

AN EXPLORATION OF PERCEPTIONS OF HOW SCHOOL-HOME
COMMUNICATION LEADS TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT
IN A RURAL HIGH SCHOOL

by

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ABSTRACT

Students benefit greatly from strong partnerships among parents, schools, and communities (Epstein, 2008). Heightened communication between schools and families increases students' ability to achieve in school (Ferrara, 2015) through the completion of assignments, improved engagement in class, and better overall attitudes toward school (Shirvani, 2007). Ross (2016) connected positive parental involvement to the completion of high school and advancement into postsecondary education for students identified as at risk of dropping out. Epstein (1995, 2008) categorized parental involvement into six types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. However, parents do not become involved automatically. Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, and Sandler (2005) named three contributing factors in parents becoming involved in schools: parents' role construction, invitation to become involved, and life context. The purpose of this study explored the current communication practices between parents and school in a rural secondary school and how parents and school personnel perceived the effectiveness of those practices in facilitating positive parental involvement in school.

In this study, parents and school personnel were interviewed to determine their perceptions of the communication practices of a rural high school regarding its impact on parental involvement. Artifacts were also gathered from the school's automated call-out system for review. The findings of this study revealed seven themes: Methods for Mass Communication, Types of and Reasons for Individual Communication, Communication's Impact on Parental Involvement, How Parental Involvement Impacts Student Achievement, How Parental

Involvement Changes as Students age Into High School, Perception of Current Parental Involvement Within the School, and Impact of Rural Setting on Parent Involvement. Schools should be diligent in not only using various methods to communicate with parents, but should also seek feedback as to the effectiveness of their methods, and be willing to change as the need arises. However, simply communicating information may not be enough to motivate parents to involvement. Schools should be conscious of the content they communicate in order to provide appropriate invitations to all types of involvement.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the two men who helped mold me into the man I am today, my father and my father-in-law. To my father, Jerry L. Hooper, who taught me the dedication and work ethic required to undertake and complete such a daunting task as this, I say thank you from the bottom of my heart. As I reflect on the years of working on the family farm and wishing to be anywhere else, I would give anything for a chance to be there again. I know you will not be present to see me complete this journey, but I know that you are with me in spirit. If it were not for you and the lessons you taught me, I would not be here today. To my father-in-law, Henry “Carl” Logan, who accepted me into his family after the loss of my father and loved me as his own son, thank you for being there for me as a father after the loss of my dad. As I began this journey, you were so encouraging and supportive. I wish both of you were here to celebrate the completion of this journey. Know that we are thinking of you as we celebrate together.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Students benefit greatly from strong partnerships among parents, schools, and communities (Epstein, 2008). With the common goal of parents, teachers, and administrators being student learning and growth (Dillon & Nixon, 2014), one can see the need to foster such partnerships. With this in mind, parental involvement in schools shows positive impact on student outcomes across social class divides (Deslandes & Rivard, 2013; Lareau, 1987). Ross (2016) connected positive parental involvement to the completion of high school and advancement into postsecondary education for students identified as at risk of dropping out.

However, parents do not become involved automatically. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) name three contributing factors in parents becoming involved in schools: parents' role construction, invitation to become involved, and life context. Parents' role construction pertains to what individual parents believe their duty is regarding student learning (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Regarding parents' invitation to become involved, Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) noted that regular teacher-parent communication builds relationships of trust that lead to increased involvement. Moreover, the context in which a family lives plays a significant role in understanding academic achievement of students (Semke & Sharidan, 2012). Students in rural schools have been identified as having lower family income and parents with lower levels of education (Stanley, Commello, Edwards, & Marquart, 2008) compared to students in urban schools, both of which are considered within the life context of the student.

Teacher-parent communication should not merely consist of the teacher contacting the parent; rather, bidirectional communication has been shown to have a direct impact on student achievement (Bennett-Conroy, 2012). Increased communication between schools and families increases students' ability to achieve in school (Ferrara, 2015) through the completion of assignments, increased engagement in class, and better overall attitudes toward school (Shirvani, 2007). Administrators understanding the current methods and various channels of communication available as well as the preferred communication methods of parents helps to make communication more effective (Olmstead, 2013; Rogers, 2007). School officials utilizing various types of technologies and digital methods of communication can have drastic impacts on how parents perceive schools (Sack-Min, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Research has shown that parental involvement is tied to students' academic achievement (Ross, 2016), but school administrators and parents have identified problems regarding a lack of parental involvement. School administrators have recognized a decline in the level of parental involvement as students move to middle and high school (Brannon, 2007). Parents indicated that their involvement tends to decline as students move into higher grades due to two factors: parents' limited knowledge of the content and parents' negative past experiences while in school (Brannon, 2007). Griffin and Galassi (2010) found that lack of communication between teachers and parents produced significant barriers to student achievement. Some forms of parental involvement, such as interference, can have a negative effect on student achievement, by parents displaying disbelief in the abilities of the student, thus creating the expectation of failure (Gonida & Cortina, 2014).

Parental involvement and communication are vital to the goal of education with connections between parental involvement and students completing high school and even entering and completing programs after high school (Ross, 2016). Ross (2016) found that parental involvement in all aspects of a student's schooling, from academics to extracurricular activities, led to increased levels of success. One of the key factors in a parent's ability to be involved with their student's education is the level of communication between the school and parents (Bennett-Conroy, 2012). Bennett-Conroy (2012) conducted a study focused on bidirectional communication and found connections to higher academic achievement due to the development of strong relationships between schools and homes. This relationship development is important as both parties seek to see the student succeed (Dillon & Nixon, 2014).

Limited research exists regarding the current communication practices in secondary schools regarding methods of communication, content of communication, frequency of communication, and communication technologies in use. Effective communication aids in the facilitation of parental involvement in schools leading to increases in student achievement levels (Ferrara, 2015). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) identified parental involvement as "home based activities related to children's learning in school" (p. 6) as well as school-based involvement including both curricular and extracurricular activities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Moreover, student achievement covered a wide range of factors in order to encompass the entire student population. Student achievement can be simply gaining credits to stay on track to graduate (Ferrara, 2015), or it could be progressing through the honors track in efforts to receive scholarships and opportunities after high school.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the current communication practices between parents and school in a rural secondary school and how parents and school personnel perceived the effectiveness of those practices in facilitating positive parental involvement in school.

Significance of the Problem

This study may aid school administrators in their efforts to improve communication methods between schools and parents and thus improve student success. The study provides information regarding school-to-home communication through the review of communication methods, evaluation, and analysis of both teacher and parent interviews, which may be helpful to school administrators. Moreover, through reviewing current communication methods, administrators can see which methods the study participants believed were most effective as well as which methods needed attention. With data from teacher interviews, administrators may gain insight into the consistency of communication as well as the content associated with each attempt. Analysis of parent interviews allows administrators to gain perspective on parental perceptions of the effectiveness of communication from the school in this study.

Research Question

This qualitative case study was based on one overarching research question:

1. How do parents and school personnel in a rural secondary school perceive the effectiveness of current communication practices between schools and homes regarding parental involvement?

Epstein et al. (2002) recognized parental involvement in schools as consisting of six distinct types: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Collaborating with the Community, and Decision Making. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) concluded that parents do

not become involved automatically, but rather require some type of motivation. In an effort to provide each set of participants with appropriate interview questions geared toward the interviewee's role within the school, specific interview guides were created for school administrators, teachers/other school personnel, and parents. The questions in each interview guide were developed to collect data regarding perceptions of how current communication practices motivate parents and aid the increase of Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995, 2008).

Methods

This qualitative study reviewed the communication practices of a small rural high school in the central region of a southeastern US state in relation to parental involvement. This school was selected because of its rural location and geographic proximity to me. Because it is a rural school, the data were examined in that context as rural is part of the life context and may have an impact on communication between parents and school. The study looked closely at the current communication practices, frequency of communication, and perceptions of parents and school personnel as to their effectiveness in facilitating parental involvement.

Review of the communication practices looked at the current methods of communication used to relay information from the school to parents and within the community. All communications were considered including, but not limited to, school-wide communications, teacher-to-parent direct communications, teacher-to-home class-wide communications, and administrator-to-parent direct communications. Interview questions were designed to illuminate the content of these communications as well as the means by which the communications were distributed. The study also reviewed the frequency with which the school used the methods in place to disseminate information to parents.

Artifacts were gathered pertaining to the automated call-out system. These artifacts provided confirmation of the parents' and administrators' responses to interview questions. Parent interviews were structured to determine perceptions of current communication practices. That information was then measured against the interview data from teachers/other school personnel and administrators to determine gaps in the current communication plan in relation to getting parents involved.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on Epstein's parental involvement framework (Epstein et al., 2002) and the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model of factors that motivate parents to become involved. Epstein's framework of six types of parental involvement (see Table 1) is the most commonly used across parental involvement research (Beauregard, Petrakos, & Dupont, 2014; Pakter & Chen, 2012). Studies have used this framework to determine parental practices that have been more or less impactful on a child's education (Beauregard et al., 2014; Pakter & Chen, 2012). The Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model is used to identify parental motivations to become involved in their child's education; factors such as the parents' motivational beliefs, how parents perceive their invitations to become involved, and their life context (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) play key roles in the involvement of parents.

Assumptions of the Study

It was assumed for the purpose of this study that

1. Interviewees were honest when answering interview questions.
2. Parents had received some form of communication from the school.
3. Teachers and administrators communicated with parents.

Table 1

Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement (Epstein et al., 2002)

1. Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help all families establish home environments to support children as students
2. Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.
3. Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit and organize parent help and support.
4. Learning at Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
5. Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include families as participants in school decisions and develop parent leaders and representatives.
6. Collaborating with the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and provide services to the community.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations for this study included

1. Teacher's and administrator's assumption that frequent communication with parents equated to equitable communication across all parents.
2. Parents willing to participate in the study were more likely to already be involved.

Delimitations of the Study

1. The results of the research were not generalizable to other schools.
2. The participants were from a convenience sample.
3. The population was limited to a small rural school in the central region of a southeastern US state.
4. Access to artifact data was limited due to a change in the messaging system prior to the study.

Definition of Terms

Communication—transfer of information from one source to another by various methods such as face-to-face interaction, phone calls, letters, or digital means (i.e., email, text message, or mass communication system).

Parent—defined by FERPA as a natural parent, guardian, or individual acting as a parent in the absence of a parent (Education, 2019).

Parental Involvement—involvement in home-based or school-based activities that are either curricular or extra-curricular (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Rural—any territory that is 25 miles or more from an urbanized area and 10 miles or more from an urban cluster (NCES, 2019).

Summary

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter I introduced the study and framework on which the study is based. The need for parental involvement was established as well as the importance of communication between schools and parents in facilitating parental involvement. Furthermore, Chapter I provided information on the significance and purpose of the study as well as limitations, assumptions, and definition of terms. A review of literature is presented in

Chapter II. Pertinent literature was reviewed to further establish the importance of parental involvement in schools as well as the need for clear and regular communication between schools and parents. Chapter III addresses the methods used to conduct the study including research questions, researcher positionality, and data collection. This chapter also gives details about the setting and participants of the study. Chapter IV discusses the results of the study, while Chapter V delves into the findings and offer recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This review of literature discusses the role of communication between schools and homes as well as the integral part played by parents in aiding students in their educational journey. This review begins with defining parental involvement, recognizing various types of parental involvement, and connecting parental involvement to students' academic success. The review then shifts to investigating how communication encourages parental involvement and the use of various technologies to conduct such communication. Finally, the review concludes by looking at how the rural setting of the school can impact both communication between schools and homes and parental involvement in schools.

Parental Involvement

Numerous studies have been conducted concerning the concept of parental involvement ranging from types of involvement to how involvement impacts students as they advance into middle school and high school (Epstein, 1995, 2008; Mac Iver, Epstein, Sheldon, & Fonseca, 2015). Epstein (1995, 2008) noted that viewing students as children helps educators create a family-like school setting combined with parents who create a school-like home environment that leads to academic success for students. Schools, families, and communities alike are recognized as having overlapping spheres of influence that impact students' ability to succeed (Epstein, 1995). Epstein (1995, 2008) categorized parental involvement into six types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Caring communities can be built through the implementation of plans

designed to encourage involvement in the aforementioned areas (Epstein, 1995). Student success cannot be tied to student standardized test scores alone, but also to students' attitudes toward school and behavior (Epstein, 1995). Research showed that the building of partnerships between families and schools cannot be the responsibility of one individual, but should be a team goal (Epstein, 1995, 2008). As parents desire useful information regarding the student's schooling and transition into higher grades, vertical communication between elementary, middle, and high schools is suggested (Mac Iver et al., 2015). Future research was suggested regarding how to best engage parents about creating positive expectations of caring communication between schools and homes (Mac Iver et al., 2015).

Parents become involved in the schooling of students when they feel the teacher and student desire involvement (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Personal contact between teacher and parent aids in the creation of trusting relationships which, in turn, leads to increased parental involvement (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Parents who understand what is expected and what is being assessed at their child's school are more likely to take an active role at school and at home as a part of their child's educational process. Deslandes and Rivard (2013) conducted a pilot study in Quebec aimed at improving parents' understanding of student assessment at the elementary level. This study found that parents, regardless of their social class, became more involved in their child's education when better understanding the assessment process. This understanding only came after the introduction to informational tools and workshops designed to increase parent's understanding of the new assessment process (Deslandes & Rivard, 2013). This points to the need to keep parents informed as a means of gaining or at the very least maintaining a strong level of parental involvement in schools.

Deslandes (2006) outlined a program designed to develop, implement, and evaluate school-family-community collaboration in four schools in Quebec over a 3-year period, noting that the school's mission should not be focused on short-term change. Although the researcher did not outline the specific activities used to foster collaboration, she did discuss at length the challenges faced within the program as well as future challenges foreseen by the participants (Deslandes, 2006). While the overarching purpose of Deslandes' research was to increase school-family-community collaboration in schools, it is also very important to recognize challenges that a school might encounter along the way in order to properly prepare (Deslandes, 2006).

Challenges identified included background differences between participants, resources needed to facilitate collaboration, cooperation among responsible parties outside the school such as employers and politicians, understanding the inner workings of schools, and what true collaboration looks like (Deslandes, 2006). At the outset of the project, action teams were created at each school consisting of school administrators, teachers, and parents. While the size of the action teams differed from the two primary schools to the two secondary schools, the basic structure of the teams was consistent (Deslandes, 2006). The researcher pointed out that during the process, some members of the action team at one school left the project due to lack of faith in the program. This leads one to believe that, although collaboration plans within schools should be structured, they also do not need to be forced (Deslandes, 2006). While teachers and school leaders should be intentional in their efforts to involve parents and community members in the happenings at the school, forcing them into involvement that does not fit the needs of the school or the strengths of the stakeholder can prove to be ineffective.

