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Parent, Teacher, and Administrator Perceptions of School Community Relationships

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Tammy J. Watson

August 2019

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Keywords: Preschool, school community relationships

ABSTRACT

Parent, Teacher, and Administrator Perceptions of School Community Relationships

by

Tammy J. Watson

The purpose of this purposive qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school community relationships of preschool parents, preschool teachers, and elementary administrators. In this purposive study, participants were chosen based on predetermined characteristics (Shenton, 2004). Parents from varying levels of academic and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as their level of parental involvement, were included in this study to eliminate bias.

The following themes emerged through coding and transcribing data: the family aspect at school; positive perception of principals; positive perception of teachers; open lines of communication between home and school; opportunities for parent involvement; the expectation of parent involvement; support school community relationships; promote a positive school climate; encourage open lines of communication; and provide activities for parent involvement. This qualitative study also looked at factors that facilitated and inhibited relationships. Factors that emerged in facilitating relationships were good communication, appreciation for involvement opportunities, one-to-one parent teacher meetings, being open to parents, and establishing positive relationships. Factors that may inhibit relationships were socioeconomic barriers and communication and transportation issues.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated first and foremost to the three shining stars in my life: Trey, Jacob, and Grant. I want you to realize the importance of continuous learning and hope I have provided a good example of determination and perseverance. You all are kind, smart, and can accomplish whatever your hearts desire. Follow your dreams and never give up. I look forward to seeing what the future holds for each of you. I love you to the black hole and back.

This is also dedicated to the love of my life, Jay. Thank you for your endless support with family and daily life so I could have the time needed to complete this study. I look forward to spending more quality time with you and many, many more years of love and laughter.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	2
DEDICATION	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	8
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Significance of the Study	9
Research Questions.....	9
Limitations of the Study.....	10
Definition of Terms	10
Delimitations of the Study	11
Summary	11
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	12
Introduction.....	12
History of Preschool Programs	12
Current Preschool Initiatives	15
Full-Service Community Schools.....	16
Child-Parent Center Program.....	18
Communities in Schools Program	19
Benefits of Parent and Community Involvement.....	20
Community Involvement and Socioeconomic Status.....	21
School Community Partnerships.....	23

Defining Involvement and Engagement Between Home and School.....	26
Factors Influencing Parental Involvement	27
Educating Teachers on Parent Involvement	29
Parental Involvement Effects on Early Childhood Education	30
School and Parent Communication.....	32
Teacher Communication.....	33
Perceptions of Parental Involvement	36
Administrative Roles in School Community Relationships	38
Conclusion	41
3. METHODS AND PROCEDURES	43
Introduction	43
Purpose of Study	43
Research Questions	43
Role of the Researcher	44
Trustworthiness and Credibility	44
Gaining Entry and Informed Consent.....	46
Research Design.....	46
Data Collection	48
Interview Questions	49
Data Analysis	49
Ethical Considerations	49
Summary	50
4. DATA ANALYSIS.....	51
Introduction	51
Researcher Notes	52
The Family Aspect At School.....	53
Positive Perceptions of Principals.....	55

Positive Perceptions of Teachers	57
Parent Perceptions of School Communication	61
Opportunities for Parent Involvement	66
Parent Involvement Expectations	70
Support School Community Relationships	71
Promote a Positive School Climate.....	74
Encourage Open Lines of Communication Between Home and School	76
Provide Activities for Parent Involvement	79
Factors that Facilitate Relationships	83
Factors that Inhibit Relationships	88
Summary of Data Analysis	90
5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	92
Introduction.....	92
Study Findings	93
Recommendations for Practice	101
Recommendations for Future Research	102
Concluding Summary	103
REFERENCES	104
APPENDIX: Interview Questions	117
VITA	117

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Universal preschool occupies a prominent place on the national educational agenda today. After decades of research supporting the importance of quality preschool experiences, the relationship between parent, student, teacher, and administrator becomes vital in enhancing these programs. There is a consensus among researchers that high-quality school and community relationships described as emotionally supportive are more beneficial to children than ones that focus on primarily instructional support (Cadima, Doumen, Verschueren, & Buyse, 2015). Bowman, Donovan, and Burns (2000) suggest that young children are capable of learning and understanding much more than previously thought, and the authors reiterate the importance of providing quality relationships that will enhance daily classroom instruction. The focus on positive school and community relationships allows for reciprocal trust and exchange that benefits the overall preschool child. The popular proverb, it takes a village to raise a child, produces a clear message and that is, the community plays a vital role in the growth and development of our youth (Benigni & Bronk, L 2015). From there, the relationships are built between stakeholders, and the self-esteem and happiness of the preschool child is given a foundation to flourish and succeed in the classroom environment.

Statement of the Problem

With the increase in preschool programs, the relationship between parent, student, teacher and administrator forges the foundation for lifelong learning. Because family involvement during the preschool years has been linked to academic achievement and lifelong success, it is important to examine how such relationships can impact the perception of stakeholders. The current expansion of universal preschool programs requires more attention to the importance of early education. Because preschool is an important time period in a young child's life, bridging

learning at home to the classroom environment through meaningful relationships can positively impact achievement and learning. This qualitative study examines parent, teacher, and administrator perceptions of school and community relationships in a public preschool school setting. As preschool continues to become a vital part of the educational system, the role of relationships and perceptions cannot be minimized.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to provide a rich description of parent, teacher and administrator perceptions and their relationships. Hughes and Kwok (2007) found that when children have good relationships with teachers and peers at school, children are inspired to be a part of the daily classroom.

Positive relationships between parents, teachers, and administrators facilitate learning environments that are safe and secure. These relationships provide the platform for social and academic skills as well as impact learner outcomes. Not only do positive teacher-student relationships provide a sense of closeness, warmth, and well-being for the child, but they also play a fundamental role in academic success and social skills. These relationships in elementary school can expand beyond the current school year and have lasting academic and social/emotional implications up to eight years later (Gallagher, 2013). There is little evidence of the role parent perceptions play in this relationship and how this role impacts social, academic, and behavioral outcomes. This study will provide a unique parental aspect to qualitative research.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are preschool teachers' perceptions of school community relationships in preschool?
2. What are preschool parents' perceptions of school community relationships in preschool?
3. What are elementary school administrators' perceptions of school community relationships in preschool?
4. What are the factors that establish strong relationships among parents, teachers, and administrators?
5. What are the factors that inhibit strong relationships among parents, teachers, and administrators?

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations were inherent in this qualitative study. The instrument used for the interviews were open-ended questions. Participants may not have expressed all of their perceptions of school and community relationships. Additionally, the interviewee's overall satisfaction and happiness in the educational system may influence their responses. Another limiting factor exists in the study's design when data accrued from a small number of stakeholders may not represent the perceptions of all teachers, parents, and administrators. In addition, the results may not be generalized to other preschool classrooms. These limitations are noted and will be recognized throughout the dissertation.

Definition of Terms

Preschool Education – “The range of programs offered under public and private education auspices or providing compensatory education under special legislation and are largely half-day or cover the normal school day” (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabel, 2007, p. 24).

School-Community Relationships – “An assemblage of the people intimately attached to a school – its teachers, administrators, student and the students’ families” (Redding, 1991, p. 7).

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations for the study were as follows: (a) data were only analyzed and collected during the 2018-2019 academic year, (b) the study only focused on a school system located in the Southern United States by interviewing parents, teachers and administrators in two schools, (c) the geographical area of the elementary schools were not inclusive of all students and cultures in the United States; therefore, the ability to generalize the results of the study to the larger population was limited.

Summary

This qualitative study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 has presented the introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature and research related to the questions being investigated. In Chapter 3, the methodology, the data collection procedure, and the rationale for using this design are described. A detailed description of the results, analyses, and findings that emerged from the study are discussed in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the study, interpretation of the findings, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This qualitative study was designed to examine the perceptions of parents, teachers, and administrators on school community relationships during a child's first year in preschool. The relationships were analyzed through gathering one-to-one interview data from 10 parents, two preschool teachers, and two elementary administrators. This chapter will provide an in-depth look at why it is vital for stakeholders to become involved in the school community as well as the necessity for quality relationships through community and parent involvement in the lower elementary school classroom.

Klein, L. and Knitzer (2006) found that the challenge is not just choosing a curriculum, providing some professional development, or creating a program, but building a comprehensive early childhood system where families and communities help support the social, emotional, and cognitive growth children need to be successful as they enter and continue through school. (p. 10)

Schools and community stakeholders partner together to create enriched academic experiences for children. The relationships between teachers, parents, and administrators can enhance a child's educational experience as well as meet the needs of the child. Research will also examine the importance of creating connections and maintaining relationships between schools and communities.

History of Preschool Programs

The first publicly funded preschool program, Head Start, resulted from a president's initiative in 1965. The half-day program was created by the federal government for preschool children from low-income families. The goals of this program were based on needs to improve child care, socialization, instruction, and support services for families. The Perry Preschool Project, Abecedarian Project, and Chicago Child-Parent Centers originated by local initiatives in communities and also established clear and consistent goals. Organizations should have clear and consistent goals set at the highest level of authority (Bolman & Deal, 1991). These programs continue today, but the goals and outcomes do not appear significant after 40 years (Burke & Muhlhausen, 2013).

Three of the most referenced indicators in comparing program effectiveness relates to historical data from these programs. During the 1960s, only 10% of 3- and 4-year-old children were enrolled in preschool programs. Due to an increasing number of working mothers, along with initiatives to decrease poverty and research showing that there is a relationship between childhood experiences and young children's brain development (Gayl, 2008), the Perry Project was the first intense preschool implemented during 1962-1967 (Social Programs That Work, 2016). Head Start, which began in 1965 as a result of a summer pilot project, was a part of President Johnson's War on Poverty (Gayl, 2008). Chicago Child-Parent Centers originated in 1965 throughout Chicago neighborhoods with low incomes (Gayl, 2008) and continues to operate today. The Abecedarian Project, which operated from 1972-1985, was the most intensive program operated by the University of North Carolina.

The Perry Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan, involved 123 low-income, randomly selected black children which were divided into two groups (Gayl, 2008) and considered at-risk children.

The first group was a control group that received no preschool intervention and the comparison group entered a high-quality preschool program to receive explicit intervention and instruction based on HighScope's participatory learning approach. Students were in a preschool environment where teacher-to-student ratios averaged 6:1. Teachers were required to have at least a bachelor's degree and teaching certification. The curriculum involved activities which promoted student engagement and active learning while working to involve children in the decision making and problem solving process.(Social Programs That Work, 2016). Students met with teachers each weekday for 2.5 hours, and teachers also made home visits each week totaling 1.5 hours (Armor, 2014; Gayl, 2008; Social Programs That Work, 2016). The study found that adults at age 40 who underwent the preschool program had higher earnings, committed fewer crimes were more likely to hold a job, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not have a preschool education (Gayl, 2008).

The Abecedarian Project examined two comparable groups of 111 young children in an early childhood study at the University of North Carolina (Gayl, 2008). This program was unique because it provided services to parents and children as early as infancy. High-risk infants were identified, enrolled in the project, and then tracked throughout their educational careers up to the age of 21 (RTI International, 2018). The project entailed a child development center that provided 40-50 hours of care and instruction per week (Armor, 2014). Due to the uniqueness of program design, data results showed a positive correlation between preschool and successful educational careers. The children assigned to the preschool treatment group were more likely to not only flourish during their educational careers, but they were more likely to attend a four-year university. The incidence of teenage pregnancy was also lower in those participating in the preschool treatment group (RTI International, 2018). This would lead one to believe that

participation in early childhood education influences physical and mental health, economic prosperity, and improved academic outcomes.

Head Start, the first publicly-funded preschool program, originated as a result of President Johnson's War on Poverty initiative in 1965. According to Gayl (2008), there were only 10% of 3- and 4-year-olds enlisted in an educational setting. Head Start continues to be the longest standing program serving both 3 and 4-year-old children. Since its creation, Head Start has served over 32 million children and provided services that foster children's growth. The Department of Health and Human Services was asked by Congress to conduct a study on the impact of the Head Start program (Caronongan et al., 2016). Results of the study were released in 2010 which painted a minimal picture of effectiveness. High dollar programs, such as Head Start, have seen very little improvement in cognitive and social-emotional abilities of children by third grade (Burke & Muhlhausen, 2013). There is some evidence that Head Start had a negative impact on assessed math ability of children entering Kindergarten (Burke & Muhlhausen, 2013). Overall, there was little or no effect on 4-year-olds cognitive or social-emotional ability (Burke & Muhlhausen, 2013). In sum, this study finds that providing access to Head Start has some benefits on cognitive, health, and parenting domains; however, there are few sustained benefits.

Current Preschool Initiatives

Over the past decade, political and educational leaders have pushed for the expansion of publicly funded preschool programs. State and federal governments have invested in initiatives to address the unmet need for high-quality preschool for all family income levels. During the 2015-2016 school year, state-funded preschool program enrollment reached a record high of approximately 1.5 million children. This accounts for 32% of all 4-year-olds who were enrolled in some preschool program in the United States (Barnett et. at., 2010). In order to prepare

students for lifelong success, these investments are providing a solid base upon which to build voluntary, universal access to high-quality early education (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2009).

Presently, preschool programs vary from state to state. There are programs in 43 states available for children who are labeled as at-risk. At-risk preschool is defined as meeting set entrance criteria such as income requirements or poverty, children with disabilities, family unemployment, limited English proficiency, homelessness, parent with limited education, and parents who are incarcerated (Barnett et. al., 2010).

One example of a state funded program is Virginia's Preschool Initiative (VPI). In 1995, the Virginia Preschool Initiative was established to serve at-risk-4-year-olds who were not enrolled in a program. There were 18,356 4-year-old children who received preschool services during the 2015-2016 school year (Barnett et. al., 2016).

Georgia, Massachusetts, and District of Columbia provide universal preschool programs which allow opportunities for all children to enroll in a preschool program without the label of being at-risk or disadvantaged. Additionally, universal programs provide the chance to reach all learners, increase peer effects, and improve program effectiveness (Barnett, 2010).

Currently, there are seven states that do not fund preschool initiatives. For these states, options are made available at the local level to use allocations such as Title I funding or TANF programs to provide support for at-risk preschool classrooms (Barnett et. al., 2016).

Unfortunately, these programs target only a select population of at-risk children.

Full-Service Community Schools

Some schools are joining a movement toward community service, or full-service community schools. Due to a lack of funding and school resources, many urban schools are

adapting this model to incorporate community assets to benefit the students. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind in 2001, urban schools continued to fall behind schools in more affluent areas. Although the standards were the same for all schools in the United States, urban schools often could not attain the standards due to the lack of qualified teachers, minimal funding, and inadequate technology (Min, Anderson & Chen, 2017). Urban schools have begun to solicit both monetary donations and classroom support from local businesses through the use of grants (Gatt & Sorde, 2012). In urban schools, school and community relationships can support students' emotionally, physically, and mentally. Zhou and Bankston found that a close-knit community "can provide a social form of control that reduces children's chances of dropping out or hanging out with bad crowds, because both the child and family are apprehensive of the potential neighborhood shame that would be created by delinquencies" (as cited in Min et al., 2017, p. 30). The integration of community services in schools considered economically disadvantaged not only benefits students, but also supports parents as well. Community involvement increases "social capital" such as friends, peers, and contacts through whom one can access opportunities to further one's success (Min et al., 2017, p.30).

As the community becomes more involved in the education process, parents become more familiar with business leaders, and the contacts made, benefit both students and parents. Full-service community schools involve the school, community partners, and service organizations in the community for the benefit of the student. The idea is to create a "neighborhood hub" in which the school holds a vital place in the community and entities in the community form relationships with the educational system (Min et al., 2017, p.31). The community and school create partnerships to provide funding for programs to meet the needs of both the children and family members. For example, a business can fund a family literacy

program in areas where many citizens do not speak English as their primary language (Min et al., 2017). Chicago educators have found that utilizing the community to promote parent involvement benefits the school as well as the family. Teachers reported multiple times that at the beginning of the school year, many parents volunteered to participate in activities, however, busy schedules during the school year prevented parents from participating as planned. With the support and encouragement from community stakeholders, parent participation can be increased (Min et al., 2017).

