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To the University Council:

The Dissertation Committee for Tishsha Hopson certifies that this is the final approved version of the following electronic dissertation: "Parental Involvement: A Qualitative Case Study of Parent Involvement In Two Rural Mid-South Middle Schools."

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF PARENT  
INVOLVEMENT IN TWO RURAL MID-SOUTH MIDDLE SCHOOLS

by

Tishsha Hopson

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Major: Leadership and Policy Studies

The University of Memphis

December 2010

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to a very special group of people in my life that gave me that extra inspiration, support, encouragement, spiritual guidance, and essential feedback needed to keep the faith and be steadfast as I progressed in this journey: My husband, parents, sisters, family, and friends.

To my husband, Pastor Dale Hopson, who has not only been an honorable husband, but a friend and mentor. He has demonstrated patience, understanding, and provided spiritual guidance that kept me grounded and focused when times became challenging during this process. Additionally, he kept the faith and provided assurance that this stage of great accomplishment would finally reach its culmination.

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Finally, to my family and close friends who provided encouragement, prayed for me, and stood beside me throughout this process.

I express gratitude and humility to you all for believing in me.

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a better understanding of what parental involvement means to parents and what influences them to become involved in a school. Joyce Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement Typology provided a guiding framework to assess terms and categories commonly used in parent involvement research. The study was guided by two research questions: What does parental involvement mean to parents? What influences parents to engage in parent involvement? The researcher conducted interviews, focus groups, and took fieldnotes as primary sources of data to answer the two research questions. The researcher interviewed six parents that were both male and female parents of students in grades 6-8 who attended either East Hickory Heights Middle School or Rockhill Middle School. Rockhill Middle School made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and East Hickory Heights Middle School did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the 2008-2009 school year. The two selected middle schools were located in the Riverwood Schools District.

Findings from this study indicated that to increase parent involvement in middle schools, school districts and school administrators should involve parents in the decision-making process and develop collaborative practices that will allow parents and schools to communicate and collaborate more effectively together. Additionally, school districts and school administrators should revisit parent involvement programs and activities that were implemented at the elementary school level to increase parent involvement at the middle school level. Research-based parent involvement strategies will allow the Riverwood

Schools District to increase parent involvement and participation in any of the six parent involvement strategies suggested by Epstein. Additionally, implementation of research-based parent involvement practices can potentially increase academic success for students at the middle school level.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement has become a topic of concern for policy makers, educators, and researchers (Booth & Dunn 1996; Chavkin 1993; Coleman 1997; Epstein 1992, 1995, 2001; Henderson 2002; Smrekar 2001; Weiss 1998) for more than 20 years. The premise that strong school-family partnerships improve children's educational outcomes has become self-evident among many school districts, policy makers, educators, and researchers. Research studies abound documenting the association between parents' involvement in their child's school and positive benefits accruing for students, parents, and schools. These studies contend that parent involvement impacts student achievement, but this body of literature does not explore the meaning parents attribute to parent involvement. These studies investigate parents as volunteers, homework helpers, and participants in school activities, but this body of literature does not examine what kinds of involvement parents perceive to be influential to them becoming engaged in a school. Different forms of parent involvement may produce different outcomes for teachers, students, and/or parents. Unless, we gain knowledge of parents' perceptions of how they attribute parent involvement, our picture is incomplete.

#### Background of the Study

The importance of parent involvement was accentuated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which made schools accountable for academic achievement for all students. According to Epstein (2002), "There is no topic in education on which there is greater agreement than the need for parental involvement. Everyone wants it, but most do

not know how to develop productive partnerships” (Family Literacy Center, 2006, p.1). Dialogue on how to improve the quality of education in American schools has focused on the family and the role of parents participating in their children’s education. With educational reform and current research, school leaders and policy makers are finding that they can best serve the needs of children by becoming family centered. This concern was reflected in 1990 by policymakers (Patrikakou, Wessiberg, Manning, Redding, & Walberg, 2003) who created the national education goal that recognized the indisputable fact that made family involvement in children’s educational a priority area for program development. The concern is still reflected in the federal policies such as the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, (Pub L 103-227), which was signed into law March 31, 1994. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act (EAA) extends the call for increased involvement in schools to families and the community (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). The National Education Goal addressing parental participating indicates that “by the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (National Education Goals Panel, 1998, p. vi).

Educators and other stakeholders of schools have had an interest in whether parental involvement affects the learning of students. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) helps to ensure that all children receive a high quality education and holds schools responsible for making sure all students are learning. Therefore, it is important for educators, school leaders, and school stakeholders to incorporate policies, plans, and programs within the school that will allow parents to become involved in schools and

become apart of the decision-making process which will enable them to develop school-family partnerships. Partnerships developed among the schools and parents will serve as an open door for parent participation, which can become another key role for in helping schools to foster student success. School-family partnerships can be effective if educators and other school stakeholders initiate opportunities to gain feedback from parents about what parental activities influence them to become involved in a school.

### Problem Statement

The problem under investigation is ascertaining what does parental involvement means to parents and what influences them to be engaged in parental involvement in a school. This study was guided by two research questions (central questions) and two subquestions.

#### *Central Questions*

1. What does parental involvement mean to parents?
2. What influences parents to engage in parental involvement?

#### *Subquestions*

1. What meaning and interpretations do you give parent involvement?
2. What parent activities influence you to engage in a school based on Epstein's

Six Types of Parental Involvement?

### Definition of Operational Terms

The following definitions were pertinent to the study and ensured precision to this study. Specific definitions were from various sources of reference.

1. *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* – Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the minimum level of academic improvement that school districts and schools must achieve each year as determined under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act (TN Department of Education, 2008).

2. *Administrator* – In this study, the school administrator is the person who is primarily responsible for overseeing all school operations at the campus level.

3. *Case study*- A case study is the “explanation of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over a time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61).

4. *Middle School* – Learning institutions that practice grouping students between 10 and 14 years of age. There are varying groupings within this particular age bracket in the country. Groups consist of fifth through ninth (5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>); seventh and eighth (7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>) and sixth through eighth (6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>) grades (USDE, 2002). For this study, the grade levels are 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>.

5. *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* – Legislation signed into law on January 8, 2002, by President George W. Bush mandating the education systems to develop effective systems and over time increasing student achievement. This act requires schools to have 100% proficiency among students in math and reading by the academic school year ending 2014.

6. *Parent*– For the purpose of this study, the researcher defined the term parent as including biological parents, legal guardians, and primary caregivers.

7. *Parental Involvement* – Joyce Epstein defines parent involvement by the six types listed below:

TYPE 1 – Parenting: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.

TYPE 2 – Communicating: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.

TYPE 3 – Volunteering: Improve recruitment, training, work and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.

TYPE 4 – Learning at home: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions.

TYPE 5 – Decision making: Include families as participants in school decision, governance, and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, and other parent organizations.

TYPE 6 – Collaborating with the community: Coordinate resources and services for families, students, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community (Epstein, 1992).

8. *School-Family Partnerships* – School-family partnerships refers to the relationship between schools and families as they work together to promote the social and academic development of children. The term school-family partnerships emphasizes that two institutions share major responsibilities for children’s education (Epstein, 1992). According to Epstein (1992), the term school-family partnership is broader than the term parental involvement because it expresses “shared interests, responsibilities, investments, and overlapping influences” (p. 1139).

9. *Student Achievement*– For the purpose of this paper, the researcher defined student achievement as student gain in academic areas as measured by school year-end standardized tests.

10. *Title I*- A federally funded entitlement program designated to assist low-income children who are failing academically behind in school. This program is based on at least 40 percent of students in a school receiving free or reduced lunches (USDE, 2008).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of what meaning parents attribute to parental involvement and what influences them to become involved in a school. In addition to gaining a better understanding of what parents attribute to parental involvement, this study will also provide a guide for administrators to implement in middle schools as a foundation for relevant parental activities that parents attribute to increasing student achievement and parent involvement in middle schools.

## Theoretical Framework

This study used the theoretical framework developed by Epstein (1987). Several models of successful parent involvement programs exist that are reflective of what parent involvement programs should be involved (Epstein, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). After reviewing those designs, the model of parent involvement described by Epstein (2001) is the one selected for use in this study. This model provided the basic structural support for this study's design.

Epstein (1994) used Bronfenbrenner's theory of overlapping contexts and created her own theoretical model where "overlapping spheres of influence" include family, school, community, and peer group with the student as the center of the overlapping spheres. This model is similar to Bronfenbrenner's in that Epstein sees child development occurring in different, overlapping contexts. Epstein's model supports that "overlapping sphere of influence" between the school and home requires that schools and families work together for the success of the students. Epstein comes to a related conclusion as Bronfenbrenner's, that communication between the different contexts could help students. She sees the parent-school partnership as one that helps students "increase their academic skills, self-esteem, positive attitudes towards learning, independence, other achievements, accomplishments and other desired behaviors that are characteristics of successful students" (Epstein, 1994). Epstein contends that the family and the school "share" the children. All the years the children attend school they attend home (Epstein, 1994).

Epstein (1994) described the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and its components. Epstein stated:

The sphere of influence on children's learning and development include family and school, or in full form, the family, school, community, and peer groups. The spheres can be pushed together to overlap to create an area for partnership activities, or pushed apart to separate the family and school based on influences that operate in each environment. (p. 40)

The nature of the school family partnership is represented by the fluctuating amount of overlap between the spheres. Before discussing these further, the researcher will convey the reason for selecting this framework for this study.

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence does not view the sphere of influence as separate or sequenced, because families and schools share their children. Additionally, the theory posits that children's success is the primary focus for the home and school partnerships. The Theory of Overlapping of Sphere of Influence emphasized the continuous, dynamic patterns that may exist between the home and school.

Within the overlapping spheres of influence perspective, there is both mutual responsibility and mutual benefit for schools and families. Mutual responsibility is exemplified in Epstein's (1990) belief that successful overlap in school-family partnerships helps students know that their teachers and parents are working together to help them set and reach important goals. The partnership also is mutually beneficial to parents and teachers. Epstein (1995) notes that while students are the primary focus of partnerships, there also are various outcomes for parents and teachers, such as more positive relationships between teachers and parents.

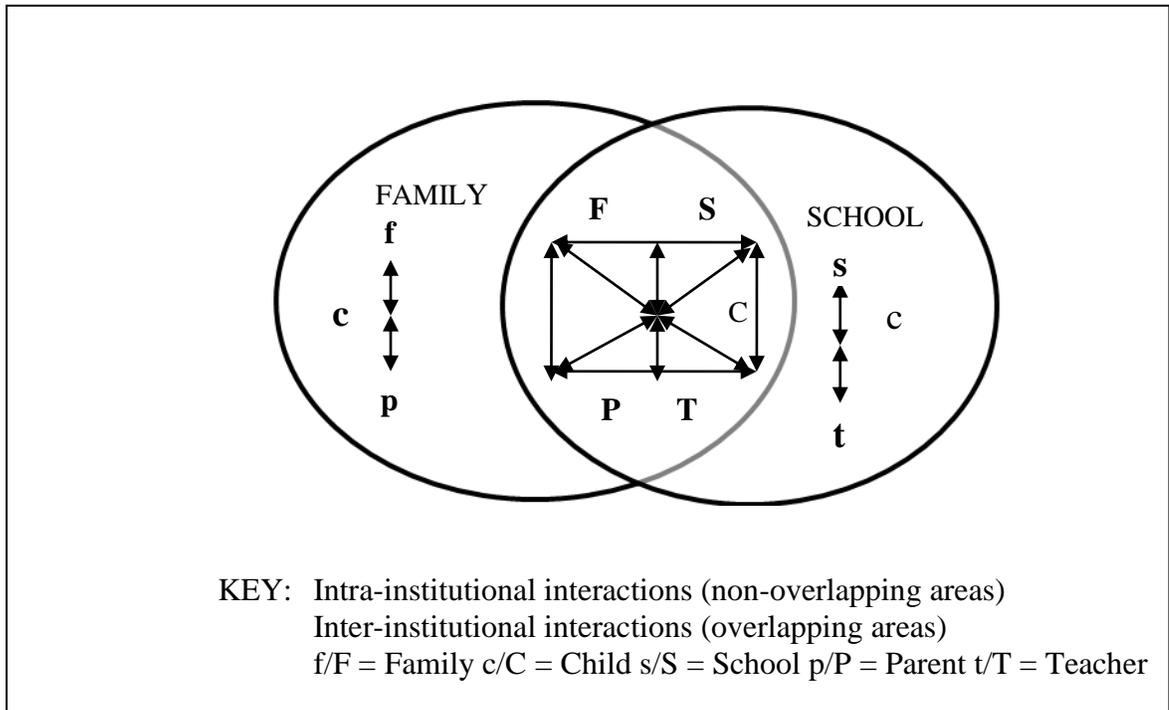
According to Epstein (1987), overlapping spheres of influence “accounts for the *continuity* of school and family actions and interactions across the school years, and the *changes* in forms and purposes of parental involvement at different student ages and stages of development” (p. 126). This view contrasts with the other three perspectives (separated, sequenced, or embedded), because it emphasizes that schools and families work collaboratively to educate children, and it provides an alternative to other theoretical approaches (Epstein, 1990).