Parental involvement is sometimes referred to as a partnership between the parent and the school, although there can be hurdles to overcome in building and maintaining an effective partnership with parents such as prior negative experiences with schools related to school administration (Dillon & Nixon, 2014). While some parents may not have experienced much success while attending school, it is important for schools to offer all parents opportunities to be involved (Dillon & Nixon, 2014). One particular method of inviting parents to be involved is by keeping them aware of needs and opportunities for involvement (Dillon & Nixon, 2014). Dillon and Nixon (2014) suggested that schools be aware of what methods of communication are being used to communicate with parents, as some methods tend to leave the tone of the message to interpretation and can be counterproductive. Keeping in mind that both the school and the parent are concerned with the learning and growth of the student, lasting partnerships can be sustained (Dillon & Nixon, 2014).

Ferrara (2015) discussed her research involving parent involvement facilitators (PIFs) and the impact made at a large western United States school district (Ferrara, 2015). The PIFs were charged with the task of engaging with parents of ninth grade students who had been identified as having specific risk factors that often lead to dropping out of high school. Through the interactions with the PIFs, parents gained a level of social capital stating that “social capital exists in relationships and provides a network of support” (p. 44) for the parents. This was seen to be a positive response to the PIFs’ engagement. Over the duration of the study, lasting 3 years, there was an increase in the number of students identified as on-track to graduate rising from 45% in the 1st year to 59 % by year 3 (Ferrara, 2015). This study further indicated that increased communication between schools and families increased students’ ability to achieve

success in school. One limitation found in the study was that the program focused on 9th grade students and did not loop through as students moved to 10th grade and beyond (Ferrara, 2015).

Parental involvement preparedness curriculum has not historically been offered in preservice education programs. For this reason, Ferrara (2009) conducted a research study over 3 semesters focused on the implementation of a parental involvement program delivered through a professional development approach for preservice teachers (Ferrara, 2009). The program consisted of content designed to teach preservice teachers about parental involvement strategies to engage parents to impact student learning rather than simply teaching them how to deal with parent issues (Ferrara, 2009). Modules of parental involvement training were delivered at the introductory level, methods level, and internship level of the preservice education program. Upon the completion of the program, teachers were surveyed to gauge their confidence in their understanding of parental involvement and how it might actually look in their classroom. Survey data collected from preservice teachers entering the internship portion of their education who felt comfortable with their understanding of parental involvement increased from 40% to 80% (Ferrara, 2009). Knowing that parental involvement in schools has a positive impact on student outcomes paired with Ferrara's (2009) data leads one to believe that there is a need for increased focus on parental involvement curriculum in preservice education programs.

Brannon (2007) interviewed principals across the state of Illinois about the decline of parental involvement from elementary school to middle school. Through this study, she found that many principals indicated similar issues or misconceptions as to why parents seemed to pull back their level of involvement in their children's education as they entered middle school. Some parents stated that they felt their children no longer wanted the parents at their school now

that they were getting older. However, this misconception was disproven as student surveys indicated that students actually preferred parents to be involved and even inquisitive regarding the goings on at school. Some principals indicated that negative experiences parents suffered when attending school had left them feeling alienated and thus led to their lack of interest in being involved. Other concerns included the accelerated curriculum of today's middle school along with prior time commitments. Brannon shared what was being done to overcome these issues, as well as things that principals saw as potential ways to help in the future. Brannon closed the article by encouraging parents to maintain their level of involvement, if not increasing it, because students need their parents more than ever during their middle school years.

Ross (2016) examined the link between parental involvement in high school and student completion of high school and postsecondary schools. The author looked at eight measurable types of involvement by parents that connect in some way to their students' completion of high school and postsecondary educational endeavors. Findings indicated significant connections to parental involvement in extracurricular activities as well as academic outcomes. The overarching finding by Ross was that parents who set expectations for their children and followed through on making sure that students reached those goals were vital to increasing student achievement. Ross concluded by stating that there was no "one-size-fits-all approach" (p. 26) to parental involvement, each school should be addressed individually.

Gonida and Cortina (2014) examined patterns in parental involvement in homework assignments of fifth and eighth grade students. The study focused on the practices of parents while helping children complete assignments. It was determined that parents tend to assist or

intervene in the child's homework differently based on the parents' desired outcomes as well as their beliefs regarding the student's academic ability (Gonida & Cortina, 2014).

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) took an in-depth look at what motivates parents to become involved in their children's education, narrowing it down to three major factors. The first is the parental role construction paired with a sense of efficacy. Parental role construction consists of what the parent believes expectations are as they relate to their child's education, as well as the means by which they are involved according to those expectations (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This role construction can be a result of the parent's past experiences, or based on social expectations surrounding the school, but are an integral part of the motivation of parents to become more involved. These role constructions are paired with a sense of efficacy or belief that parents are capable of making decisions that will lead to outcomes that help the child along their educational path. Parent efficacy does not always mean direct involvement at the school campus, but can merely consist of monitoring their children's actions and school-related activities, which has resulted in increased achievement of students (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

The second motivating factor involves how parents perceive invitations to become involved from school administrators, to teachers, as well as the student (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). This would include school-wide invitations to encourage parental participation at various events. These invitations should be designed to let the parent know that their involvement and opinions are valued and meaningful in the education of their children. If these invitations are not perceived as such, then the level of involvement will be limited (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Invitations from teachers are especially meaningful due to their direct nature and the fact that many parents desire to know the status of their child within the classroom. The invitations to

involvement made by the student seem to be more difficult to understand as they are not always explicit or overt in the delivery but are being made all the same through the actions of the student.

The third and final motivation for involvement is life context of the parent and how it leads to involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parents bring a level of knowledge and skills that determine the level of involvement in which a parent can participate. Along with these indicators of motivation, two realities of the environment were stated: self-motivation and decline in involvement as students move into higher grades. Some parents will be involved without the need of external motivation; however, this can lead to the feelings of entitlement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parental involvement has been found to decline as students move into middle and high school (Brannon, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Lareau (1987) examined the family-school relationship in regard to how social class impacts the level of parental involvement as well as the level of achievement of their students. Family-school relationships have changed over history. What was formerly an intertwined relationship where the rural family provided for all the needs of the teacher but had little or no involvement in the formal development of the child, to a time recognized for an increase in mass schooling where parental support was shown through other means, Lareau (1987) noted a “political and economic support for the selection and maintenance of school sites” (p.74) evolving to a present model of parents aiming to “reinforce curriculum and promote cognitive development” (p.74). This idea of parental involvement was put to the test through a participant-observation study involving a school recognized as upper-middle class and another as working-class (Lareau, 1987). The researcher found that responses to the invitation to involvement were higher in the upper-middle class school than in the working-class school and

a corresponding achievement gap was noticed as well. This related to the Bourdiean concept of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), where the upper-middle class families possess more of the *capital* valued by the school. The researcher indicated that the primary difference came from “differences in family life, particularly in social networks and childrearing patterns” (Lareau, 1987, p. 80). Further research in the area of increasing informational resources for parents could expand on this research.

Social capital has been identified as social resources (Bourdieu, 1986) that can impact the value seen in families within schools. Stevens and Patel (2015) explored how this concept might possibly serve as an underlying factor in parental involvement in schools. Given that parental involvement is displayed in many forms, and has been identified as beneficial to students at all grade levels, why is it that teachers and schools still struggle to get parents to participate (Stevens & Patel, 2015)? Parents indicated that each time teachers communicated positively with parents regarding their student or happenings at the school, capital increased and trust was gained (Stevens & Patel, 2015). It is also important to recognize that the shortcoming in student outcomes might be misread due to inadvertent obstacles hindering parents from becoming involved due to schools not tapping into social capital (Stevens & Patel, 2015). It is important for schools to develop open lines of communication with parents and families and learn what valuable capital they possess either individually or within the community, and invite those families to become involved at schools.

Duppong Hurley, Lambert, January, and Huscroft D’Angelo (2017) conducted a confirmatory factor analysis comparing parental involvement frameworks as they related to secondary school students rather than elementary school students. Basing the study on a three-domain framework rather than the more commonly used six-domain framework, focus was

placed on the domains of home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and academic socialization (Duppong Hurley et al., 2017). The researchers identified some factors commonly associated with the decline in parental involvement in secondary schools such as the increased number of classes and thus the teachers that each student has in middle and high school and the increased difficulty of the content leading to parents feeling inadequacy in their ability to assist students (Duppong Hurley et al., 2017). Upon the in-depth review of the data and comparison to a single-factor model, a three-factor model, and a six-factor model, the researchers found that the six-factor model fit most acceptably (Duppong Hurley et al., 2017). This revelation indicated that consideration of multiple types of parental involvement was vital to improving student learning outcomes.

Griffin and Galassi (2010) conducted a study regarding barriers to academic success as seen through the eyes of the parents of students in a rural middle school. While participants listed a number of perceived barriers to academic success, one area that emerged consistently throughout both groups of participants was the lack of communication between teachers and parents. One particular parent indicated that when their child was in elementary school, there was more communication between the teacher and the parent and that the parent felt far more aware of where their child was academically at any given time throughout the school year. After the student advanced to middle school, the parent felt the communication from the school regarding the student's progress declined under the notion of giving the student more responsibility (Griffin & Galassi, 2010). When asked what would help the school as a whole to overcome some of these barriers, parents indicated that more frequent updates on students' academic standing, along with additional resources for parents, as well as support for parents would help in the movement through middle school (Griffin & Galassi, 2010).

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) discussed the need for a shift from parental involvement in schools to parental engagement in children's learning. Noting that traditional views of parental involvement that included parents participating in activities at the local school and simply being present in and around the institution where education was taking place did not have the impact that was found when parents are truly engaged in the learning of the child (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) pointed out that while the phrases sound and look similar, the two are actually quite different. Parental involvement can be viewed as a true or false statement and is easily observable. Simply stated, parents are either involved in activities at the school or with their student's homework or they are not. Parental engagement, however, refers more to an internal concern that the parents have related to the child's learning. They went on to clarify that while some parents are afforded the opportunity to be physically present and involved in their child's education, others, due to various circumstances are not (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). These two differing situations do not, however, impact the importance placed on education by the parent in either context (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The authors stated that when viewing parental engagement as a continuum, it is clear that it requires constant cultivation in order for the student to progress. Communication between schools and parents is a vital aspect in cultivating a continuum of parental engagement in children's learning. The researchers also noted that in order to properly nurture parental engagement, schools should engage parents in communication where parents are encouraged to dialogue with teachers rather than one-way transfer of information (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Communication

Bennett-Conroy's (2012) study of teacher/parent relationships based on adequate bidirectional communication indicated that communication between teachers and parents has been directly connected to higher achievement. In this study, the researcher collected data on two classes, one without any increased communication or intervention and the other with intervention and increased communication. Findings indicated that there was not only an increase in the number of homework assignments submitted, but there was also a significant difference in the scores on those assignments (Bennett-Conroy, 2012). While the study did have significant findings, the researcher indicated some limitations to the research. One limitation noted was that the researcher was employed as an administrator within the system and believed that some respondents may have skewed their responses to what they felt the researcher wanted to hear. A second limitation mentioned was that information self-reported by teachers may have also shown some bias (Bennett-Conroy, 2012).

Rogers (2007) investigated how middle schools in the southeast used the emerging technologies of the time to communicate with parents of middle school students. Using Epstein's framework of six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995, 2008), Rogers conducted her research in middle schools with differing racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Her study focused on the current communication technologies such as cellular phones, websites, and email, and reviewed the usage of each as well as the preferences of both parents and teachers.

Rogers' subject schools varied in socioeconomic make-up allowing her to look at the relationships between parents of differing social classes and their preferred mode of communication. Teachers and parents were studied regarding their preferred mode of

communication as well as which mode better facilitated parental involvement and which mode better fulfilled Epstein's framework of six types of parental involvement. While relationships were found at all levels of socioeconomic backgrounds in the modes preferred, it was also found that various issues prevented parents and teachers from using some forms of communication. Issues such as cost of usage associated with cell phones and internet connections at homes made parents and teachers alike hesitant to fully engage with these emerging technologies. Limitations to the study included a lack of internet connection within homes but also limited knowledge of the technologies reported by the parents and difference of technologies used by teachers and parents (Rogers, 2007).

In a study of ninth grade Algebra students, Shirvani (2007) looked at the relationship of teacher communication with parents and its impact on parental involvement as it pertained to students completing homework assignments. Through review of data and surveys of parents, teachers, and students, Shirvani (2007) found that the group of students whose parents received regular communications from teachers showed significantly higher scores as well as decreased discipline referrals. The researcher attributed the increase in grades and decrease in behavioral issues to parents' attitudes toward the school and teachers as a direct result of the increased communication between school and home (Shirvani, 2007). This indicated that the best way to increase parental involvement and parental engagement in school is to engage parents with regular communications of various methods. This frequent communication, not entirely revolving around student misbehavior or changes to the everyday activities within the school creates an increased level of comfort and trust on the part of the parent and thus changes their attitude toward schooling in general (Shirvani, 2007). Students recognized these attitudes which

resulted in multiple levels of positive behaviors such as decreased tardiness, decreased referrals to the principal, and increased scores on homework assignments (Shirvani, 2007).

A key issue in building strong relationships with families and community stakeholders alike is through building a positive perception of schools. Carr (2007) stated that it is important for schools to frame the narrative surrounding themselves before others do, through intentional delivery of information about schools through a variety of digital media. By “going direct,” as Carr called it, with school communications through outlets such as websites, messaging systems, and social media, school leaders are able to tell their own story without being subject to any bias held by others.

Carr (2007) encouraged schools to build and maintain quality websites where stakeholders can quickly and easily find information, also noting the need for the use of mass messaging systems for immediate and consistent delivery of content regarding the school. Also, with the emergence of social media, schools are able to deliver content related to the everyday happenings within the school that offers opportunities for families to feel as though they are a part of the school community.

Considering there is a direct connection between parent involvement and student achievement, schools should place extra emphasis on fostering strong relationships with parents and keep them informed about the happenings at the school and within the classroom (Olmstead, 2013). Olmstead’s study concerning the use of technology as a form of communication between schools and parents looked at the various channels of communication schools utilized to encourage parental involvement. The study provided a review of types of technological communication used, looked at teacher perspectives on the effectiveness of the

means of communication, and determined a sense for how connected parents felt to their student's teacher (Olmstead, 2013).

A variety of communication methods were evaluated including push methods such as email and phone messaging where information is sent out to the individual parent directly via social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Pull methods such as websites and parent portals where parents visit or in some cases login to access information were also evaluated (Olmstead, 2013). Parents and teachers alike indicated that these methods were effective in keeping them informed about what was going on at the school. While the study revealed that a very high percentage of parents indicated that they listened to the entire message when called by the school messenger (Olmstead, 2013), there was no indication as to the content of those messages.

Building on the need for trust in the school, Bryk and Schneider (2003) spoke to the fact that relational trust is a primary contributing factor in school reform. So, what then is relational trust and how does it impact a school and community? Relational trust is built on the idea that each party within the relationship understands that he or she is obligated to perform the duties associated with their role while holding others accountable for performing their duties (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Reaching this level of trust requires school personnel to display respect and integrity when interacting with community stakeholders. Teachers and school leaders display respect by genuinely listening to the needs of stakeholders and taking these needs into consideration when making decisions that impact the school.