Child-Parent Center Program

As a response to the lack of parental involvement, several Midwestern school districts have implemented a system titled the Child-Parent Center Preschool to Third Grade program, or CPC P-3. This program is dedicated to creating teacher-parent liaisons and providing places in which parents feel comfortable and welcome (Hayakawa & Reynolds, 2016). Created in 1967, this program remains funded by an Investing in Innovation grant. Each CPC P-3 program is housed in a location near an elementary school but not within the traditional school setting. In 2012, the program served thirty-seven schools in four communities throughout Illinois and Minnesota. CPC P-3 targets economically disadvantaged families, specifically those with children in preschool through grade three (Hayakawa & Reynolds, 2016; Child-Parent Centers, 2016).

The CPC P-3 goals include maximizing the early childhood learning experience, matching the curriculum to that of the classroom, increasing parental involvement, working with the classroom teacher as well as the principal of the local school, and continuing professional development for educators. Advocates for this program feel that it is imperative to promote early childhood education and also show parents the importance of their involvement in their

children's education. The CPC P-3 program ensures parental involvement by hiring a school-community representative (SCR). The SCR reaches out to parents, enrolls them in activities, visits the home, and supplies the parent with community resources that are beneficial to the parents as well as the children. The CPC P-3 program continues to be one of the most effective educational reform strategies used to increase parental involvement (Hayakawa & Reynolds, 2016; Child-Parent Centers, 2016).

Current research from the Chicago Child-Parent Centers asserts that increased educational achievement is the most important benefit of early education programs. At 35 years of age, according to Arthur Reynolds from the JAMA Pediatrics study (2018), CPC participants had higher levels of educational attainment than a comparison group, which included children who were enrolled in another early education program like Head Start as well as those who did not participate in any early education program. These findings support the notion that quality early education produces powerful long-term effects.

Communities in Schools Program

Much like the full-service community schools, the Communities in Schools (CIS) program implements a model of integrated student services. Nationally, schools utilizing the Coalition for Community Schools (2010) program have higher reading and math proficiency scores compared with schools using the traditional model. San Mateo Community Schools, where community involvement is high, continue to consistently meet California's Academic Performance Index standards; most students score advanced on the state's English Language Arts assessment (Coalition for Community Schools, 2010) Taft Elementary School in Redwood City, California, was once on probation under No Child Left Behind standards. After implementing the CIS program, Taft was able to leave probationary status and is now seeing

students meet proficient and advanced scoring status. Anna Yates Elementary and Emery Secondary School saw their adequate yearly progress numbers increase by more than 25 points, almost double the average increase, after implementing the Communities in Schools program (Coalition for Community Schools, 2010).

Benefits of Parent and Community Involvement

School and community relationships in the preschool environment can serve many goals ranging from enhancing academic achievement to community development. Preston (2013) states, “There is a belief that a school on its own cannot provide all the resources that a child needs in order to be successful in school” (p. 418). One of the vital resources mentioned by Preston is the emotional support given by community members to school children. Preston emphasizes that community involvement enhances the “social, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development of students” (p. 418). Schools need to recognize the importance of community involvement and implore community members for this support. Some benefits of community involvement in schools include a reduction in negative student behavior as well as improved attendance (Preston, 2013, p. 418). Hauseman et al. 2017 posit that community involvement in the school promotes student achievement.

Community involvement can promote student achievement in a number of ways. The Ontario Ministry of Education employs several methods of community involvement. School boards within the Ministry have established community engagement offices throughout Ontario to promote involvement in schools. Business owners visit local schools and volunteer as tutors or mentors and, in turn, students are encouraged to participate in service-based activities sponsored by community business. Regardless of the method of community involvement, positive

outcomes are gleaned from the involvement of area leaders in the school system (Hauseman, Pollock & Wang, 2017).

A study conducted by Mo and Singh (2008) used Wave I data to examine the true effect of parent involvement on their children's education. Studying the child's emotional and cognitive growth, parental involvement was found to have significant impact on a child's overall educational success. Children who knew their parents were involved in the school process were more likely to be engaged in the classroom (Mo & Singh, 2008).

Community Involvement and Socioeconomic Status

While many studies suggest that community involvement in a school is a definitive measure of success, schools with a low socioeconomic status found that there was a significantly lower amount of community involvement than in districts in higher socioeconomic areas. Parent Teacher Association (PTA) membership was markedly lower in schools located in a lower socioeconomic area. Studies show that parental involvement was also higher in a school located in a higher socioeconomic area. This data have influenced government leaders as far back as the 1960s and established an understanding that community involvement in schools is paramount to the success of students, especially those in low socioeconomic regions or different cultures (Jeter-Twilley, Legum, & Norton, 2007). The 1966 Coleman Report detailed the impact of community involvement on students residing in low socioeconomic areas. Coleman reported that factors outside of the school had more significance in impacting the education of children in low socioeconomic areas than affairs inside the school (Hiatt-Michael, 2006). As a response, the Federal Government created the Head Start program and established the Title I program, which aimed at assisting children from schools considered "academically underachieving" (Hiatt-

Michael, 2006). These programs allowed children growing up in economically challenged homes to overcome academic and emotional deficits.

Sy (2006) found that although education is highly important to Asian-American families, this particular ethnic group is not likely to be a part of the parent-teacher organization or any other school function. Asian-American parents are more likely to be indirectly involved in their children's education. Sy (2006) determined that the reason for this phenomenon is the idea that the requirement of parental involvement actually undermines the traditional Asian values. Asian-American parents utilized a parental involvement technique referred to as managerial involvement which includes tactics such as denying children playtime until homework is completed rather than attending a school function (Sy, 2006). Kuru-Cetin and Taskin (2016) found that parents from a variety of socioeconomic situations valued their children's education and wanted to participate in the educational process regardless of the amount of time involved.

Parental involvement within schools in lower economic areas has been difficult to obtain. Research from Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, and De Pedro (2011) showed that white, middle-class parents are disproportionately involved in the education of their children. Even in charter schools where parents of any ethnicity or creed should feel more comfortable, parents of minority children were often still uninvolved (Smith et al., 2011). According to Smith et al. (2011), these charter schools offered activities based on Epstein's model: wrap-around services, incentives, contracts to ensure participation, technology, and the involvement of parents in school decision-making. Using Epstein's model and strategies did improve the amount of parental involvement; however, the results showed that involvement of minority and/or those parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were still a monumental challenge in a charter school setting focused on acceptance (Smith et al., 2011).

A lack of teacher preparation was cited in the varied participation levels of different parents. Hiatt-Michael (2006) claims that students in teacher preparation programs are not being prepared in the area of ways to properly involve diverse parents in their child's education. With open communication and informal opportunities to build relationships, teachers can begin to connect, encourage, and involve parents in their child's education.

School Community Partnerships

New educational standards demand an effort on the part of the school, including teachers, to involve both parents and community members in the educational process. Schools across the nation are increasing opportunities for community involvement and relationship-building between stakeholders. Warren Community Elementary School involves community leaders by inviting them to participate in a Community Reading Day. Each teacher invites a member of the community to be a celebrity reader for their classroom. Some community participants bring props or prepare food for their class, while others wear costumes in accordance with the particular book they might be sharing. Another program, Read Across America, invites community members to be involved in the classroom and encompasses similar characteristics to the Community Reading Day previously mentioned. Proponents of this twenty-year program cite its strength as creating deep, lasting ties between the classroom and the community through the use of reading (Grolnick et al., 2005).

The Title I Kindergarten Book Bag Program reports repeated success surrounding community involvement within the kindergarten age group. Through this program, children receive a bag of books and activities to complete at home with parental support. Parents sign a permission form acknowledging that they will assist their child in completing the book bag activities. The child and guardian read the books together and complete the activities together at

home. A volunteer from the community helps collect the bags at the end of the project, and participants often win prizes at the end of the school year for participation in the program. Kindergarten teachers and students benefit from the reinforcement of reading from school to home. As a result of the school reaching out for participation, parents also feel more welcome in the classroom and more involved in their child's education. One of the most effective ways to increase student achievement is for parents to be actively involved in the education of their child (Grolnick et al., 2005).

Potter (2012) found that some school community involvement is nothing more than local businesses offering gift certificates to students as a reward method. Instead of volunteering to read or tutor at-risk children, business leaders may contribute in a number of other ways to the classroom. For example, they may assist with fundraisers, provide influence and information, match employee contribution, exemplify leadership, and offer money (Potter, 2012).

Potter (2012) also posits that teachers have a responsibility to evaluate the businesses in their communities in order to benefit from their assistance. Teachers are faced with finding businesses that will cooperate with them; often it is this that frustrates teachers who are already overloaded with classroom responsibilities and paperwork (Potter, 2012). Potter stresses that teachers need to view businesses in the community as another resource for the classroom. According to Potter (2012), "Each corporation is a giant resource that can be utilized by school districts to reach minor and major goals secured by an ethical contract" (p. 18).

The Mississippi Department of Education (2004) claims that all members of the community benefit from good schools; it encourages businesses and other community entities to seek out ways to work with the school system. The school and the community should be seen as mirrors for each other and represent an interdependent relationship. This supposition is generally

truthful; parents often inquire about the strength of the school system before moving into a community (Mississippi Department of Education, 2004). For the Mississippi Department of Education (2004), businesses need not be the sole community actor and many offer additional school services in the evenings. For example, the Red Cross can recruit students to participate in the collection of food and clothing donations after a natural disaster, and the YMCA offers after-school tutoring sessions. By utilizing businesses in the community, it can remove some of the teachers' burden of remediating, contacting, and organizing possible community volunteers and donors for the classroom (Mississippi Department of Education, 2004).

Trends now encourage teachers to steer away from teaching with technology in the traditional way; teachers are asked to adapt their lessons to the form of technology that students are using outside of the school such as instant messaging and social networking (Gatt & Sorde, 2012). Due to limited budgets in school systems, purchasing and supplying technology can become obstacles. Gatt and Sorde (2012) suggest that with the rapidly growing strides in technology, teachers have no choice but to utilize community assistance for funding and support. This assistance may be monetary or in the form of volunteers; regardless, schools on a tight budget cannot keep up with the quickly changing trends in technology. Teachers may utilize volunteer services in which business leaders work with students to model how technology is used in the workplace. The process of teaching students how to accomplish this is referred to teaching "e-maturity" (Gatt & Sorde, 2012). Community leaders work with students on topics such as bullying and staying safe online. Studies show that schools with a high level of information and communication technology also fare better academically. The use of technology may have an effect on how teachers develop the curriculum and student engagement, so community involvement is a necessity for funding and support (Gatt & Sorde, 2012).

In New York, many schools have implemented a similar program titled the Children's Aid Society (CAS). Schools using the program are better able to reach the lower one-third of students, and often CAS schools outscore city-wide schools in achieving adequate yearly progress. Schools in Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York utilizing community-based school programs also reported better behavior in students (Coalition for Community Schools, 2010).

Defining Involvement and Engagement Between Home and School

Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba (2016) posits that first, schools should clearly differentiate between the types of involvement and engagement. Recent research distinguishes between home involvement, parent involvement and engagement, and school involvement (Dor, 2012). There is a difference in being physically present in a school building and being active and involved regularly in school activities.

Home and parent involvement are similar in their definitions. Home involvement denotes the parent being aware of the material that is studied and providing assistance with homework in addition to being in contact with the teacher regarding the child's progress (Dor, 2012). Parent involvement often involves activities such as parent-teacher conferences, attending school events, and teachers' reports to parents on the decisions, progress, and outcomes (Murray, McFarland-Piazza, & Harrison, 2015). There are less face-to-face interactions with this type of involvement.

School involvement entails being an active member of a group that participates in school policy-making, maintenance of school property, and event planning (Dor, 2012). Parental engagement refers to the active participation and commitment of parents into the learning programs by incorporating the perspectives they hold with those of the teachers (Torre & Murphy, 2016). Additionally, parental engagement is an action where the parents perform

different actions along with the teachers (Yamamoto, Holloway, & Suzuki, 2016). The aspect of engagement allows for more personal parent-teacher interaction and relationship building.

A case study in New Zealand points to evidence that offering opportunities for parental involvement increases parental confidence in the school system. Researchers indicate that parental engagement is the approach is likely to generate more trust due to the level of activities the parents undertake (Strier & Katz, 2016). Hornby and Witte (2010) found that parents also showed an increased interest in their children's education, the climate of the school, and teacher morale improved when parents became more involved in the school system. The study also found that parent-initiated programs, as opposed to school-created programs, were more successful (Hornby & Witte, 2010, p. 30). Researchers concluded by suggesting that courses regarding parent involvement be included in teacher preparation programs (Hornby & Witte, 2010, p. 28). In this way, the uncomfortable fear of the unknown expressed by many teachers when dealing with parents might be overcome.

Factors Influencing Parental Involvement

After Columbine and other episodes of school violence, schools appear to be very unwelcoming to parents. Ferrara (2009) points out factors such as signs that instruct visitors to report immediately to the office, the covering of glass on doors and windows, and a busy office with many parents waiting in line that impact the perceptions of parents who might otherwise get involved. Teachers are also an influencing factor on parental involvement. Due to lack of teacher communication, parents report feeling that their "role as support teachers in the home fades quickly once the child enters school" (Ferrara, 2009, p.125). Ferrara (2009) found that teachers admitted to having little training in dealing with the parents and guardians of their students, and this lack of training led them to be restrained in their communications with parents.

Unfortunately, teachers may perceive that the parent is not capable of teaching children; therefore, they do not encourage them to be involved in the child's education. Teachers often replace the lack of training with a model influenced by their experiences throughout their own educational careers. Depending on their experiences, a teacher may encourage parental involvement or be reluctant to contact parents (Ferrara, 2009).

Cankar, Deutsch, and Sentocnik (2012) studied a program entitled "Reading and Conversation" that aimed to increase both parental involvement and improve parent-teacher relationships (p. 35). The results of the program found that while teachers from varying grades all acknowledged the importance of parental involvement, as children moved through the school system, higher grades were less likely to involve parents in the education process (Cankar et al., 2012). Cankar's study showed that children in lower grades benefitted from more school-to-parent communication; one can reasonably assume that the younger a child is, the more likely his or her teacher is to make a concerted effort to contact the parents. Although positive correlation was found between lower grade levels and parental involvement, teachers need to continue to build relationships and include parents in the classroom and all educational decisions (Cankar et al., 2012).

Barnyak and McNelly (2009) studied the effects of a plan implemented in an urban school in an effort to increase parental involvement by requiring teachers and administrators to follow Bandura's social cognitive theory of self-efficacy. The Epstein's model was utilized to increase validity and reliability of the data collection and results. In order to collect data, the researchers used an adapted version of Illinois' State Board of Education's Parent Involvement Inventory. Barnyak and McNelly (2009) found that while many teachers and administrators stated they believed certain things about parent involvement, their approaches and practices

regarding welcoming parents into the school and/or classroom were drastically different. Many administrators stated that they had no knowledge of programs that could bolster parent involvement; although, they expressed an interest in welcoming parents into the school. Teachers reported that they primarily used progress reports and telephone conferences as their primary means of communicating with parents. Rarely did teachers send out positive information, such as newsletters that detailed classroom activities (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

Educating Teachers on Parent Involvement

Researchers have found a profound deficiency in new teacher education and preparation regarding the encouragement of parental involvement. Gonzales and Gabel (2017) address this issue through a qualitative study that employs a two-step process to examine the intersections between parental involvement and subtractive school practices of teachers in preparation programs. The researchers cite an article by Frey claiming that new teachers first need to be prepared to understand the changing demographic of students and their families. In Arizona, for example, more and more minorities are replacing the “white Baby Boomers,” and teacher preparation programs are encouraged to prepare new teachers for the “cultural and linguistic” differences in this group of students and their families (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017, p.62). The findings of the study also showed language as a major barrier for teachers to communicate with parents who spoke English as a second language. Unfortunately, research continues to find a recurring theme of teachers not being adequately prepared to interact with parents (Gonzales & Gabel, 2017).