Overlapping spheres of influence focuses on complex interrelationships of schools and families. Epstein (1987) summarizes the following three assumptions of the overlapping spheres of influence theoretical perspective:

1. Both family and schools influence children’s learning and development. Schools and families conduct some practices separately; others are conducted jointly.
2. Interpersonal relationships and interactions occur at both institutional and individual levels. These interactions, or amount of ‘overlap,’ are dynamic, not static.
3. The child is at the center of the overlapping spheres as the primary reason for school and family partnerships.

The Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence is a theoretical model whose components can be visualized as spheres arranged in a Venn diagram representing family, school, and community. The theory is built on two components—external and internal. Epstein’s theory explains external parent participation as overlapping or non-overlapping spheres representing the family, school, and community involvement. The internal structure shows the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships and influences

patterns of primary importance. See Figure 1 for a representative diagram of the internal components.



*Figure 1* Overlapping Spheres of Influence Theoretical Model  
 Source: Epstein et al. (1997), p. 73.

*External Components*

The external structure of overlapping and nonoverlapping spheres can be represented as the school and family environments. Several forces affect such an overlapping relationship between the home and school. The philosophy and experiences of a school and a family are forces that affect the continual adjustment in the overlap or separation of spheres (Epstein, 1987). Overlap between the spheres is created when families increase their involvement and involvement in their children's education. Equal overlap between

the spheres occurs when schools make parental involvement a regular and consistent practice. Total overlap between the spheres will never occur, because some practices schools and families conduct independently. According to Epstein (1987), “The ‘maximum’ overlap occurs when schools and families operate as true partners with frequent cooperative efforts and clear, close communication between parents and teachers in a comprehensive program of many important types of parent involvement” (p. 128). Therefore, the extent of school-family partnerships can be influenced based upon the actions of both the school and family.

Time is another force that affects the amount of overlap or separation between the school and home (Epstein, 1987). Individual time and historic time are referred to as the force of time and are examples of the continual adjustment between the spheres. Individual time refers to the age and grade level of the child. Historic time refers to the social conditions of the period during which the child is in school. Connors and Epstein (1995) studied the historical relationship between parents and teachers in American schools. They depict the evolution of tight family and community control of children’s schooling in colonial days, to great separation of the roles of families and schools through the 1930s to the 1950s, to the budding emergence of productive partnerships in the 1980s and 1990s.

Trends in recent history have referenced as affecting school-family partnerships Epstein (1987). Historically, parents were not as educated as teachers. In today’s society, parents are becoming more educated at levels equal to or higher than teachers. As a result, those educated parents are now playing a more active role in the children’s

education. Various resources such as child-care books, on-line parenting websites, and parenting literature increase the number of parents who become knowledgeable about and involved in their children's education. According to Epstein, historical and individual effects of time on parent-school relationships were omitted from previous theories. Changes in ages, grades of students, and the larger historical, social contexts in which children's education occurs are recognized in the overlapping spheres of influence.

### *Internal Components*

Interpersonal relationships and patterns of influence within each organization and between organizations are represented in the internal structure of overlapping spheres. Institutional and individual interactions are two levels that occur in the internal structure. General or common practices that involve all families refer to institutional interaction between families and schools. Open-house, family nights, career day, parent-teacher organizations, or inviting all families to a school event are examples of institutional interaction. A particular child involved with parents and teachers refers to individual institutions. Parent-teacher conferences, personal correspondence between a teacher and a parent, or a scheduled meeting with a parent and student are examples of individual institutions. Both institutional and individual interactions focus on the child being at the center. Therefore, the innumerable interactions and influences on school-family partnerships are important elements in the internal structure as well as the external structure.

As the researcher explored theoretical models specially addressing community involvement with schools, there were not any models available. In a review by Jordan,

Orozco, and Averett (2002), they state that no theoretical model for community connections involving schools could be found. Furthermore, they state that some models that were available had been developed to mainly focus on parent involvement or that integrated family and community connections with schools. Epstein's model is the only model available that has undergone in- depth research by the research community (Jordan et al., 2002).

### Significance of Research

Partnerships between parents and the school have to evolve and change as students prepare for diverse emotional, social, and physical changes associated with middle school years. Although the middle school years are often characterized as a transition period, several middle grade practitioners regard the middle school years as more than a simple transition from elementary school to high school. During the middle school years, parents may often seek the school for assistance in personal and educational choices as well as understanding adolescent behavior. Parents of middle school students may express concerns about finding a balance between autonomy for the student and independence. During this period of transition, many middle school students express a desire to be more independent with a belief that they desire their parents to be involved in their education and any activities they participate in at the middle school level. The nature of parent involvement then may need to change in middle school years (Epstein, 1995).

Research on effective partnerships in the middle school reinforce the fact that families are important for student learning, development, and school success for all grade

levels. Therefore, the Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence (Epstein, 2001) emphasizes the dynamic, complex nature of school-family partnerships. This study, informed by this theoretical perspective, contributes to our understanding of school-family partnerships by examining not only what kinds of parental involvement are present, but also why participants become involved and how they feel about their involvement. In addition, to the theoretical perspective, efforts to improve school-family partnerships may be enhanced by new ways of thinking about the simultaneous influences of school and families on children's education and development. This study may contribute to the methods employed to study school-family partnerships by using naturalistic methods rather than survey methods. In addition, both schools and families have important roles to play in educating children. For this reason, it is helpful to examine how parents view school-family partnerships.

The research obtained from this study on how parents view school-family partnerships can be beneficial to not only a school district, but also administrators and teachers as they prepare for more effective parent involvement in their schools. While schools are preparing for more effective parental involvement, this study could help administrators develop programs to expand parent involvement and assist them in setting up training to prepare parents for tasks and activities in which they desire to participate. This study could also help administrators to provide in-service professional development on getting parents involved in ways that will be mutually beneficial to parents and educators. Teachers could examine ways others schools have utilized parent assistance and ways that parents desire to assist, which in turn could help teachers have more

assistance to reach students individually. Lastly looking at the aspect of beginning with the end in mind, this study could benefit students by increasing parental involvement in schools to have more adult role models to assist them with learning, career information, and questions they may have in a middle school setting.

### Limitations and Delimitations

#### *Limitations*

There are a number of limitations to this study. The diverse nature of school-family partnerships means that one cannot assume that the context of participants in the study is representative of all middle level schools. There are differences between the two middle schools of East Hickory Heights Middle, Rockhill Middle, and other middle schools. Furthermore, how parents define the meaning of parental involvement and engagement at the selected schools may not be typical of all of middle schools. In addition, the parents in this study are not reflective of the population of parents in other middle schools or their community.

As with any self report data collection method, the research must rely on the ability of the research participants to be forthright and accurate in their descriptions (deMarrais, 1998). Participants may respond in a manner in which they believe will demonstrate a more positive reflection of their experiences with a particular teacher, administrator, classroom experience, or extracurricular activity. Participants may also respond biased based on their experiences or in a manner in which they believe is expected by the researcher. Although participant briefings will convey the necessity of being as truthful and precise as possible, there remains a possibility that not all participants will

comply. Unfortunately, this is an impediment associated with conducting qualitative research (deMarrais, 1998). The researcher personally felt, however, that this type of bias would exist whenever respondents were asked to give their personal opinions. Selecting respondents from the two middle schools ultimately helped the researcher distinguish reactions that were specific to the schools from comments about the meaningful aspects of parental involvement.

### *Delimitations*

There are number of delimitation in this study. The researcher purposely chose to study middle schools that had high parental involvement as measured by the Riverwood Schools District's Parent Climate Survey. Additionally, the researcher wanted to explore parental involvement between a middle school that was not Title I and a middle school that was Title I. The researcher was not able to capture all of the parents' perspectives about school-family partnerships. The researcher sought participants for the study by giving parents an opportunity to respond by agreement to participate in this study by selecting the first three parents that returned their interest letter by April 20, 2010. In addition, this study was delimited by Epstein's (2005) Six Types of Parent Involvement in regards to parental activities that engage parental involvement in these areas. Focusing the study on parents whose child or children attended only the two middle schools presented delimitations.

### Research Design

The selection of a case study design was determined by the research questions posed in this study. Yin (1984) suggests that questions that seek to determine "how and

why” could best be investigated utilizing a case study method. The purpose of this study was to develop a better understanding of what meaning do parents attribute to parental involvement and what influences them to become involved in a school.

Qualitative case studies are prevalent throughout the field of education, and case studies of students, programs, schools, innovations, teachers, and policies are common (Merriam, 1998). Yin (1994) defines case study as a research process, while Stake (1995) defines case study by focusing on the case, and Wolcott (1992) defines the case study as “an end-product of field-oriented research” (p. 36). Further, Merriam (1998) conceives the case as what can be “fenced in” to study (p. 27). Thus, the case becomes a bounded system or entity such as a student, a teacher, a principal, or a school. The participants for this study were represented from two different middle schools. For purposes of this study, it was designed as a multi-site case study.

Since the data collection was triangulated through interviews, fieldnotes, and focus groups to gain valid and generalizable results, data analysis was coincided with that to be reported as a narrative, this report is qualitative. The report of the results was descriptive and looked for patterns or themes.

### Chapter Summary

Parental involvement in the schools is essential to school-family partnership. According to various bodies of literature and current research, there is a substantial need for parental involvement in education in order for students to achieve. Although the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) helps to ensure that all children receive a high quality education and holds schools responsible for making sure all students are learning,

parents are still encouraged by educators and other school stakeholders to take a vital part in becoming involved in schools to help students succeed academically. In order to gain a better understanding of what parents attribute to the meaning of parental involvement and what influences them to engage in parental involvement in a school, the researcher sought to use Epstein's (1987) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence to provide the basic structural support for this study's design. Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement was used as a guide to gain a better understanding of parental involvement from selected parents of the Riverwood Schools District.

### Organization of the Study

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. In Chapter 1, the researcher discussed the background of parental involvement and how it is important to develop a better understanding of what meaning parents attribute to parent involvement and what influences them to engage in parental involvement in a school. The researcher presented the problem statement, research questions, definitions of operational terms, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, significance of research, and limitation and delimitations followed by the research design.

Chapter 2 will review the literature that pertains to this study including a historical perspective and current research on parental involvement, parent involvement in schools, types of parent involvement, theoretical framework, and paradigmatic assumptions. Chapter 3 will describe the outline of methodology used to conduct the study including data collection procedures, data management and analysis. Chapter 4 will be a report of the research findings. Chapter 5 will discuss findings of the study and their implications.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Current literature and research supports the idea that students benefit in many ways from the combined efforts of homes and schools. In fact, a high degree of consistency exists with regard to several key points. First, family contributions to student achievement are critical throughout the education process. Additionally, efforts to improve student achievement are generally more effective when parents are involved. Second, parental involvement in school tends to encourage student success and longevity. Third, families, schools, and community organizations all contribute to student achievement and can have significant impact when working together. The literature review is an examination of parental involvement.

#### Historical Perspective of Parent Involvement

Research on the topic of parent and family involvement began to emerge as a recognizable field in the 1960s. This initial body of research on parent involvement focused primarily on relationships between characteristics of the family and school achievement. This research identified correlations between socioeconomic status and student achievement, demonstrating that students from more affluent families tended to attain better grades and higher levels of education than students from poorer families (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Hauser, 1971). To explain this achievement gap, early researchers developed a “culture of poverty” theory, also better known as the deficit model. Many of these deficit models view poor families in communities as being

deficient with few opportunities improve their lives and having a lack of cultural resources compared to those of middle and upper class groups. The “culture of poverty” theory contends that poor families remain in poverty because of their adaptations to the burdens of poverty. As a result of these burdens, children in poor families are at a disadvantage of achieving at the same level as children in middle and upper class, because of limited resources and lack of parent knowledge.

In the 1970s and 1980s, research on parent involvement grounded in Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital and social reproduction began to challenge earlier deficit models. Bourdieu’s theoretical model emphasized “class conflict and cultural difference.” Earlier researchers associated the education achievement gaps with class conflict and cultural difference (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Bourdieu (1977), schools represent and reproduce middle and upper class interests, class values, and worldviews. Feuerstein (2000) contends that reproducing class values, experiences, and worldviews of middle and upper class make it difficult for teachers to communicate effectively or value parents and students who come from cultural backgrounds lacking cultural capital resources required to fully engage and participate in schools. Bourdieu’s theory shifts the problem of deficiencies of low-income and minority students and their families to the classist and often racist assumptions of schools.