Using a moral-ethical view to guide how teachers and school leaders conduct daily duties also helps build a reputation that leads to trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Stakeholders cannot recognize either of the aforementioned traits in teachers or school leaders without social

exchanges. Teachers and school leaders feel safe in their efforts to implement new practices within their classrooms and schools based on the amount of professional trust among peers and support given by parents. Byrk and Schneider (2003) also pointed to a direct connection between schools with high relational trust and increased student achievement.

Manning-Smith (2014) encouraged schools to examine their communication practices to determine the level of engagement being seen by families within their school, pointing out that without parental involvement, teachers are isolated and alone in their efforts to deal with student issues (Manning-Smith, 2014). While many schools tend to provide mainly informational communication to parents and families, there are other methods of communication that might prove to be more effective. In their efforts to move away from informational communication, teachers need to provide more opportunities to engage families in dialogue. Dialogue between families and schools provides families opportunities to be involved in the decision-making process within the school as well as developing mutual trust (Manning-Smith, 2014). Teachers' utilization of multiple methods of communication such as email, text, and blogs, provide a forum in which families can provide feedback related to shared information. These communication methods can be specific to individuals, targeted to a small group of families, or delivered to large groups and each allows for dialogue as well. The researcher also noted that by establishing strong relationships with families, schools gain educational partners and resources that can be used throughout the school (Manning-Smith, 2014).

Sack-Min (2015) published an interview with the chief communications officer of the Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS), Mychael Dickerson, regarding how important communication was to the BCPS. In this interview, Dickerson expressed a need for communications from schools. Dickerson also shared some of the highlights of BCPS

communication strategies. One of the highlights noted was the use of digital technologies within the communication plan as Dickerson referred to them as “game changers for engaging students, parents, staff, internal and external stakeholders, and communities” (p. 48).

While noting that all school districts may not have the resources to have a dedicated district communications director to oversee all of the information communicated, districts should tap into the resources that already exist within the system. Dickerson suggested that districts without communications directors look within to find those individuals who are savvy with digital communication and social media and have them act as the curator of information distribution for the school (Sack-Min, 2015). It would be understood that some level of accountability would be needed to ensure that appropriate information would be disbursed and that all posts represented the school or district in a positive light. Dickerson noted that not all communications from the school should be immediate, and that not all information is intended to be sent to the masses and should be distributed accordingly through the proper channels (Sack-Min, 2015).

Historically schools have been viewed solely as a place where information is transferred from individuals who have it—teachers, to individuals who need it—students. This idea of education would place schools on the same level to that of the local library where one might go for information and simply leave once said information has been obtained. Brown and Vaughn (2015) had a differing view of schools, stating that schools are about people and revolve around communication and relationships. While the communication between teacher and student is a vital part of the education process, Brown and Vaughn (2015) indicated that communication should also include parents as well as the local community and that the information being communicated should be informative and continuous.

One way to communicate with stakeholders is to utilize the technologies currently available. These technologies give school leaders the ability to open their schools up to communities like never before. Through the use of social media school, leaders can showcase individuals and groups within the school and strengthen the overall culture of the school. By taking this proactive approach to communicating school information, school leaders have the opportunity to set the narrative surrounding their school rather than simply reacting to events that might arise. This effective and efficient transfer of information to all stakeholders leads to the development of relationships which, in turn, builds trust in the school (Brown & Vaughn, 2015).

Rural Setting

Semke and Sheridan (2012) conducted a systematic review of empirical literature on family-school connections in rural settings, noting that context plays a significant factor in understanding the academic achievement of students. Their review of research studies conducted between 1995 and 2008 related to family-school partnerships that were situated in rural settings. The research yielded 18 studies. Of these studies, all were situated in North America and were described by the researchers as being in rural settings, although the definition of rural was not clearly identified in every study. Of the findings that surfaced from this review, it was determined that additional research needs to be conducted involving education in rural settings (Semke & Sheridan, 2012).

Stanley et al. (2008) researched the effects of rurality on education regarding school adjustment in comparison to urban peers. Although there was no difference identified in the adjustment to school, there were significant differences found between income level based on the percentage of students on free or reduced lunch programs, and parents' education level

among families in rural areas compared to those of families in urban areas (Stanley et al., 2008). Other variables such as school activities, non-school activities, and family care were also considered. Rural schools were identified as being considerably smaller than their urban counterparts. Rural schools were identified as having struggled with issues of funding, as well as the ability to maintain quality staffing. While urban schools were able to offer student opportunities outside of the classroom, many rural schools did not have such offerings (Stanley et al., 2008).

A variety of research has been conducted on the impact socioeconomic status has on the perceptions teachers have of their students' ability to learn as well as the expected amount of accessibility and involvement of parents. Miller, Kuykendall, and Thomas (2013) noted that teachers tend to have low perceptions of students based on the communities from which they come. This study found that not only did teachers show lower perceptions of students' academic development, but also a low perception of the communication and association with parents in schools with higher percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunch (Miller et al., 2013).

Rural and urban schools differ in more ways than simply geographic location and population. While schools look to renew schooling, Bauch (2001) found that when addressing rural schools, it is important to use a school-community model that focuses on the connections between stakeholders. noting that this model is best suited for the rural setting due to its basis on the setting in which the school rests. Bauch noted that in order to establish strong connections between schools and communities, leaders should focus on six types of connections. Social capital refers to an individual's circle of influence within the community. Such capital is obtained over time as connection with the community grows stronger and is often not found in

newcomers to the community (Bauch, 2001). Sense of place is another type of connection considered vital to fostering connection in rural schools. Sense of place is that innate belonging one feels when at “home,” and thus produces a heightened connection (Bauch, 2001). One type of connection that tends to have a more drastic impact on student success is parental involvement. This connection includes many variations of involvement ranging from actually being on campus volunteering, to simply talking with students about their school day or future educational goals. Since many rural communities are very close knit socially, many of the community gatherings take place on the school campus or at school-related events off campus.

Another connection type mentioned by Bauch (2001), was that of church ties. In some rural communities, churches provide individuals with increased social capital within the community. Though all of the connection types mentioned to this point have had a direct connection to the school, meaning that they impact the student or immediate family of students and school employees, there are also connections that include indirect stakeholders as well. School-Business-Agency relationships were also named as another important connection needed for rural schools, noting that these relationships not only provide resources for the school but also offer programs for students to get involved and thus build much needed social capital and sense of place through volunteer opportunities and school-to-work programs (Bauch, 2001). These opportunities and programs not only teach students valuable skills and responsibility but also foster connections that can help to hold students in the area after graduation or draw them back after post-secondary school. Bauch also named community as a circular resource; another connection that aids in connecting students to communities through involvement in community planning and other things specific to the community. Bauch’s study illuminates why rural schooling is distinctly different than schooling in urban and even

suburban areas, as well as why such settings should be identified and recognized as such throughout research studies.

In keeping with the connections recommended by Bauch, Hines (2002) found that school counselors can have a dramatic impact on helping foster such connections. In her study, she looked at a number of topics that can be impacted through strong school-home relationships. Stating that “parents need information and training on how to participate in the educational process” (p. 196), Hines indicated that schools not only need to build relationships with families, but that they should communicate with a purpose. Through increased communication and development of relationships between rural schools and families, school can aid students and their families by connecting them to resources within the school and community (Hines, 2002). Resources that can help families with issues from poverty to addiction that might not be readily available to urban and suburban schools that can foster trust in students and lead to academic successes.

Hoffman, Anderson-Butcher, Fuller, and Bates’ (2017) study looked closely at the everyday happenings of rural middle school students noting how their experiences could impact their completion of school. While rural schools are isolated and often have limited resources, strong relationships between parents and schools can lead to improved academic successes for students (Hoffman et al., 2017). Hoffman et al. also noted that their study was limited by the fact that it only focused on the perspectives of the students and that future research could be conducted to include school personnel and community stakeholders (Hoffman et al., 2017). The overall takeaway from the research was that rural schools need to be aware of potential risk factors for their students and be proactive in strategically planning to address those risk factors as well as providing assistance for students in need.

When researching the perceptions of rural educators in public schools; Lin, Isernhagen, Scherz, & Denner (2014) found many inconsistencies on the topic. When looking at teachers' understanding of parental involvement as well as reflecting on how parental involvement looked within the walls of their school, educators' perceptions varied (Lin et al., 2014). The researchers noted that rural schools face unique issues such as finding and retaining experienced staff and inadequate instructional resources, which lead to high levels of teacher turnover from year to year. This frequent turnover also contributed to inconsistency in how parents are engaged and limited long-term relationships between teachers and parents (Lin et al., 2014). The researchers concluded that while teachers were using traditional approaches to involve parents, they seemed to be seeking more contemporary outcomes, pointing out that teachers should reflect often on their parental involvement approaches (Lin et al., 2014). By reflecting on how schools attempt to involve parents in the education process and refining those processes to meet the changing needs within the community, educators should see more productive parental involvement that results in the overarching desired outcome, student academic success.

Summary

While there seems to be extensive literature pertaining to the need for increased parental involvement as a catalyst for improved student achievement, research showed a gap pertaining to the effects in the secondary setting of grades 9-12 in rural schools. Communication between the school and parents was a documented method of promoting increased parental involvement across all levels of schooling. The use of social media and other communication technologies helps to relay much needed information to parents regarding happenings at school and within the classroom if used properly. Finally, this review showed the need for additional research in rural settings regarding family school connections.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore the communication practices between parents and the school in a rural high school, and how parents and school personnel perceived the effectiveness of those practices in facilitating positive parental involvement in schools. Ferrara (2015) showed that effective communication aided in the facilitation of parental involvement in schools leading to increases in student achievement levels. Communication referred to the relay of school/classroom-related information that benefits students in the education process. Parental involvement denoted any supportive action, either at home or at school, by the parent to aid the student in their educational progress. These actions range from assisting with study and homework to assisting in attendance and students having appropriate materials when attending school. Student achievement covered a wide range of things in order to cover the entire student population. In some cases, student achievement was defined as simply gaining credits in order to stay on track to graduate (Ferrara, 2015), or it could be progressing through the honors track in efforts to receive scholarships and opportunities after high school.

The current study was a qualitative case study, which allowed for the answering of “how” and “why” certain phenomenon occurred (Yin, 2014). A case study allowed for a deeper look into parental involvement in a rural high school through the observation of the specific context where the phenomenon is currently occurring. Case study research allows for the focus of the study to be targeted to specific areas such as processes and programs (Yin, 2014) and affords the researcher the opportunity to select data sources (interviews, documents, or

observations) that provided insight into the proposed research questions. Case study research allows for review of one case within a specific context or multiple cases in a variety of contexts with a number of embedded units of analysis in each case (Yin, 2014).

Setting

This case study was conducted at a Rural High School (RHS) located in a southeastern US state. RHS is home to approximately 500 students in grades 9-12, 50% of whom are identified as economically disadvantaged, meaning they qualify for free or reduced lunch programs. While boasting a low student to teacher ratio of 17:1, RHS has shown less than stellar test scores, falling below the district and state average in both reading and mathematics. RHS is located in a state in which almost half of all public schools are considered rural. The rural setting of RHS was important to the study in that it was a key element of each family's life context as referenced in the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model. The school is considered rural based on the NCES definition because it is geographically situated 30 miles or more from any major metropolitan area. RHS was selected because of its rural location, its proximity to me, the large number of rural schools in the state, and my familiarity with the rural schools since I have worked at neighboring schools to RHS as both a teacher and administrator.

Researcher Positionality

As a sitting school administrator, I have an acute awareness of the need for parental involvement in schools, especially in rural schools where it may be difficult for parents to be involved. Through this case study, I desired to identify potential best practices as well as possible pitfalls related to the communication practices used by schools in their efforts to involve parents. While I have served as both a teacher and school administrator in neighboring towns, I selected a rural high school outside of my current school system of employment in

which I have not served in either capacity. I chose a rural school for proximity, but also because of the number of rural schools in the study state, which makes the study of communication and parental involvement in rural schools important. I bring these perspectives and biases to the study; however, by establishing clear criteria and procedures for data collection and including participants from a system other than the one in which I am employed, I attempted to minimize bias.

Participants

Participants for the study consisted of both school personnel and parents in order to gain perspective on how the perceptions of each group compares to the other. School personnel participants were sub-divided into groups based on their roles within the school: school administrators, teachers, and personnel with non-teaching roles. School administrators participated to determine the current parental communication practices used within the school. Both the lead principal and assistant principal were interviewed. Teachers participated on a voluntary basis, with volunteers divided by grade level taught and one teacher selected from each grade level randomly. Recruiting volunteers was based on willingness to participate, and randomly selecting from teachers in each grade allowed for a cross-section of participants with diversity and removed the appearance of bias. Parent participants were recruited using parent interest cards (see Appendix A) completed upon request as parents randomly came to the school for any reason, such as student check-out. The parent interest cards collected various information such as parent name and contact information, parent's preferred method of contact, and student's grade level. The interest cards were then divided by the grade level of the students with two parents per grade level randomly selected from the volunteer pools. Non-teacher participants were also recruited on a voluntary basis in order to get perspectives of personnel

whose role was not directly related to classroom instruction. Participants consisted of one teacher per grade level, two parents per grade level, four school personnel in non-teaching roles, and both the principal and assistant principal.

Instrumentation

Data for this study were gathered through the use of parent interviews (see Appendix B), school administrator interviews (see Appendix C), teacher interviews (see Appendix D), and other school personnel interviews (see Appendix E) as well as various communication artifacts from the mass messaging system used by the school. In an effort to provide each set of participants with appropriate interview questions geared toward the interviewee's role, specific interview guides were created for parents and school personnel. School personnel were interviewed based on their role within the school allowing for interview questions to be more applicable to the interviewee's position within the school. The questions in each interview guide were developed to collect data regarding perceptions of how current communication practices aid the increase of Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995). Questions were also included regarding how their life context in a rural area impacts their involvement in school (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005).

The parent interview guide began with an introductory script introducing me and outlining the general purpose of the study. Interviewees were advised that they were being recorded for transcription purposes. Questions were designed to determine their perception of their current level of involvement. Parents were also asked to give examples to support their answer. Other questions touched on the school's amount and frequency of communication with them as well as the content of those communications. Further information was gathered related to the methods by which communication from the school was delivered as well as if the

communication was directed to the parent as an individual or intended for a larger group such as a class or school-wide.

School administrators, both principal and assistant principal, were interviewed. The interview guide opened with an introductory script introducing me and outlining the general purpose of the study. School administrators were advised that they were being recorded for transcription purposes. Questions were asked to determine the administration's current expectations regarding teacher-parent communication. Administrators were also asked what methods they currently used for individual parent contacts as well as school-wide communications. Information regarding the administration's perception of how involved parents were in various school activities was also gathered. Administrators were also asked to reflect on how they felt their communications from the school invited parental involvement.