Lindberg (2014) studied the skills, beliefs, and knowledge of pre-service teachers in order to measure the teachers’ preparedness by using the Epstein and Dauber “Parent Involvement Survey” (p. 1355). To analyze the data, Lindberg employed MANOVA, ANOVA, and t-test

research models. The results were much the same as other researchers' findings. While many pre-service teachers had a rather positive belief system regarding parental involvement, future primary grade teachers seemed to exhibit the most positive attitude regarding interactions with parents (Lindberg, 2014). Those who would be working with middle school students had less positive views of their future interactions with parents. Each student teacher felt there should be courses instructing them on how to handle parent issues, but at the same time, pre-service teachers felt that parental involvement was not well-supported in a school setting due to "reasons stemming from both teachers and parents" (Lindberg, 2014 p. 1357).

Parental Involvement Effects on Early Childhood Education

Most experts agree that early childhood education is imperative to a child's overall success in his or her schooling. Kutulmus (2016) found that parental involvement in a preschool-aged child was "crucial" to success when analyzing dimensions of parental involvement in early childhood education (p. 1149). This study showed that not only was parent involvement highly important, but home and school relationships also had a heavy influence on creating a successful school career for each child. Kutulmus (2016) encouraged parents to be a part of their children's preschool activities as well as their educational process at the early childhood education level in order to increase student academic achievement. The study concluded that parents who became involved in their children's education at an early age were more likely to remain involved, and they did not complain of communication barriers with future teachers that many other parents did. The results showed a significant improvement in literacy when parents read to, and with, their children in addition to studying the letters of the alphabet with preschool-aged children (Kutulmus, 2016).

McNeal (2014) also found a positive correlation between parent involvement and the success of the child. McNeal proposed a theoretical model that separates parent involvement into those practices linking parents to children in the school environment. According to the research findings, some forms of parent involvement, particularly parent-child discussion, have a far greater effect on student attitudes, behaviors, and achievement than do others (McNeal, 2014). In addition, indirect involvement in the educational process had a more profound effect on student behavior than a parent's attendance at school activities or participating in the Parent Teacher Associations (PTA). McNeal examined whether parental involvement directly impacted student achievement in math and science. The results showed that a parent's willingness to assist through use of discussion with homework or assignments had a profound effect on student achievement in mathematics and science (McNeal, 2014). Unfortunately, McNeal's data only showed a small correlation between parent attendance at school activities and student achievement in eighth grade science.

During a more recent study, Jay, Rose, and Simmons (2017) found that while schools do seek parental involvement, especially in regards to help with homework assignments, when parents are not proficient in math themselves, they do more harm than good. In an effort to combat these results and continue to encourage parental involvement, schools are asking parents to help their children "find the math" in everyday situations (Jay et al., 2017). Researchers found that due to the parents' lack of confidence in their ability to do math, many of them simply refused to become involved with this part of their child's education. Head teachers from four primary schools allowed the researchers to carry out a series of workshops that targeted parents of students ranging from ages 4-11 years old. With the implementation of a series of workshops, parents began to feel more confident and took more prominent roles in their children's math

instruction at home. As parents became more confident in their own analysis of the mathematics in everyday family life, they were able to develop new strategies for sharing the mathematical thinking and awareness with their children (Jay et al., 2017).

In an effort to show the effects of a parent involvement program on kindergarten children's families, St. Clair, Jackson, and Zweiback (2012) conducted a six-year follow-up to the Migrant Education Even Start quasi-experimental study. Most of the children and families, in both the control and intervention groups, were Hispanic and spoke English with varying degrees of fluency. Parents participated in sessions available throughout their child's kindergarten year that helped them engage their children in academic activities linked to their children's curriculum in school (St. Clair et al., 2012). After following these children for two years, findings indicated that by the end of first grade, children from families participating in the parent involvement training program scored significantly higher on language measures than children in the control group. (St. Clair et al., 2012) suggest that equipping migrant families with new abilities to nurture their children's language skills leads to positive and lasting reading outcomes for children in early childhood education.

School and Parent Communication

Charter schools from across the United States are found to practice the greatest amount of parent communication, and therefore, have more parental involvement (Barrows, Cheng, Peterson, & West, 2017). Barrows et al. found that charter school parents' perceptions showed that they were less likely to see serious problems at their children's school and were more satisfied with most aspects of the school. Parents of children attending charter schools expressed higher levels of satisfaction and communication than parents of children attending assigned-district schools. Charter parents are less satisfied than private-school parents but report more

communications within the school (Barrows et al., 2017). Parents whose children attended public schools reported the largest amount of dissatisfaction with the communication level from their children's schools. According to Barrows et al., private schools see at-risk students' grades improve, higher homework completion rates, more classroom participation, and fewer absences as a result of successful parent communication and involvement.

Ouimette, Feldman, Tung, Chamblin, and Coyne (2002) study, based on Boston Pilot School (BPS) Program's approach, analyzed the relationship between school communication and parental involvement. The BPS program was created in 1994, and it is implemented in a charter school within the Boston Public School District. The student population in the charter school reflect a variety of races, economic, academic, and mainstream special needs. Rather than allowing the school district to make decisions regarding the budget, staff, and curriculum of BPS, the pilot school program makes its own decisions, inviting parents to have a major role in school planning (Ouimette et al., 2002). The program at BPS works actively to involve parents in not only school activities, but also in policymaking as well by making a regular effort to communicate with parents. Due to BPS parents being regularly involved in parent and family events held on campus, they feel more welcome on the campus at all times. The results of this pilot program show better achievement scores on standardized testing, higher attendance rates, and higher promotion rates than the student population of the Boston School District. Due to consistent parent communication and involvement, Ouimette et al. (2002) explains that Boston's Pilot charter school outperforms students on every standard measure of engagement and performance.

Teacher Communication

Parent-teacher communication is an essential part of the school community relationship. Teachers should make parents feel that they have some control over their child's education; also, parents need to feel that they have an influence over their child's learning (Baker et al., 2016). If parents feel that communication is a barrier to their involvement in the school, they may be less willing to participate in their child's educational journey. Can (2016) suggests the integration of a "good info-notice system" (p. 1) Technology offers several communication avenues for teachers to use when reaching out to parents and stakeholders. Applications such as Remind 101, ClassDojo, and text messaging services, allow teachers to send out information on a mass instant messaging system straight to parents' phones. Teachers like the ease of using an instant messaging system in which to communicate; parents enjoy the reminders as well, saying that it is "positive and useful" (Can, 2016, p. 1). Unfortunately, some parents may not have access to technology or internet usage; however, there are other ways to implement a notice system. Schools even in rural Nepal implement a system in which schools send a "communication notebook" home (Can, 2016, p. 1). This notebook is a means of communicating with parents about upcoming events as well as classroom study updates. Furthermore, parents must sign off that they have seen the notebook to ensure transition of information from school to home (Can, 2016).

Patrikakou (2016) also examined the use of technology as a means to encourage parent involvement. The researcher posited that schools no longer have any excuse for a lack of communication between parents and teachers. Mobile technology, such as smart phones, have become so cheap that most every parent, regardless of socioeconomic status, has access to a phone with instant messaging at the least. Patrikakou discussed text messaging and robo-call

systems that can keep the parent informed of activities at the school. The researcher also pointed to text message applications that allow teachers to send messages via a service to both parents and students without actually sending his or her personal number since privacy has been a concern of many teachers. As technology becomes more commonplace in classrooms, teachers from preschools to postsecondary institutions are finding more innovative ways to use technology to communicate with parents and their students (Patrikakou, 2016).

Not only can communication increase parental involvement, it also has a direct impact on student and staff security. A case study in Broward County, Florida, found that students in third grade with increased awareness of parent involvement felt safer in schools where parents were frequently active (Hall, 2016). Schools included in the study maintained weekly contact with parents via phone calls, written notes, or in-person meetings. One child in the study explained that he felt safer at school because his teacher was in constant contact with his family. The teacher knew his mother, and the people in the office were familiar with the student's mother, so they also made a point to speak to the student by name regularly (Hall, 2016). The results of this study also showed that teachers reported feeling a sense of security due to communication and parent involvement. Hall described teachers being excited about the regular communication between themselves and parents. The teachers expressed being more comfortable speaking to parents about any assistance they needed, from helping a child with homework to participating in fundraisers for the school (Hall, 2016).

Research also denotes barriers in communication. Baird (2015) noted that many parents and teachers alike complain that there is a communication barrier to parent involvement. For most teachers, this is the lack of understanding on how to contact parents or the inability to invite them to participate in school activities. Often teachers call the number listed on the parent

information file only to find that the number is not in service. Teachers may also contact parents who do not speak English as their native language and cite a language barrier as a significant issue regarding the ability to encourage participation in parent-teacher activities (Baird, 2015). In addition, Baird states, “Teachers often mistakenly label bilingual parents (especially parents who are not fluent in English) as simply ‘uninterested’ or ‘uninvolved’ in the lives of their children, and do not make great efforts to include them in school activities” (p. 155). Children whose parents do not speak English at home are found to be behind their peers academically. Though this is not the fault of the child, teachers do not reach out to the parents in an effort to build a bridge between the parents and the school (Baird, 2015). Baird (2015) found that increasing parental involvement in children from homes in which English is a second language increased academic achievement by at least 30%.

Perceptions of Parental Involvement

Current research on the perceptions of parental involvement shows that parents want to feel involved in their child’s education and teachers have the means to accomplish this feeling of involvement. Erdener (2016) performed a qualitative study on principal and teacher attitudes toward parent involvement. Teachers at all grade levels were asked to participate in the test as well as school administrators. Erdener used surveys to collect data about the teachers and administrators involved in the study. Erdener found that both elementary and high school levels and teacher education levels (e.g., a bachelor’s degree or higher) affected the level of parent involvement in schools. Participants stated that educator attitudes also had a significant impact on the amount of parent participation (Erdener, 2016). As with previous research, teachers must provide a welcoming environment for parents to feel that they are truly encouraged to participate in their child’s school. Socioeconomic background and other demographics can influence the

perceptions of parents and have some impact on parent involvement. Bardhoshi, Duncan, and Schweinle (2016) found that typically, race and income level proved to provide the most influence on perception and predicted which parents were most likely to participate in school activities. Bardhoshi et al. found that American Indians were especially reluctant to participate in their children's school and displayed negative perceptions of teacher and parent communication. These results factor in issues of distrust toward teachers as a predictor of parent involvement.

Jensen (2011) studied the level of teacher comfort and teachers' perceptions when parents became involved in the educational process. Jensen interviewed 131 urban teachers regarding their own viewpoints as well as parental attitudes. The researcher used an online survey to compile information and analyzed the data for themes using coding to classify the transcribed data. Jensen found that teachers continue to seem reluctant when encouraging parents to be a part of the school community regardless of the positive benefits yielded by parental involvement. Teachers had little knowledge of how to successfully encourage and implement parent involvement, and little assistance was provided by building supervisors. Both teachers and administrators had difficulty in coming up with opportunities to include parents in planning policy for the school or curriculum decisions.

Wanat (2010) conducted a qualitative study that explored 20 parents' perceptions on the ways that schools involved them in an educational setting. In order to increase validity and reliability, the study used the Epstein model to welcome parent participation for the data collection method. Further qualitative analyses of parent interviews at the five public elementary schools revealed positive and negative perceptions of programs being utilized within each school (Wanat, 2010).

In each of the elementary schools, a well-organized PTA was utilized in order to encourage parental involvement. Leaders of the PTA organized fundraisers to offset budget cuts, community involvement events, and open house nights to increase community participation. Wanat (2010) found that satisfied parents participated much more often than their peers who expressed dissatisfaction with the school district. Dissatisfied parents often cited participation in their children's lives outside of school and complained of the demanding schedule brought about by school involvement; however, parents expressed that they made efforts to help their children with homework even if they did not make physical appearances at the school very often (Wanat, 2010).

Meier and Lemmer (2015) administered a survey in Gauteng, South Africa, intended to measure parent satisfaction with their children's school system and involvement opportunities. Over a two-year period, Meier and Lemmer conducted a qualitative study and administered a survey that measured the following items: school culture, home-school communication, classroom instruction, and classroom organization. Survey results yielded that parents were satisfied with their child's school and involvement activities. Parents were less satisfied with school reports on learner progress, academic achievement, and overall well-being. Parents surveyed wanted more opportunities for enrichment activities that could be performed at home with their children. Schools made the adjustments as a result of the survey and periodically sent short questionnaires home for further input from parents (Meier & Lemmer, 2015).

Administrative Roles in School Community Relationships

The role of a principal has been underestimated in the past and has recently resurged in academic interest due to the consistent lowering of outcomes (Sanders, 2013). While parent-school engagement has been consistently proven essential in the support of high-achieving

students, the role of the principal is less understood (Povey et al., 2016). Studying how principal leadership impacted the rates of parental engagement with the school, Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) found that parents have a consistent relationship with the school community when they perceive the principal as welcoming rather than distant and removed from their concerns. These findings emphasize the changing dynamics between the past hierarchical models of charismatic power influence and the current focus on horizontal transparency in leaders (Khalifa, 2012).

The process of engaging and sustaining proactive relationships between schools, family, and the community is complex (Sanders, 2013). Sanders (2013) performed a longitudinal multiple case study in the effort to detail how principals reacted to community expectations, overall policies, and pedagogic practices. In order to examine if context and demographic factors impacted the principal's experience, this study focused on two perspectives, one suburban and one urban. The policy analyzed in this case study was the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). The findings of this study showed that community leaders were key in helping principals adapt to policy changes and community expectations.

Hilado, Kallemyn, and Phillips (2013) wanted to create a universal definition for parental involvement through the use of a qualitative study. The researchers enlisted 10 Illinois preschool administrators to explore and examine different understandings and definitions of parental involvement, especially in early education. Analysis of the data included a variety of remarks regarding a definition, understanding, or activities related to parent involvement and a child's development and learning. Due to the wide range of responses, Hilado et al. were not able to create a one-size-fits-all definition for parental involvement; however, the results yielded an important fact. Administrators who had a narrower definition of what parent involvement entailed often had more negative views regarding parents and perceived lower levels of

involvement in their particular preschool setting. Those who had a more flexible definition of the term were found to have more positive views of parents and perceived higher levels of participation in school activities (Hilado et al., 2013).

School faculty plays an important role in helping principals reach the school community. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) tested for the variable of faculty trust in their principals on the phenomenon's of student achievement, school climate, and perceived leader effectiveness. Researchers found "that both of the composite variables, principal behaviors, and school climate, made significant independent contributions to explaining variance in student achievement and that together they explained 75 percent of the variance in achievement" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p. 66). Principal's behavior and adaption to expectations is a large moderator of trust, and if faculty trust their leader, they will be more open to becoming a bridge to the community to engage parents and larger networks (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014).

The role of a principal is explored through an ecological systems view in "Principal leadership for school, family, and community partnerships: The role of a systems approach to reform implementation" (Sanders, 2013). Gathering data from principals, parents, and students, this study found that while parental engagement directly impacted student outcomes, "schools' efforts to engage parents did not consistently predict an association between parental involvement and adolescent outcome" (Sanders, 2013, p. 233). This finding is inconsistent with other research which may be due to utilizing student perspectives. Students may not be comfortable or understand how they truly feel about parental engagement. The methodology of this study, PROSPER with randomized control design, may not have fit the study research aims (Sanders, 2013). The research supports the belief that the principal's role is to facilitate

collaboration between students, parents, and community networks (Cisler & Bruce, 2013). When principals embrace collaboration through actions and trust, communities can thrive.