In recent years, theoretical shifts have taken place to increase the awareness of school-family partnerships. Researchers of parent involvement increasingly have expanded the idea of parent involvement to include recognition of family involvement to include that many students live with caretakers who are not their biological parents. As

researchers and practitioners recognized the importance of reaching all kinds of families, parent involvement research has shifted from focusing on eager parents to hard to reach families. Traditionally, parent involvement research and the implementation of parent involvement in the schools were established by teachers and school administrators. Currently, parent involvement and implementation of parent involvement often have a greater focus on family priorities and activities that used to occur at the school have relocated to the home or to a setting in the a neighborhood (Davies, 1991). Current theoretical assumptions from researchers have recognized that school policies should be created to fit parents instead of the traditional way of changing parents to fit the schools. As a result of this recognition, the view of treating and acknowledging parents as partners in schools have increased and the view of them as the consumers of an education provided by teachers and administrators has declined (Davies, 1991).

#### Current Research on Parent Involvement

A significant amount of past and current research contends that parental involvement affects the academic success of students. Epstein (1987) and Henderson (1988) report that schools that favor parental involvement outperform schools with little parental involvement (in Peña, 2000). Even non-educational theorists such as Bronfenbrenner feel parental involvement in the educational process for children positively affect their performance and behavior. Bronfenbrenner (1974, 1979) argues that parent participation was critical to good education.

Under the provisions of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act: No Child Left Behind* (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001), direct parental

involvement and schools are required to emphasize the acquisition of parental participation in both the school and classroom. Issues such as these emphasize that school-home collaboration is essential in order to have an educated populace.

Federal mandates under NCLB require that schools raise the achievement of all students and close existing achievement gaps between specified subgroups of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Additionally, the act requires annual testing to measure progress and holds the schools accountable for results by granting parents the right to request that their children be moved to another, more-effective school and by administering of federal sanctions of increasing severity against failing schools. As a result, increased parent and family involvement is, and will continue to be, a pivotal factor in the accountability aspect of NCLB.

Although research has pointed to a link in parental involvement and student achievement in school, there continues to be a challenge of the “how” of parental involvement (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Gutman & Midgley, 2000; Seefeldt, 1995; Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1996 as cited in Peña, 2000). Another issue is the level of parental involvement in charter schools compared to the level of parent involvement in traditional public schools. A finding in an evaluation report by the United States Department of Education (2004) on charter schools indicated “high levels of parent involvement in multiple avenues” (p. 28). According to Nathan (1996), “parental involvement is a central tenet of the charter school movement” (p. 1). Despite of these findings by researchers, challenging areas continue to exist within the traditional and charter schools such as factors that inhibit parents from participating in school activities

and decrease the effects to promote student academic achievement. In addition to those barriers, some of the biggest hurdles to overcome are addressing curriculum changes and requirements, increasing academic rigor, setting standards for homework, generating parent support and involvement in activities, and communicating the goals of the school in a manner that can be addressed for success.

Currently, there are several changes taking place to address some of barriers that face parent involvement at all school levels. Educators, families/parents, schools, and communities are working hard to support the success of the school systems as they strive to provide a quality education for all students. Several research studies have put emphasis on the effects of the home-school relationship as well as the community relationships on the educational process (American Youth Forum, 1999). These findings emphasized the importance of how schools should be the center of the community.

#### Parental Involvement in Schools

Societal demands that schools should be held accountable for student achievement have prompted reforms on the federal, state, and local levels. The National Education Goals, adopted in 1990, specified eight goals for educational improvement in the United States. Goal eight stated that “By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (National Education Goals Panel, 1998, p. vi). According to the final report from the National Education Goals Panel however, there was no significant change in the level of parent participation in the majority of states. More recently, the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law establishes strict provisions

for states, school districts, and schools with regard to parental involvement among the parents of disadvantaged students for the purpose of increasing academic achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

A substantial amount of research has been conducted concerning the involvement of parents in their children's education. Parental involvement has been consistently correlated with student test performance, and is an important element in student academic performance. Comer and Haynes (1991) stated that meaningful parent participation is essential for effective schooling. Furthermore, families provide social, cultural, and emotional supports that children need to function well in school.

A cursory examination of national trends shows that parental involvement declines dramatically at each grade level. Coincidentally, with each year in school, more families report that they are unable to assist their children and understand the schools. Epstein (1992) suggests that schools should establish comprehensive school-family partnership programs in order to alleviate this problem. Partnership programs can provide substantial benefits for students which include: improved academic achievement (including classroom grades and standardized tests), improved attendance, homework habits, attitudes toward school, behavior, and increased completion rates for secondary and postsecondary education (Epstein, 1986; Henderson, 1987). Other studies suggest that there are also substantial benefits to parents which include: additional family services and support, enhanced parenting skills and leadership, enhanced sense of community and connection with other families, increased parental efficacy, and increased parental confidence in the child's school (Coleman, 1991; Henderson, 1987). Henderson and

Berla (1994) examined the various benefits of parental involvement and added a third category named school/community. They cite specific benefits for students as 1) higher grades and test scores, 2) better attendance and homework completion, 3) fewer placements in special education, 4) more positive attitudes and behaviors, 5) higher graduation rates, and 6) greater enrollment in postsecondary education. Henderson and Berla (1994) cite specific benefits for families as 1) more confidence in school, 2) better relationship with school officials, and 3) more confidence about helping their children learn at home and about their own as parenting skills. Henderson and Berla (1994) cite specific benefits for schools and communities as 1) improved teacher morale, 2) higher ratings of teachers by parents, 3) more support from families, 4) higher student achievement, and 5) better reputations in the community. The benefits of parent involvement cited by Henderson and Berla for students, families, schools, and communities key are similar benefits that are incorporated in Joyce Epstein's framework of six typologies.

In a study to determine how urban African-American families from a variety of family structures and socioeconomic levels promote and support their children's school success in the early years, Bright (1996) found that home-based involvement such as encouraging students and helping students with homework creates a useful link between the home and the school. In a similar study, Wanat (1997) found that parents made no distinction between parental involvement at school or at home. She further notes that parents valued any sort of activity that allowed them to be directly involved with their

children, especially if the activity was designed to meet the specific needs of their children.

### *Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level*

Early adolescence is a developmental period of physical, emotional, social, and intellectual change (Capelluti & Stokes, 1991; Clark & Clark, 1994; Epstein & Petersen, 1991; Manning, 1993; Wiles & Bondi, 1986). During this period, early adolescents begin a search for increased autonomy and independence (Coleman, 1980; Erikson, 1968; Havighurst, 1972). This does not mean, however, that adolescents no longer need adult guidance. In fact, most early adolescents still want and need adult guidance and approval (Allen, Splittgerber, & Manning, 1993; Capelutti & Stokes, 1991; Clark & Clark, 1994; Rich, 1990; Salzman, 1990; Stem, 1990). As early adolescents renegotiate relationships with their parents, parents' roles change. This means the nature of parental involvement in middle level schools also changes.

Since most of the research on parental involvement has focused on the primary and elementary level, little is known about parental involvement after elementary school (Epstein, 1985; Rutherford & Billig, 1995). Research is needed in the middle grades to address concerns about the changing nature of parental involvement during these school years. In addition, much of the research on school-family partnerships has utilized survey research methods. Survey research has limited potential for providing the depth of information necessary to understand the complexity of parental involvement. In order to understand parental involvement better, especially during the secondary years when involvement declines so drastically, researchers need to know why parents get involved

and how they feel about their involvement. Thus, conducting more qualitative research studies can help us gain a better understanding about school-family partnerships.

### *Parental Involvement Defined*

The majority of research shows that parental involvement is important; however, different studies define parent involvement in different ways. Black (1998) suggests that researchers and school officials have varying interpretations of parental involvement, which range from attending conferences and volunteering at school to reading to children at home and helping with homework. Parent involvement is important to the educational success of a young adolescent and yet generally declines when a child enters the middle grades (Epstein, 2005; Jackson & Andrews, 2004; Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2003). Joyce Epstein (1995) and the Center of Family, School, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University have established a comprehensive framework consisting of six types of parent involvement (Type 1—parenting, Type 2—communication, Type 3—volunteering, Type 4—learning at home, Type 5—decision-making, and Type 6—collaborating). Other researchers have adapted Epstein’s list in an effort to differentiate between parent involvement at home and at school. Examples of home-based involvement might include: 1) helping with reading skills and checking homework, 2) supervising children after school and monitoring how after-school time is spent, and 3) engaging children in conversations about school and what they are learning. Examples of school-based involvement might include: 1) attending school events, 2) going to parent-teacher conferences, 3) meeting with teachers, and 4) volunteering in the classroom or school.

From the perspective mentioned above as it relates to home-based activities, Ho and Williams (1996) categorize parental involvement into four distinct types, of which two are home-based and two are school based: 1) discussing school activities, 2) monitoring out-of-school activities, 3) contacts with school staff, and 4) volunteering and attending parent-teacher conferences and other school events.

Similarly, Fan and Chen (2001) examine multiple measures of parent involvement. Using the methodology of meta-analysis (analyzing multiple research studies), the researchers identified three constructs of parent involvement: (1) communication, (2) supervision, and (3) parental expectations and parenting style. Fan and Chen refer to communication as parents' frequent and systematic discussions with their children about schoolwork. Supervision includes monitoring when students return home from school and what they do after school, overseeing time spent on homework and the extent to which children watch television (Fan & Chen, 2001). Parental expectations and parenting style were found to be the most critical of the three, which include the manner and extent to which parents communicate their academic aspirations to their children (Fan and Chen, 2001). Fan and Chen found that high expectations of parents and student perceptions of those expectations were associated with enhanced achievement.

As previously stated, current research clearly demonstrates that parental involvement in schools can significantly enhance student achievement (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Though parental involvement has been measured in various ways, and though many tangential yet related variables such as, care, warmth, support, nurturance,

and responsiveness, have been described in the research literature, it was assumed for the purpose of this study that these variables reflect some aspect of positive parental involvement.

### Benefits of Parent Involvement

Feuerstein (2001) says that parent involvement encompasses a broad range of parenting behavior, ranging from discussion with children about homework to attendance at parent-teacher organization (PTO) meetings. Regardless of the type of parent involvement strategies that schools have to offer, the relationship that the student and parent have with the teachers, administrators, and other staff members in the school will generate either a positive or a negative impact on each child's education. According to several researchers, parental involvement leads to improved educational performance and fosters better classroom behavior (Epstein et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; NMSA, 2003; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002; Van Voorhis, 2003). Parental involvement creates a better understanding of roles and relationships between and among the parent-student-school triad (Epstein et al., 2002). In addition to these positive benefits of parental involvement, parents who participate in decision making experience greater feelings of ownership and are more committed to supporting the school's mission (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

It is very clear that parental involvement has positive benefits. It can definitely benefit the students in question, but it can also benefit the teachers, the school, the parents themselves, and the community, as well as other children in the family. Epstein (1995) points out that when schools and families connect, the outcome is a caring community that helps all children within it to be successful in life and in school.

### *School Climate and Culture*

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) state that there is proof in the research that students can still be successful without parent participation. Although research may indicate that students can be successful without parent participation, this does not translate to mean that parent involvement programs are not important. Parent involvement in programs at the school can help to increase positive relationships that students develop with their peers and adults. Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) noted that whether at home or at school, parents became involved if they perceive that teachers and students expect or desire their involvement and increasingly so if this perception is united with an inviting school climate. A positive school climate or relationship between teachers and students must exist before parents can perceive the environment of the school to be inviting.

Researchers contend that recent literature supports that schools have developed and maintained positive school climates as a result of parent participation (Bafumo, 2003, Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Xitao, 2001). Claudet (1999) recognizes the importance of the administrator's behavior and actions in developing positive school climate in schools. Claudet (1999) suggests in the Organizational Supervisory (O/S) Model of Instructional Supervision that campus administrators are significant variables of school inputs into the professional learning environment. The school administrator sets the tone for the climate in school and has an effect on the level of participation that occurs in the school. Increased parent involvement is likely to occur in a school if the school administrator priorities parent participation deems it a priority in the school.

A parent's perception of the school's effectiveness on their child's success can be influenced by the relationship between a teacher and student (Esposito, 1999; Thompson, 2003). This level of influence can also affect how a parent positively or negatively perceives their child's relationship with the teachers, administrators, other staff members at the school, and the climate of the school and/or district. Peterson and Skiba (2001) stated, "increased parent involvement has been shown to result in increased student success, teacher satisfaction, and improved school climate" (p. 168). Furthermore, it is essential for the school administrator to foster a climate that supports parent participation to help increase positive feelings for parents to remain engaged in the school. As a result of these continued efforts, all aspects of the school environment can obtain positive benefits, including the monetary gains for the school (Claudet, 1999).