Teacher-parent communication referred to contacts made by the teacher to the parent regarding positive or negative behaviors displayed by students (Bennett-Conroy, 2012), as well as reminders of classroom assignments or events communicated through technologies such as class websites or social media groups (Olmstead, 2013). Teachers were identified as school personnel who have the responsibility of instructing a classroom of students in a given subject area. Teacher volunteers were recruited and then selected randomly, allowing for one teacher interview per grade level. The teacher interview guide began with an introductory script introducing me and outlining the general purpose of the study. Interviewees were advised that they were being recorded for transcription purposes. Questions on the teacher interview guide focused on the teachers' perception of how involved parents were in relation to their class and sought examples to support their answers. Specific questions were asked about the frequency of communication with parents, content of those communications as well as the methods by which

those communications were delivered. Teachers were also asked how they felt their communications encouraged or invited parents to be more involved.

Other school personnel refers to non-teacher personnel within the school and included roles such as school counselor, school nurse, career coach, and school secretary. The other school personnel interview guide opened with an introductory script introducing me and outlining the general purpose of the study. Interviewees were advised that they were being recorded for transcription purposes. Interviews focused on issues such as frequency of communication attempts, responses from parents when contacted, and content of communications. School personnel were also asked to comment on the usage of technology outlets such as websites (school-wide or small-group), mass messaging applications (such as Remind, GroupMe, etc.), and social media. Perception of the effectiveness of any communications associated with the role of the non-teacher personnel were also collected.

Research Question

This qualitative case study was based on one overarching research question:

1. How do parents and school personnel in a rural secondary school perceive the effectiveness of current communication practices between schools and homes regarding parental involvement?

In an effort to provide each set of participants with appropriate interview questions geared toward the interviewee's role within the school, specific interview guides were created for parents and school personnel. The questions in each interview guide were developed to focus on the communication practices used by the school, how participants perceived those practices to motivate parents to action, and perception of current parental involvement. The questions were also developed to collect data regarding perceptions of how current communication practices

aid the increase of Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995) and how the life context in a rural area impacts parental involvement in school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005)

Data Collection

Once I received IRB approval for the study (see Appendix F), data were collected through the use of interviews with parents, teachers, school administrators, and other school personnel. Participation was on a voluntary basis and possible participants were contacted in person or with assistance from school personnel.

Parent interest cards required minimal time on the part of the parents and were delivered in the school office by me for parents to complete while on regular visits to the school (i.e., school events, check-out, and meetings). From these cards, parents were contacted to participate in a one-on-one interview conducted at the school. Interview times were approximately 30 minutes in length.

Teacher/other school personnel participants included four classroom teachers as well as the school counselor, career coach, school nurse, and school secretary who were contacted via email with details regarding the study as well as an invitation to participate on a voluntary basis. These participants were given the opportunity to have their interviews conducted on a school day during their planning period or immediately following the completion of the school day for their convenience. Interview times were approximately 30 minutes in length.

School administrators were interviewed one-on-one and interview times were scheduled to fit within the school administrator's busy schedule. School administrators were contacted directly by phone call due to the limited number of administrators and asked to participate in the collection of data. Interviews of school principal and assistant principal lasted approximately 30 minutes each.

Data were also collected pertaining to various artifacts such as records of outgoing communications sent through the automated school messaging system. These data were requested in advance and were emailed to me by the school principal.

Data Analysis

Constant comparative analysis was used to analyze the data collected. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using a mobile recording device and a transcription app named Otter (<https://otter.ai/>). Transcripts from each interview were reviewed along with the audio recording to insure accurate transcription. Interview transcripts went through an initial coding process based on general information where codes were related directly to the data presented in the interview transcript. The data then went through focused coding using NVivo software to identify more specific patterns in the data. Information related to frequency of communication, content of communication, method of communication, as well as participant perception of effectiveness of communication was identified and analyzed.

Focused coding was then conducted to identify patterns within the responses. Upon review of the patterns identified in the coding software, closer review of the data revealed commonalities among responses. Patterns were separated into themes and then related to how the data were associated with Epstein's six types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1995, 2008) as well as Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s model (2005). The resulting seven themes were Methods for Mass Communication, Types of and Reasons for Individual Communication, Communication's Impact on Parental Involvement, How Parental Involvement Impacts Student Achievement, How Parental Involvement Changes as Students age into High School, Perception of Current Parental Involvement Within the School, and Impact of Rural Setting on Parent Involvement.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the communication practices between parents and the school in a rural secondary school, and how parents and school personnel perceived the effectiveness of those practices in facilitating positive parental involvement in schools. The findings in this study are based on the perceptions of parents and school personnel as they were shared with me in one-on-one interviews.

Participants

Participants for this study were recruited in a variety of ways. Recruitment of participants in the school personnel pool provided a variety of individuals for both the teacher pool and the non-teacher personnel pool. The teacher pool consisted of four teachers identified as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, and Teacher 4. These teachers spanned both core curriculum and elective classes and all grade levels as they each taught multiple grades. The non-teacher school personnel pool consisted of four individuals (i.e., school counselor, career coach, school nurse, and school secretary) who served the school in a non-teaching capacity and are identified as Non-Teacher 1, Non-Teacher 2, Non-Teacher 3, and Non-Teacher 4. The school administrator pool was made up of both school administrators, who are identified as Administrator 1 and Administrator 2. It was found that four of the school personnel participants qualified in multiple pools as three of the teachers and one administrator also had non-teaching roles within the school as either coaches or sponsors of extra-curricular activities; however, they were classified as to their primary role within the school.

Parent participants were selected from the parent interest cards that were filled out by parents visiting the school. Parents identified as Parent 12-1 and Parent 12-2 were the only parents who completed interest cards with students in the 12th grade and parents identified as Parent 11-1 and Parent 11-2 were the only 11th grade parents who completed interest cards. While there were a few more participants who completed interest cards from both the 9th and 10th grades, only one 10th grade parent who was drawn to be a participant responded when contacted. After multiple attempts to schedule an interview with the drawn parent, a replacement parent was drawn and they also declined to participate. The final parent who indicated having a student in the 10th grade was a parent of multiple students and had actually been drawn to participate as a 9th grade parent. At that point a new 9th grade parent was drawn and the original parent was used in the 10th grade. Therefore, the parents of 10th grade students were identified as Parent 10-2 and Parent 9-2 (10), and 9th grade parents were identified as Parent 9-1 and Parent 9-3. Each of these participants were interviewed individually.

Findings

Interviews were recorded and transcribed using a mobile recording device and a transcription app named Otter (<https://otter.ai/>). Transcripts were then reviewed along with the audio recording to insure accuracy of the transcription. Transcripts went through initial coding based on general information. The data then went through focused coding using NVivo software to identify more specific patterns in the data. Upon review of the patterns identified in the coding software, closer review of the data revealed commonalities among responses. Patterns in the data created natural divisions leading to seven themes: Methods for Mass Communication, Types of and Reasons for Individual Communication, Communication's Impact on Parental Involvement, How Parental Involvement Impacts Student Achievement, How Parental

Involvement Changes as Students age into High School, Perception of Current Parental Involvement Within the School, and Impact of Rural Setting on Parent Involvement. Artifacts were also examined within the data analysis. The following section provides detailed information on each of the aforementioned themes and artifacts, along with excerpts from various participants.

Theme 1: Methods for Mass Communication

The Mass Communication theme relates to all forms of communication intended to reach a group of parents large or small. Participants identified many types of mass communication options used to relay information to parents such as automated call-out system, communication apps such as Remind and GroupMe, school website, and social media outlets such as Facebook. The most widely reported form of mass communication was the automated call-out system. The call-out system, though referred to by various names and descriptions from one participant to another, appeared in 13 of the 18 interviews. All but one parent participant reported the automated call-out system in their interview responses. Parent 9-2 (10) stated,

I get phone calls to the phone tree, it's a is a good way to communicate with parents, I think, or it's a good way to communicate with me, because it lets me know what's going on in the school. So, I really liked that option.

Parent 12-1 added, “We get a call at home or on our cell phone for specialized things like health fairs, or flu shots, testing days, to know when they are going to take test and that we know that's happening.” Parent 11-2 also reported, “And we, they use the call out system. I think it might be one call now. It may have changed I can't remember. I just answer it when it calls.”

Parent 10-2 discussed getting information in multiple ways through the automated call-out system saying, “I don't know what's it called, it comes to your phones and message. So, the audio message about any school happenings, sometimes like especially with the parent day that

we have twice a year.” Parent 10-2 later mentioned: “One thing to that comment is they also send emails as well. If you have . . . given them your information, they’ll email it and you’ll also get it on the phone as well too.”

School personnel mostly agreed with parents indicating that the automated call-out system served as a primary means of delivering information to large school-wide groups as well as smaller groups like a specific grade level. Administrator 1 stated,

Most of the communication that goes regularly, back and forth, is done through OneCallNow. I mean it’s just going to be for big things so it's not, I guess a set schedule, it’s just going to be when the need arises to let them know that something's happening.

Administrator 2 echoed that and continued to discuss how the system combines multiple platforms such as phone calls, text messages and email. He also discussed how this varied from parent to parent depending on the information provided by the parent during the registration of the student. He further clarified that with the recent conversion to a registration platform, the school seemed to be getting more current and accurate information from parents. Both Administrator 1 and Administrator 2 discussed how they tried to be cautious not to overuse the platform and thus render the platform ineffective. Administrator 1 reflected on their use of the automated call-out platform saying,

I feel like we do a better job of not putting out unnecessary information on some of our methods of contacting parents. The parent side of me would say I get phone calls that I think are irrelevant sometimes to everything. Like, I shouldn't get those phone calls, because it doesn't affect me. And it's right in the middle of either eating dinner or ballgame or me at work. And the thing goes off and you know what it is.

Administrator 2 shared similar reflections as he discussed the use of the automated call-out system stating,

I do all calls out to parents, I try not to overuse it, because to be honest I have a son in school myself, and I have been overburdened sometimes with calls that aren't very meaningful to me. I found that people stopped listening to [them]. So, if I make a call and they hear my voice on the line I hope it's not so often that it takes away from the

need of the call. So, I would say probably compared to some other schools my all calls are more minimal but I would say, since the first of this school year to October, it might be four or five during that time period, if that.

Non-Teacher 3 was also a fan of the use of the automated call-out system and discussed some of the various content that is sent out through that platform.

Yes, during flu or cold season we did call out reminding parents about getting flu vaccines and using proper hand washing and disinfecting and reminding the parents you know don't send your child to school sick. Obviously, we do call outs. We do have a company that comes in and provides vaccine sometimes. Sometimes it's the flu vaccine, sometimes they offer other vaccines. So, we'll do call outs on that. If we have school medications that need to be picked up or any type of medical forms or health forms, concerning the children's health. We do that each year that there's a call out about things like that. If we have a major outbreak of some illness or communicable disease, we may do a call about that as well, to inform parents.

None of the teacher participants reported use of the automated call-out system as a means of communication with parents. The teacher participants focused more on communication apps such as Remind or GroupMe with three of four participants indicating current or previous use of those platforms. They did qualify that they mostly used these apps to communicate concerning their various extracurricular activities. Teacher 2 stated,

I'm also the sponsor of a club in our school, and so we have the Remind system on their phone. I have used Remind with my students in the past, it was like a standard with more students and letting them know, "Hey, we have a test tomorrow," "Don't forget to study," things like that.

Teacher 3 added, "We use an app called . . . What's the name? I got it on the board. Remind, Remind. Yeah, it's usually through that or group text."

While teacher participants mostly indicated the use of communication apps, only one administrator, one non-teacher, and two parent participants reported using them. Administrator 1 is also connected to extracurricular activities and reported,

The stuff I'm involved in, that I have knowledge of, the posts are fairly regularly [*sic*], especially in season. When I did eSports last year, I had a Remind app that I used to communicate and you know being involved in cheer. It's very regularly used. But then

we switched over to GroupMe, where it is a little bit newer. I don't really, I can't personally tell the difference in it but people seem to like it.

Non-Teacher 1 reported that she used the app to send out quick updates on information that parents and students needed: "I would do like Remind 101 with the parents, just to send out quick messages about hey, I saw this scholarship application deadline is this date." Both parent participants who reported the use of communication apps did so in regard to their student's participation in extracurricular activities. They both indicated that the content of those communications usually revolved around event times and locations as well as any changes to upcoming events.

Six out of 10 school personnel participants reported the school website as a means of communication that was used to get information out to parents. Included in those six were both administrator participants, three non-teacher participants, and one teacher participant.

Administrator 1 mentioned the school website as a place where parents, students, and community members could go to find information about the happenings at the school even noting that the school marquee sign simply directed parents to the website. Administrator 2 went into more detail as to who manages the website as well as some of the content found there in his response:

Our media specialist, librarian, pretty much is over our web page, but teachers, you know, different sports have their own page. Several people submit information to the website. Also, I do have like a public calendar that's posted to that site that most of that goes directly through me because I don't want a hundred different calendars and all the calendars being the same. So, if a sports program, I list all the sports activities. Say a sports program is having a banquet. Just like our counselor, we constantly have colleges, military, or different employers come and do recruitment and things during lunch. I list all of those things on the public calendar so parents can see.

Non-Teacher 2 also indicated that he uses the school website extensively in his role within the school,

The school website, and then go to academics and guidance from there, me and our librarian, or media person, that do the website. So, I have access to be able to get on and update my site. I try to keep them posted, I actually need to get it updated right now. I have left up last year's scholarship information just for people to see what all was there. So, we have a lot of local scholarships here that our kids apply for and instead of having, you know, to be announced, or you know, check back in the spring, I've just kept up all of last year's things. But I would say I will update that thing at least especially, whenever scholarship season is here, at least biweekly, you know, monthly biweekly.

Non-Teacher 3 and Non-Teacher 4 also indicated the school website as a place to find important information. The sole teacher participant who reported using the school website was Teacher 1 who reported that he used it with his extracurricular activities, stating that he kept a photo journal of his team on their page.

The parent participants, in contrast to the school personnel, did not mention the use of the school website as a means of communication with the exception of Parent 11-1. While parent participants did indicate some links to resources considered individual communication that can be found on the school website, they did not indicate the school website as a source of information. Parent 11-1, in his response, simply indicated that he could go to the school website if he needed additional information.

Perceptions varied across participants regarding social media usage. While both administrator participants reported that they did not use social media to distribute information, other school personnel indicated that social media was a popular means by which information was transmitted. Administrator 2 indicated that there were no school-managed social media accounts saying,

I do not do social media apps, those types of things. I think all of our sports programs use different group apps. And that's just my nature as far as social media. The district does use social media and we have things that feed into the district's Twitter accounts and those things. But as far as the school controlling Facebook page, even though those are out there, those are not actual school pages, some other people have created them.

However, three of four teacher participants, Teacher 1, Teacher 3, and Teacher 4 reported using social media, primarily Facebook, with their various sports teams as a means of distributing information. Teacher 4 stated it best saying, “Sports-wise, there's Facebook groups for that. So, a lot of times if we have to post something it's posted on there for the parents get the information.”

Two parent participants also provided some additional insight to the use of social media to deliver school information. Parent 10-2 stated,

... also, on Facebook. There is a general being friends with some of the teachers on Facebook, they will post some assignments or if there's anything happening at the school, say an event that's going or change to our schedule or any money for any type of reptile shows or concessions been sold or an in-school ballgame type thing. They usually post that on Facebook.