Conclusion

Considering the evidence presented in this literature review, three things can be discerned. First, several decades worth of research shows that parental involvement is paramount to a child's success in education. Different types of parental involvement can influence a variety of student outcomes within a school environment. Indirect parent involvement has a greater effect on student test scores and can be linked to high academic achievement in the classroom. Direct involvement through parental attendance at school activities has more effect curbing negative behaviors. For example, those who merely attended events at the school and did not assist with homework at home had more effect on classroom behavior than student achievement. Furthermore, parents who were more involved with their child's educational progress at home were considered more successful in helping their children achieve success in the classroom.

There were numerous factors influencing a parent's willingness to be involved in their child's education. Research found that parents often do not feel welcome in the school setting; therefore, they do not attempt to become more involved. This is particularly true of parents falling into the lower socioeconomic category. However, schools can implement programs that will help break down barriers between parents and teachers.

Finally, literature showed that perceptions of school relationships vary based on teacher and administrator pre-service experiences and educational level. Student teachers are overwhelmingly not prepared to handle parent interaction as a part of their internship phase, and while some teachers say that they wish for more parental involvement, they do not act on creating a welcoming classroom.

Overall, the strongest associations were found when the families and teachers develop and maintain communication about school activities, academic expectations, and children's learning activities. School and community relationships through parental involvement continue to be an integral part of positive academic achievement and impact a child's educational experience. The significance of parental involvement continues to be emphasized through state and federal regulations, and schools are being instructed to engage families in education and their children. The participation of stakeholders in regular two-way communication and policymaking is vital to early childhood education.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Chapter 3 presents the methods used to examine the preschool experiences of parents, administrators, and teachers and each small group's perception on school community relationships with regards to preschool. Phenomenological research is used to develop an understanding of interactions through the perspectives of the various human beings involved (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Interviews, which consisted of open-ended questions, were the chosen method used to collect and analyze qualitative data. Interviews increase the depth and detail of participant responses (Patton, 2002). Data were transcribed and coded into relevant themes. Participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts of interviews and adjust their responses (Cope, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school community relationships from the viewpoint of preschool parents, preschool teachers, and elementary administrators. The focus of the research was to develop an understanding of the factors that facilitate or inhibit these school community relationships during the first year of enrollment in an elementary preschool program.

Research Questions

The focus of this qualitative research is perceptions of school community relationships during the first year of enrollment in a preschool program. Interviews are valuable for data collection since they give insights into the past (Weiss, 1994). Morrell and Carroll (2010) state that interviews also allow the researcher to look "through the eyes of the group" (p. 82). The

research questions helps identify the most important issue of a particular researcher and determine the kind of data needed (Moustakas, 1994). The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are preschool parents' perceptions of school community relationships?
2. What are elementary administrators' perceptions of school community relationships specifically in preschool?
3. What are preschool teachers' perceptions of school community relationships specifically in Preschool?
4. What are the factors that establish strong relationships among parents, teachers, and administrators?
5. What are the factors that inhibit school community relationships among parents, teachers, and administrators?

Role of the Researcher

Researchers are the tools through which data are gathered and examined (Chenail, 2011). The role of the researcher was to interview participants. The researcher should be the facilitator of the interview process where participants share information (Chenail, 2011). Therefore, the researcher will seek to capture the meaning that each participant gives to the event (Creswell, 2013). Data gathered from interviews was transcribed, coded, and reviewed by participants for accuracy. Interviews were digitally recorded to avoid researcher bias. Participation included two preschool teachers, and two elementary administrators, and parents from varying levels of academic and socioeconomic backgrounds to eliminate bias.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness reflects a need for qualitative researchers to adopt a transformative perspective and reflect carefully on the authenticity of responses provided to open-ended interview questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize the need to assess the trustworthiness of the data collection technique to ensure that reliable data are used in the qualitative study. The adequacy of responses to open-ended interview questions indicates an ability to link coded themes with behaviors observed in an organizational or institutional setting (Weiss, 1994). Cope (2014) reinforces the need for credibility in qualitative research by including engagement, observational methods, and audit trails (p. 90).

In order to establish credibility, the researcher used data source triangulation. Patton (2002) states that “(triangulation) means comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods” (p. 559). The use of in-depth, open-ended individual interviews “is one of the most powerful tools for gaining an understanding of human beings and exploring topics in depth” (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, Dicenso, Blythe, and Neville, 2014, p. 545). During the interview process, it was important to maintain a disinterested position and not permit subjective biases to influence the data analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Individual interviews gave the participants the freedom and flexibility to expand on topics in a confidential setting whereas focus groups may limit responses (Carter et al., 2014). The adequacy of responses to open-ended interview questions indicates an ability to link coded themes with behaviors observed in an organizational or institutional setting (Weiss, 1994). Though member checking, participants had the opportunity to review and clarify interview transcripts, interpretations, and conclusions of the research

(Creswell, 2009). Participants were informed that the interview and data collection process would be reviewed by the dissertation committee to ensure credibility and dependability.

The researcher's "responsibility (is) to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers," not prove transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 316). A thick description of the interview setting, participants comments pre- and post- interview, and body language provided an understanding of the environment and context of interviews. The thick description also allowed my dissertation committee to determine transferability of the study.

The researcher confirmed the trustworthiness of the study by providing an audit trail of the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Carcary (2009) states that for research to be relevant, the researcher accounts for decisions through the use of an audit trail (p. 15). Research findings were documented through journaling the collection and compilation of interview data. Any topics that were unusual or interesting, coding process and findings, and themes that emerged were noted.

Gaining Entry and Informed Consent

Informed consent is a process by which participants are notified of how findings would have valuable implications by what they share (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Each of the participants received a letter of informed consent that described the nature of the qualitative study, assured voluntary participation, and offered the option to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Obtaining informed consent from study participants verified that responses to open-ended interview questions would be used only for this study and would remain confidential. Participants were made aware of the transcribing and coding processes and

notified that they would be able to review transcribed answers. The researcher informed participants that the research process was overseen by a doctoral committee for credibility.

Research Design

This study took place in two rural public elementary schools. Each school was located in the Southern United States and both schools were elementary schools. One school had an enrollment of approximately 251 students in preschool with a 52.6 % of free and reduced lunch rate. The second school had an enrollment of approximately 273 students in preschool. Of these students, 53.1% qualified for free and reduced lunch. These schools provided a relatively homogenous setting with a 96.5 % of the population being Caucasian.

Data collected for this study was gathered through interviews with ten parents of preschool students, two elementary school administrators, and two preschool teachers in two rural schools district in the Southern United States. This purposive study selected participants based on predetermined characteristics (Shenton, 2004). The researcher contacted the administrators of two elementary schools to obtain a purposeful sample for this study. The ten parents were selected based on the level of parent involvement throughout the school year. Five of the parents had attended school activities five or more times and five who had attended less than five school activities. Group participants were contacted to set up an interview date and time. Individuals were made aware of the informed consent and they could opt out at any time. Table 1 shows the composition of the groups included.

Table 1

Group Compositions

Schools	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
School 1	1 female	5 females	1 female
School 2	1 female	5 females	1 male

Data Collection

Data collected for this study was gathered through one-to-one, digitally recorded interviews conducted by the researcher. The use of recording devices in qualitative research investigations varied depending on the subject matter and the organizational or institutional setting (Weiss, 1994). Data were collected over the 2018 fall semester, beginning in August and ending in December. The questions were designed by the researcher and intended to gather participants' perceptions of the school community relationships in the preschool setting. Table 2 shows a sampling of the questions included in the individual interviews. The use of open-ended questions gave participants the opportunity to expand on thoughts rather than answering predetermined questionnaires (Patton, 2002).

Interview Questions

- Tell me about your experiences at your child's school (focusing on preschool).
- Tell me about your perceptions of (student/teacher/principal) relationships in your school.
- Tell me about the relationship you have with teachers/staff.
- Tell me about school-related activities in your school, focusing on preschool.
- What are things you do as it relates to parent involvement?
- Tell me about things that help you build relationships at your child's school.

Interviews took place in a conference room or private area to ensure confidentiality. The researcher conducted a total of 14 interviews with participants from three different groups. The interviews provided detailed descriptions of perceptions of preschool experiences. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and allowed the study participants to describe their preschool experiences with no researcher interference. Due to the recommendation made by Shenton (2004), data collected for this study was aligned with the need for researchers to develop familiarity with participants and setting. Member-checks were conducted for accuracy after the transcripts of the audio recording had been transcribed and coded.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure used in this qualitative phenomenological study involved the transcription of raw interview data into codes and themes considered relevant to the topic of investigation. Open coding allowed the researcher to sort information into categories while axial coding provided further disaggregation of information into organized themes (Charmaz, 2006).

Member checking and peer debriefing ensured the conclusions reached from interview data were accurate and grounded (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The method used to increase the quality of research and transparency is triangulation (Jones, 2006). Triangulation of the interview data were also important as the researcher reviewed observations collected in field notes, assessed responses to open-ended questions for consistency, and achieved data saturation. The use of triangulation by the researcher confirmed responses to open-ended questions and mitigated any potential biases (Shenton, 2004). The researcher performed a data-oriented audit that reflected how responses to open-ended questions aided triangulation.

Data saturation also guided the analytic procedure followed in this qualitative investigation. Henninck, Kaiser, and Marconi (2016) found that code saturation may be reached with as few as nine interviews. Code saturation was reached for this study.

Ethical Considerations

Since this study involved the use of human subjects, an institutional review board (IRB) was necessary to obtain approval for conducting this qualitative phenomenological investigation. The goal of the IRB is to “protect the rights and welfare of human research subjects recruited to participate in research” (Patton, 2002, p. 246). Involving an IRB to obtain approval for conducting this study entailed that the researcher: effectively uncovered the meanings of lived experiences, ensured the credibility and trustworthiness of data coded into themes, and informed consent was sought.

The participants who responded to open-ended interview questions had the option of refusing to provide information. The researcher informed study participants that the risks associated with providing responses to open-ended interview questions were minimal (Weiss,

1994). If any of the study participants did not feel comfortable answering a question, the researcher exercised the option to terminate the interview.

Summary

Chapter 3 looked at the research methods used in this qualitative study and the factors that strengthened or inhibited the school community relationship. The purpose was to assess the perceptions of school community relationships of parents, teachers, and administrators in two elementary preschool classrooms. The focus was to understand the perceptions of participants in the study. Purposeful qualitative data were triangulated from interviews with parents, administrators, and teachers.

CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school community relationships from the viewpoint of 10 Preschool parents, two elementary administrators, and two preschool teachers. The focus of the research was to develop an understanding of the factors that facilitate or inhibit these school community relationships during the first year of enrollment in an elementary preschool program. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the preschool parents' perceptions about the relationships in the school community?
2. What are the elementary school administrators' perceptions about the relationships in the school community?
3. What are the preschool teachers' perceptions about the relationships in the school community?
4. What are the factors that establish strong relationships among parents, teachers, and administrators?
5. What are the factors that inhibit strong relationships among parents, teachers, and administrators?

The research took place in two rural public elementary schools within the same district in the Southern United States. Data collected for this study was gathered through face-to-face interviews with 10 parents of preschool students, two elementary administrators, and two preschool teachers. A purposive sampling technique was used in the selection process. The researcher contacted the administrators of the two elementary schools to obtain a purposeful

sample for this study. The ten parents were selected based on the level of parent involvement throughout the school year. Five of the parents were found to have attended school activities five or more times while the remaining five parents attended activities less than five times. The face-to-face interviews with the participants were set up on a certain time and date. Individuals were made aware of the nature of their participation in the present study.

Each of the participants received an informed consent form describing the nature of the qualitative study. All of the respondents who participated in the study did so in a voluntary manner and participants were given the option to withdraw their involvement at any point in the study.

To increase the quality and transparency of this research study, triangulation was utilized to confirm participant responses to open-ended questions, memos, and member checks. The use of triangulation by the researcher confirmed responses to open-ended questions and mitigated any potential biases (Shenton, 2004). Data were transcribed and coded into categories to find theme similarities and differences.

Research approval was granted through the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board. Each participant received a letter of informed consent which described the study, ensured voluntary participation, and offered the opportunity to withdraw at any time. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded to find theme similarities and differences. Interviews took place from November 26 – 30, 2018. Transcripts of interviews were provided to all participants, and participants were asked to review the data for accuracy and credibility of study.

Researcher Notes

The researcher began compiling field notes through the participant interview process that took place in November 2018. The collection of notes continued during the interview,

transcribing, and coding process. Field notes contain thoughts and comments of the researcher. Memos were coded to find common themes.

The field notes collected from the one-to-one, face-to-face interviews revealed that six parents were open and honest during the interviews. Common themes were evident as data were collected from all parent participants. Four parents were reluctant to answer all questions and were very short with answers to most questions. Assurance was given to each individual about confidentiality of information and the option to opt-out of the interview at any time.

Additionally, administrator participants were very open and honest during the interviews. Our working relationship did not seem to impact the credibility of their responses. Both administrators supported the importance of constant and consistent parent communication and building school relationships. Administrators also viewed their preschool programs as a family unit.

Furthermore, teacher participants spoke freely and honestly during the interviews. Their responses supported the importance of communication and relationships. Both teachers utilized ClassDojo as their primary method of communication and expressed the positive reception of ClassDojo by parents. One teacher voiced the increase in parental roles placed on the teacher and expressed the need for more involvement from parents in the parenting process.

The Family Aspect At School

Eight parents indicated a sense of family during the first year of school. Parent 1 supported the family aspect saying that preschool, “Gave us a much better balance because she gets to be in a group. And she gets to be a part of something...” Parent 2 also confirmed the family aspect stating,

A lot of these kids, they spend more time with their teachers and school than they do at home. Some of these kids think that that's their home life. They think of their teachers and everything as family. It's just not your teacher or whatever, it's more like a big family.

Parent 3 shared that her son, "refers to his class as a class family." She stated,

I really like that aspect of looking at things because your class, it really is a family. Because you're with them all the time, every day. A lot of times, for more hours than I get to spend with him at home. The fact that he feels comfortable there and feels that it is a family atmosphere, I do like that. I know that he sees it as his family and everybody in that class. So it's good that they have a positive family atmosphere as an example for them.

Parent 4 spoke of the class atmosphere as a sense of community,

It's a small community and I think there is a sense of community in the school among the kids here and I like that. I know that she'll come home and talk about kids that need help in her room, whether that be a physical disability or even that need help with learning and getting things done and you can tell the kids want to help. She wants to be a helper and is concerned when things happen with her friends. So you can definitely tell there is a sense of community that built and fostered in the classrooms. It's very rare that anyone has ever come home and said that their feelings were hurt or anything like that. So there is definitely, I think, a sense of community with the kids.

Parent 6 spoke about student relationships,

The pre-k classroom, they all love each other. They all have a special relationship with each other. This parent was also "blown away when we came to Thanksgiving lunch,

when we came to the fall festival and these teachers that aren't teachers of my son, they knew his name so I know that they are involved and they are interacting with him even though they don't see him by himself any time during the day.

Parent 8 was complimentary of family-type relationships stating, "our students have really good relationships here. They get along well." She also mentioned that preschool, "helped them to get along with other children. They learned a lot about how to deal with issues." Parent 9 supported the family aspect by voicing that,

Even the teacher next door, when we came for open house, she was very friendly and she made friends with my daughter right off the bat. And they are big buddies. They always wave at each other and speak to each other, so I think that's great too.

Parent 10 also spoke about the family aspect of preschool adding that,

Most of the time, they (children) are quick to help each other and quick to encourage each other. They have very minimal issues and if they do, it's an isolated thing. She goes on to say that preschool "seems to be one of our happiest places in school.