Creating school climates that are conducive to student achievement can be developed by using effective research based strategies and by incorporating programs that include parent involvement activities suggested by parents. There are six types of parent involvement strategies that were established by Epstein (2001) that have been proven to be effective in creating school climates conducive to student achievement. Additionally, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001 created another avenue for parent participation to become a major area of focus in schools today. The focus of parent participation emphasized by the federal law mirrors the suggestions made by Epstein's six types of parent involvement strategies. The six types of parent involvement strategies established by Epstein (1995) are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Epstein emphasized that

if all of these strategies are used together in schools then the probability of student achievement will increase.

### *Fiscal Benefits of Parent Involvement*

Parent involvement in schools can be beneficial to schools which helps to increase student achievement and higher average daily attendance (Dunlap, Newton, Fox, Benito, & Vaughn, 2001; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). School administrators can gain fiscal benefits from parent involvement by promoting a warm school climate. Therefore, by promoting a warm school climate and increasing the school's morale, the average daily attendance can be increased. Additionally, addressing concerns about the home-to-school communication, communicating with families concerning parent programs, and student success is invaluable in promoting school attendance.

Collaboration results from improved attendance, behavior of students in classrooms, and ease of parent-teacher relations have caused a higher level of self-confidence in parents who assist their children in succeeding academically in school (Fleet, Conderman, & Lock, 2001). A warm school climate linked with parent collaboration can build a successful home-school partnership if parent involvement policies and school improvement plans are development and implemented in the school environment. Teachers who are capable of engaging students providing instructional rigor and authentic academic work can be helpful in sustaining students who desire to come to school. As a result of this collaborative effort, increased academic achievement for students would potentially be the final result.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found that activities such as parent workshops, home visits, counselors following-up on student absentee referrals, and the use of truant officers in family and community involvement have been proven to positively affect the rates of attendance when involving parents in the school. Researching strategies and effective parent involvement programs in urban and ethnically diverse communities could assist school administrators in gaining a better understanding of which methods of parental involvement would have the most significant impact on student attendance and academic achievement.

The lack of parent involvement has been linked to decreased dropout rates in schools (Plevyak & Heaston, 2001). Typically when a student drops out of school, there is a decrease of school revenues due to a lower average daily attendance. Additionally, various sanctions can be placed on the district if the overall dropout rate is too high. Not only does a school district face challenges as a result dropout rates, but the society faces an increase of unemployment and government welfare support for those students. The state legislature has tried to implement a variety of measures to reduce the dropout rates in schools; however, districts and schools have the authority by law to address problems and implement strategies to deal with at-risk students and potential students who may drop out of school. The support of the federal, state, and local governments is essential in providing monetary funds to allow schools to help at risk student who face the challenge of dropping out of school. As a result of adequate funding from the government, schools can have the opportunity to create and implement parent involvement policies and programs that target strategies to involve parents early in their children's educational

endeavors. These opportunities can also encourage parents to maintain age appropriate strategies for students as they transition from middle school to high school to prevent their children from dropping out of school.

### *Community Involvement*

Epstein's (2001) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence and parent involvement policies that contribute to promoting community involvement have demonstrated the ability to increase student achievement. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) contend that fiscal and academic gains can be accomplished if schools work with the community and reach out to them by obtaining resources to coordinate school-related services for families and students with businesses, agencies, and other local groups.

To develop and sustain strong organizational partnerships, Epstein and Jansorn (2004a) advocated the organization of an "Action Team for Partnership (ATP), consisting of teachers, parents, the school administrator, other educators, and community partners" (p.12). According to Epstein and Jansorn (2004a) this ATP would be responsible for "preparing annual action plans, organizing committees, publicizing activities, and reporting regularly to the school council, faculty, parent organizations and other school and community groups" (p. 12).

The federal *No Child Left Behind Act* and the school district of Riverwood promote and support the partnership of parent participation in schools. "Widespread support for parent involvement is reflected by its inclusion in nearly every policy proposal aimed at improving the performance of our nation's schools" (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001, p. 2). "Our education system does not afford children from low

income and racial-ethnic minority backgrounds the same educational opportunities, on average, as middle-income non-minority children” (Desimone, 1999, p. 2). The *Elementary and Secondary Act* (EASA) of 1965 advocated parent participation in schools and strived to close the achievement gap that existed between low socio-economic and middle class families by creating Title I funds (Schugurensky, 2002). One billion dollars of Title I funds would be allocated yearly to schools with a high percentage of low socio-economic students.

### Barriers Facing Parent Involvement

Whether dealing with home-based or school-based involvement, increasing parental participation in schools is a challenge. Educators and lawmakers need to recognize the barriers that exist which hinder or prevent active involvement of parents in the education of their children. The most common barriers included time, lack of cultural understanding by educators, not understanding the educational system, childcare difficulties, transportation, changes in the family structure, and lack of teacher training, race and class barriers, the curriculum, educational jargon, snobbery, boring meetings, the school staff and the public’s perception of the school. Beginning with the constraint of time, many families have found that it is more and more difficult to meet the obligations of managing a family and a career. These many responsibilities coupled with time restraints and economical limitations often find families having to make choices between working and attending school events (National Parent Teacher Association, 2000; New Skills for New Schools, 1997; Patrikakou et al., 2003). Another significant barrier that decreases parental involvement is culture (Kottler & Kottler, 2002; Noguera, 2003;

Singleton & Linton, 2006). Researchers have revealed that some minority parents might not understand the grading system or the requirements of the school and feel disrespected when talking to the teacher (Constantino, 2003; Kottler & Kottler, 2002). This causes parents to become less involved and to feel that school personnel have not made an effort to understand their culture. Often, non-English speaking parents are frightened or unsure of the school surroundings and unclear on how to find out information about the school (Kottler & Kottler, 2002; Muldrow, Cano, & Kimmel, 1999; Noguera, 2003).

Other characteristics that prevent involvement include parents' psychological resources and the beliefs about their role in their children's education (Patrikakou et al. 2003). Additionally, parents often have the desire to help their children succeed in school but lack the knowledge, time, or necessary skills to assist their children (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004b). Parents might not have confidence in themselves that their participation can influence or help their children's education; therefore, it is the responsibility of the school district and school administrators to provide parents with the tools that will allow them to become more engaged. School administrators, guidance counselors, and teachers alike have a shared responsibility for meeting parents on their terms and training them to effectively work with their children (Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005). Parents, in turn, can hold the responsibility of learning to help their children. "The goal is to hold parents and schools mutually accountable and to have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed at improving academic achievement of all students" (Christie, 2005, p. 646).

Barriers have also been created by parents because of their feelings of inadequacy, their failure in school, their low self-esteem, their lack of parenting skills,

and anger at the school, (Hale 2001; Measuring Up, 1999). These barriers can lead to parents being intimidated when speaking to school staff, and since their school experiences were negative they might impose those same feelings on their children, which causes issues with their becoming involved in their children's education.

Another barrier faced by schools, and particularly teachers, is that of dealing with diverse cultural values and family situations. Many of the students served in today's schools come from non-traditional homes. Additionally, many schools serve populations of students from various cultural backgrounds, all of which include differing norms and values. These differences often bring about poor communication between schools and families, which in turn creates interpersonal conflicts, disruptive behaviors, and lack of involvement (Sheets & Gay, 1996). As a result, school administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors share the responsibility of effectively communicating with parents (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004a).

#### Types of Parent Involvement

Epstein's (2002) collective research on school-family partnerships offers a comprehensive view of parental involvement. She refers to parental involvement as a school, family, and community partnership for the purpose of emphasizing shared interests, responsibilities, and overlapping influences of family, school, and community. Interestingly, Dauber and Epstein (1993) conclude that the involvement of parents in their children's schooling depends chiefly on how schools seek to involve parents than on the status of parents. Epstein's framework, upon which this study was based, approached parental involvement typologies from an institutional perspective. For the purpose of this

study, the framework was approached from a parental perspective in order to assess current levels of parental involvement in the specified school district. An explanation of each of the six typologies follows:

*Type 1 – Parenting*

Parenting refers to the basic levels of support for health, safety, nutrition, and housing to the development of parenting skills that prepare children for school and the continual need to supervise, discipline, and guide children (Epstein, 1987).

*Type 2 – Communicating*

Communicating refers to school-to-home and home-to-school communications (Epstein, 1987).

*Type 3 – Volunteering*

Volunteering is defined as involvement at any level by anyone who supports the school goals, performances, and sporting events, etc. Furthermore, it refers to volunteers who assist teachers, administrators, and children in classrooms or in other areas of the school. However, types of volunteering are not limited to attendance at school programs, serving as room parents, and classroom support (Epstein, 1987).

*Type 4 – Learning at Home*

Learning at home supports parents' knowledge of their child as a learner and refers to parent-initiated or child-initiated requests for taking part in learning activities at home (Epstein, 1987). Moreover, the best way to accomplish learning at home is by interactive homework, student-teacher-family contacts, long-term projects, or other interactive strategies. Learning at home was assessed by those activities in which the

parent engages in learning activities at home, including homework, reading, and other learning activities.

*Type 5 – Decision-making*

Decision-making refers to active parental participation in school councils, PTA/PTO, school improvement committees, and any other decision-making body associated with the school (Epstein, 1987).

*Type 6 – Collaborating with Community*

Collaboration involvement refers to connection with agencies, organizations, and businesses that enable the community to contribute to the school, children, and families (Epstein, 1987). The community is one of the overlapping spheres of influence in Epstein's theoretical perspective of parent involvement (Epstein, 1992).

Jackson and Davis (2000) provide a valuable design for middle grades similar to Joyce Epstein's six typologies. The Turning Points design refers to Epstein's six types of parent involvement areas and considers how they are implemented in the middle school (Jackson & Davis, 2000). The makeup of the Turning Points design places the young adolescent learner at the center and helps schools create strong collaborative learning communities where the unique needs of the young adolescent learner can be fully met. Turning Points (Jackson & Davis, 2000) views parenting as the schools learning about families as it relates to their cultures, goals, talents, and needs. Turning Points (Jackson & Davis, 2000) viewed communicating as schools using a variety of methods to stay in touch with families about school programs and student progress, not simply behavior problems or academics. Turning Points (Jackson & Davis, 2000) viewed volunteering as

schools considering all ways family members can participate in supporting student and school programs in Turning Points schools. Turning Points (Jackson & Davis, 2000) viewed student learning as schools considering a variety of ways to connect families and community members with student learning. Turning Points (Jackson & Davis, 2000) viewed decision-making as schools giving families meaningful roles in the school's collaborative decision-making process and provide training and information to support and encourage participation. Turning Points (Jackson & Davis, 2000) viewed collaborating with community as schools looking for multiple ways to engage community members, groups of individuals, and organizations in the life of the school through supporting student learning and development.

#### *Criticisms of Epstein's Research*

Epstein's (2001) research offered a comprehensive parent involvement program, and is perhaps the most frequently cited in this area of scholarship. Epstein's typology suggested effective parent involvement programs focus on 1) parenting skills to assist parents with understanding their children's learning needs, and helping teachers understand family needs; 2) communication that allows for two-way, open communication between the school and home; 3) volunteering that recognizes parents' talents and contributions both in and for the school; 4) learning at home strategies that engage the family with their children's school work; 5) decision making that includes parents as key stakeholders in making decisions that will impact student learning; and 6) collaborating with the community to create mutual benefit by sharing resources and contributing to both school and community goals.

Although this research study relies heavily on the research of Joyce Epstein, there have been some criticisms of her work as it relates to the school-family partnership. Vincent and Tomlinson (1997) viewed the school-family partnership as a means of maintaining teachers' professional control by considering parent support as an option. Lareau (1996) categorically disapproved a concept of partnership based on equal-status, because she believes teachers should have greater power than parents. Cochran and Dean (1991) called for compensatory programs of parent education as well as interventions based on empowerment (Dunst et al., 1992).

In addition to these criticisms, there are other models that attempt to formalize parental involvement. Lunenberg and Irby (2002) summarize seven other models of parent involvement alongside Epstein's school-home-community partnership model including: 1) Gordon's systems approach; 2) the Systems Development Corporation study; 3) Berger's role categories; 4) Chavkin and Williams' parent involvement role; 5) Honig's early childhood education model; 6) Jones' levels of parent involvement; and 7) language minority parents involvement approach. Their research suggests developing a family partnership center, establishing parent centers or cooperatives, and creating new options for parents as potential strategies for successfully engaging parents.

#### Paradigmatic Assumptions

Because this study will utilize a qualitative approach, it is necessary for the researcher to address paradigmatic assumptions. The research questions asked in this study are a direct reflection of the researcher's assumption of the topic, reality, and truth. Therefore, it was necessary for the researcher to define these assumptions to allow the

reader an opportunity to understand the information with these assumptions in mind gaining a clear understanding of how the study was approached, implemented, and examined.

### *Ontological*

Parent Involvement continues to be a vital component in the growing relationship between schools and their communities. Our schools must improve education for all children, but schools cannot do this alone. As the connection between school and family partnerships becomes more prevalent in our schools today, more will be accomplished if schools, families, and communities work together to promote successful students. Secondly, as academic rigor continues to be embraced as a standard focus within middle schools, academic success should be a high propriety for schools and communities because it is best accomplished through their cooperative actions and support. Therefore, any form of weakness in parts of our educational system places our youth in jeopardy.