Parent 11-2 echoed that statement saying, “Various teachers will put things on Facebook, so, if you're a Facebook friend of them, they will go on there. Sometimes they'll put that on the town Facebook site as well.” Non-Teacher 3 also mentioned the use of the personal Facebook pages as well as athletic pages saying,

We share things our lead nurse sends us or, you know, we can put reminders on our Facebook. We don't have, or I don't know that there's a Facebook managed by the school, but sometimes, you know, the band pages or the football booster pages and sometimes we share things like that.

Although the majority of the discussion of mass communication related to the use of the automated call-out system, communication apps, school website, and social media, it is valuable to note that Teacher 4 had a unique perspective. When asked about his preferred method of communication he stated,

Honestly, as I'm younger, but I'm still not into technology that much when it comes to this all the new technologies, kind of, I'd rather just have a parent meeting, team meeting. That way, it's easier actually looking at them. I know that they hear me.

While this is one unique opinion, it did speak to the community feel surrounding the school that will arise in a later theme.

Theme 2: Types of and Reasons for Individual Communication

The second theme that emerged was related to types of communications intended for individual parents rather than groups. Participants discussed methods of communication used when sharing information regarding student concerns such as behavior, attendance, academics, and other specific needs. Participants responded that there were five consistent methods used: phone, email, face-to-face, text, and the Student Information System (SIS). Before delving into the methods of individual communication, it is important to note the administrators' expectations regarding parent communication. Both administrator participants reported that expectations had been established regarding teachers communicating with parents.

Administrator 2 stated,

I expect teachers to communicate with parents, whether it's written, you know, sent by students, even mailing items to parents. A majority of time just written through student email, phone contacts, especially if something's come to arise, or there's issues in the classroom that parent might not be familiar with or know what's going on. I really don't want all that communication being negative either. We often ask teachers to call, or contact parents, even when things are going well to have positive communication with parents.

Administrator 1 added, "We expect our teachers to communicate both positive and negative conversations. We just ask for contacts be made periodically just to keep a baseline of parental knowledge, both good and bad."

It was apparent that these expectations had been communicated to the faculty as similar statements appear in various teacher and non-teacher participant responses. Most notably,

Teacher 4 stated,

I do mostly positive praise. I mean, the first time you call them during the year it's kind of like an oh-no moment for them. But then we say "Hey, they're doing great"; call and

say “Hey, no problems, good grades, let me know if you need anything.” That opens that door of communication and it makes it easier down the road if there is a problem. Every time I call, if I do a positive call, they’re “Hey, thanks coach. Great to hear from you let us know if you have any problems.” A lot of times out on the field and everything, a parent comes by just to say, “hey,” shake my hand, say, “hey, my kid loves your class.” And I’ll say, “hey, he’s a great kid”; just kind of open communication.

There are a number of other such statements that appear throughout this section that are embedded in a response regarding a certain method of communication. Teacher 2 noted awareness of the expectation, however, saying making positive contacts is difficult:

I will contact parents usually if there's issues. I know we're supposed to do things like, just contact this parent just to let them know the kids doing great and all that, too, but sometimes with our time it's hard to do that.

The most widely reported method of individual communication reported by all participant groups was phone. Phone communication covers the standard person-to-person call as well as the automated call-out system, which also makes calls to individual students. Fifteen of the 18 participants interviewed reported some type of individual phone communication.

Parent 12-2 indicated that a phone call was her preferred method of communication saying,

I like a phone call. I like to just talk on the phone. That's easy to me and quick. The phone call would be the easiest, because then I don't have to worry about having to come over here for their free period. So, I really liked the phone call, that's the way I like to get in touch with people.

Parent 11-1 discussed a specific phone call he received that was very beneficial for his student as he recalled,

There has been an issue with my child being extremely depressed because of some stuff that happened with her biological mother and biological father. And I got a very forthcoming phone call from our counselor here, offering to help me set up counseling for her, which was a blessing.

Parent 10-2 referred to the automated call-out system contacting her individually, saying, “Now usually the call-out would either be like your child missed today, or was tardy, you know, they notify us.”

Teacher participants also noted the phone call as a useful method of individual communication. Teacher 1 had a different approach to making a phone call home, stating,

I will look up the students' parents' contact information and call them directly if it's a situation that needs to be dealt with quickly. A lot of times I'll ask the student, in private, to call home on their cell phone, and parents generally will answer the phone if the kid calls. And then that gives me immediate contact with the parent so they're very targeted towards what needs to be dealt with. Generally, if I'm needing to communicate with them, it's more of a corrective fashion, because I'm not getting a sort of necessary or expected behavior in class.

Teacher 3 takes a different approach to when phoning parents saying,

Usually it's by phone. That's my first source once I establish a relationship or contact with them, sometimes they suggest email, but I prefer calling. I try not to call parents just when there's discipline problems or problems with academics. In the past, I have if I know there's a kid that's struggling and they do well, sometimes I'll call and just tell the parents or leave a message with them saying this is [Teacher 3]. I just wanted to let you know there's not a problem. I wanted to brag on a little Johnny and the improvement that I've seen in class. I've seen them do good deeds in school, and I'll contact their parent and just say, this is what I saw today. I just want you to know, because I was proud, and I know you are too. I always try to stay positive. Even if it's a negative situation, I try to stay positive.

Administrator 1 noted that even though they expect parent contacts to be positive and negative, in his role, most of his contacts have a negative connotation, "I usually call parents daily, unfortunately it's usually, you know, negative connotation towards it when I am reaching out for whatever reason, but for me personally, it's usually daily. There's at least one, usually multiple, contact made."

Non-Teacher 2 discussed his communication with individual parents and the various content he discusses with parents on his calls,

I would say that I communicate with parents on, if not a daily, every other day basis. You know, just like today, you know, I called home just to speak with a parent about a dual enrollment status for one of our students. And this pretty much deals with all of the three counseling realms, academic, social/emotional, and college/career. I talked with one today about dual enrollment and some college stuff for their student. Yesterday, I was off; with the day before would have been some social/emotional things. Tuesday, I dealt with academic life. So, it was usually academic, social/emotional, or career.

Non-Teacher 3 also discussed why it was important for her to call parents when she needed to communicate, saying,

I have diabetic students, and sometimes I call their parents with issues they might have, like highs or lows. I also talk with parents when children are sick, if they have fever or some type of symptom and I need to call their parents and notify them they need to check them out for some reason due to health issues.

Email and face-to-face communication tied for the second most widely referenced method of individual communication across participant pools. Administrator 2 indicated that he felt email was preferred by many parents saying, “I think a lot of times phone calls are, you know, people that work can't take calls. I find parents email me a lot, I respond and that actually seems to be a preferred method for a lot of our parents.” Non-Teacher 2 stated that he preferred to use email to contact parents, but went on to state his reasoning for not currently using this method fully, stating,

So, if I had my choice, if I had to speak to everybody out there, I would like to be able to email every parent. I've talked with our technology person about being able to do more of that right now. I just have email access to every student. So, I want to get to the point where we have every updated parent's email.

Teacher 2 provided insights on how she went about insuring that she had current email addresses to use when reaching out to parents, “Okay, of course, I've used email. I get the students to fill out a form at the very beginning of the semester and they put their parents' email address on that form. I will contact parents usually if there's issues.” Parent participants referenced email communication directly from teachers as well as through the automated call-out system in some cases. Parent 10-2 said, “Usually I will receive an email if there was ever a concern. You know regarding academics . . . typically is easier for me to send an email.”

Face-to-face communication was also reported by 10 of 18 participants interviewed as a consistent method used. Multiple participants, both parents and school personnel, referenced

having grown up in the town and knowing one another, thus leading to comfort communicating through this method. Administrator 1 stated that he preferred face-to-face, saying, “I much prefer we just run into each other and talk about it. It’s a lot easier to look at somebody's face and have a conversation about what the problem is, or whatever.”

Teacher 2, among others, reported that through her connections with extracurricular activities, she often takes advantage of opportunities to speak with parents,

Well if I'm at a ball game and I say okay I'd rather speak to the parent face-to-face that way there's no miscommunication. Sometimes email can sound cold or it can be interpreted in different ways. Face-to-face is less of a chance for that to happen.

Teacher 4 also referenced communications at extracurricular activities, saying,

Occasionally parents just come by the field for practice just to check on their kids and stuff, and that's fine. I see them at other sporting events or functions occasionally, and the parents will want [to] just constantly talk about school.

Teacher 3 indicated that his encounters with parents at extracurricular activities provides him with the opportunity to build a strong relationship with parents that can lead to support down the road if needed as he said,

Coaching, I see a lot of parents at games, at practices, and all that. So that's where I do most of my communication. A lot of times it's not negative. Say, probably there's one negative [for] every 10 to 15 positives. It's mostly positive to try to get the parents on your side. As always usually it's just, hello, shake their hand, and your son or daughter is doing great, and great in class. Usually it's a big smile and everybody's happy and it gets them on your side and we're good down the road. Because, a lot of the negative stuff you have to call about, it's usually “Yes, sir. I'll take care of it.” We're a small school, small community, there's usually no more problems. It's handled at home, and it's done with.

Parent 11-1 reported that running into school personnel away from school was not only good for communication, but went a long way in building relationships as well, even calling it a blessing, saying,

I've talked to him away from school, and it was a very, very good conversation. Anytime have ever had a question, and that goes for anybody that's here. I will run into

Administrator 1, and discuss concerns that we have, and he's very forthcoming. Honestly a blessing.

Parent 10-2 also recalls speaking with administrators at school events and building a connection with them from that interaction, stating,

I know that I've met both administrators and some of her teachers at games or functions. They have always been very nice and I always introduce myself so that they know who I am. I tell them where I work, so that if there's any ever any concerns.

Eight of the 18 participants reported text messages as one of their methods of communication. While six of the eight participants who reported communicating through texts were parents, there were only two school personnel. One of the school personnel participants was Non-Teacher 3 who used texts to contact parents who are unable to take calls, and the other was Teacher 3 who used texts after having made initial contact with parents who requested texts. Most of the parent participants who reported using texts indicated it as part of the communication from the automated call-out system regarding individual things like attendance, or communication related to extracurricular activities. Parent 9-2 (10), however, reported a very different experience related to her text communication with a teacher related to her special needs child. She stated,

The special education teacher and I stay in close contact, and she usually texts me at least once or twice a day. Um, she (daughter) is autistic. So, there's like, if she's had a bad morning, sometimes I'll just check on her day to see how she's doing, or her teacher will let me know. Maybe she got upset that day or she gets migraines with loud noises. We keep in communication with her health issues or her anxiety issues as well as her academics.

While some may not think of the SIS as a normal form of communication, five participants indicated that it was a means by which they communicated. Four of the five participants who reported the SIS as a means of communication were parents and the fifth was Teacher 1. He identified the SIS as a "major" way that parents stay connected, by checking

student's grades and contacting teachers through the system. Parent responses reflected a similar sentiment, noting that it allowed them to know what was going on in their classes. It is also important to note that all of the four parent participants who reported using the SIS system were parents of students in grades 10-12 with no 9th grade parents indicating the use of the SIS.

Theme 3: Communication's Impact on Parental Involvement

After discussing communication, participants opened up regarding their perceptions of how communication from the school impacted parents' desire to become more involved with their child's education. Fifteen of the 18 participants interviewed indicated they saw a positive relationship between communication from the school and their level of involvement. Both administrators indicated they felt communication with parents led to more parental involvement with Administrator 2 saying,

I think communication can definitely make a difference. An example that I'm thinking about are the students' four-year plans. That's when students need to start focusing on where they're headed. Our counselor and I work on four-year plans at the high school and start planning their academic courses. Start planning on what their goal is after high school. You know, yearly parents sign off on those plans which is a form of communication. We receive a lot of contact with parents at that time of the year, and if they're involved with that, I think, that means there is a conversation outside of school about education or life and where that child is going.

Three of four teacher participants also saw a positive connection between communication from the school and parents' involvement in their child's education. The focus on the teacher responses revolved around building relationships and rapport through communication, and cooperation that came from that relationship. Non-Teacher 2 discussed the breakdown of barriers as a positive in his statement, saying,

The students don't always want a parent here, at a high school level, but a parent having more information, kind of understanding what's going on, breaking down any sort of trust barrier, would make them feel more comfortable. You know, it would definitely benefit both the parent and the school.

Non-Teacher 3 added that social media communications often helps drive parental involvement in her area,

A lot of parents will not answer a phone call, a call-out because they might not recognize the number, but they're going to get on their Facebook and scroll. They see that there's another parent saying that they're having flu shots tomorrow, and they participate. I think, you know, it's good for the parents if they don't hear about it. A lot of the children are not going to go home and tell their parents, especially at the high school age. They don't usually bring home forms and share information as much as younger children.

Seven of the eight parent participants indicated that communication from the school directly impacted their involvement in their child's education either by being actively involved at the school or simply through having meaningful, supportive conversations with their student.

Parent 12-2 said,

It makes me want to be involved. When they make it easy, and they seem like they really try to. I just come in and ask questions and whenever I need to. I can tell you that I've come in the office, which I've known Pam all my life, so I just come in and ask her, whenever I need to. I believe that if the school took more initiative to ask, or say, we have this club, or this organization that's helping us do this or raise money. Yeah, I think that would really encourage me, or make me more apt to do something.

Parent 9-2 (10) reported a strong connection, not only to her involvement, but to her comfort in even bringing her children to the school district, saying,

The special education, I was really worried, coming from a different school district, to this school district. But the special education teachers here have really eased my mind and have made me feel a lot better about her being here. I don't know it may just be I'm a very hands-on parent. So, I can't tell you what the opposite side is because I've just always been that way. It plays a huge level. Because we were teetering on putting them in private school. Like I said, the special education department at this school is what made me feel comfortable with our coming here.

Parent 9-3's comments related to her knowledge of her son's lack of responsibility in relaying information combined with his previous struggles academically. She felt that more communication in this area would have impacted her involvement, stating,

My son, he's not always going to tell me everything, you know, if there's something that needs to be known. He's probably not going to come home tell me about it, and then a teacher reaches out to you later to find out what's going on. I know when he was in the middle school I didn't know exactly how he was doing, you know, grade wise and stuff. Like math is not a good subject for him, although he is doing good this year in math. It's like, if they were to, like last year, if I would have been contacted more about how he was doing the math and stuff. I feel like maybe he could have done better than what he did, if, if I knew he was having trouble or whatever.

Parent 11-2 also reported that communication from teachers would allow her to have more meaningful discussions with her child about academics, saying,

I know they have a harder time doing it because they have so many students, but if they did have a remind or something and they just periodically sent updates through that. That would probably make me ask more questions, talk to her more about what was going on in class.

While the majority of participants reported a positive connection between communication and parental involvement, there were three participants who did not share that perception. Parent 10-2 noted, "My ultimate concern is my child. So, if there is an issue I think it's great to have a rapport, so that you're able to go to them if there is a problem. But I've never been swayed one way." Similarly, Non-Teacher 4 stated, "In just my opinion, I don't think that any kind of communication we send out, with the majority of the parents, it wouldn't matter." Teacher 2, however, went into more detail with her response, saying,

I'm not certain that we can instill that into the parent. I mean, I think it has to be from within. You have to have enough concern for your child to be prompted to go to the school and ask questions. I don't know if we can send out a mass message over the telephone, if we can send an email, that's going to stimulate them to respond. I don't know how that will.