Positive Perceptions of Principals

All 10 parents agreed that there is a positive perception of the building administrator.

Parent 1 complimented the building administrator saying, "Our principal is just really friendly and just kind of warm and inviting. I would have to say that she sets the bar pretty high. And also that she's always out there when kids are being picked up and everybody has that interaction with the principal every day in a positive way." Parent 2 added, our principal "is really open. She's the same way. She'll come up to you and speak to you. If we have any problems or any concerns, she's really there to help. She's really good. I have a good perception of her." Parent 3 also indicated that her perception of the principal, "It's positive." Parent 4 noticed that the

principal, “always seems to be there so she’s always involved in just everything that’s going on. And you know, some mornings I drop my daughter off and she’s out there, too. And so you always see her face everywhere.” Parent 5 was complimentary on the personal aspect saying that the principal, “knows my kid’s name, and I like that.” She also talked about her perception of the administrator in saying,

She knows her name, and students talk about her being in the room, and different things that she does. So, that tells me she’s visible in the school and checking in on teachers, and the classrooms, and things like that. I like that. She’s also directly involved. Like we came in for different back to school nights, and she was the person that would open it or speak at it to where it wasn’t a designated teacher, that she was the direct figurehead in that school, and I like that she said it’s that time that she’s in control of her school.

Parent 6 made the brief comment that her perception of the administrator is “The same (as teachers), it’s great.” Parent 7 made an overall comment about the administrator stating, “Our principal is amazing. He’s probably the best principal that I have ever experienced.” Parent 8 commented that the school had been fortunate to have good principals stating, “I feel like we have had great principals here that understand the children and care about their well-being and their education.” Parent 9 shared her perception of the building administrator indicating his level of visibility and involvement,

Well, he seems to be on top of stuff. He’s active with every.... He’s involved with the kids. Like Halloween, he dressed up, and he’s participating in everything, it seems like he makes sure everything’s in order. I guess that the rules are followed, and he’s a nice person. He’s good with the kids, but I can see his serious side. He’s serious about his job,

I think. I think he would do whatever it takes to protect these children if something bad was to happen, or whatever, I think he'd be front and center.

Parent 10 supported the administrator's involvement stating,

I think that's also a plus that we have because he has a relationship with literally as many students as possible. Especially the younger students when they first start. He knows them by their name, talks to them, asks how your days going, things like that, and I think that's another plus of our school and Preschool program. It's small and they feel important and noticed and I think that goes a long way.

Positive Perceptions of Teachers

Again, all 10 parents interviewed had very positive perceptions of the teachers that their children have had in preschool. Parent 1 commented, "Her teachers have been great," and, "That kind of set it up really well for me to feel at ease about her being in preschool."

Parent 2 also stated her approval of the preschool teacher saying,

It's pretty good. I think XXX, of course I know her from where she taught XXX and XXX from the previous grade. She's really nice. And then another lady. I can't think of her name. Her assistant or whatever, teacher aid. I know her. She's was with XXX but she's really nice. It's really good. When you're at the school, they come and talk to you and ask you how you're doing. They're really good. I can say I've had a good experience.

Parent 2 also talked about her personal relationship with teachers and staff saying,

They are pretty good. As far as a personal level or, I know several of them because of where I lived here all my life and then cut hair. I know XXX and stuff. It's pretty good, I love them. They seem pretty nice. Like I said, I know several of them."

Parent 3 also commented on positive teachers relationships,

Again, I have a very positive....I don't know many teachers there. I did know the preschool teacher outside of the classroom and she's a very good teacher. And she's an excellent teacher and I'm seeing a lot of progress and seeing a lot of improvement and where he's going academically but also socially which I think is important as well. It's been good. And the substitutes that he has had have been very good with him and done well with providing the same academics that the teacher is instilling as well. So that's been really good.

Parent 4 spoke about the positive teacher/student relationship, "I think they have a really good relationship with the students and it seems like they care, and they're always loving and just always, I guess keeping everybody involved." She also stated her approval of communication between home and school,

Of course, you know, we are new, but so far, with my daughter's teacher, she's always sending messages through the ClassDojo and always keeping us aware of what's going on. And if there's anything, she'll call or just send me a quick message, or if I have questions, she's always quick to respond, so it's been really good.

Parent 5 was complimentary of the opportunities to get to know teachers,

And I think it also made me feel like I could talk to people and interact more. Like I learn them more as people, not just this teacher setting that you come in on that formal meet the teacher night, that kind of thing. They were so kind and wonderful, she learned so much, they follow such a standard curriculum, but yet they cared about them as people. I have absolutely nothing negative to say about the whole process.

Parent 5 also mentioned teacher/student relationships stating,

I think that I would piggyback to the student. They foster that, that taught. That peer support, that peer love, that you do that. That's taught by the teachers. If they don't see that and learn that, they don't do it, so I think that's definitely there." She is also impressed with teacher/teacher relationships. "I feel like there's a good working relationship between the teachers too.

Parent 6 supported the teacher/student relationship throughout the school by saying,

They all seem to like...but the teacher/student, I was actually blown away when we came to Thanksgiving lunch. When we came to the fall festival and the teachers that aren't teachers of my son, they knew his name. So, I know that they are involved and they are interacting with him, even though they don't see him by himself anytime during the day.

Parent 7 commented briefly on teacher's relationships stating, "I guess good relationships. Like I've said, I've had three been through it before. One in first and one in pre-k. So I have come into contact with a lot of them, and they're all great." Parent 8 responded briefly by saying, "I feel like we work well together, and the teachers seem to get along and have teamwork." Parent 9 was very open and understanding about teacher relationships,

Well here, it seems like everybody gets along well. I mean, everybody is friendly with each other. Of course, I'm not here all day. And, I'm sure everybody has their moments. When you're in a close group, people can get on each other's nerves from time to time. But, I mean, everybody's professional. They are friendly and courteous. And, I'm happy here. I love the school. I really do.

Parent 9 also commented on teacher communication,

Well, my daughter has two teachers, basically, and they must communicate well because they always know what's going on with the child. With her. They both know what's

going on and they must communicate well because they always know. You can tell one something and you know she'll let the other one know, and vice versa. So, I mean, as far as.... I'm just in year one, so, so far, so good.

Parent 9 was also impressed by the surrounding teacher's interest in building relationships,

And even the teacher next door, when we came for the open house, she was very friendly and she made friends with my daughter right off the bat. And they are big buddies. They always wave at each other, and speak to each other, so I think that's great too.

Parent 9 also commented on the ease of communication and how it helped build parent/teacher relationships,

Well, so far, so good. I really like the ClassDojo app.... it is an app, yeah. That's really nice, so that for some reason, she decides she's going to ride the bus and not need parent pick up, or vice versa, I don't have to call the school. I can just send her a message and say, "Hey, she's riding the bus today." She sends me a message back when she checks it. It's very easy to communicate back-and-forth, without having to call the school and make sure the message gets to her, or what not. I don't worry about somebody not getting the message.

Parent 10 spoke about the openness of teachers,

I think it's very open, very encouraging. For myself as a parent, it's probably a little different because I work here too, but I would like to think it has a lot more to do with the parent than it does the teacher. I think all of our teachers seem to be very open if the parents are willing to come. Anytime I have ever had a question, I've had it addressed. I haven't been contacted myself other than the normal, you know, these are the dates that were free, and things like that. I know that's not the case for every parent but I feel like

that something that we try to do our best to help with. But, in my experience, I'm pretty proactive about that.

Parent Perceptions of School Communication

Nine parents stated that they have appreciated the consistent lines of communication from school. Parents feel well informed and a part of their child's learning. Parent 1 stated, "There's been great communication." The parent added,

The first day, we've got that DoJo app. where we can communicate. It's kind of like texting. And so the first day about 9:00, she sent me a message and said, "We're having a great day. She loves singing. She's playing in the kitchen center. And, that was really nice because I was wondering how she's doing. And then I think the first day she also sent me another message in the afternoon and kind of gave us an update on the day. That kind of set it up really well for me to feel at ease about her being in preschool.

Parent 1 stated how much she valued the communication aspect,

We've had good communication from the very beginning. That's the biggest thing to me. You can't do much without communication. Anytime that she trips and falls or if she goes to see the nurse for anything, I always get a message. And she says, "This is what happened, but she's fine. She went back to playing." Knowing that I always get told about those kind of things makes it so that I'm not constantly wondering what's going on.

Parent 1 also commented on how much she appreciated the teacher posting pictures on ClassDojo, "Of course, again on she puts pictures every now and the DoJo then of things they do. And of course I always show that to my daughter." Parent 2 supported the open lines of communication saying,

And if you have any questions or concerns or just want to come and see the classroom, they do really good with that. They are really open and honest. And the ClassDojo really helps, because I can text the teacher and she, if not within the next couple of hours, it's at least by the end of the day. So, that's a really good open line of communication I think.

That really helps a lot.

Parent 2 also spoke about the other kinds of communication methods used by the school. "They send home notes and letters and stuff like that. That's really good. They really keep you informed what's going on." Parent 3 spoke highly of school communication methods saying,

And we've received lots of communication through ClassDojo, lots of communication in his folder. Everything's been very well communicated. And any concerns I have had, they've been, both the principal and the teachers, have been very good about responding quickly and been very understanding and worked with us.

Parent 3 also was complimentary of the quick response from the teacher,

She's always very quick to respond to a phone call or an email, always very open to hear any concerns. I have actually been up to this school personally and talk to her. She's been very open to conversation, doesn't rush conversations or make you feel....make sure opinion feels valued. And has, even after conversations, contacted back just to check in and make sure that any concerns I had...was everything handled properly? Or did I feel that it was handled properly and those kinds of things. That has been something that I have appreciated as well.

Parent 3 continued,

We mainly communicate through ClassDojo. And they're always very quick to respond through that communication route." "The ClassDojo notifications are set up on my

phone. I don't get notifications for anything else but ClassDojo because I don't want to be bothered with other things. I do try to keep open communication with the teachers if there's something we don't understand or there's not a whole lot of concerns that I have. But if anything comes up, just making sure we communicate with the teacher, communicate with the kids so that they understand what's going on, too. But mainly just communication.

Parent 3 also talked about communication through daily folders that are sent home and PTA meetings,

And just make sure we keep a good eye on what's coming home in the folder. Again, I think keeping the communication open and by going to the parent teacher association meetings. You know what's going on with the school because most things come home in a folder. If I miss it in one folder, it's in three other folders. So it's nice being able to go to those things and you hear it from a person. And you can actually talk to the person and ask questions. Then when you're thinking about it, you can get it directly from the source. Being able to do that and also just having the kids involved in things at school there.

Parent 4 appreciated the open lines of communication stating,

They keep us well aware of what's going on and just keep us up-to-date and everything.” She also added, “Of course, you know, we are new, but so far, with my daughter's teacher, she's always sending messages through the Class Dojo and always keeping us aware of what's going on. And if there's anything, she'll call or just send me a quick message or if I have questions, she's always quick to respond. So it's been really good.

Parent 5 spoke in depth about the importance of communication between home and school,

I always felt very comfortable to contact teachers. There was never one that I didn't feel like that I could send an email or send a note to that something wasn't addressed, or handled, or whatever. If something was going on at home, I could let them know that, or something with school or something they were struggling with, they were always good to offer information and support, I think it's a very open communication line here. So, it's very important for me to keep the communication lines open. I try to check in with teachers just how are things going, respond to things that they send in, or just check in when I see certain things come in so that they know that I am an active parent and that I want to be involved in what they do.

Parent 5 continued, "I really like the, when they have the journals, like back and fourth. They had a home journal and whatever, that you could write stuff in, and I think that makes you feel like that you're involved in stuff, and that they contact you about positive things." Parent 6 commented on the ease of communication at her child's school. "Anytime I have an issue, I can go directly to the teacher. We use the ClassDojo and that's every day. I am saying the things that he's doing throughout the day." When asked to expand on ClassDojo, Parent 6 mentioned,

I do like it. I guess my first thing is, at first, I am sending him to Pre-K and I'm thinking, OK, I want to see pictures all day long. I know they are busy. Besides that, though, I like that. I like being able to shoot her a message or her shoot me one. She's really good about putting on their points, that he did take a nap that day, so when I pick him up, I know what he has done for the day.

Parent 8 briefly commented on her approval of communication in preschool, "The communication in preschool was excellent. His teacher, she was great with communicating with the parents, letting us know what was going on, what they were studying and learning about,

everything that was going on.” Parent 9 shared her communication experiences of preschool stating, “She lets us know what’s going on. She sends the folder home with the papers, with what they’re doing for the month. I really like that, so we can, if I see something on the paper, we can talk about it at home as well.” Parent 9 was also complimentary of communication between teachers saying,

They must communicate well because they always know what’s going on with the child. With her. They both know what’s going on, and they must communicate well, because they always know. You can tell one something, and you know she’ll let the other one know, and vice versa.

Parent 9 also stated her approval and the ease of using ClassDojo,

Well, so far, so good. I really like the ClassDojo app or, it is an app, yeah. That’s really nice, so that for some reason, she decides she’s going to ride the bus, and not need parent pick up, or vice versa, I don’t have to call the school. I can just send her a message and say, “Hey, she’s riding the bus today.” She sends me a message back when she checks it. It’s very easy to communicate back-and-forth, without having to call the school, and make sure the message gets to her, or what not. I don’t have to worry about somebody not getting the message. You know what I’m saying? Or miscommunication or what not, because it’s typed right out. I really like that ClassDojo app.

Parent 9 shared other communication methods that helped to stay informed. “They send a paper home to let you know what’s going on, what to expect, prices. I really like that. Like I say, so far, so good.” Parent 10 was also complimentary of the level of communication from school,

Anytime I have ever had a question, I had it addressed. I haven’t been contacted myself other than the normal, you know, these are the dates that we’re free, and things like that.

The parent communication is wonderful. We got daily feedback. We got daily notes in Dojo they would use. There would be weekly activities. We would know what they're working on in school.

Parent 10 expanded on the parent outreach aspect of communication,

Whether I see a need or not, I feel like it's important to always make that contact and just be available for whatever they might want to bring up. Because it seems like, if you don't think first hand, ok, well, you don't need a meeting, or you don't need something, anytime that I've had conversations, they might say, "Oh yeah, well there was this day she seemed upset about this", or "so-and-so said this to her and you might want to ask about that." I just think it's important because the more contact you have, the stronger that relationship can be, too, and so the teachers can know that we're supportive of what they do as well.

Opportunities for Parent Involvement

All 10 parents commented on the many opportunities provided by the school for parent involvement. Parent 1 talked about coming in to help when she can. "Of course we've had a few things where parents are allowed to come in and of course I always try to do that. We've had those field trips which was a lot of fun." Parent 1 also stated, "There have been, it seems like maybe about once every week or two we have an opportunity to come in. I'm glad that I'm able to do that." Parent 1 commented on attending school lunch week,

The first time I came in I think it was the parent, it was like school lunch week. And they have designated days for the parents to come in. And so there was a lot of parents that came in that day. So it was nice to not only meet the kids, but also to get to meet a few of the other parents of the kids.

Parent 1 also mentioned after school events,

We had the fall festival which I volunteered to help. So I got to see a lot of parents that I hadn't otherwise seen because sometimes they work and they can't come in during the school day. There was a lot of fun things for her to do (fall festival) that was really enjoyable. The book fair more recently. But she also really enjoyed being able to kind of go shopping at school and get some books.

Parent 1 also spoke about involvement in field trips, "The field trip, we went to the pumpkin patch and that was a lot of fun. They had the hayride and of course they've got kind of a tour guide that's telling us some history about the place and some kind of trivia facts and things."