### *Epistemological*

The researcher believes that providing a framework for schools to implement schools is vital to understanding the key factors in linking school-family partnerships. Many times schools have become overwhelmed with testing, job crisis, and making annual yearly progress (AYP) that they forget to focus on adolescents and their success for tomorrow. The researcher's goal is to spend time in an array of middle schools to explore how parents view parent involvement in middle school and what they attribute to the meaning and interpretation of parent involvement. Teachers, parents, students, and administrators have different meanings and perspectives for what they attribute to the

meaning of parent involvement. The researcher's worldview is to be an advocate for parents, adolescents, and schools by developing a guide that will increase parent involvement and student achievement.

### *Axiological*

Parent involvement can be very important to children as they transition from one stage to another stage of growth in their lives. Having a supportive family relationship involves families not only connecting with the child, but connecting with the school. As research continues to develop and theoretical frameworks are provided for both families and schools, it is important not to overlook middle school adolescents. Middle school adolescents are maturing and being exposed to various types of media, books, entertainment, electronic devices, gangs, etc., which shape their perspectives as it relates to the importance of school, family, and academic success in the society today. It is our responsibility as educators, parents, and community members to promote learning environments that foster positive school-family partnerships.

### *Rhetorical*

The use of language used in this study demonstrated the researcher's knowledge about parent involvement, how the participants of the study attributed meaning to parent involvement, and how their experiences shaped what they attribute to increasing parent involvement and student achievement. Bhattacharya (2007) recommended that a researcher refrain from using taboo words and incorporate a new vocabulary when doing qualitative research (p.15). Acceptable words as noted by Bhattacharya such as "academic rigor, triangulation, beliefs, and multiple realities will be used in this study as

the researcher employs the language of qualitative research to discuss the literary and narrative form of my paradigmatic assumptions, literature review, and data analysis (p. 15).

### *Methodological*

According to Creswell (2007), the methodological assumption of a researcher conceptualizes the research process in a specific way. The researcher focused her energy in this qualitative research study to gain a better understanding of parent involvement by using a case study approach. The researcher plans to learn about parent involvement by gaining knowledge from the views of the participants of this study and discussing their views within the context in which their personal experiences occur. Conducting research from the two selected middle schools where the participants' children attend helped the researcher to understand what they have to say and how their experiences have shaped what they attribute to parent involvement.

### Chapter Summary

In Chapter 2, the researcher presented a review of literature on school-family partnerships, which included literature on the historical perspective of parent involvement and current research on parent involvement. The importance of parental involvement in middle school is essential as students begin to develop their own self-identity and personal outlook on life. In this chapter, the researcher defined parental involvement according to a review of literature; however defining what parents attribute to the meaning of parental involvement will be beneficial to this study and school districts as they begin to implement parental activities in their schools. The researcher discussed

positive and fiscal benefits of parental involvement, school climate, barriers facing parental involvement, and types of parental involvement. Additionally, the researcher presented paradigmatic assumptions of the study, which included the ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological views of the study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

A qualitative design was applied to explore the personal meanings and experiences of parents and how they perceive, describe, feel, and make sense of parental involvement and parental involvement activities within the middle school that their child attends. Patton noted “qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases” (p. 14). Researchers utilize a qualitative approach with the intent of allowing themes to emerge from data collected (Creswell, 2003). “Qualitative inquiry is particularly oriented toward exploration, discover, and inductive logic” (Patton, 2002, p. 55). For this reason, it is helpful for the researcher to explore what meaning parents attribute parental involvement and what influences them to become engaged in a school. These two viewpoints from parents can help researchers, educators, and other school stakeholders understand how parents view the school-family partnership.

#### Qualitative Research

Qualitative studies are common throughout the field of education, and case studies of students, teachers, schools, programs, innovations, and policies are common (Merriam, 1998). Berg (2004) stated that qualitative research refers to the “meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and description of things” (p.p. 2-3). Additionally, a qualitative framework provides meaning to elicit data through a variety of sources and methods, and provides flexibility to the interpretation of the concepts and themes that emerge from this data. Qualitative design is an appropriate

approach to “discover essences, feelings, attributes, values, meanings, characteristics, and teleological or philosophical aspects of certain individuals or group lifeways” (Leininger, 1985, pp. 6-7).

In order for a qualitative researcher to create a deep understanding of an observed phenomenon, he or she must be able to “observe how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how inhabitants of these settings make sense of surroundings through social structures, social roles, symbols, and so forth” (Berg, 2004, p. 7). A qualitative researcher’s ability to observe how subjects react in a setting are suggested by Berg (2004) to be extremely systematic possessing the ability to be reproduced by subsequent researchers. The ability to achieve reliability by leaving notable evidence in the research design is the foundation of testing research. It allows the researcher the ability to sustain the challenges from the scientific community. Qualitative research is interpretative in nature. It also places emphasis on the structure of the phenomena and the rigor of the methodology used. The structure of this qualitative design was defined by the actual words expressed by the participants and factual data collected from the participants (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi, 1975).

### *Case Study Design*

This qualitative research study was conducted in the form of a case study design. Case study design is used to gain a clear understanding of a problem or situation (Merriam, 2002). Yin (1994) defined the case study research process as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are clearly evident” (p.

13). A concern of case study research is to generate knowledge of the case under (Stake, 1995). Case study research entails a researcher to pursue a greater understanding of issues intrinsic to the case. According to Stake (1995), a case study is recommended researcher's goal is to gain a deeper understanding of a specific case (intrinsic case study) or a specific phenomenon (extrinsic case study).

Case studies can take on a two different forms including a single case design or multiple cases for comparative purposes (Jorgensen, 1989). This was similar to the position of Creswell (1998) who indicated a case study should allow for developing an in-depth analysis from single or multiple cases using multiple data sources. Case study research derived from multiple data sources and sites are variously termed collective case studies (Stake, 1995), cross-case studies, multi-case or multi-site studies, or comparative case studies (Merriam, 1998). The form selected by the researcher in this study is a multi-site case study. Data will be collected from six participants at two similar rural mid-south middle schools in Southern Tennessee. Miles and Huberman (1994) think of a case study as a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). They show a case study as a circle with a heart in the middle. The heart is the focus of the study, while the circle “defines the edge of the case: what will be studied” (p. 25). Parents are the heart of this study, and the edge is studying how parental involvement can increase and strengthen the home-school partnership.

#### Participants and Research Site

The researcher conducted a multi-site case study with six parents, three from each school, whose child attended one of the two middle schools named East Hickory Heights

Middle School or Rockhill Middle School. Each middle school has similar demographics, community, and school climates. Students from various ethnic backgrounds such as African American, Asian, Caucasian, and Hispanic represented the two schools' populations. The majority of the student population was represented by more than eighty percent of Caucasians. Therefore, community and family involvement in school activities were priorities for a positive school climate at these two middle schools. Every nine weeks, a variety of activities was sponsored by various committees within the school to engage parents to participate in their child's learning experiences. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of what meaning parents attribute to parent involvement and activities that increase their participation at the school. Therefore, a male and female parent from each grade levels was selected to participate in this case study.

The participants of this study were selected during Spring 2010. Prior human subjects approval from the researcher's university was obtained prior to the selection of the participants. The researcher chose to select a male and female parent from the grade levels of six through eight in East Hickory Heights and Rockhill Middle Schools to represent viewpoints from both genders as it related to parent involvement. The names of the participants were selected from sign-in sheets filled out at the last two school sponsored parent involvement activities. All the parents from each grade level that signed the sign-in sheets were given an information letter about the purpose of the study and a consent form to be returned within the following week after receiving the returned letter

of participation in the study. The parents were selected based upon the first response received back of their willingness to participate in the study.

The site of research selected for this study was decided upon by the participants. This gave the participants an opportunity to select a site they felt comfortable to express their comments. The two selected middle schools were East Hickory Heights Middle School and Rockhill Middle School, which are located in rural neighborhood areas in Mid-South of Tennessee within the Riverwood Schools District. East Hickory Heights Middle School and Rockhill Middle School serve approximately a total of nine hundred ninety to eleven hundred students in grades six through eight.

The researcher selected these two middle schools based on their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) status for the last school year, Title I status, and the Riverwood Schools District's three year Parent Climate Survey Data. East Hickory Heights Middle School is not a Title I School and it did not make AYP for the 2008-2009 school year. Rockhill Middle School is a Title I school and made AYP for the 2008-2009 school year. Additionally, the researcher selected these two middle schools to explore the level of parent involvement in a school that was not a Title I school compared to a middle school that was a Title I school.

In 2009, the Riverwood Schools District's Parent Climate Survey data revealed the two middle schools had similar percentages of parental involvement in the areas associated with Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement (Type 1—parenting, Type 2—communication, Type 3—volunteering, Type 4—learning at home, Type 5—

decision-making, and Type 6—collaborating). See Table 1 for the results of the two middle schools’ Parent Climate Survey Data for the past three school years.

Table 1

*Riverwood Schools District’s Parent Climate Survey Data*

School Year	2007	2008	2009
Percentage	%	%	%
<b>Parenting</b>			
East Hickory Heights Middle	95	80	90
Rockhill Middle	82	70	80
<b>Communicating</b>			
East Hickory Heights Middle	70	80	93
Rockhill Middle	83	81	91
<b>Volunteering</b>			
East Hickory Heights Middle	78	85	89
Rockhill Middle	70	52	87
<b>Learning at Home</b>			
East Hickory Heights Middle	92	100	98
Rockhill Middle	70	91	99
<b>Decision making</b>			
East Hickory Heights Middle	79	72	91
Rockhill Middle	82	79	87
<b>Collaborating with the community</b>			
East Hickory Heights Middle	95	70	91
Rockhill Middle	70	70	86

Source: Riverwood Schools District Parent Climate Survey Results (2009), Riverwood County

## Data Collection Procedures

According to Creswell (2007), case study data collection involves a wide array of procedures as the researcher obtains an in-depth picture of the cases. Creswell (2007) encouraged researchers to design qualitative projects that include creative data collection methods that will encourage various readers and editors to examine their research studies. This study utilized a descriptive, case analysis approach to gain a better understanding of what meaning parents attribute to parent involvement and what influences them to become involved in a school. “Descriptive means the end product of a case study is a rich, ‘thick’ description of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). “Innovative programs and practices are often the focus of descriptive case studies in education” and they are useful in presenting “information about areas of education where little research has been conducted” (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). As shown in Table 2, two middle schools and six parents with assigned pseudonyms made up the multi-site case study.

Table 2

### *Participants for this Study*

Pseudonyms	Description	School
Mr. David Hampton	6 <sup>th</sup> grade parent	East Hickory Heights Middle School
Mrs. Keshia Holt	7 <sup>th</sup> grade parent	East Hickory Heights Middle School
Mrs. Sabrina Smith	8 <sup>th</sup> grade parent	Each Hickory Height Middle School
Mrs. Jennifer Davis	6 <sup>th</sup> grade student	Rockhill Middle School
Mr. Sonny Dills	7 <sup>th</sup> grade student	Rockhill Middle School
Mrs. Jessica Shaw	8 <sup>th</sup> grade student	Rockhill Middle School

The researcher chose to use interviews, focus groups, and field notes as forms of data collection methods. All three forms of data collection sources are important because they are the links to analyzing the data, establishing patterns and themes.

Data collection occurred in the spring and summer of 2010. The six participants had two one-on-one interviews and met for two focus groups over a 2 month period. The interviews and focus groups were typed. Primary interviews were approximately 30-40 minutes in length. The second interview was held to clarify and enhance data gathered from the first interviews to help generate questions for the two focus groups with all the participants. The second interview was approximately 30 minutes in length. The focus group meetings were approximately 30 to 45 minutes in length. After each interview and focus group, the researcher transcribed the audiotapes and coded transcripts. Pseudonyms were used to label each audiotape. The transcribed audiotapes and coded transcripts were stored in a secured file cabinet at the researcher's residence. The field notes collected were used to portray the context of the study, to compare interview transcriptions, and to contextualize data from each interview and focus groups.

#### *Data Collection Interviews*

Case study interviews can be conducted in several forms. Most interviews are of an open-ended nature, in which the respondent is given ample opportunity to describe their views about the questions and offer their opinions as well (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Windsor, Clark, Boyd, & Goodman, 2004; Yin, 1989). deMarris (2004) posits that "qualitative interviews are used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or set of experiences" (p. 52).