Theme 4: How Parental Involvement Impacts Student Achievement

How Parental Involvement Impacts Student Achievement was the fourth theme found during the data analysis process of the study. Although many of the participant responses were

similar in tone, there was variation in details and experiences as well as a couple of unique perspectives.

All of the school personnel participants responded that there was a recognizable difference in the achievement levels of students who had supportive, involved parents at home compared to students from whom they observed less parental involvement. Administrator 1 said,

I think involvement helps me push academics, helps the teacher push academics, when they have that support at home. And by support, I mean not necessarily helping them with academics, it's just the expectations. Parental expectations, I think, is probably the best word for parental involvement at the high school level.

Non-Teacher 1, who is new in her role within the school, talked about her desire to see involvement in her area as she develops her program saying,

I do have dreams and desires with this position in the future. I want parental involvement, heavily, especially with this position. However, I know that will come, you know, in due time. From my experience, when parents and teachers are involved, preparing the students and asking them questions, the students are more likely to take it a little bit more seriously. I believe that if students see their parents pushing them and feel their support they're more likely to achieve more.

While many of the school personnel participants reported some form of support or accountability from parents as being valuable involvement in the student's academic achievement, Teacher 3 presented a unique perspective as he compared parental involvement to a team where everyone has a role to play. Teacher 3 said,

But to me, the parental involvement is the key, they need to be involved. It's no different than a team. They need to know exactly what the kids are going through and what they're doing, so they can stay on the same page. But I think parental involvement is key to kids' success. I've told my team that it doesn't matter if you're a scout team player or a starter, everybody has a role. I think parental involvement with the school stuff is the same. Everybody has a role to play. But it's sometimes it's hard to convince parents. Once you get them involved, then you can give them, not an assignment but an actual role to play. It doesn't matter how big the task or how small the task. Some of our students don't have a two-parent home. Some of them don't even have single parent

home. But we're not going to solve the education problem until it starts being important at home again.

Teacher 1, while still recognizing the need for parental involvement, discussed his concerns about what he perceived as over-involvement. He stated,

Sometimes parents micromanage their kid's grades. They want them to constantly have the highest grades and sometimes they want to control the path that the kid's on. Over the years I've had experiences with parents trying to find support for their kids misplacing their work or constantly neglecting to do this, that and the other and I've addressed students on this before. A lot of times they personally preferred sort of more blue-collar task, like they would much rather be in trade schools or digging ditches, than opening a book. So, sometimes parents can. I guess hope their aspirations get pushed off on the kids and try to control that that's an extreme.

Parent participants mostly agreed with the statements made by school personnel noting that providing support and expectations from home helps their students' academics. Parent 10-2 stated, "I think parental involvement is very important. I think that the student needs to see the parent and the school are working together to help them to be successful." While staying with the idea of support and accountability, Parent 11-1 said,

Well, if we're not involved, a lot of times they will slide. When you have somebody at home who cares about your school and is willing to say look, "I pulled this up on INOW. This isn't pretty. What are you going to do to fix it?" Okay. Tell me when and how. And then you can go back and verify that it's done.

Many other parent participants had similar perspectives related to keeping up with student grades and simply discussing their academics as a means of being helping their students be successful. Two parents, however, had varying thoughts worthy of being specifically stated in their words. Parent 9-3 said,

Well, for me, when I was growing up, my parents, they weren't involved in my school, or even really helped me with schoolwork. I feel like if a parent is more involved and shows their child that they care, then the child is going to do better, or try to do better, want to do better. Right? They've got someone they know is behind them.

Parent 9-1, however, took a totally different stance regarding parental involvement stating,

In high school they usually just want to be left alone. I mean, they don't really need anything. It's not . . . they're not like elementary school where they do all these fun activities, and they need PTO parents to come help.

Theme 5: How Parental Involvement Changes as Students age Into High School

When discussing parental involvement at the high school level compared to parental involvement at the lower grades, there were a variety of responses. School personnel seemed to recognize that parental involvement at the high school level might be more difficult to identify due to it being less visible or face-to-face. Administrator 2 stated,

I think it really varies, like at the high school level. It's kind of natural for parents not to be quiet as involved. Our school does not have a PTO, and those types of things. I think you'll see some of the parent involvement, start backing away in the high school level. As far as during the school day in those times I think parent involvement backs way off. I think as a teenager, peer pressure about a mom and dad. I think parent involvement, especially in athletics and extracurricular is big. I think our parents here, do participate in those things, and that's good for the student. I think that oftentimes, as far as in academics, students that are involved in extracurricular, some of those tend to have probably better academic grades and achievements than, students that aren't participating.

Administrator 1 had similar thoughts saying,

I think it changes because it's not as much face-to-face unless you're outside the school building, and that's fine. I think a lot of the parental involvement, at least here, and I think it's probably that way that most other schools and school districts, is going to be the extracurriculars. That's where you really get the parental involvement. But those parents are also some of your biggest supporters with academics as well. That makes it easier to bridge that gap, as far as academics. When the kids aren't involved in extracurricular that's where you really have a breakdown and a disconnect that's where it's hard.

Non-Teacher 3 added, "At the high school level, to me that's harder, because you know parents don't come in and volunteer that much. You know, you don't have as many PTO meetings and things like that." Teacher 4 said,

I mean, elementary school things are a little different. It's more hands on in the classroom but high school setting I think the parents kind of keeping tabs on them and good work and having that communication back and forth.

Theme 6: Perception of Current Parental Involvement Within the School

When discussing their perceptions of the current level of parental involvement at the school, the responses differed between the school personnel participants and the parent participants. The overall perception shared by school personnel was that the current level of involvement was 50/50, although there were participants who saw it above that as well as those who perceived it to be lower than that. Administrator 2 felt that the current level of parental involvement was appropriate for the setting saying,

I think it's appropriate. I don't think parents are overly active, but I feel like most parents I have called, and they have a conversation. They know the door is usually open and we can communicate. I hope they feel this is an office that they can come to and discuss whatever is needed.

Teacher 4 referenced the difference between the parental involvement at his current school compared to that of his previous assignments. He found that the family dynamic at the different schools had an impact on the level of involvement as well as the role of the teachers as he stated,

I think it's different for different schools. I'm in my seventh year, third school. What happened at school one is a lot different from what happens here. I know it's different than school two. I mean, if you've got a place that has a lot of parent involvement, I mean, it's easier to kind of get them on board. Whereas if you have school that there's not a lot of parents, then it's almost like you've got to step into that role.

Other school personnel viewed the current level of parental involvement as moderate.

Administrator 1 called it,

I think it's a mixed bag. We have great support from the community, especially with extracurricular activities and their children. You develop those relationships with those parents because you see them all the time. So, if I was to call one of my linemen or one of my cheerleaders' parents and say, I've got an issue. I'm going to have their support because we already have a relationship. On the flip side we've got a big commuter group that drives and goes to work. That's a tougher base to have those relationships, and you got to work on those from ninth grade to that kid that starts driving and going to work in 11th grade and falls off the wagon, so to speak. It's tougher sometimes to have that relationship. That's why I say it's a mixed bag; it's not perfect.

Non-Teacher 1 provided unique insights on parental involvement based on her direct conversations with students and their responses to her. She stated that the current level of parental involvement was,

50/50. I've seen some parents who are heavily involved with their child's life, and I've also seen some of them are very invisible in regard to that. Having one-on-one conversations with students, you really get to see how their parent is involved. So, for example, I have a student whose parent is like, "I don't care what you do." I asked every graduating senior "hey what do you want to do after high school?" So, I asked them why, what do your parents want you to do, and stuff of that nature and they will be honest with me. They don't care. I've also seen it, where some students that say, "my mom or dad want me to do XYZ." I've seen both sides.

There were two teachers who said that, while there was some involvement, that it was not across the board or always focused on what they felt was most important. Teacher 2 stated,

I'm just going to be honest with you that parental involvement involves parents of students who are under some sort of a service. I have had students who have IEPs. Those parents expect you to follow those rules and things that are listed on their IEP. Sometimes they feel that you haven't read the information and you're not quite sure. They want to further instill that or emphasize it to you so that they know you know their accommodations and things. So, mostly the parents of those students are the ones that contact me the most. Oftentimes it's the overachieving students' parents who check in with me to make sure that their students are doing well. The ones who usually have issues or problems, you don't hear from their parents.

Teacher 3 also pointed out areas where he sees involvement that might not be as productive regarding academics. He said,

This always kills me and this this doesn't sound like a typical coach. We get 3000 people come to a football game on Friday, and we can't get 30 people to come to parent day or a PTO meeting or whatever. That's aggravating. Because, I'm not one of those high school football coaches that's just sport, sports, sports it all. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for academics. I wouldn't have a team if, you know, if they weren't eligible. To me that's very important. It's aggravating when we have awards day and half the parents don't show up. But hey, you turn the lights on to have a ball game, or go by the youth park during the middle of the week, and there's ton of parents out there with the kids practicing baseball, but we can't go home and do homework. That bothers me.

Non-Teacher 4 reported the lowest perception of parental involvement of all the school personnel participants when she said, “It's a very low level. You see the same faces all the time. And you know that they're involved. But there is a low level of parent involvement.”

Seven out of eight parent participants, however, perceived that they were very involved in their children's education and even gave examples to justify their perceptions. Parents listed actions such as having conversations with their students about school, checking on their grades through the SIS platform, helping with homework, and staying on top of behavioral issues as ways they were involved. Parent 11-1 noted that he stayed involved to help his student not have the struggles he had in school, saying,

Well, I have always been involved in my children's education. I mean, I was just a redneck country boy. Okay, and I realize that what you learn now is a lot easier, to learn it now than it is to wait to go to college. I did not take algebra in high school, I didn't take algebra until I went to college, I was 24 years old, algebra did not click.

Parent 12-1 discussed how her involvement allowed her to help stay on top of behavior issues with her son stating,

I would say medium-high to high. I'm not here every day because he's in 12th grade and so he needs to be responsible. But if there's a problem, I like to know about it beforehand, before it gets crazy. But also, just to know that there's support from parents I think helps the teacher and the whole school. You know just the community of the school.

Parent 9-2 (10) also discussed how behavior issues with her son had been easier due to her being involved noting,

I can tell you one time with my older son, a group of kids skipped school, and the school knew me enough, because I was there enough, that the principal just called me directly, and said, “Hey, they've left campus, you know, you may want to take care of this.” He couldn't necessarily get a hold of the other parents. So, because he called me directly, I was able to take care of it. And, you know, some of those kids were out there running wild and their parents never knew it.

Parent 11-2 stated that she simply checked in on her student as she recalled,

I just periodically check her grades and I expect for her to tell me what's going on, I mean my child happens to come talk to me. I know not everybody's child does that, so I have that relationship where she'll come and talk to me and if not, I just ask her questions.

There was one parent participant who indicated that she was not involved in her child's education. After having stated high school students just wanted to be left alone, and being asked her level of involvement as a follow-up question, Parent 9-1 said, "Not much, not much."

Theme 7: Impact of Rural Setting on Parent Involvement

RHS is situated in a rural area. Data indicated that there is a distinct difference in the perception of how school personnel view the impact of the rural setting compared to how parents perceive it to be. Administrator 1 discussed the rural setting in regard to communicating with parents stating,

It is a Title One school and district and it has a lot of rural places where the Verizon tower, AT&T, or whatever doesn't work. So, a lot of those methods of communication don't work. We have hoppers that go from one place to the next, you can't keep up with them, you can't keep stuff in INOW right so they don't get the call. I send out the attendance letters, some of them come back, because they hop, they move from house to house. Can't keep tabs on them. I don't know that we're going to have a unanimous 100% way of getting communication across period, so, I think you just do multiple fronts and hope you hit the ones that are most likely for somebody to see.

Administrator 2 discussed the location in relation to where parents go to work and how that impacts involvement saying,

I think at times it can impact a good bit. I would say just thinking about this rural setting, and location, you know, I don't know the percentage, but a majority of parents that are working are probably driving 30 plus minutes away from home to their employers. So, during [the] school day that would greatly impact them physically being at the school for those types of things. But we try to accommodate and rotate open houses and those types of things in the afternoon, evening hours. Parent days we have rotated. We didn't see a lot of change with it in the afternoon versus throughout the day.

Other school personnel participants discussed the rural setting in two very distinct ways, four discussed the rural setting in regard to the economic challenges or poverty experienced by families in the area and how it impacts their involvement. Non-Teacher 2 stated,

Sadly, it definitely has some impact on parental involvement. We deal with people from, middle class, working every day. Some of our parents work a good way away, but I don't think that's more of an obstacle than we serve a lot of very lower income students, too. I hear the phrase we don't have gas money to go wherever to or come to whatever meeting at the school. So, I think the rural, you know, the lower socioeconomic levels of a number of our students do very much impact parental involvement.

Other school personnel participants discussed the rural setting of the school in the terms of the small-town community or family feeling that led to easier communication and better involvement. Teacher 2 said,

I think that because it's such a rural school, word travels quickly. We can put something up on our marquee and most everybody's going to see that. We have teachers who are on social media, and put things out there, and a lot of parents respond to that. Because the school is so small, I think that's an advantage that word seems to travel more quickly, with less effort than maybe a larger school. That's my perception.

Non-Teacher 4 added, "Since it is a small rural community, just about everybody knows everybody. I know most of the parents and grandparents, because I've been here a long time."

Parent participants also reported that the small-town community atmosphere had a positive impact on their level of involvement due to their comfort level. Parent 12-2 said,

I think it makes it easier. I think that it makes it better. I mean, I know most everybody's parents, we know the students. When I come over here, which I don't know a whole lot of the teachers now, but I used to, I went to school with some of them. I think that makes it a lot easier to be involved.

Parent 11-2 also said,

We're such a small town that I'm probably more involved than some people might be, because it's a smaller school. We come to community events that the school might participate in. So, I am probably more involved than I would be if I lived in a big city, and she went to a larger school that wasn't rural.

Parent 11-1 initially indicated that the setting didn't matter but later admitted that it allowed for less opportunities for students to get into trouble stating,

The rural setting of the school doesn't matter very much. If you have a child that is willing to learn. If you lay the foundation, letting them know that it's important that they need to learn now. Get what you can now. It doesn't matter where you are. The schooling is awesome. I mean they're doing a great job. As far as where the school is. I would rather it be here than in the middle of the city, where you got a whole bunch of junk going on all around you.

Only Parent 9-1 indicated that the rural setting had not a positive impact on their involvement in their child's education.

Artifacts

Artifacts were collected related to the automated call-out system used by the school to distribute information. The reports collected contained two main categories of information: scheduled messages to be delivered containing information related to content and audience, and message tracking containing information about delivery rates of messages within each communication method. This information was reviewed and is reported in this section.