Parent 1 was also involved in preschool's Halloween party,

I had talked to her teacher about volunteering if it would ever be helpful to them and I've done that once so far. It was when they were having the Halloween party. They had games and things and a lot going on. So she said they could use extra hands then. I got to go in the classroom for a couple of hours and kind of help with some of the games and interact with the kids.

Parent 2 was brief in saying that, "I went to the book fair is in stuff like that." And she also, "I try to go to PTA meetings and stuff." Parent 3 added,

There have been a lot of activities and they tried to include everyone in these activities.

We tried to attend most of the parent teacher events that they have like PTA or PTO. And just making sure we keep a good eye on what's coming home in the folder.

Parent 4 spoke about involvement in the preschool field trip,

We have participated in the field trip to the orchard. They're always seems to be doing something, always trying. Like the fall festival. Trying to get you here, trying to get you

involved, see everything they're doing and stuff like that. So I think they're doing an awesome job.

Parent 5 expanded on the many activities that they have participated in,

The book fairs, and the literacy nights, and the back-to-school nights, and Christmas concerts. They really have a lot of community involvement, and seem to really want parents involved in it and coming. You always feel welcome to come into the school and it's an open door that you get to come in that they are really not like oh. So I feel good about that.

Parent 5 voiced her level of support for the school,

I am a parent that believes in being involved with your kids and I think where I work in a school system I know how important that is. I want the teachers to have an open mind with me too. Whether it's positive or negative, either way I want them to know that I am involved in my kids. So it's very important for me to keep the communication lines open. I try to check in with teachers, just how are things going. Respond to things that they send, or just check in when I see certain things come in so that they know that I am an active parent and that I want to be involved in what they do. And also when they're doing community events or things like that to try to really promote that at home as well to make that seem important to my kids of what matters in school matters. So I view myself as an active parent but I want to support the school in that too.

Parent 6 also commented on participating in several school events,

I went on a field trip with them. I did the Thanksgiving lunch. They do the fall festival. Well, a small one is at the beginning of the month, all the parents are supposed to send a snack for all the kids. I do that every month. Any activities that are going on, I tried to

make myself a part of it and be there. Just whatever I can be there for, and make sure I am there.

Parent 7 mentioned, “Going to parent teacher conference and then sometimes you’re asked to volunteer to do parties and things like that. Or chaperoning on field trips, we got to do that.”

Parent 8 was brief in expressing involvement by, “Talking with the teachers, sending notes to her or them. The dojo is a great thing and email.” Parent 9 expanded on the many events and activities that she had participated in. “Well, so far, what I have been to, I love. We did the costume contest. That was fun for Halloween. Our little projects like hiding the...disguising Tom the turkey little deal, and things like that. I’ve come to everything that I’ve been able to. And she enjoys it too.”

Parent 9 also supports school instruction by,

Well, I like to look at her, I guess you call it a curriculum. As they come in, and see what she is doing for the class. And of course, most every day, there might be a day here or there that she doesn’t bring home something in her folder, and it relates to whatever is on that curriculum paper. Like the month of November, of course, was about pilgrims, and Indians, and pumpkins and, turkeys, Thanksgiving stuff. And the Book It, I love the Book It stuff. That’s been a lot of fun. Some fun...sometimes I don’t want to read another book. But we do to get our time in.

Parent 10 explained communication from the parent aspect,

The parent communication is wonderful. We got daily feedback. We got daily notes in Dojo they would use. There would be weekly activities. We would know what they’re working on in school so they encourage us to do things at home which would just enrich what they did at school. Then we were always invited to every awards, every activity.

Parent 10 continued by saying,

You're always invited to come. You're always invited to be here anytime. Just a real encouraging atmosphere if you want to come in the afternoon, if you want to come in the morning, if you want to have lunch, if you want to come to an assembly. Maybe not always specific activities, so as much as you just always felt like you could come. Or if you wanted to come for a snack or a party or celebration or whatever, you could do those things.

Parent 10 also expressed her support at home. "We do homework, we do reading, we do site words, we do field trips, we do travel. We do lots of stuff. Anything that we know that they are working on, we try to do on our own at home."

Parent Involvement Expectations

All teachers and administrators shared their expectations of parent involvement. Teacher 1 talked about the importance of parents supporting their children in several aspects. "I hope that my parents get my students what they need and get them here. This is important, even in Pre-K that they support their children in their learning and reinforce what we're teaching in school."

Teacher 2 also shared the importance of parent involvement,

I really expect the parents to be involved. I want them to make their child a priority and their education. I always express to my parents that they're going to be grown up, they're going to be gone before you know it and this part of their lives are so important especially ... their personalities are created in the first five years of their life. The majority of their brain development is taking place and I just tell my parents it is of the upmost importance for you to be involved in what they're doing and I know this day and age there's so many things they can be involved in but I tell parents if you sit down five

minutes a night and read them a story, that's all it takes. You give them five minutes of your undivided attention and sometimes that's all it takes but just at least give them that. Administrator 1 was consistent with the importance of parent involvement. "Well, of course first and foremost, is for everyone to do their very best, whatever that might be in whichever category. For the parents, to have the children here, because we are an elementary school."

Administrator 1 also shared that her,

Parent expectations, once again, to have the children at school. Also, to support us and to support the school system and environment here. The relationship between school and parent is very important because we need their support daily in order to make a successful student at whatever age.

Administrator 2 stated several factors that impact parent involvement outcomes,

I believe that is the key to student performance, or one of the major keys in student performance. The parents are kind of their reflection, or the child's reflection of their parents. So if you don't have the parents on board up front, then you're kind of dead in the water before you ever get started. Now there are exceptions to that rule, which we deal with quite often, more so now than we used to. But I want my parents to feel welcome here at the school, and I want them to feel like they are part of their child's learning.

Support School Community Relationships

All teachers and administrators spoke about supporting school community relationships. Teacher 1 spoke about the role of a school administrator in school community relationships, "I expect the principal to be accessible to the students and to the staff and to the parents and to facilitate those relationships, to enforce school policy if needed." Teacher 2 also supported the role of a school administrator in school community relationships saying,

As far as principal expectations go I just feel like that the principal's there to back me up, to help me show parents and show students the importance of what we're doing here at school. I feel like the principal should be there to help support finding answers to those issues and then just to support the curriculum and support parental involvement, encourage parents as well.

Teacher 1 was also complimentary of the building administrator relationships with students. "I can easily speak about the student and principal because our students see our principal a lot. She shows up during lunch, she comes into our classrooms, and she knows their names. They know her so they have a really friendly relationship." Teacher 1 mentioned the positive student relationships,

Well, we have a very loving group of students this year. We have a child with different abilities and they have been so accepting of her. It's been very nice to see. This has just been an outstanding group. They get along well. We're able to play in our centers with very little disturbances this year. It's been wonderful.

Administrator 1 spoke about the overall positive relationships within her school,

Well, I'm very fortunate. I do believe that we have great relationships here at XXX.

That's something that I started nine years ago when I came here, was to really focus on the culture of our school. Students know whether you are being honest with them, and whether you love being here every day, and really want them in your school. We have a great relationship, our teachers do with our students. Our students are really, this year, even more with our Strive for Five campaign. They're really wanting to be here, and they're really wanting to make us proud that they're here, and to do their best. I've been very fortunate that I've been able to, over time, develop some great professional

relationships with my teachers. Through attrition, retirement transfers with my staff over the last nine years, I've been able to really focus on hiring. Hiring folks that I think will really fit the vision of this school. So I've been very proud about that. With that being said, having some really close relationships from the beginning with these folks. They've bought into our vision here, so it's been very productive. Parents, always trying to make them feel welcome. Hopefully, they feel like they're involved. So far so good, with those parent relationships, too.

Administrator 1 spoke in depth about how programs can support building relationships,

Well, it's been awesome, because our childrentalk about buying in, our children have bought into it. We promote it in that, we want you here, we want you to learn, we want you with us every day. The parents on the whole, now we still have our habitual offenders, as all schools do. Where we have to really dig a little deeper, work a little harder with some of these parents to make them understand it's so important that their children are here. Or we can't teach them, we can't educate if they're not here. But it's been a great community relationship building program, because the parents do see the benefits of it. We've had children, actually at this school, I've heard them, I've witnessed them say to their parents, "You've got to have me here, I'm striving for five." I've had parents call in about a child being sick and saying, "I'm having difficulty, he's giving me a fit. He wants to come to school today. He doesn't want to miss. He wants to be there for that program." But that has been a ... I think that's really strengthened the community relationship on that piece.

Administrator 2 talked about the positive parent support within his school,

I feel parent involvement here is positive, I think it's always something that I wish we had more of. We're always after those parents that you don't see often. I think if you ask any of my parents, for the most part, they would have positive things to say about the school, the teachers, and the education the child receives here at XXX.

Administrator 2 also stated that the community sees his Preschool classroom as positive, I feel like the community ... the perception the community had of our Pre-K program here at XXX is a positive one. Our Pre-K teacher, a very strong teacher runs a very solid program, and we have a waiting list every year of folks waiting to get into our Pre-K program, so I think that speaks for itself.

Promote a Positive School Climate

All teachers and administrators spoke about promoting a positive school climate. Teacher 1 stated that first experiences need to be positive,

Well I just think that as their first experience with school, we need to make it as positive as possible. I think that involves a lot of communication. As a 25 year teacher, sometimes you forget that it's brand new for them. You have to remind yourself of that, so that you can answer all of those questions that you don't even think about being a question anymore. But you have to remember that it's a questions for them. I'm really aware of that and try to make it a smooth transition from home to school positive because I want all of their school career to be positive. If we can get started on the right foot, it's so much easier.

Teacher 2 supported the positive school climate by saying,

Student relationships ... I know within my own classroom they are, I mean, I just start from the beginning. I just foster an environment of school family. We're here together.

We're a school family, and that's what I always foster within my classroom. Now, once they leave me I kind of see them start to go away from that. I think that everything becomes so academic that maybe that's kind of put on the back burner unfortunately but now like, especially this year, my little group of kids, they are so sweet to each other. They're so caring. I mean, they are there to take care of each other. If somebody falls down they're not laughing at each other. Can I help you? Are you okay? That kind of thing. So that's the perception. That's what I feel like that it is in my room for sure.

Teacher 2 also remarked about parental relationships,

I feel like we have good relationships with our parents. I mean, we are constantly inviting parents to come in. We have events going on all the time. I know at least once a month parents are invited in for something that's going on whether it's a grade related specific program or if it's just to read to students or volunteer or whether it's a school wide program. Like we have our Christmas program coming up. This past couple weeks we had the Thanksgiving dinner. Lots of parents showing up for that, so I feel like, I feel like we do foster pretty good relationship between school and relatives.

Teacher 2 shared that principal relationships affect school climate,

I think that everyone has a pretty good relationship with the principal. I don't get to see the teachers much down the hall but I know in upper areas of the hall he ... XXX a very, he's easy to talk to, easy to go to ... we'll be quick to say if he doesn't have a solution but he'll sure help you find the solution, I guess I should say. So I mean, he is very supportive, will help us in any way. That he can help us in any ... under any means necessary that is under his control, he'll help us.

Administrator 1 explained the importance of the first meeting between parents and school staff,

Well, we try when we start in the spring and we're getting in the new applications for our children for the next year. We set aside a time for families to come in and enroll their children. We try to do this as a community wide, with the Head Start, the different day care providers, and things like that, to work together to make it important to the families that we want them involved. Education at the preschool level is so very important. Because of the expectations, we have for our students academically starting in Kindergarten, we really need to reach out and touch as many students as we can in our four year old program. Whether it be at a local day care provider or here, because they need to grow not only academically, but socially. They need to learn how to go to school. So that's made it really interesting to get the families here initially to explain the program itself. Then, to make them a part of it. We have our Kindergarten camps in the summer. We're able to bring our families in and start developing relationships with them before they actually become a true Kindergartner. So at the preschool level, we really try to put out the word and communicate with families. So that they understand that it's very important and we want them part of our school community.

Administrator 2 viewed parent involvement as positive in his school,

I feel parent involvement here is positive, I think it's always something that I wish we had more of. We're always after those parents that you don't see often. I think if you ask any of my parents, for the most part, they would have positive things to say about the school, the teachers, and the education the child receives here at XXX.

Encourage Open Lines of Communication Between Home and School

All teachers and administrators interviewed encouraged an open line of communication between home and school. Teacher 1 explained the importance of ClassDojo in her daily communication with parents,

I have the Dojo app, which I think is pretty common now. I love it. I have 100% participation this year and I did last year also. I'm able to send messages to the whole group very easily and quickly. I can send individual messages if I need to or I can send, if there's a behavior issue, I can send an individual message to that parent, so they're aware right away of what has transpired. It's been great. Also, I use it for the class story part of it, which is set up like Facebook so I can take pictures of the kids doing something, well, today we did a little play with The Little Red Hen. I was able to take pictures of that and I'll put it on Dojo so the parents can see their kids acting out The Little Red Hen. I've had parents tell me that that that helps so much. I know as a parent myself that means a lot where you can find out specifically what happened and not just that it was a fine day. If there's something a little long for Dojo, I'll send that home. Of course, any field trip information, that's sent home on paper not just the Dojo. Those are the two main ways that we communicate.

Teacher 2 also talked about using ClassDojo in preschool,

As far as Pre-K goes, I still do, I use the ClassDojo app. I'm in constant contact with my parents all throughout the day if necessary and then I still do monthly newsletters and calendars. Newsletter, just stating anything, any kind of skills or special activities that are going to be going on for the month and then on the calendar I list daily specials on the calendar, birthdays, special events at the school, anything that's going to go on.

Teacher 1 explained the other methods of communication within the school, “We have the School Messenger which sends home messages as needed. We do the school newsletter. XXX calls as needed and sometimes if something comes up quickly, she’ll even have me to send them a Dojo real quickly and let them know.” Teacher 2 also spoke of the different communication methods,

Well I think communication between all of us, you know, we have as far as staff go, we have the staff meetings. We're notified if it's something that is spur of the moment. We're notified through group emails so we keep in touch as a faculty staff that way.

Communication as far as with the community, parents, things like that, I think each individual teacher, we either use the ClassDojo app or we use the Remind to be in constant contact with parents. I'm pretty sure that almost every teacher in the school uses one or the other to keep in touch with parents and all time. We still, I know ... I know the office sends out, at the beginning of the month or at the end of the month, a list of upcoming events for the next month. So basically like a newsletter, calendar type deal from just the office.

Administrator 1 and Administrator 2 talked about the constant line of communication within their schools. Administrator 1 stated,

Well, Pre-K and the rest of my grades ... Most all of my teachers include a ClassDojo every day. It's an app that teachers can use on their phones, on their computers, and be in constant contact with our families. Actually, my previous Pre-K teacher is the one that brought it to our school. She was the one that piloted it first. It was so successful, because the children buy into it too knowing that they are able to make a difference each day in their behavior and be aware of it. Whether that is in a positive direction or sometimes a

negative one, if they have a point taken. But they know immediately why and they have the opportunity to gain back points by the end of the day. So it's really a great tool to motivate the children and have them just to be aware of their behavior, their discipline within the school, and their academic performance. If they're on task, or not. So our teachers use that pretty much universally here at our school. So not only counting the newsletters, and the mid-terms, and all those other things that go home, report cards, and notes, and planners, and daily planners, and so forth. On a preschool level, the ClassDojo has been super helpful, because when parents send their four-year-olds to school and that's the first time a lot of them have been away from their children at all. So it really helps them to feel more comfortable in knowing what's going on with their child during the day. They know that they can be in constant communication with a teacher, if need be.

Administrator 2 also said,

We are in constant communication with the parents from Pre-K through fifth grade, either by School Messenger, newsletters, Remind, Dojo, and almost a daily thing with Remind and Dojo. Teachers use that daily. Their parents are also able to ask questions and respond to messages, so ... And, of course, we're up for phone calls, as well. So the parents would say that if they need something from the school or teacher that they have that availability.