Qualitative interview questions are generally broad in scope. “How” and “why” questions predominate in an interview to flesh out details and nuances of program dynamics as perceived by the interviewee (Yin, 1989). Creswell (2007) stated it is important to identify what type of interview is practical and will get the most useful information to answer each research question. Two semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted within a three-month time frame. Three to five descriptive interview questions were asked in each session. Bhattacharya (2007) “noted that researchers try to design interview questions that will allow participants to describe their experiences” (p. 41). The interview questions created for this study, therefore, were refined when necessary after the initial individual interviews with the participants based upon their responses. To guide the interviews, an interview protocol was developed (see Appendix D). The interview protocol contained questions for the first and second one-on-one interviews and the two focus groups. The two one-on-one interviews and focus groups occurred within a two week period. A schedule for the interviews and focus groups is reflected in Table 3. Site 1 in Table 3 represents East Hickory Heights Middle School. Site 2 in Table 3 represents Rockhill Middle School.

Table 3

*Interview and Focus Group Schedule*

Participants	Interview 1	Interview 2	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2
Site 1-David Hampton	April 26, 2010	May 10, 2010	May 13, 2010	May 21, 2010
Site 1-Kesha Holt	April 29, 2010	May 10, 2010	May 13, 2010	May 21, 2010
Site 1-Sabrina Smith	April 29, 2010	May 7, 2010	May 13, 2010	May 21, 2010
Site 2-Jennifer Davis	April 22, 2010	May 6, 2010	May 13, 2010	May 21, 2010
Site 2-Linda Hill	April 20, 2010	April 20, 2010	May 13, 2010	May 21, 2010
Site 2-Jessica Shaw	April 23, 2010	May 6, 2010	May 13, 2010	May 21, 2010

*Data Collection Focus Groups*

Focus groups were utilized in this study to generate discussion among the participants about parent involvement and their personal experiences at the school. The purpose of the focus group design was to obtain perceptions of a particular area of interest in a permissive, non- threatening environment. Typically, focus groups are composed of seven to ten participants who are selected because of certain shared characteristics related to the topic of the study (Krueger, 1994). According to Kruegar (1994), attitudes and perceptions pertaining to services, programs, ideas, and products are largely the result of interaction with other people. An advantage to using a focus group for research is that it is a socially oriented procedure, perfectly designed for facilitating the products of social interaction. According to the demographic data, ninety-five percent of the students and parents live in the neighborhood of the two middle schools. The participants were given the opportunity to select an agreed upon site to conduct the focus groups. This gave the participants an opportunity to select a site they felt comfortable to

express their comments. Since the participants selected the research site, the researcher did not have to seek permission from each middle school principal to conduct research at the school site. Three to five open-ended interview questions were asked in the focus groups. The focus group interview questions were created based upon the participants' responses generated from the first two individual interviews. The focus groups met twice and shared information about two different parent involvement experiences. Both individual interview and focus groups were audio taped and transcribed for data analysis. A schedule for the focus groups is shown above in Table 3.

#### *Data Collection Field notes*

During the one-on-one individual interviews and focus groups, field notes were taken both descriptively and reflectively. Field notes provided the researcher a detailed snapshot of each individual middle school and how each participant views parental involvement at that middle school his or her child attends. Recording field notes entailed writing phrases, comments, key words, and events that were taking place at the site in order to have something concrete to reference back to when the researcher analyzed the data (Creswell, 2007). The researcher used a predesigned form to record field notes for the interviews and focus groups for this study.

#### **Data Management and Analysis**

Creswell (2007) stated that an analysis of a case study consists of making a detailed description of the case and its setting. Stake (1995) suggested four forms of data analysis and interpretation in case study research: categorical aggregation, direct interpretation, establishment of patterns, and naturalistic generalizations. In order to

achieve these four forms of data analysis and interpretation, the researcher did the following:

1. Categorical aggregation- utilized the interviews, focus groups, and field notes to identify overarching categories for reoccurring expressions and ideas. Additional categories established from the interviews, focus groups, and fieldnotes were parenting, learning at home, volunteering, communication, decision making, and collaborating with the community.

2. Direct interpretation- implemented when specific examples were highlighted within the interviews, focus groups, and field notes.

3. Patterns- identified as overlapping categories merged together.

4. Naturalistic generalizations- implemented by highlighting “generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or for applying it to a population of cases” (Creswell, 1998, p. 154).

Windsor et al. (2004) outlined a series of steps that apply to data analysis methods in a case study research. These steps included: assigning codes to written data, recording inferences about the data in the margins of the written records, sorting the data into similar and contrasting patterns, incorporating the patterns into relevant themes, and developing the themes into constructs. In order to achieve these five steps of data analysis methods, the researcher did the following:

1. Assigning codes- Participants from each middle school were assigned a unique code. For example, three participants from East Hickory Heights Middle School were assigned a 3 letter code. The other three participants from Rockhill Middle School

were assigned a different 3 letter code. Coding and categorizing in search of patterns, themes, and trends were ongoing during the first stage of the data analysis process. Bhattacharya (2007) defined coding as “tags or labels attached to words, phrases, paragraphs, pictures, video clips, or any other form or qualitative data to assign a unit of description, meaning, and/or relationship” (p. 70). Coding helped the researcher to examine data by creating categories (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). Coding was repeated and then those codes were grouped into categories.

2. Recording inferences- Inferences about the data were recorded in the margins of field notes and interview/focus group protocols.

3. Sorting the data- Data were sorted into similar and contrasting patterns. Patterns were established after determining two or more categories.

4. Incorporating patterns into relevant themes- Themes were established based on reoccurring phrases or words from the participants. The researcher color-coded the data and grouped them into themes. The researcher identified common themes that existed in the narratives of the participants as they expressed their beliefs, opinions, and views about parental involvement and their parental involvement activities at the middle school.

5. Developing themes into constructs- Emerging themes were recorded into charts which included participants’ names and remarks. Interview and focus group transcripts were read repeatedly until no new themes emerged. Through constant engagement and immersion in the data, four themes became prominent.

In this study, information received from the participants about parent activities and experiences at the school was compared to notes taken in the interviews and focus groups with the participants. Categorizing for this case study was systematic and informative to detail the study's purpose, prior knowledge about parent involvement, and the constructs were made explicit by the participants of the study.

Triangulation is a procedure used to establish validity in a qualitative study. "Triangulation happens when the most desired convergence occurs when two or more independent sources all point to the same set of events or facts" (Yin, 2004, p. 9). Additionally, triangulation is used to double check the integrity of the inferences drawn from information sources gathered throughout the study. For example, data from interviews may be compared with data gathered through focus groups to discover which inferences are valid. Some experts recommend that triangulation is best applied by aggregating the themes that emerged from the data analyses according to the research questions they inform (Windsor et al., 2004). Creswell (1998) provided that triangulation and its use of multiple data sources "shed light on a theme or perspective" (p. 202), and increased the reliability of the data. Additionally, Mathison (1998) proposed:

Good research practice obligates the researcher to triangulate, that is, to use multiple methods, data sources, and researchers to enhance the validity of research findings. Regardless of which philosophical, epistemological, or methodological perspectives an evaluator is working from, it is necessary to use multiple methods and sources of data in the execution of a study in order to withstand critique by colleagues. (p. 13)

Triangulation, as Stake (2006) asserts, ensures greater accuracy in being able to identify alternative explanations emerging from case study analysis and this in turn informs the basis of valid and reliable results in case studies. Triangulation was achieved for this study of parents' attribute of parental involvement and views of their personal experiences at the middle school through collecting and analyzing multiple sources of data, which included:

1. transcripts of interviews: Each participant was interviewed twice and for each interview, a tape recording was made and transcribed.
2. focus groups: All participants met twice for the focus groups, a tape recording was made and transcribed.
3. field notes: Field notes included what the researcher saw and recorded during interviews and focus groups with the six participants of East Hickory Heights and Rockhill Middle Schools.

One of the steps in the process of triangulation requires that the researcher frequently assess the newly found patterns and trends uncovered in the cases against the findings in the literature and against the questions raised in this study. For this purpose, patterns and themes were compared to Epstein's framework of six parent involvement typologies. The development of the narrative of each case will be dependent on how effectively and efficiently all the information gathered is analyzed and reassembled to build the case records (Patton, 2002). In the end, the process of cross-checking new findings as the case emerge with other similar research findings will result in new or revised theories and confirming previous beliefs on the topic of parent involvement.

## Representation

The researcher represented the findings of the study in a written report of the case study. After the researcher gives the reader(s) an opportunity to develop a sense of the parent involvement at the two selected schools, the researcher will identify the issue, purpose, and the method of the study so the reader(s) have an opportunity to learn about parent involvement activities and how other researcher such as Joyce Epstein and Jackson & Davis (Turning Points 2000) developed parent involvement frameworks to promote school-family partnership. The written report of the findings will contain information that advises the reader(s) of the participants of the school, personal experiences of the parents, common themes, and how these themes are related to the framework of Epstein.

Final representation of the study will be in dissertation form for submission. Upon completion of the dissertation process, the document will be reviewed and condensed per request for submission to a scholarly journal. The researcher considered potential audiences to include parents, teachers, administrators, an array of other educational stakeholders, and researchers who believe in promoting parent involvement in middle school settings. The major consideration for conducting this study was to capture the attention of school authorities, policy makers, and school board members who can makes decisions to implement parent involvement programs that increase parents' participation, increase student achievement, and build positive home-school relationships. The researcher believes the most appropriate genre for teachers, parents, school board members, and school authorities is to combine various types of lyric, epic, and literary genres to gain the true essence of parent involvement and how it affects the home-school

relationship. Considering the participants' viewpoints and referencing back to the framework of Epstein and the Turning Points 2000 design, the researcher would conclude that a detailed narrative and descriptive interviews would also be appropriate to conveying the findings and interpretations of the data from the participants.

### Risks and Benefits

There are risks and benefits for the participation as it related to this study. The research study required participation with parents of students who attended the two selected middle schools. The researcher was extremely careful in safeguarding the well being of the participants and information they shared with the researcher in relation to their child and the school. The researcher believed one primary risk for the participants in this study was the risk of their confidentiality being violated due to personal experiences that may not be positive about the school and that could possibly affect the relationship between the student and teacher or student and administrator. The researcher took every precaution to ensure that the participants felt comfortable with the research methodology, and made all participants aware that they could discontinue participating in the research study at any time in the event the participants may have felt concerned about sharing their personal experiences.

The participants did not receive any tangible benefits from this study such as money, gift cards, or rewards; however, intangible benefits such as gaining a breath of knowledge about parent involvement could arrive from this study. As a result of the participants' viewpoints and shared experiences, another possible intangible benefit for the participants could be future enhancement of parent activities by school leaders to

increase parent involvement. Lastly, another beneficial aspect for participants of this study was taking their viewpoints and having it included in research that could promote the schools' status not only in academics, but in having positive school-family partnerships that increase parent involvement. Contributions from this study could serve as a guide to other researchers, parents, and schools to see the importance of parent involvement and how it could have an impact on all stakeholders.

#### Ethical and Political Consideration

The goal of this research was to present the perspectives of parents as it related to what they attribute to parent involvement. Therefore to help prevent any challenges relating to ethical or political issues in this study, strict codes of professional behavior were followed at all times. Also, before the study could be conducted, prior endorsement was received from the Internal Review Board (IRB), which is the governing committee that previews all research done in the name of the college that a researcher is affiliated. After receiving endorsement from the Internal Review Board, the researcher sought permission from the Riverwood Schools District to conduct the study. The appropriate school administrators were contacted at East Hickory Heights Middle School and Rockhill Middle School. Written permission from the administrators of the schools was secured to interview the participants. The researcher assured the administrator and the Riverwood Schools District that individual schools, and the participants would remain confidential. Pseudonyms were developed for the middle schools selected and participants' names to ensure confidentiality.

As the researcher began to gain interest in this topic and selection of participants, ethical and political issues were considered as the researcher thought about participants for this study. Creswell (2007) stated it is important for participants to know that they are participating in the study and understand the purpose of the study. Secondly, the consent form created for this study acknowledged that findings of the study will be shared as a reference to increase parent involvement in the middle schools. In order to eliminate any ethical issues as it relates confidentiality, the participants were advised that their names would not be referenced in the study. Another ethical issue the researcher considered was the possible finding of the participants affecting the relationship with the teachers, administrator, and/or other parents. As a result of the unknown, it was very important for the researcher to focus on creating interview questions that would not leave a negative effect upon the current relationship between the participants and the school, but to build on future positive experiences. Another issue considered while conducting this study was addressing any illegal activities that may surface from the study such as gang activity, gambling, assault, etc. within the schools, which inhibit parents from participating in the school. If any of these issues were to occur, the participants would be advised that they would have to be reported to school and law authorities to ensure a safe learning environment and protection of lives of others.

In order to ensure that the researcher provided strategies designed to address potential ethical or political issues, the researcher used multiple strategies such as confirming and by having the research study reviewed and corrected by her advisor, dissertation committee, and/or qualitative professor at the university. Another strategy the

researcher used to address these issues was to use a case study approach that represents a composite picture of the participants rather than just one participant in the study. Lastly, the researcher did not express any personal experiences during the study or “off the record” about parental involvement, because this sharing minimizes the “bracketing” and reduces information that could be shared by the participants in the study.

### Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher described the methods used for conducting the study. The researcher explained qualitative research and the case study research design. A description of the participants and research site, data collection procedures, data analysis, risks and benefits, and ethical and political considerations were also provided in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### Introduction

This chapter contains the findings and the analysis of the data. Data for this study were gathered from six individual participants from two selected middle schools in the Riverwood Schools District. These six participants from the two selected middle schools are representative of the multi-site case study. A review of the research questions, a summary of the methods, a brief description of the participants and a synthesis of the findings from sources of data collection are presented in the chapter. The data that was collected enabled the researcher to study what parents attribute to the meaning of parent involvement and what parent involvement practices were implemented in the two selected middle schools in the Riverwood Schools District. Findings from the study will provide school districts, principals, and other community stakeholders a guide for consideration to implement parental involvement practices parents attribute to increasing their involvement.

#### Research Questions

This study was guided by two research questions (central questions).

##### *Central Questions*

1. What does parental involvement mean to parents?
2. What influences parents to engage in parental involvement?

Four common themes emerged from the data that are indicative of the framework composed of Epstein's (1987) six types of parent involvement typologies. The four

themes are 1) Mission Possible: Parents as Advocates for Student Success, 2) Partnering with Parents: Walking the Journey Together, 3) Bridging the Gap: Engaging Activities and Supportive Programs, and 4) Essential Ingredients: Climate, Communication, and Collaboration. The themes are adequate in determining what parent involvement activities and practices influenced parents to become involved in schools for this study. Additionally, the themes are adequate in determining implementation of parent involvement activities in middle schools from other school districts.

### Summary of Methodology

Qualitative methods using a case study design were used for this study. Participants were selected based upon their involvement in the selected middle schools, response of interest by the prescribed time frame, and their written consent to participate in the study. Two one-on-one interviews were conducted initially for each participant. Then two focus groups were conducted for all six participants. The results of the interviews and focus groups were used to frame the qualitative data.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted in the spring of 2010. Two 30 to 45 minute one-on-one interviews were conducted at local coffee shop in the Riverwood Schools District area with each participant. Two 30 to 45 minute focus groups were conducted at local restaurant in the Riverwood Schools District area. The interviews and focus groups were scheduled to accommodate participants' schedules. The guiding questions on the interview protocol were developed to capture background information and to acquire additional support for the data analysis process. During some interviews, additional questions were asked to probe for understanding. The interviews and focus

group discussions were very informative and the participants were open and straight forward in their responses to the questions about their perspectives of what influences them to become involved their child's middle school.

The interviews and focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed in support of the research questions which guided this study. The transcripts were compared to the fieldnotes obtained from each interview and focus group.

Fieldnotes were taken during each interview and focus group to capture the researcher's initial reactions, perceptions of the participants, and other details not reflected by the verbal responses of the participants. The transcripts for each question were reviewed and reduced to codes to assist the researcher in determining categories (Bhattacharya, 2007). The process of coding data, categorizing, and documenting emerging common themes was continuous during data analysis for each interview and focus group. Additionally, the process mentioned above continued after the culmination of all the data being collected, analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated.

Identification of common themes was recorded in charts. During and after the process of organizing the data, patterns became prominent. Examples of these prominent patterns include repetitive responses from the participants about the importance of parents taking a vital role in the lives of their children, investing time and showing interest in children, and having a collaborative relationship with the principal and teacher of their child in the middle school attended. As a result of the few patterns mentioned, it brought significance from the participants' perspective that parent involvement is

essential to the success of a student and building collaborative partnerships with parents and schools.

### Brief Description of Participants

The six participants included 1 male and 2 female parents from each middle school. The participants were purposely selected based upon their previous involvement in their child's school and to gain a perspective from each gender from the different grade levels from sixth grade through eighth grade of both middle schools. The data are skewed considering that the perspectives from each participant does not reflect the overall perspective of what all parents attribute to parental involvement from each grade level and each gender of parents. Clearly, the importance of active parental involvement at the middle school level was embraced by all six participants. Pseudonyms were selected for each participant to present the findings of this case study. Mr. David Hampton, Mrs. Kesha Holt, and Mrs. Sabrina Smith are pseudonyms used to represent the participants of East Hickory Heights Middle School. Mrs. Jennifer Davis, Mr. Sonny Dills, and Mrs. Jessica Shaw are pseudonyms used to represent the participants of Rockhill Middle School. Throughout this chapter, references to these pseudonyms are used for the six participants.

#### *Mr. David Hampton*

Mr. David Hampton is male parent of a sixth grade student at East Hickory Heights Middle School. This is his child's first year at the middle school. He has three other children who attend an elementary and high school in Riverwood Schools District. Mr. Hampton's family has lived in the Riverwood District for five years. Mr. Hampton is

very passionate about the success of his children. He believes that his role as a male parent is vital in contributing to his children's success in life. Additionally, he is passionate about people and their desire to go to the next level of success. He volunteers at the school regularly and loves to participate in extra-curricular activities. Mr. Hampton has worked for the city government for over 15 years. He works closely with various community members and leaders. His ultimate goal is to be an influential mentor for youth and give guidance to struggling families in less fortunate communities.

*Kesha Holt*

Mrs. Kesha Holt is a female parent of a seventh grade student at East Hickory Heights Middle School. This is her child's second year at the middle school. Mrs. Holt has only one child. Her family has lived in the Riverwood District for 10 years. She enjoys communicating with people and giving advice to young girls to help prevent them from getting in trouble in middle school. Mrs. Holt has a busy schedule, but this does not prevent her from investing time in her child's social, personal, and academic endeavors. She works at the school occasionally and is a home mother. Mrs. Holt's personal interests center around her family, child, and traveling. Her number one goal and priority is to ensure she provides the best opportunities and experiences for her child to have a well-rounded and diverse education. She believes as a mother, it is her responsibility to be there for her child, especially in the middle and high school years.

*Mrs. Sabrina Smith*

Mrs. Sabrina Smith is a female parent of an eighth grade student at East Hickory Heights Middle School. This is her child's first year at the middle school. Mrs. Smith has

only one child. Her family has lived in the Riverwood District for 10 years. Mrs. Smith believes that middle school is a very difficult time for students and it is important for her to be totally involved in her child's life. Mrs. Smith is a business owner of a hair salon. Her profession gives her an opportunity to meet several people and become familiar with the personal and professional interests of her clients. As a business owner, her schedule at the salon can be very busy. She does not allow her schedule to interfere with volunteering her time a few days out of the week to participate in activities and visit the school. Mrs. Smith's main goal is for her child to be successful this last year of middle school and finish high school with a satisfactory status. Her contribution as a parent is to be involved in her child's life by giving unconditional love, providing support, supplying resources, and giving guidance daily.

*Mrs. Jennifer Davis*

Mrs. Jennifer Davis is a female parent of a sixth grade student at Rockhill Middle School. This is her child's first year at the middle school. Mrs. Davis has only one child. Her family has lived in the Riverwood District for 1 year. Mrs. Davis is a full-time caretaker at home and volunteers at the school. She has an outgoing personality and loves to meet people. She enjoys traveling to different places and collecting postcards from the different states she has visited. She believes that her child succeeding in life and being able to have diverse experiences is essential in her obtaining a good career and being able to provide for her family. Mrs. Davis enjoys volunteering at the school and participates regularly in activities that allow her be involved with her child. She believes two of the

most important aspects of her child's life are being actively involved and providing on-going support.

*Mr. Sonny Dills*

Mr. Sonny Dills is a male parent from Rockhill Middle School. This is his child's first year at the middle school. Mr. Davis has only one child. Mr. Davis is in the military full-time and speaks to students at the school frequently. His family has lived in the Riverwood District for 2 years. Mr. Dills is a great communicator and very straightforward about his desires for his child. Additionally, he is very serious about his child achieving her goals and being successful in every stage of her life. He believes his main priority as a parent is to ensure that his child is provided with the necessary educational resources to succeed in school and has effective teachers to deliver instruction to help his daughter progress from one grade level to the next grade level. Mr. Dills participates in school activities when he is not away on assigned military duties. The school activities he enjoys participating in are those activities that allow him to talk to the students about different job careers, making the right choices in life, and those that require mentorship.

*Mrs. Jessica Shaw*

Mrs. Jessica Shaw is an eighth grade parent at Rockhill Middle School. This is her child's third year at the middle school. Mrs. Shaw has three children who attend a high school in the Riverwood Schools District. Her family has lived in the Riverwood District for 12 years. Mrs. Shaw is a substitute teacher at various schools in the district. As a substitute teacher, this gives her an opportunity to really see what challenges students

face both academically and socially in school. She enjoys substitute teaching, because it gives her the opportunity to be a positive role model and learn about the current generation. Mrs. Shaw is very caring and loves people. Additionally, she enjoys being able to participate in school activities and makes a point to come to the school on a regular basis to check on the status of all of her children. Mrs. Shaw finds that being involved at the school motivates her to be more involved in her children's lives outside of school. Her main goal is to ensure all her children finish school and go to college by being a supportive parent, making sure they have the best teachers, and challenging them to excel academically.

#### Synthesis of Findings from Sources of Data Collection

Four common themes emerged from the data that center around the overarching research questions. The themes became prominent while conducting the interviews, focus groups, and immersion of the data. The two themes for the first research question are 1) Mission Possible: Parents as Advocates for Student Success and 2) Partnering with Parents: Walking the Journey Together. The two themes for the second research question are 1) Bridging the Gap: Engaging Activities and Supportive Programs and 2) Essential Ingredients: Climate, Communication, and Collaboration.

The participants of this study expressed their perspectives of what meaning they attribute to parent involvement and their personal experiences related to parent involvement at the middle school level. Commonalities that described their perceptions of parent involvement and what activities influence them to become involved in a school emerged in the interview and focus group transcripts and fieldnotes. Synthesis of the

findings are presented by the four themes. Those themes include responses from the participants which helped the researcher gain information to answer the research questions that guided the study. The research questions and common themes are listed in Figure 2, which provide an outline for answering the two research questions. Quotations of the participants' responses are provided verbatim.

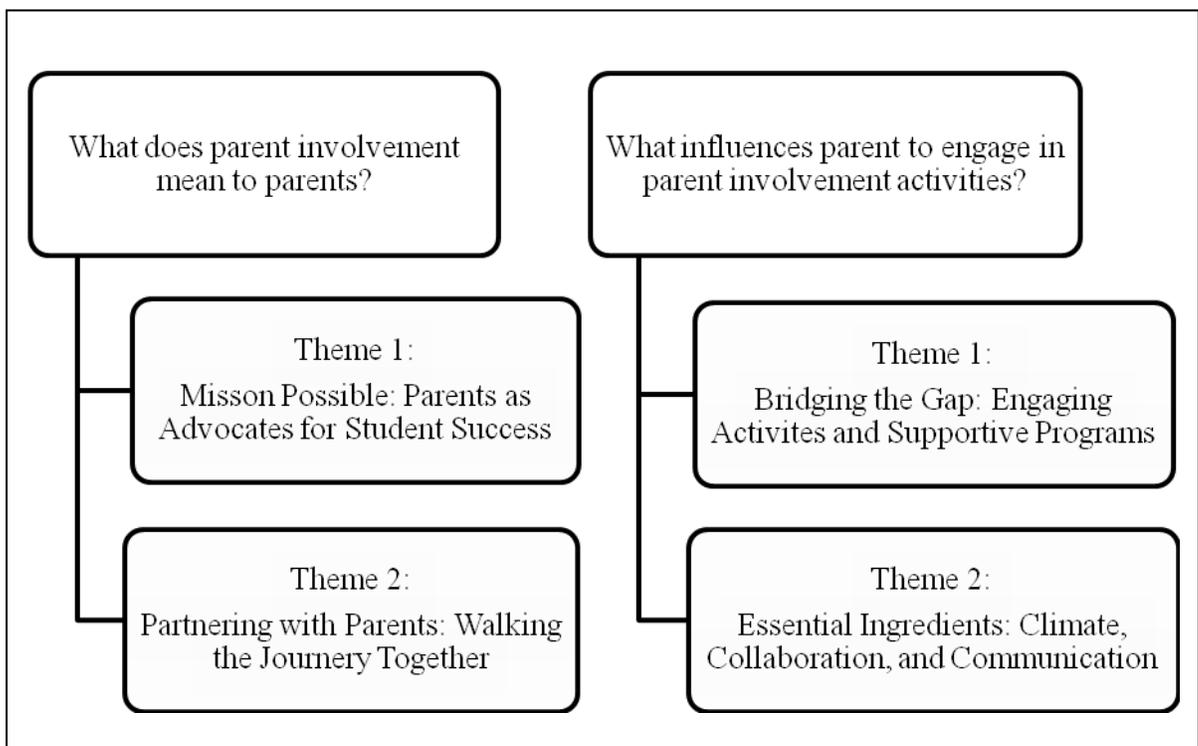


Figure 2 Research Questions and Common Themes

*Mission Possible: Parents as Advocates for Student Success*

The six parents were asked to discuss what meaning they attribute to the topic of parent involvement. Based upon the participants' responses and analysis of the data, they

believe that parental involvement means being an advocate for children in all aspects of a child's life which pertains to educational success, social involvement, providing support, and being a guide to lead them on the right paths in life. The following responses came from parents whose children attend East Hickory Heights. Mr. David Hampton expressed the following statements in his initial interview about the topic of parent involvement:

I think parental involvement means to be totally involved in the well being and outcome of your child, my child's education, to see that she's successful in academics, and preparing my child for the next stage of education. Also, my involvement with my child plays a major part in her achieving her goals, because me being a part of her life and showing that I'm willing to participate and being there to support her in her education, causes her to thrive and not only to be good in her work assignments, but also it causes her to achieve. She also knows that it's going to make me proud to see her and seeing that means being successful in her education.

