**Thank You**

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APPENDIX C  
Teacher Cover Letter

Approved by the Human Subjects Committee  
University of Kansas, Lawrence Campus (HSCL).  
Approval expires one year from 10/20/2005.

January 5, 2006

Dear Certified Staff:

The Department of Teaching and Leadership at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

We are conducting this study to better understand the relationships between parents and teachers. This will entail your completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire is expected to take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

The content of the questionnaire should cause no more discomfort than you would experience in your everyday life. Although participation may not benefit you directly, we believe that the information obtained from this study will help us gain a better understanding of what contributes to a strong family-school partnership. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary. Your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please feel free to contact us by phone or mail.

Completion of the questionnaire indicates your willingness to participate in this project and that you are over the age of eighteen. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email [dhann@ku.edu](mailto:dhann@ku.edu) or [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu). **PLEASE RETURN THE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE ENVELOPE LOCATED IN YOUR SCHOOL'S OFFICE BY FRIDAY, JANUARY 20, 2006.**

Sincerely,

Cynthia R. Taylor  
Principal Investigator  
Department of Teaching & Leadership  
Joseph R. Pearson Hall  
University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
(785) 864-9666  
[ctaylor@usd497.org](mailto:ctaylor@usd497.org)

Dr. Marc Mahlios, Ph.D.  
Faculty Supervisor  
Department of Teaching & Leadership  
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University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045  
(785) 864-9666  
[mahlios@ku.edu](mailto:mahlios@ku.edu)

APPENDIX D  
Teacher Survey

# TEACHER SURVEY

School-Family-Community Partnerships Survey (adapted from Joyce Epstein, 1993)

This survey is designed for elementary teachers in the Lawrence Public Schools. While you are not required to respond, your cooperation is needed to make the results of this survey comprehensive, accurate, and timely. The top portion of the survey is for statistical purposes only and will remain solely in the hands of the researcher.

Please describe yourself. For each item below, please choose the most accurate answer. *(Please use a #2 pencil)*

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>					<b>Grade Level(s) You Teach</b>				
<input type="radio"/> Female	<input type="radio"/> Native American	<input type="radio"/> Black	<input type="radio"/> White	<input type="radio"/> K	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 4	<input type="radio"/> 6			
<input type="radio"/> Male	<input type="radio"/> Asian	<input type="radio"/> Hispanic	<input type="radio"/> Other	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 5				
<b>Assigned Teacher Responsibility</b>			<b>Highest Level of Education</b>			<b>Your Age</b>		<b>School</b>		
<input type="radio"/> General Education	<input type="radio"/> Bachelor's Degree	<input type="radio"/> 20-29	<input type="radio"/> Broken Arrow							
<input type="radio"/> Special Education	<input type="radio"/> Master's Degree	<input type="radio"/> 30-39	<input type="radio"/> New York							
<input type="radio"/> Specials	<input type="radio"/> Master's +	<input type="radio"/> 40-49	<input type="radio"/> Schwegler							
<input type="radio"/> Counselor	<input type="radio"/> Doctorate	<input type="radio"/> 50-59	<input type="radio"/> Sunset Hill							
<input type="radio"/> Other		<input type="radio"/> 60+	<input type="radio"/> Woodlawn							
			<input type="radio"/> Deerfield							

Please respond to each of the following statements using the scale provided. --Please choose only one answer.

	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
<b>1. Communication</b>					
<b>How well does your school...</b>					
a) provide information to parents in a variety of ways (i.e., newsletter, email, home visits, phone calls)?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
b) conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year with follow-up as needed?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
c) disseminate information on topics such as school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school grades?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>2. Parenting</b>					
<b>How well does your school...</b>					
a) link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
b) provide a central location where parents/families have easy access to information and resources on parenting?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
c) offer workshops, seminars, or training on parenting skills?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>3. Student Learning</b>					
<b>How well does your school...</b>					
a) provide clear information regarding the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
b) provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home and monitor homework?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
c) assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
d) regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents?.....	<input type="radio"/>				

EXCELLENT    VERY GOOD    GOOD    FAIR    POOR

**4. Volunteering**

How well does your school...

a) survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability to volunteer?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
b) ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given options for helping in other ways?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
c) organize a program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training?.....	<input type="radio"/>				

**5. School Decision Making and Advocacy**

How well does your school...

a) provide workshops for parents that teach them to influence decisions and resolve problems at the school?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
b) encourage formation or activities of PTAs that respond to issues of interest to parents?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
c) include and give equal representation to parents on decision-making and advisory committees?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
d) provide training for staff and parents in how to be collaborative partners and share decision-making in areas such as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform, safety, hiring personnel, and other personnel issues?.....	<input type="radio"/>				

**6. Collaboration with Community**

How well does your school...

a) distribute to staff and parents information on community resources that serve the cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other needs of families within the community?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
b) develop partnerships with local business, community organizations, and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families?.....	<input type="radio"/>				
c) collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education?.....	<input type="radio"/>				

**7. Satisfaction with Parent-Teacher Relationship**

Agree    Neutral    Disagree

a) I am satisfied with the overall relationships with my students' parents.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) I feel I am valued in the relationships with my students' parents.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c) The overall relationships with my students' parents are NOT pleasurable.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d) I feel comfortable in the relationships with my students' parents.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d) Overall, the relationships with my students' parents are tense and stressful.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

THANK YOU

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