Provide Activities for Parent Involvement

All teachers and administrators stated that their schools provide activities for parent involvement. Teacher 1 talked about the many activities offered throughout the school year to parents,

Well, we're lucky that we're in the school and not separated because we participate in everything that the rest of the school participates in, the PTA meetings, literacy night, book fairs, all of these things where parents come to lunch like the book fair, Veteran's Day, school lunch week, breakfast week, yeah. Jotted down some. We participated in The Hero Half Days, where we reward, well, it's for Strive for Five. Everyone participates. We concentrate on community helpers. We did policemen the first time. We have field trips, and the parents are invited as chaperones for that. The holiday concert, the parents are invited for that. We do the Wolf Trap in the spring, and they come at night, and do a program for the parents. Fall festival, field day.

Teacher 1 explained that she has volunteers for different activities,

Well, I usually have a lot of volunteers for the field trips, which is wonderful when you're taking a bunch of four-year-olds anywhere. We had three parents volunteer to help out of pre-K during the fall festival. They ran games for us. I'm not sure how many pre-K parents were there for the movie night and our first PTA meeting. I remember seeing two or three specifically. We have a lot of parents come for the lunches though like school lunch week, we usually have a lot for that. We did this year, we had a whole table full. We had a couple veterans, and we had four or five come for lunch with the book fair.

Teacher 2 also commented on activities to encourage parent involvement,

Okay, for Pre-K, we have lots of school related activities throughout the year. Parents came in, I had almost, I'm going to say 75 percent of my class had someone show up for Thanksgiving lunch. We have our holiday concert coming up. I feel that there will probably be even more that will show up for that since it's school wide and it's one function, all in one spot. I had, well before school started you know, we invite parents to

come in for that week long one on one parent meetings. I had 100 percent participation with that. Let's see, I'm trying to think of other activities we've done. Field trip, I didn't have as many parents volunteer for field trip in the fall as I thought that I would but fortunately most, I mean, I have parents that are employed. But we will have book fair next week as well and I will encourage parents to come in and shop with their children for that. Hopefully most will. We have the little awards assemblies at the end of the nine weeks. I have a lot of parental involvement with that. I invite my parents if their child is getting an award to come in and usually somewhere between 75 to 100 percent show up for those little award days which is, I think, fantastic. Trying to think, we'll do spring field trips, a spring field trip. I'm hoping for more participation with that one and of course field days, awards days, different things like that, so parents are given lots of opportunities.

Administrator 1 shared the types of involvement activities at her school,

It's, of course, the focus is to prepare them for Kindergarten, and that sort of thing, and learn what school is about. But we include them in absolutely everything. So from the individual family meetings that we have at the very beginning of the year. We now have staggered start for our Pre-K children. It has been such a benefit to not only the student, but to the educator itself. We also set up conferences now with the families of these Pre-K students to familiarize themselves with the school, the staff, what goes on in a given day. So there's conferences before the Pre-K students ever get here. To talk about the expectations or what this is all about. Then, we include them in all the activities, whether it's a PTO program, whether we're doing a fun movie night, whether we're having school lunch week, or inviting the parents in, we do that. We've invited all of our parents ...

We're celebrating everyday heroes this year. So we've brought in parents to help us with volunteering to do these celebrations. Of course, we have scheduled parent / teacher conferences throughout the year. If a teacher needs to see a parent more than once or twice through the year, they will call for that. We take trips to the Apple Orchard, that's kind of a customary program in the fall. We include our Pre-K in our awards assemblies. For character ... they get character awards and they also get attendance awards. We include them in anything we're having special. Like if we're doing Veteran's Day Programs, or Fall Festivals, Book Fairs, any and everything. Once again, it's inclusive. Pre-K will also, at some point during the year, have their own PTO program. A lot of times, they will partner with Kindergarten and work together. It just depends on the year. But our Pre-K will also be included in our Holiday Concert. They will have a portion of the program to themselves, too. So we include them with everything we do whether it's Read Across America, whether it's Breakfast Week in the schools, or whatever it might be. They're included in everything.

Administrator 2 was complimentary on the one-to-one preschool meetings with parents,

Well, I think one of the key things we've done in the last couple of years has been our Pre-K teacher and para are meeting with the parents before school starts. They're taking two weeks to sit down individually with each parent, giving him the opportunity to ask questions, voice any concerns, and it's also a good time for the teacher and the para to get to know the parents as well as the child because we're also doing roster during evaluations, during that meeting with the child. So we just ... It provides an opportunity on both sides to develop a solid foundation to build on throughout the year.

Administrator 2 would like to see 100% participation,

If there's one area that I would like to increase participation, it would be parent participation. For the most part, if you ask parents to attend an activity or event that are here, especially if the parent or the child's getting something out of it. But I think that's something that any administrator would say that they ... I wouldn't be happy unless I'm getting 100% of my parents in here, so that's something that we work on daily and each year.

Factors that Facilitate Relationships

Seven parents, two teachers, and two administrators expressed the many opportunities provided to help in facilitating school community relationships. Parent 1 affirmed relationship building saying,

Definitely, it's having the opportunities for parents to come in and interact. If it wasn't for that, I probably wouldn't have met any of the other parents of kids in her class. Just having set times to promote for parents to, push for parents to come in that gets us through the door and interacting with each other.

Parent 2 spoke about the different opportunities to build relationships,

The book fairs, the luncheons, stuff they do. They invite the parents to lunch and stuff. The Christmas program and stuff. Everything that they do at the school. I think they do a really good job involving. The parent teacher conferences and stuff. Even if there's not one needed, they tell you that you're more than welcome to come. And if you have any questions or concerns or just want to come and see the classroom. They do really good with that. They were really open and honest. And the ClassDojo really helps because I can text the teacher and she, if it's not within the next couple of hours, it's at least by the

end of the day. So that's a really good open line of communication I think. That really helps a lot.

Parent 3 spoke about building relationships through good communication,

Again, I think keeping the communication open and by going to the parent teacher association meeting. You know what's going on with the school because most things come home in a folder. So it's nice to be able to go to those things and you hear it from a person and you can actually talk to the person and ask questions then when you're thinking about it. You can get it directly from the source. Being able to do that and also just having the kids involved in things at school there. They enjoy school more and talking to them about school. It's not really any rocket science things. But just talking with them.

Parent 4 also supported the school in facilitating relationships. "Honestly, there always seem to be doing something, always trying, like the fall festival. Trying to get you here, trying to get you involved, see everything they're doing and stuff like that. So I think they're doing an awesome job." Parent 5 expressed appreciation for the many opportunities to facilitate relationships,

I think the programs. I think that makes you feel like you're in the building, whether that be simple things as parties, or even just the events that are going on they send you stuff on, theme weeks, whatever. I think that makes you feel that your kid matters there and that there's a bar in for that. When they have the journals, like back-and-forth. They had a home journal or whatever that you could write stuff in and I think that makes you feel like that you're involved in stuff. And they contact you about positive things. That's one area in a school that sometimes is easily missed. We saw your kid do this or well she did great at that and that makes you feel so good as a parent and involved in that.

Parent 9 supported communication and activities as factors in facilitating relationships,

The ClassDojo helps for sure. Well, and the activities. Coming to the activities. I don't know all the teachers. I don't know all of them. I know their faces. I may not know their names yet, but I will. Some of the girls, I actually went to school with and I've known for a long time. And when you come in, everybody speaks or what not. And sometimes you stop in the hall and you're like, "Oh, I like your sweater," and then you have a little conversation and it builds relationships. And secretary, she's great up front. If you have a question or whatever you need, she's always happy to help. It seems like she's good at her job, too.

Parent 10 expressed that facilitating relationships begins with the parent,

I think kind of what I said earlier. I think that's a lot of the parent's responsibility. As long as the school is open, I just try to be visible and be available and attend meetings when they're optional. Whether I see a need or not, I feel like it's important to always make that contact and just be available for whatever they might want to bring up.

Because it seems like even if you don't think firsthand, ok, well, you don't need a meeting or you don't need something, anytime that I have had conversations, they might say, "Oh yeah, well there was this day she seems upset about this," or "So and so said this to her and you might want to ask about that." I just think it's important because the more contact you have, the stronger that relationship can be, too, and so the teachers can know that we're supportive of what they do as well.

Teacher 1 viewed parent involvement activities as interaction and communication with teachers as well as parents participating in activities,

Well, I think any time the parents are here and they're speaking with us, interacting with us. Oh, we had parents volunteer for our Halloween party too. They helped run the games. Any time they're doing things like that, that facilitates relationships. I think the Dojo has been great for relationships also. Most of these parents are so much younger than I am now, they're used to the texting. That's much more common with them than it is for people closer to my age. So that's just normal for them. I mean, they don't think anything about that, but that's been really helpful, I think. I try on the do part, I really try to be a partner, and to do what I can do to help their child individually because they all have different needs. I try to do what I can do, whatever that might be within reason.

Teacher 2 stated how the start of the school year impacts the beginning of relationships,

Well I think ... I think just the way we're able to start our school year with the one on one parent meetings. I think that has been one of the greatest things that we've done for the simple fact, with some of these parents, their children are considered at risk. They're at risk for a reason. When I can sit down with those parents one on one it gives them an opportunity to ask me anything they want to ask me, tell me anything that they want to tell me and not worry about someone else, another parent overhearing them ... maybe judging them or criticizing or having a concern about the child.

Teacher 2 continued with the beginning of school meeting saying,

I think that has been the biggest thing to foster, start to foster those parent/teacher relationships. It's just been wonderful. It kind of opens me up to the parent feeling like if they do have questions, if they do have concerns, that they can feel free to contact me. They've had my undivided attention for an hour and 15 minutes. They realize, okay, she's approachable. I can let her know if I'm concerned with anything. Anytime they need to

contact me through the ClassDojo app they're free to contact me, they're free to call the school. They know I'll call them back when I have the opportunity so ... but I think the one on one meetings have been the absolute best thing in parent/teacher relationships.

Administrator 1 stated that being open is important,

Well, it goes back to just being open to listen. I told my staff when I came here nine years ago and I've spoken with parents about this numerous times. My door is open. I think, sometimes too, it can be to a disadvantage in a day because your priorities get changed real quickly because I don't always require a parent, of course, to have ... schedule an appointment. If there's something that they feel that's weighing on them enough that they need to come in to the school and make a personal visit, then I need to make time to see them. I think with an open door policy, you prove yourself over time and people know they can talk to you. People know you will listen. People know that your answer may not be what they want to hear, but you're gonna be as fair as you can be. I think a lot of times with administrators, good or bad, your reputation precedes itself. I've been very fortunate that I have great relationships here. Also, working in this particular community for as many years as I have, you develop relationships initially and then that spreads to others because there's so many families that are connected one way or the other from year to year that makes a big difference. So it's being open, it's being willing to talk to people, and it's being willing to establish a relationship. You've got to want to have a relationship in order to facilitate them, really.

Administrator 1 also talked about being visible and approachable to families,

I really, really try to put my families at ease, because I think a lot of times, the young families, the Pre-K families ... it is such a big step for them. I try to be visible with them.

If they're here for a program, or they're here for lunch, I personally make it a goal to go and speak to every family here. I make my way around the cafeteria and thank them for coming. Speak with them about their child just a quick anecdote or just something to make them feel at ease and make them feel welcome. Actually, smile a lot. I know it sounds kind of simple. But if they know that you're really happy that they're here and that you're glad that they came to be with their child. I think that's things you should do. You should just make them feel welcome.

Administrator 2 spoke about facilitating relationships through school staff,

I think this goes back to just the staff in general and hiring staff. I feel you're as good as the folks around you, and my goal is to hire good folks that are for that. Kind of filters down. So I feel like that if you've got good folks around you that helps facilitate all relationships. Staff wise, parent wise, student wise, and the community.

Factors that Inhibit Relationships

There are several factors that inhibit relationships. Teacher 2 and Administrator 1 agreed that socioeconomic status can inhibit relationships. Teacher 2 stated,

I think sometimes just with some of my parents I think it is their social situation. I think it's their economic situation. I think maybe that they are afraid that if they open up too much about something that they're going to be reported maybe instead of reaching out for help. I know we had just this one instance just last week, I had a parent that we were trying to reach out to make sure that they were going to have food and I think they were afraid to say, 'Yes. We need food.' It was already a situation where we had found out that there was a possibility there was no running water in the home. They had electricity but there was no running water. Whether they were hooked to county water, had not paid

their bill or if they had a well and the pump wasn't working ... I'm sure that several ... their situations, parents out there that feel like I'm not going to open up too much because then you'll be in my business and ... you know? I can kind of understand that because I have seen situations where you know ... it's an unfortunate for the parent and for the child and I just wish they would just reach out.

Teacher 2 also added,

I think for me, I mean, I try and we have a great guidance counselor and I feel like that I can go to her if I have, if I've tried and I feel like I can't get through to a parent. I can go to her and say I feel like there might be this need here and I just can't get the parents to answer me or follow up. Is this something that you can look into? And she's very good about that. I think like I said, barriers on that end kind of go back to that socio-economic kind of thing and parents just, I think they just put their guard up and some of them, you have a few that will not let you in.

Administrator 1 added to social and economic factors inhibiting relationships, "I think, well, several things that can inhibit that with new families coming in. First off, they don't know what to expect. There can be a difference in socioeconomic differences, which inhibit some folks."

Administrator 1 also commented on trying to overcome preconceived ideas prior experiences with school,

Or if they've had a bad situation themselves in school, that's what they remember. It's our part to make them feel welcome and to be open and listen. Explain to them, this is what's going on, these are our expectations. We're excited to have your child here and we want a relationship with you. We really would love to have you be on board with us with this.

But I think, just the fear of the unknown. I think, sometimes, with Pre-K parents because

they don't know what to expect. Like I said, earlier, I think a lot of times they do feel like, that's my baby and this is my first time of being away from my child. They're four years old and it's a big step in a family as the children start off to school. So I think, sometimes, it can be just the fear of the unknown and maybe just not having the best feeling about school from something they've personally experienced.

Teacher 1 spoke about communication and transportation issues of some parents,

We've had some transportation problems this year with parents, like who are supposed to come to a meeting, the before school meetings that we have individually. Then they didn't have their car. Then there was another family with transportation problems with a car outside for one of the field trips they were supposed to come on. So just things like that. Then we've had some issues with the phone, parents with phone problems. They'll send us a note, "I won't have my phone until Friday, so I won't see Dojo until Friday." Things like that inhibit relationships, when they're cut off because of communication or transportation.

Administrator 2 looked at factors that inhibit relationships differently. He looks to his faculty and staff to work through those problems,

I guess in general. Yeah, things that come up every day that could inhibit relationships. And I think that goes back to the people that you have in your building or specifically in your Pre-K program. Is that person the kind of person that's willing to work through those so that you don't have problems with relationships. So again, it goes back to, I guess, just the climate and atmosphere that you set from the start.

Summary of Data Analysis

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of school community relationships from the viewpoint of preschool parents, preschool teachers, and elementary administrators. The results in Chapter 4 represent the comments provided by 14 participants during one-to-one, face-to-face interviews. This purposive study selected participants based on predetermined characteristics (Shenton, 2004). Ten parents were selected based on the level of parent involvement throughout the school year. Participants were initially contacted by the building administrator and signed informed consent forms based on IRB approval methods.

Coding and transcribing interview data suggested the following themes: the family aspect at school, positive perception of principals, positive perception of teachers, open lines of communication between home and school, opportunities for parent involvement, the expectation of parent involvement, support school community relationships, and provide a positive school climate, encourage open lines of communication, and provide activities for parent involvement. Facilitation of relationships revealed good communication, appreciation for involvement opportunities, beginning of school one to one meetings, being open to parents, and staff experience. Inhibition of relationships revealed socioeconomic barriers, communication and transportation issues, and staff experience.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of preschool parents, preschool teachers, and administration regarding school community relationships within a school district in the Southern United States. Participants consisted of 10 parents of children who are currently enrolled in elementary school, two preschool teachers, and two elementary administrators. This qualitative study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature and research related to the research questions being investigated. Chapter 3 presents the methodology, the data collection procedure, and the rationale for using this design. A detailed description of the results, analyses, and findings that emerged from the study are discussed in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the study, interpretation of the findings, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion of the study.