Six messages were sent out between the start of the school year and the collection of the artifacts in October. The content of the messages related to such things as graduation date set (general audience), FAFSA and financial aid workshop (senior class), notification of a phone threat to the school (general audience), and flu clinic (general audience). There were also scheduled messages to be sent for daily attendance notifications. Attendance notifications were designed to individual communication with the parents of students marked absent in the SIS. Messages appeared to be unique for a one-time run as in the instance of the phone threat, or to be repeated on a scheduled basis as with the FAFSA workshop.

Message tracking artifacts provided valuable information related to the automated system. The tracking data provided details about the number of recipients scheduled to receive

the message when it was scheduled as well as the rate it was received. Each message provided the user data on the communication method used to deliver the message such as phone, email, and SMS text message. Each method detailed if and how the message was received. Using the method of phone, options were for voicemail, live answer, recipient hung up message played, recipient hung up message not played, no answer, number deactivated, number blocked, or recipient has no phone number. While the data on the artifacts collected included valuable reports (Appendix F), they did not provide the anticipated information expected due to a conversion in the messaging system before the study began. It was anticipated that data could be collected for prior school years, but with the change from one messaging system to another, those data were no longer available, resulting in limited artifacts. The use of these reports can, however, show school administrators how effective and efficient this method of communication is as well as allowing them to identify patterns such as the need for current contact information for families based on the number of failed attempts due to inaccurate information in the system.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Schools are encouraged to examine their communication practices to determine the level of engagement being seen by families within their school (Manning-Smith, 2014). The purpose of this study was to explore the current communication practices between parents and school in a rural secondary school and how parents and school personnel perceived the effectiveness of those practices in facilitating positive parental involvement in school. The findings of this study revealed seven themes: Methods for Mass Communication, Types of and Reasons for Individual Communication, Communication's Impact on Parental Involvement, How Parental Involvement Impacts Student Achievement, How Parental Involvement Changes as Students age Into High School, Perception of Current Parental Involvement Within the School, and Impact of Rural Setting on Parent Involvement. Artifacts were also reviewed related to the automated call-out system.

The seven themes developed throughout this study relate to five of the six types of involvement identified in the Epstein et al. (2002) framework: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, and Collaborating with the Community. The concept of Parenting as involvement appeared in multiple themes as it related to establishing a home environment to support children as students. Communication as involvement also appeared in multiple themes regarding school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and student progress.

Although not overtly stated, Volunteering appeared in Theme 2 in regard to individual communication as it related to recruiting parent help and support with student progress and behavior, as well as Theme 3 related to communication's impact on parental involvement as participants indicated their willingness to help if they knew of a need.

Learning at Home was also connected to multiple themes as participants referenced provided information about helping students at home with homework, decision making, and planning. Collaborating with the Community was touched on as participants discussed social media in their responses. Parent participants, as well as some school personnel, indicated that while there was no school-managed social media site, often teachers and parents associated with extracurricular activities would post school information on their personal or team pages to help inform others. Epstein et al.'s (2002) sixth type of involvement did not present itself in the study mainly due to the development of the interview guides. There were no interview questions regarding Decision Making.

There were also connections to the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model used to identify parents' motivation to become involved in their child's education. In Theme 3, participants discussed communication's impact on parental involvement which provided insight into participants' motivational beliefs. Themes 1 and 2 provided some positive connections to parents' perceptions to become involved related to communication. Theme 5, however, provided responses from some participants that had a negative connection to parents' perceptions of invitations to become involved related to parents' perceptions that students did not desire their parents to be around in high school. Theme 7 spoke directly to the motivating factor of life context as participants referenced community, geography, and poverty in their

responses. The following will provide a discussion of how the findings within each theme helped to answer the research question.

Discussion

Theme 1: Methods for Mass Communication

The Mass Communication theme relates to all forms of communication intended to reach a group of parents, large or small. Participants identified many types of mass communication options used to relay information to parents such as: automated call-out system, communication apps such as Remind and GroupMe, school website, and social media outlets such as Facebook. A majority of the participants interviewed indicated a positive perception related to the mass communication methods used by the school as well as various teams and organizations. These forms of mass communication fit the idea of “going direct” as a means of building a positive perception of the school through the school leaders telling their own story (Carr, 2007). The theme of mass communication also encompassed both push (automated call-out, social media) and pull (school websites) methods of communication to help foster strong relationships and maintain connections with parents (Olmstead, 2013).

This theme impacts two of the six types of parental involvement in the Epstein et al. (2002) framework: Communicating and Learning at Home. Communication is impacted through the school sending school-to-home communications about happenings at the school such as open houses, parent days, and other events that are school-wide or impact a large group of students. Learning at Home pertains in this case to the planning and decision-making part of involvement as participants discussed things like financial aid workshops that were communicated to the senior class through the automated call-out system. Mass communication also provides opportunities for the school to communicate various invitations for parents to

become involved, thus impacting parents' motivation to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Theme 2: Types of and Reasons for Individual Communication

The second theme that emerged was related to communications intended for individual parents rather than groups and looked at the types of communications used as well as the reasons for use. Manning-Smith (2014) found that communications directed specifically to individuals opened the door for dialogue between schools and families. It was important to notice that school administrators had relayed expectations for communication with parents to their staff; however, the staff were not forced to meet these expectations through any type of documentation. Deslandes (2006) noted that collaboration efforts with parents should be structured, but not forced.

Participants indicated that individual communications came through a variety of methods, including phone, email, face-to-face, text, and the Student Information System (SIS). Shirvani (2007) attributed increases in students' grades and behavior to positive attitudes and trust garnered by regular communication between teachers and home through a variety of methods. School personnel participants also reported efforts to make communications that were not always negative in context, which was also noted to increase comfort and trust among parents (Shirvani, 2007). Bryk and Schneider (2003) also spoke to the development of relational trust between schools and parents with the expectations that each party perform their role within the relationship. Multiple participants made statements referencing such trust during their interviews like Teacher 4 who said,

I do mostly positive praise. I mean, the first time you call them during the year it's kind of like an oh-no moment for them. But then we say, "hey, they're doing great"; call and say, "Hey, no problems, good grades, let me know if you need anything." That opens that door of communication and it makes it easier down the road if there is a problem.

Every time I call, if I do a positive call, they're, "Hey, thanks coach. Great to hear from you. Let us know if you have any problems." A lot of times out on the field and everything a parent comes by just to say, "Hey," shake my hand, say, "Hey, my kid loves your class." And I'll say, "Hey, he's a great kid." Just kind of open communication.

Many school personnel participants also identified face-to-face communication as their desired method when having dialogue with parents, which speaks to the idea that schools are about people and relationships (Brown & Vaughn, 2015). This increased level of relational trust also impacts parents' motivational beliefs as well as how parents perceive they are being invited to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Parenting, Communication, and Volunteering are three types of involvement (Epstein et al., 2005) connected to the theme of individual communication. Parenting involvement is related to helping create a home environment that supports children as students. This was reflected in participant responses related to positive communication with parents to develop relationships and trust as well as the school reaching out regarding academic progress and needs. Communication involvement pertains to school-to-home and home-to-school communication and was evident in responses related to face-to-face communication between parents and teachers allowing information to travel in both directions about school happenings as well as student progress. Volunteering is related to recruiting of parent help and support, and was referenced as participants indicated reaching out to parents regarding specific student needs.

Theme 3: Communication's Impact on Parental Involvement

Participants opened up regarding their perceptions of how communication from the school impacted parents' desires to become more involved with their child's education. Epstein (1995, 2008) noted that viewing students as children helps educators create a family-like school

setting combined with parents who create a school-like home environment that leads to academic success for students. Teacher participants reported that through regular communication, such relationships were formed, while parent participants indicated that communication allowed them to have meaningful conversations at home with their student about education. Traditional views of parental involvement that included parents participating in activities at the local school and simply being present in and around the institution where education was taking place did not have the impact that was found when parents are truly engaged in the learning of the child (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Parents also reported that if communicated with more, they would be likely to become more involved, indicating that they perceived communication as an invitation from the school to become involved. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) noted that parents perceived invitations to become involved were one motivating factor leading to involvement. This acknowledgement of communication leading to increased parental involvement also points to the motivational beliefs of the parent participants, which is also identified as factor leading to involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Findings in this theme related to four of the six types of parental involvement listed in *Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, and Learning at Home* (Epstein et al., 2005).

Theme 4: How Parental Involvement Impacts Student Achievement

The fourth theme found during the data analysis process of the study was How Parental Involvement Impacts Student Achievement. Without parental involvement, teachers are isolated and alone in their efforts to deal with student issues (Manning-Smith, 2014).

Parents who understand what is expected of their child at school are more likely to take an active role at school and at home as a part of their child's educational process (Deslandes &

Bertrand, 2005). School personnel participants all indicated a recognizable difference in the achievement levels of students with supportive and involved parents, and parent participants also felt their involvement impacted their student's grades. This excerpt from Non-Teacher 3 speaks volumes about how parental involvement impacts student achievement:

From my experience, when parents and teachers are involved, preparing the students and asking them questions, the students are more likely to take it a little bit more seriously. I believe that if students see their parents pushing them and feel their support, they're more likely to achieve more.

Parent participants also agreed that their involvement led to academic success. Parent participants indicated involvement types such as Parenting, Communication and Learning at Home as key to establishing expectations for their students.

Theme 5: How Parental Involvement Changes as Students Age Into High School

With involvement displayed in many forms, and identified as beneficial to students at all grade levels, why do schools still struggle to get parents to involved (Stevens & Patel, 2015)? Some parent and school personnel participants indicated students did not want parents around as much as they aged into high school, although a similar theory was disproven in earlier research that found students actually prefer parents be involved (Brannon, 2007). School personnel did recognize that parental involvement was different at the high school level, noting that it was less visible than in elementary school. This excerpt from Administrator 2 speaks to the drop off in on campus involvement in high school,

I think you'll see some of the parent involvement start backing away in the high school level. As far as during the school day, in those times I think parent involvement backs way off. I think as a teenager, peer pressure about a mom and dad.

Ross (2016) found significant connections to parental involvement in extracurricular activities as well as academic outcomes. Participants across the board identified high levels of parental involvement in extracurricular activities, also noting that student who participated in

extracurricular activities were often also successful academically. Administrator 1 discusses this, stating,

I think a lot of the parental involvement, at least here, and I think it's probably that way at most other schools and school districts, is going to be the extracurriculars. That's where you really get the parental involvement. But those parents are also some of your biggest supporters with academics as well. That makes it easier to bridge that gap, as far as academics.

Teacher participants added that involvement was harder for parents at the high school level noting fewer opportunities to volunteer in the classrooms as is often seen in elementary schools. This indicated a change in the types of involvement practiced by parents, away from Volunteering, as seen more frequently at the elementary level, to the less hands-on types of involvement of Parenting, Communication, and Learning at Home. This change also impacted the parents' motivation factors as life context changes as students age and mature; parents' motivational beliefs do not change, but their perception of invitations to become involved may change. Some participants indicated this in their responses as they indicated that students no longer desire parents be involved at the high school level.

Theme 6: Perception of Current Parental Involvement Within the School

School personnel and parents provided differing opinions regarding the current level of involvement within the school. All parent participants except one indicated that they were regularly involved in their student's education, with the one exception indicating "not much" involvement. Parent participants reported having varying types of involvement which included Parenting, Communication, Volunteering, and Learning at Home. All of these types were present in at least one, if not multiple, response from parents. The common idea of setting expectations for their student and following up on the student's progress was evident from most

all parent participants. It appeared that the parent participants were motivated to be involved and recognized invitations from the school to become involved.

School personnel participants, however, reported current involvement to be a “mixed bag” or “50/50.” It is understandable that parents participating in the study would perceive themselves as involved, otherwise they would not have participated. School personnel, however, have the opportunity to see their class or in some cases, the entire school, more holistically, recognizing which parents are involved as well as which ones are not as much. Mac Iver et al. (2015) suggested additional research on how to best engage parents about creating positive expectations of caring communication between schools and homes regarding parental involvement.

Theme 7: Impact of Rural Setting on Parent Involvement

Semke and Sheridan (2012) noted that context plays a significant factor in understanding the academic achievement of students. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) also included life context as a motivator to parental involvement. Findings from this study indicated that there was a distinct difference in the perceptions of how school personnel viewed the impact of the rural setting compared to how parents perceived it to be. While school personnel mostly discussed the rural setting’s impact on parental involvement, parents seemed to focus more on the sense of community closeness.

While some school personnel referenced impacts on parental involvement that related more to the geography of the area regarding parents’ need to travel long distances to work or limited cellular coverage, others referenced the impacts of poverty on families in the community. Although Miller et al. (2013) noted that teachers show lower perceptions of students from lower income families, this did not appear to be the case in this study. All

references made to poverty were more directed to the parent's ability to get to the school for meetings or events, or in reference to communication difficulties stemming from perceived financial issues.

Administrator 1 said, "It is a Title One school and district and it has a lot of rural places where the Verizon tower, AT&T, or whatever doesn't work. So, a lot of those methods of communication don't work." Non-Teacher 2 also commented on the impact of poverty on parental involvement saying,

We serve a lot of very lower income students, too. I hear the phrase we don't have gas money to go wherever to or come to whatever meeting at the school. So, I think the rural, you know, the lower socio-economic levels of a number of our students do very much impact parental involvement.

The school personnel participants' perception of involvement in relation to the rural setting of the school may not be entirely related to the parents' lack of motivation to become involved or their perception of invitations to become involved, but more directly related to their life context.

Parent participants as well as a few school personnel, however, reported that the rural setting was a positive for them because of the strong sense of community felt in and around the school. Bauch (2001) found that when addressing rural schools, it is important to use a school-community model that focuses on the connections between stakeholders. These connections seemed to run deep as many of the parents reported growing up in the area and having long-standing relationships within the community. Bauch (2001) also noted many rural communities are very close knit socially, many of the community gatherings take place on the school campus or at school-related events off campus. Non-Teacher 4 summed up the sense of community saying, "Since it is a small rural community, just about everybody knows everybody. I know most of the parents and grandparents, because I've been here a long time." Parent participant perceptions of the rural setting as a positive in relation to the strong sense of community

confirms that the setting is part of the life context and in some cases motivates parents' involvement not only with their own students but also with other students in the community.

Artifacts

Carr (2007) encouraged schools to use mass messaging systems to help with immediate and consistent delivery of information from the school. RHS uses such a system. The artifacts reviewed from this system provided information on the effectiveness of the system to provide immediate and consistent information. The system provides detailed data related to the connection rates and receipt rates of the various types of communication sent out as well as identifying the number of invalid contact numbers. The data confirmed statements from participants who indicated that some parents either did not answer, or screened the calls, or had invalid contact information on file. With parent perception of invitations to become involved being one of three motivating factors in the Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) model, these data are a valuable resource in confirming the delivery of those invitations. What was not noted or discussed was the frequency with which the data from such artifacts were reviewed within the school system.

Implications

Students benefit greatly from strong partnerships among parents and schools (Epstein, 2008). However, parents do not become involved automatically, they require motivation (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Parental involvement and communication are vital to the goal of education as parental involvement leads to students completing high school and even entering programs after high school (Ross, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore the communication practices between parents and a rural secondary school, and how parents and

school personnel perceived the effectiveness of those practices in facilitating positive parental involvement in schools.