Data collected from parents, teachers, and administrators enabled an inclusive look at the perceptions of school community relationships and the effect of these relationships on parent involvement, school climate, and communication. Parents, teachers, and administrators provided their viewpoints on stakeholder perceptions of relationships, parent involvement opportunities, and communication. This study was guided by five research questions. The data from interviews were coded, transcribed, and examined many times for emergent themes. Field notes were gathered throughout the data collection and analysis.

Information presented from this study may inform educators, administrators, and central office staff of the importance of school community relationships within the first year of school and the implications of that relationship throughout the child's educational career.

Considerations from this research could help ensure there are open lines of communication with stakeholders as well as provide a variety of opportunities to support parent involvement.

Study Findings

Five research questions guided this process throughout the qualitative study. These questions investigated the perceptions of school community relationships in the elementary school setting focusing on preschool.

Research Question 1

What are the preschool parents' perceptions about the relationships in the school community?

A total of 10 parents were interviewed in this study. In Chapter 3, parents who participated as respondents were further divided into two groups. The first group was composed of parents who were able to attend five or more school activities in the past year; the second group was composed of parents who were able to attend less than five school activities in the past year. It was also noted that parents who were able to attend more community engagement programs were able to share more detailed responses to interview questions. The parents' experiences were positive stating they liked how the teacher consistently communicates, the constant flow of monthly parental involvement activities, and spotlighting the importance of parent engagement. Parent engagement is the approach that is likely to generate more trust due to the level of activities that the parent undertakes (Strier & Katz, 2016). Kutulmus (2016) found that parental involvement in a preschool-aged child was "crucial" to success when analyzing dimensions of parental involvement in early childhood education (p. 1149). Kutulmus (2016)

encouraged parents to be a part of their children's preschool activities as well as their educational processes at the early childhood education level in order to increase student academic achievement. One way to have parents more directly involved in their children's education is to make them feel wanted and needed.

The family aspect at school was a recurring theme throughout the parent interviews. Most of the parents responses suggested that getting along with the students was an important key to success. Community involvement increases "social capital" such as friends, peers, and contacts whom one can access opportunities to further one's success (Min et al., 2017). Parents appreciated teachers creating a family atmosphere within their classrooms. Children refer to their classrooms as their school family and establish family-type relationships with their teacher and peers. Their experiences suggest that the school where they have decided to enroll their children has managed to create an environment that promotes the formation of positive relationships between school and community. Parents often inquire about the strength of a school system before moving into a community (Mississippi Department of Education, 2004).

The importance of maintaining healthy relationships between parents and teachers was a recurring theme of parent interviews. Most parents agreed that keeping in touch with their child's teacher was helpful. Cankar et al.'s (2012) study found that children in lower grades benefitted from more school-to-parent communication and teachers make concerted effort to contact parents. Parents appreciated when teachers made the effort to reach out to them. Parents also appreciated when teachers made them feel comfortable during school activities and programs. One way for teachers to have more parents directly involved is to keep communication open and continue to invite parents to participate in school related activities. Hornby and Witte (2010) found that parents also showed an increased interest in their children's education, the climate of

the school, and teacher morale improved when parents became more involved in the school system.

The parents' perceptions of their relationships with the school administrator were positive. Most parents agreed that the school principal handled their responsibilities effectively. The school administrators appeared to be doing a good job keeping the parents involved in school activities. Administrators who had a more flexible view of parental involvement were found to have positive views of parents and perceived higher levels of participation in school activities (Hilado, Kallemeyn & Phillips, 2013). While parents and teachers spoke highly of principal relationships, there is very little research to support the perceptions of administrators impacting school community relationships.

During the interview, parents were asked to describe the relationship with the teachers and staff. Parents responded positively saying that they appreciate the fact that the teachers and staff members are doing their best to keep them updated about their child's progress in school by utilizing a variety of communication methods. As technology becomes more commonplace in classrooms, teachers are finding more ways to use technology to communicate with parents and their students (Patrikakou, 2016). The majority of parents used ClassDojo, which provided parents a means of keeping track of their child's academic progress. Cankar et al.'s (2012) study showed that children in lower grades benefitted from more school-to-parent communication. Most parents stated that they find ClassDojo an effective communication tool. Information can easily be shared between the different school community stakeholder groups using ClassDojo.

Research Question 2

What are the elementary school administrators' perceptions about the relationships in the school community?

Two school administrators were interviewed in this study. Administrative participants were asked about their expectations for the parents, students, and teachers, in terms of their participation as a stakeholder in the school community. Administrator 1 revealed that she expects everyone to do their very best to contribute to the development of the school community. In specific terms, she wanted the students to be there to participate in school activities and for the parents to help in this endeavor. Hauseman et al. (2017) posit that community involvement in the school promotes student achievement. Administrator 1 expected her teachers to be partners in helping the parents keep their children at school as well as to support the school and the educational system. Bowman et al. (2000) found the importance of providing quality relationships that will enhance daily classroom instruction. For administrator 1, a strong and stable relationship between the parents and the school system is essential because it is hard to operate without the support of parents. Mo and Singh (2008) studied the child's emotional and cognitive growth, and research showed that parental involvement was found to have a significant impact on a child's overall success. Although administrator 1 and 2 have similar responses, the focus for administrator 2 was more on the provision of the students' basic needs and making sure that everyone was happy whenever they are in school.

According to administrator 1, maintaining a stable form of communication between the school administrators, teachers, and parents is crucial. Both administrators agree that ClassDojo is an effective communication tool and makes a difference in how the parents, teachers, and students operate, and build meaningful more stable relationships with each other. Research shows a different view on communication. Barrows et al. (2017) found that parents whose children attended public schools reported the largest amount of dissatisfaction with the communication level from their children's schools. Barnyak and McNelly (2009) reported that

teachers primarily used progress reports and telephone conferences as their primary means of communicating with parents, and rarely did teachers send out positive information such as newsletters. Gonzales & Gabel's (2017) research found the recurring theme of teachers not being adequately prepared to interact with parents.

According to administrators and teachers, encouraging the parents to volunteer and participate in the schools' programs were an effective way to keep all stakeholders engaged. In order to maximize school and community relationships, any special event should involve the parents, teachers, and students. Grolnick et. al., (2005) found that such programs as Community Reading Day and Read Across America created lasting ties between community and classroom. In addition, maintaining an open line of communication between teachers and parents is the key to successful implementation of parent involvement. It is also important for the school to engage with the parents and other stakeholder groups using non-academic and informal means. This can be accomplished to the organization of movie nights, school lunch weeks, holiday celebrations, and other extracurricular activities. Programs such as Full-Service Community Schools, Child-Parent Center Program, and Communities in Schools have implemented non-academic means of community engagement to assist in increasing school community relationships.

Research Question 3

What are the preschool teachers' perceptions about the relationships in the school community?

Two preschool teachers were interviewed in this qualitative study. According to both teachers, communication and cooperation with the school administration enabled preschool teachers to do their jobs more efficiently. Teacher 1 suggested that she was able to do her job more effectively since the school administrator was there to back her and her co-teachers up, especially when it came to showing the parents and the students the importance of what they are

trying to accomplish. Teacher 2 shared that the principal supports the teachers and helps foster their relationships with parents and students. The preschool teachers also believed that the school administrator plays an important role in the development of an environment where different school community stakeholder groups can communicate and foster relationships. Barr, J., & Saltmarsh, S. (2014) found that parents who have a consistent relationship with the school community perceive the principal as welcoming. Khalifa's (2012) findings show there is now a focus on increased transparency of school leaders.

The quality of the communication between parents and teachers in the community were positive from the perspective of the preschool teachers. The preschool teachers also praised the schools use of ClassDojo. Teachers like the ease of using an instant messaging system in which to communicate; parents who are able enjoy the reminders as well, saying that it is "positive and useful" (Can, 2016, p. 1). Patrikakou (2016) discussed text messaging and robo-call systems which can keep the parent informed of activities at school. ClassDojo allowed the members of the community to communicate information in real time and helped formulate possible solutions to issues faster.

It was described earlier how the teachers consider parental participation important in the students' learning and development process. Without participation from the parents, the learning and development process of some students is hindered. Socioeconomic barriers can also inhibit the formulation of relationships between the school communities' various stakeholder groups. Schools with a low socioeconomic status found that there was a significantly lower amount of community involvement than in districts in higher socioeconomic areas. PTA membership was markedly lower in schools located in a lower socioeconomic area. Studies show that parental

involvement was also higher in a school located in a higher socio-economic area (Jeter-Twilley et al., 2007, p. 3).

Having an open mindset is another key to success when building relationships. Teacher 2 considered students similar to a blank slate ready to be filled with learning. On the other hand, Teacher 1 simply expects her students to do their best. Both teachers expressed a need for fostering a family-type environment where students are comfortable and accepted. Research did not support the findings of this study that creating a family-type atmosphere was beneficial to school community relationships or teacher expectations of preschool students.

Research Question 4

What are the factors that facilitate the formation of school community relationships?

The 10 parent participants in this study were involved to some degree in school community activities at their child's school. Even though some parents were more involved than others, all participants made an effort to attend school community activities throughout the school year. Furthermore, providing a variety of opportunities for parent involvement can help facilitate school community relationships. Both teachers and administrators agreed that their schools provide many different activities to involve parents. Most parents spoke about such events as book fair and Thanksgiving lunch. Both teachers agreed that Thanksgiving and school lunch week were popular with parents. They felt that this was due to the friendly environment. This study consisted of a homogeneous sample of participants, which were composed mostly of Caucasian parents. Research has shown that white, middle-class parents tend to be more disproportionately involved in the education of their children compared to parents from other socioeconomic and cultural groups (Hughes, Devine, & Wang, 2017).

Participant responses were consistent in terms of their perceptions about relationships in a school community. All teachers and administrators indicated that each have done a good job in developing an environment that is conducive to the formation of strong bonds and relationships between the different stakeholder groups of the community. Parents indicated they appreciated the family-type atmosphere in their child's classroom. Participants indicated that the family environment at school supported their personal connections to family values.

Findings also showed that parental involvement plays a role in the academic outcomes of preschool students. When "parents are active and consistent participants in their child's education, where scholastic success will follow" (Child-Parent Centers, 2016).

Research Question 5

What are the factors that inhibit the formation of school community relationships?

Both teachers and one administrator agreed that socioeconomics can inhibit school community relationships. Community involvement in schools are paramount to success of students, especially in low socioeconomic areas (Jeter-Twilley et al., 2007) Parents are sometimes afraid to communicate with the school for fear of being reported to such agencies as the Department of Social Services. One teacher noted that some parents avoid communication with the school because they feel the school is interfering with their personal matters. A teacher stated that one reason for this lack of parent communication is past experiences. Parents associate their negative past experiences with the current school relationship and avoid communicating or being involved in the school community.

Another barrier was communication and transportation. One teacher said that while most parents embrace the consistent communication methods, there are several who avoid making contact with the school. If parents feel that communication is a barrier to their involvement in the

school, they may be less willing to participate in their child's educational journey (Baker et al., 2016). A teacher also commented that parent refusal to communicate with the school may also be associated with past experiences and socioeconomic status. In such cases, it can be a matter of making parents realize that it may actually be different this time that they would not have to go through another set of bad experiences under the current school leadership. The lack of transportation is also noted by a teacher as a barrier. When parents are unable to attend school activities, parent teacher meetings, and field trips, this can impact the school community relationship.

From the parent perspective, one of the biggest barriers to change can be the anxiety associated with letting your child attend school for the first time. If the parents trust the school and administration to make the best decisions for their child, then that usually becomes a good starting point for the development of trust. Trust can play an important role in the process of building relationships. Parental engagement is the approach that is likely to generate more trust due to the level of activities a parent undertakes (Strier & Katz, 2016). In the case of parents, trust would most likely revolve around the idea of making them feel welcome and needed and making the impression that the teachers, administrators, and school staff are glad that their child is enrolled in the school.

Recommendations for Practice

Data gathered from the review of literature, interviews, and field notes show that school community relationships play an integral role in the elementary school setting and have the potential to improve relationships between stakeholders. The following are recommendations for central office staff and policymakers:

- Communication is an essential part of school community relationships. Administrators and teachers should continue using ClassDojo as a method of communication. Teachers should also provide daily and weekly updates of school activities to encourage more parent involvement.
- A positive school climate welcomes parents into the school. It is important for administrators and teachers to provide a positive school climate and involvement opportunities for stakeholders. The school staff are encouraged to continue welcoming and inviting parents into school as well as providing a variety of opportunities for parents.
- There can be challenges associated with building school community relationships. It is suggested that central office staff and school administrators provide professional development opportunities to build positive relationships with community stakeholders.

Recommendations for Future Research

A positive relationship between school and community relationships is a necessity for student success. The following are recommendations for future researchers who want to implement a study with a similar topic:

- Expand the study to include a diverse socioeconomic status. This study was limited to participants in the Southern United States. Data may not represent the perceptions of all teachers, parents, and administrators. In addition, the results may not be generalized to other preschool classrooms.
- Consider focusing on a fixed or a narrower set of themes or variables. It will be easier to identify and describe relationships between variables, if any.
- Consider using a quantitative research approach for future research.

Concluding Summary

The purpose of this research was to provide information about the participants' perceptions of school community relationships. This qualitative study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 has presented the introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature and research related to the questions being investigated. In Chapter 3, the methodology, the data collection procedure, and the rationale for using this design are described. A detailed description of the results, analyses, and findings that emerged from the study are discussed in Chapter 4. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the study, interpretation of the findings, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion of the study.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

Administrator Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your experiences as an administrator?
2. Tell me, as an administrator, what are your (student/parent/teacher) expectations?
3. Tell me about your perceptions of (student/parent/teacher) relationships in your school.
4. Explain to me, from your perspective, parent-community relationships, focusing on preschool.
5. Tell me about (teacher/parent) communication in your school.
6. Tell me about school related activities in your school, focusing on Preschool.
7. Describe to me (parent/teacher) participation in school related activities.
8. Tell me about things that help you facilitate relationships.
9. Tell me about things that inhibit relationships.
10. In talking about relationships, are there things that you do or don't do? Do you see any barriers?
11. Are there other thoughts you would like to share?

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your experiences as a teacher?
2. Tell me, as a teacher, what are your (student/parent/principal) expectations?
3. Tell me about your perceptions of (student/parent/principal) relationships in your school.
4. Explain to me, from your perspective, parent-community relationships, focusing on preschool.
5. Tell me about (teacher/parent/administrative) communication in your school.

6. Tell me about school related activities in your classroom.
7. Describe to me (parent/teacher) participation in school related activities.
8. Tell me about things that help you facilitate relationships.
9. Tell me about things that inhibit relationships.
10. In talking about relationships, are there things that you do or don't do? Do you see any barriers?
11. Are there other thoughts you would like to share?

Parent Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your experiences at your child's school (focusing on Preschool).
2. Tell me about your perceptions of (student/teacher/principal) relationships in your school.
3. Tell me about the relationship you have with teachers/staff.
4. Tell me about your child's experiences in Preschool.
5. Tell me about school related activities in your school, focusing on Preschool.
6. What are things you do as it relates to parent involvement?
7. Tell me about things that help you build relationships at your child's school.
8. Tell me about things that inhibit relationships at your child's school.
9. Was there something that someone could have done to make this better?
10. Are there other thoughts you would like to share?
11. What you would you change, if any, to make school activities better?

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