The findings of the study indicated that perceptions vary, not only across school personnel and parent participant groups, but in some cases within participant groups as well. While some participants may prefer one method of communication over another, all seem to be effective in delivering information from the school. There are various implications related to each theme found. Some themes have implications for each participant pool, others are more focused to one group.

The implications for Theme 1 apply to all participants groups. Mass communication efforts provide consistent information to large groups. Implications for parents are related to their providing current contact information to the school and making sure that it is updated in the event that there is a change. School personnel mentioned in various responses that invalid contact information created a barrier in their communication efforts. By providing the school with valid contact information, regularly used mass communication such as the automated call-out system is more likely to reach parents.

Multiple participants indicated that they received group/team-specific communication through the use of communication apps such as Remind or GroupMe. While some teacher participants indicated use of these methods with their extracurricular activities, it was not reported to be used within the classroom. If this is an effective way to communicate with groups, it would stand to reason that it would be a consistent way to get classroom information to parents. Providing parents with regular, consistent communication would lead to more opportunities for their involvement through awareness of what is happening in the classroom.

School administrators reported that there were no school-managed social media pages for communication, while parents reported that they received communications about school happenings through social media outlets. If information is being communicated through social media without oversight by the school, it could lead to inaccurate information being communicated. For this reason, the school would benefit greatly by creating a school-managed social media outlet(s). The use of social media would provide consistent communication of content that does not require updated contact information for parents and is available regardless of work schedules and accessible via a variety of devices. School personnel also referenced the school website as a key source of information and communication; however, parent participants did not indicate the school website as their primary source of information. The use of school-managed social media outlets could assist in directing parents to the website when the information is too large for the social media platform.

Theme 2 provided a variety of individual communication methods as well as reasons to communicate with parents individually regarding their student. Implications within this theme are focused primarily on school personnel. All of the reported types of communications are valuable and effective means by which to communicate with parents, however, school personnel should be conscious in their selection of what situation warrants which communication method. Participants indicated various needs for communication such as regular updates from a special education teacher, or updates on student with specific medical concerns. Depending on their role within the school, school personnel should consider making initial contact with parents to determine the means of communication most likely to reach them in the event of an immediate need.

The impact of communication on parental involvement discussed in Theme 3 has implications focused to school administrators. Parent participants indicated that more communication from teachers would impact their level of involvement with their student. This is valuable information and should be communicated to faculty and staff. While it was clearly reported that there are expectations from administration currently related to the need for communication with parents, this provides further evidence from actual parents. School administrators now have confirmation from parents that communication has an impact on their level of involvement with their student.

The implications for Theme 4 and Theme 5 seem to work together. Participants across all pools indicated that parental involvement impacted student achievement; as well, they indicated that parental involvement declined as students moved into high school. The implications related to these themes fall onto school personnel, primarily the school administrators, establishing expectations for parents as their students enter the high school setting. Parents need to be told what appropriate involvement looks like at the high school level. Responses from school personnel and parents seemed to indicate a variety of ideas of what it means to be an involved parent. Administrators also reported opportunities such as open houses where they have parents on campus and can communicate their expectations related to parental involvement. By establishing the expectations of what parental involvement looks like at the high school level, student achievement will be impacted and parents can maintain their level of involvement.

Theme 7 related to the rural setting of the school is one that participants have no control over. Neither parents nor school personnel can change the geographic location of the school, however, they can make efforts to address the impact it has on parental involvement. School

administrators should continue, as they reported, to make conscious efforts to provide opportunities for involvement at a variety of times to allow for more participation. All school personnel should continue to provide information and communication in a variety of outlets to reach parents.

The perception of parental involvement discussed in Theme 6 should be impacted through response to the implications listed for each of the other themes. Schools should be conscious of the content they communicate in order to provide appropriate invitations to all types of involvement: Parenting, Communication, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with the Community (Epstein et al. 2002). It is also vital that schools recognize the need to motivate parents to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Schools should take into consideration the context in which their students live and make every effort to help parents overcome barriers to involvement.

Limitations

Limitations to this study included school personnel assumptions that frequent communication with parents equates to equitable communication across all parents. In interviews with school personnel, responses were focused on the parents with whom they had direct communication. Most of these instances were related to some need within a classroom related to academics or behavior; however, some school personnel reported communication that happened by chance at various events either at school or extracurricular events.

It was difficult to get parents to agree to participate in the study and the parent pool was limited to parents who came to the school and filled out a parent participation card, which meant there was not a large pool of parents from whom to select. These parents may have been at the school for various reasons, including solely to check out their child.

The collection of artifacts related to the school's mass messaging system was anticipated to provide data from previous school years; however, the school's recent change of messaging platforms provided limitation in this area. Due to the conversion from one platform to another, data were only available since the conversion. While this provided a snapshot of what type of data were available, there were not sufficient data in the new system to make valid connections. It should also be noted that this study is limited in that it is a case study and perceptions are related to one school and may not be generalizable to all schools.

Recommendations

Academic success is a primary goal of education. Parental involvement in school has an impact on students achieving such goals. Communication from schools to homes provides vital information to parents that can lead to their increased involvement. Rural and urban schools differ in many ways. This study focused on the perceptions of parents and school personnel regarding the effectiveness of the current communication practices to impact parental involvement in a rural school.

While the findings of this study were focused on five of the six types of involvement mentioned in the Epstein et al. (2002) framework, there was no reference to parental involvement in Decision Making. Future research focused specifically on parental involvement in the decision making within the school could be useful. This study also found that some school personnel recognized poverty as an obstacle regarding parental involvement. Research on the impact of poverty in rural schools and how that impacts parental involvement is recommended. This study also focused on high school parents and school personnel. Research is also recommended to look at the decline in parental involvement over a 4-year period, tracking students from elementary school into high school. Lastly, this study provided a small

sample size with limitations to the responses based on the fact that parent participants were likely already involved. Research consisting of a larger sample size in a similar setting might produce differing results.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the communication practices between parents and a rural high school, and how parents and school personnel perceived the effectiveness of those practices in facilitating positive parental involvement in schools. Both parent and school personnel participants provided valuable perceptions regarding how communication, as well as the impact of the rural setting of the school, impacted parental involvement. It was determined that communication occurs intentionally and regularly from the school as a whole as well as from individual personnel. These communications do impact the level of parental involvement within the school for both academic and extracurricular activities. Parents mostly desire to be involved in their children's education as well as extracurricular events. It was also determined that the rural community in which RHS is located is a very close and caring atmosphere. While the overall findings of this study were positive, it is hoped that both parents and school personnel continue to be intentional in their efforts to meet the needs of their students by continuing to review and reflect on their communication methods, and how they impact parental involvement.

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APPENDIX A
SAMPLE PARENT INTEREST CARD

Parents,

As a Graduate student at The University of Alabama, I am currently seeking parent volunteers to participate in a research project as part of my dissertation requirements. The study will focus on communication between school and home and how it impacts parental involvement in the school. Participant requirements for involvement will consist of a one-on-one interview lasting only 30 to 60 minutes, conducted here at the school and scheduled at your convenience. If you would be willing to participate in this study, please provide the information requested below.

Name: (please print) _____

Preferred Means of Contact: (Circle one)

Home Phone Mobile Phone (voice) Mobile Phone (text) Email

US Mail Facebook messenger Other: _____

Grade Level of Student: (please mark all that apply) 9 10 11 12

Contact Info:

Phone (_____) - _____ - _____ Cell (_____) - _____ - _____

Email: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Signature

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Script

Welcome, (Parent). Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I appreciate your time and your support of my work.

First, let me tell you a little about what we will be doing today. I am a graduate student at The University of Alabama, and I am currently working on my dissertation study.

In this interview, we will discuss communication between the school and homes and how that impacts parental involvement in your school. Over the next 30-45 minutes, I will ask you some questions about how your student's teacher communicates with you as well as the general content and effectiveness of these methods to impact your level of parental involvement at your school. I will be taking notes as you talk, but these will be used for follow-up questions or clarification. Please know that if you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you are welcome to pass on the question. If you need a break, feel free to let me know. I will be using an audio recorder as well as my laptop to record this interview. I will also use a pseudonym in my interview transcript to protect your identity. You can stop the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions? If not, let's get started.

Interview Questions

1. Discuss your thoughts on how parental involvement affects student achievement.
2. Do you consider yourself an involved parent? If so, explain why? How would you describe your level of parental involvement?
3. What role does school to parent communication play in determining your level of parental involvement?

4. What would you say is the biggest obstacle preventing your involvement in your child's education?
5. When the school communicates information to you, do you feel as though it is an invitation to be involved?
6. What, if any, technologies are being used by the school to get information to parents?
7. What type of content is generally communicated by the school?
8. How frequently do you receive communication from the school (include individual teachers, coaches and school wide communications)?
9. Does your child's teacher use social media as a means of supplementing his/her communication plans? If so which ones?
10. What method of communication do you most prefer?
11. What else might be useful in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of your school's communication plan?

Is there anything else you would like to add that we may have not covered?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

Script

Welcome, (School Administrator). Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I appreciate your time and your support of my work.

First, let me tell you a little about what we will be doing today. I am a graduate student at The University of Alabama, and I am currently working on my dissertation study.

In this interview, we will discuss communication between the school and homes and how that impacts parental involvement in your school. Over the next 30-45 minutes, I will ask you some questions about your current methods of communication, the general content and effectiveness of these methods and the levels of parental involvement at your school. I will be taking notes as you talk, but these will be used for follow-up questions or clarification. Please know that if you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you are welcome to pass on the question. If you need a break, feel free to let me know. I will be using an audio recorder as well as my laptop to record this interview. I will also use a pseudonym in my interview transcript to protect your identity. You can also stop the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions? If not, let's get started.

Interview Questions

1. Discuss your thoughts on how parental involvement affects student achievement.
2. Describe an involved parent; tell me how they differ from the elementary setting to the secondary setting.
3. What is the current level of parental involvement at your school?
4. What would you say is the biggest obstacle preventing parental involvement at your school and why?

5. Describe the current methods used for communicating with parents.
6. What, if any, technologies are being used to assist with your communication plan?
7. What type of content do you generally communicate to parents?
8. Tell me about the frequency of communication that is dispensed from the school.
9. Describe what, if any, feedback you have received from parents regarding school to home communication.
10. Have you considered using social media as a means of supplementing your communication plans? If so which ones and why?
11. What else might be useful in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of your communication plan?
12. How do you know which communication methods are most effective at getting your parents involved in their child's education?

Is there anything else you would like to add that we may have not covered?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX D
SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Script

Welcome, (Teacher). Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I appreciate your time and your support of my work.

First, let me tell you a little about what we will be doing today. I am a graduate student at The University of Alabama, and I am currently working on my dissertation study.

In this interview, we will discuss communication between the school and homes and how that impacts parental involvement in your school. Over the next 30-45 minutes, I will ask you some questions about your current methods of communication as well as the general content and effectiveness of these methods as well as the levels of parental involvement at your school. I will be taking notes as you talk, but these will be used for follow-up questions or clarification. Please know that if you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you are welcome to pass on the question. If you need a break, feel free to let me know. I will be using an audio recorder as well as my laptop to record this interview. I will also use a pseudonym in my interview transcript to protect your identity. You can stop the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions? If not, let's get started.

Interview Questions

1. Discuss your thoughts on how parental involvement affects student achievement.
2. Describe what an involved parent looks like to you.
3. What is the current level of parental involvement in your classroom?
4. What would you say is the biggest obstacle preventing parental involvement in your classroom and why?

5. Describe the current methods you use for communicating with parents.
6. What, if any, technologies are being used to assist with your communication plan?
7. What type of content do you generally communicate to parents?
8. Tell me about the frequency of communication that is dispensed your class...from the school.
9. Describe what, if any, feedback you have received from parents regarding school to home communication efforts of the school.
10. Have you considered using social media as a means of supplementing your communication plans? If so which ones and why?
11. What else might be useful in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of your communication plan?

Is there anything else you would like to add that we may have not covered?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Script

Welcome, (School Personnel). Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. I appreciate your time and your support of my work.

First, let me tell you a little about what we will be doing today. I am a graduate student at The University of Alabama, and I am currently working on my dissertation study. In this interview, we will discuss communication between the school and homes and how that impacts parental involvement in your school. Over the next 30-45 minutes, I will ask you some questions about your current methods of communication as well as the general content and effectiveness of these methods as well as the levels of parental involvement at your school. I will be taking notes as you talk, but these will be used for follow-up questions or clarification. Please know that if you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you are welcome to pass on the question. If you need a break, feel free to let me know. I will be using an audio recorder as well as my laptop to record this interview. I will also use a pseudonym in my interview transcript to protect your identity. You can stop the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions? If not, let's get started.

Interview Questions

1. Discuss your thoughts on how parental involvement affects student achievement.
2. Describe what an involved parent looks like to you.
3. What is the current level of parental involvement in your school?
4. What would you say is the biggest obstacle preventing parental involvement in your school and why?

5. Describe the current methods you use for communicating with parents.
6. What, if any, technologies are being used to assist with your communication plan?
7. What type of content do you generally communicate to parents?
8. Tell me about the frequency of communication that is dispensed from the school.
9. Describe what, if any, feedback you have received from parents regarding school to home communication efforts of the school.
10. Have you considered using social media as a means of supplementing your communication plans? If so which ones and why?
11. What else might be useful in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of your communication plan?

Is there anything else you would like to add that we may have not covered?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX F
ARTIFACT DATA

FASFA Workshop for Senior Students

Delivery Method	Answering Machine	Live Answer	Recipient Hung up (msg played)	Recipient Hung up (msg not played)	No Answer	Phone Number Deactivated	Not Delivered (number blocked)	Recipient Has No Phone Number	Total
Phone	61 (42%)	37 (26%)	28 (19%)	1 (1%)	8 (6%)	5 (3%)	4 (3%)	1 (1%)	145 (100%)
	Delivered - email accepted by provider	Recipient has no email	Email Sent	Total					
Email	67 (46%)	48 (33%)	30 (21%)	145 (100%)					

	Delivered - Msg Received	Delivered - Msg Sent	The Recipient has no SMS number	Not Delivered - SMS number blocked	SMS delivery failed	Invalid SMS number	SMS number deactivated	Total
SMS Text	97 (67%)	2 (1%)	30 (21%)	7 (5%)	4 (3%)	3 (2%)	2 (1%)	145 (100%)

APPENDIX G
IRB APPROVAL

October 2, 2019

John Hooper
Department of ELPTS
College of Education
The University of Alabama
Box 870302

Re: IRB # EX-19-CM-227 "An Exploration of Perceptions of How School-Home Communication Leads to Parental Involvement in a Rural High School"

Dear Mr. Hooper:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your protocol has been given exempt approval according to 45 CFR part 46.104(d)(2) as outlined below:

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

The approval for your application will lapse on October 1, 2020. If your research will continue beyond this date, please submit the annual report to the IRB as required by University policy before the lapse. Please note, any modifications made in research design, methodology, or procedures must be submitted to and approved by the IRB before implementation. Please submit a final report form when the study is complete.

Please use reproductions of the IRB approved informed consent form to obtain consent from your participants.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Director & Research Compliance Officer