The researcher asked Mr. David Hampton to clarify what he attributed to the meaning of the topic of parent involvement and he stated, "Parental involvement is just taking an interest in your child. This means a total interest in overseeing something that's going to be valuable in your child's life and that's their education." The researcher noted a similar response from Mrs. Kesha Holt. She stated, "Being involved means a parent should take time to show interest by being involved in every aspect of their education from discipline to academics, to supporting the school, sports, whatever they're in."

Additionally, Mrs. Sabrina Smith stated:

Parental involvement means being involved in your children's life from every aspect which includes sports, grades, home, friends, and communication. You have to be a support system for your child. You are all they have as they try to discover who they are and who they want to be. If I don't take the time to invest in my child and find out what it is that she wants to do or even her concerns, I could stand a chance of someone else doing it that may have a negative impact in my child's life.

The researcher asked the participants from Rockhill Middle School to discuss what meaning they attribute to the topic of parent involvement. Based upon the participants' responses and analysis of the data, they also believe that parental involvement means being an advocate for their children in all aspects of their lives. Mrs. Jennifer Davis shared her perspective of what she attributes to parental involvement by stating:

I believe parent involvement means being involved in your child's life not only at home, but in all areas. Parents should number one believe in their children and be willing to help them accomplish their goals and dreams in life. I believe it means helping your child do homework, academics at school, showing up for school activities, and being involved in their personal lives. Parents have to get more involved and take time to show their kids that they value them and where they are in this stage of life. In particularly at the middle school level, because so much is going on with our children and they need us to be there for them and give that extra boost to encourage them that they can make it. Parent involvement means you have to go that step further by going to the school, going to the counselor, and taking a few road trips to learn about colleges. Don't just let a child play with the PSP or video games, but get involved with their social life while letting them have some independence at the same time.

Mrs. Davis further commented that she believes that parent involvement also means getting involved by assisting your children and helping them figure out and determine their career aspirations. Mrs. Davis stated, "Parents being involved goes beyond coming to a school, but getting involved now actively for their future." Additionally, Mrs. Jessica Shaw had similar comments about the meaning of parental involvement. Mrs. Shaw stated:

Parent involvement means getting involved to the point in a child's life when you can help with homework and check over the homework. It basically means just being there for your child. You have to be a voice for them and fight for their success. Even when my kid acts like she does not want me involved, I let her know I will always be here to give her support and guidance she needs in school, with personal issues, and especially with it comes to peer pressure from other

kids. It's pretty early now, but I want my kid to know that even if she does decide not to go to college, I will help her in some other area so she can still have a promising future. I hope she does go to college and I believe she will, but I have to continue to listen to her dreams and make sure she is in a good school environment to help her develop and learn all that she can.

Mr. Sonny Dills stated:

I believe that parent involvement means getting involved at home and the school by letting kids know you are active in their lives and are willing to help them as they go through different steps in their life. This means from elementary, to middle, and through high school. We are not at that point yet, but before you know it, we will be. We as parents have to be the most important supporter, leader, and guide for our children. Most children at this age, if they do not have that structure, who is going to do homework? If they don't have their parents to push them and to enforce it, why would you do homework? I mean, what fun is homework when you could be outside running the streets? It's because of a spiral downward or a bad domino effect. If there is no structure and guidelines and parameters then who will guide them to staying in school to graduate, develop responsibility, and take pride in yourself when you work? If we don't teach them this structure now, then by the time they get there, they probably will not do their homework. No one's going to make them. They will say, "Please, my mom's too busy and she's tired." As a result, they get in trouble at school, the teacher gets frustrated, and then the kid gets frustrated. Nine times out of ten times, it's really not handled very well. The teacher's frustrated, the parents are mad and screaming at the kid and the kid is screaming. It's like a bad domino effect. Therefore, parents have to get involved and stay involved at all times. Be supportive, get them on the right track, and let them know you love and care for them.

The one-on-one interviews and the focus groups helped the researcher analyze data from the participants that were important to providing the findings for the second theme.

#### *Partnering with Parents: Walking the Journey Together*

The second theme of parent responsibility emerged from the participants expounding on what they attribute to the meaning of parental involvement. Participants expressed that one of the primary aspects of a parent is to take an active role with schools and be responsible by taking time out to invest in their child's education. The participants

viewed parental involvement as essential and vital to helping their children succeed and progress socially and academically in school. Additionally, the participants expressed the importance of parents partnering with schools, because it will take the schools providing the academic components and the parents supporting the students actively to ensure they are progressing both in academics and in their social development. The participants emphasized the importance of parents being responsible for their role in their child's success as well as the schools providing support to them.

The participants from East Hickory Heights were asked to discuss what role parents should play in their child's education. Mr. Davis Hampton stated:

Well, initially it should be the main priority of the parents to be responsible for their child's success. That should be the priority. Then schools should assist the parents by informing them what they need them to do. That's because, we as parents know the importance of what education can do and will do and because we are living this role daily, and seeing the struggles and the hardships and the setbacks and dysfunctions that could come with everyday life, it's important that we encourage our children to go after the best education that can be offered to them in order to enhance their life and give them an opportunity and a chance to be successful. Parent involvement in it self is centered on the parents being responsible for their children.

Mrs. Kesha Holt commented similarly about parent responsibility by stating:

I think that they have a huge role. This role includes them first taking on responsibility and being the parent they know they should be in their child's life. I think even if they're not academically able to help in the learning environment, they should be accountable as a parent no matter what their education is. I think that they should be supportive and responsible enough in every aspect to do whatever they can to make sure their child has the education and support they need. When a parent can be responsible and show they are supportive in any area, this shows that their child is their top priority. I mean their child is everything.

The researcher asked Mrs. Holt to sum up what she believed the role of parents should be and she stated, "For their education, it should be parents being responsible

enough to be their main supporter. Someone they always count on.” Mrs. Sabrina Smith commented differently than the other two parents from East Hickory Heights Middle School. She stated she believes the role of the parent is to “know what students are learning, know what their homework is, and take an active role in helping them study. They all learn differently.”

The three participants from Rockhill Middle School were asked to express the meaning of parental involvement as it relates to the role of parents and their responses were similar to the responses expressed from the participants whose children attend East Hickory Heights Middle School. Additionally, they believe that parents should be responsible and take an active role in their children’s lives and education. Mrs. Jennifer Davis stated:

Being a parent in these days is hard to do. I believe that parent involvement and the role of a parent is to be responsible and show your child you are there for them. It means more than sending a child off to school, then just giving them food to eat when they come home. You have to be accountable.

The researcher asked Mrs. Davis to explain what she meant when she referenced being accountable. Mrs. Davis stated:

I mean by saying being responsible and not just letting the school become more involved in the child’s life than you are as a parent. You should show initiative in your children and let them know that you are there and are ready to help them even when they don’t ask for the help. Responsibility is the key for our kids. We have so many other things going on that sometimes we forget that our kids are the most important part of our lives. We have to help shape their future.

Mr. Sonny Dills agreed that parent responsibility is an important role for parents to play in a child’s education. He stated:

This question goes back to what I think about parent involvement. To me they go hand in hand with each other. If you are going to be involved in your child’s life

then it is imperative that you be responsible as a parent to do what needs to be done to help your child succeed. There is nothing worse to see than a parent who does not get involved and take ownership that they have a child in this world. I feel that if you can't be responsible, then you should not have children. They did not ask to be here in this world. First as priority, we as parents should be responsible in seeing that our children are provided for with clothes, food, love, and a good education.

The researcher noted that Mr. Dills appeared to be very passionate about parents being involved, because he was very open and expressive about his beliefs. He further commented:

As a parent now, if I had not gotten involved when my child first came to this school, I would have allowed her to be bullied by other students. You can't just leave it up to the school to solve problems. You have to be responsible enough to solve those problems yourself when it involves your child's happiness.

The researcher asked Mrs. Jessica Shaw the same question and she stated, "My beliefs about getting involved and what role I play in my child's life has changed over the years." The researcher asked Mrs. Shaw to expound on her comments about how her perspective has changed over the years. Mrs. Shaw stated:

I mentioned earlier that parent involvement means being there for your children, but I had to learn as the years went by each grade level that I had to step my game plan up and be abreast of what was going on in my child's life. I had to be more responsible with my child and taking an active role because he is getting older and ready for high school. Sixth grade and seventh grade are different, but eighth grade is a different ball game totally. They are getting older, liking girls, girls liking them, and you can not afford to ignore that you have to stay abreast of what's going on.

The researcher asked Mrs. Shaw to explain how she views a parent being responsible. Mrs. Shaw stated, "This involves checking those cell phone text messages, checking homework, going up to the school to visit, and making sure you have die heart conversations with your child. Mrs. Shaw also stated:

We know the basics of being a responsible parent are buying clothes and food, but it goes further when you take responsibility to help shape your child's future in a positive manner other than gang members doing it for you.

*Bridging the Gap: Engaging Activities and Supportive Programs*

The second research question asks what influences parents to engage in parental involvement. Several of the participants shared school events that influenced them to become involved in a school and what they would like to see implemented in the school to increase the likelihood of them becoming involved in the school. The researcher asked the participants in the second interview to discuss examples of types of parent activities that they would volunteer to participate in at the middle school and they shared activities such as the Parent Teacher Organization/Association (PTO, PTA), book fairs, parent nights, extra-curricular sport activities, dances, and tutoring.

The researcher asked the participants from East Hickory Heights Middle School to discuss what parent activities would they be likely to participate in at the school. Mr. David Hampton stated, "I love basketball. I played several years myself. I'm big on the sports thing. Sports would be a highlight of mine. You probably would see me involved in the activities that are centered on those types of activities." Mrs. Kesha Holt stated, "I can't think of any that I wouldn't participate in. I think that any activity that they would provide, I would be able to do. I would be more than happy to volunteer and assist." The researcher asked Mrs. Holt to name a few activities that she would participate in and she stated, "I guess I would participate in the PTO like I do now and sporting stuff." Mrs. Holt did express that East Hickory Heights Middle School could do a little more to get parents more involved. The researcher asked Mrs. Sabrina Smith to discuss examples of

activities that she would be likely to participate in and she stated, “Any field trips, fundraising, and PTA.”

Mr. David Hampton mentioned a different type of school event that influences him to become involved in a school and that was mentoring. He stated, “This is a very positive activity that most schools have and I would volunteer for this at my child’s school. It allows students to gain a different perspective other than what the teacher or principals share with them on a daily basis.” The researcher asked Mr. Hampton to expound on how mentoring as an activity would influence him to become involved in a school. He stated:

Mentorship is important. I think some of the strategies that are important are teachers and parents working together to give a child a strong balance like having home and school in one place. I think it’s just as important sometimes for teachers, maybe on special occasions, to stop by the child’s house to show that their interest is not just in the classroom, but also taking out personal time where you can go to the length of checking on that child away from school.

The researcher asked the participants from East Hickory Heights Middle School to discuss what parent activities they would be likely to participate in at the school. Mrs. Jennifer Davis stated:

Well, I don’t know if we’re normal. We try to go to everything they ever offer, because we think it’s important to participate and be involved. Then our child sees that we care about her school and what’s going on there and it helps her be more involved in her own school, rather than okay it’s somewhere I have to go during the day.

The researcher asked Mrs. Davis to name a few activities that she would be likely to participate in at her child’s school. She stated:

I like to help out at the concessions at different games; Even if it’s just once or twice each season. It really doesn’t take much for me to participate in any school

activity. They are grateful for any help they can get. I like the PTO. I try to be regularly involved in PTO.

Mrs. Davis further commented:

The school, every year, has a book fair for each grade. Helping out at the book fair would be another one. They always need parent volunteers. That helps you see what kinds of books are being made available to children and whether I need to be concerned. There is a lot out there. Just because there is something to read doesn't mean that it's something they should read. It's not just a matter of reading. It's what topics, are being put into their little influential minds. Also, last year I know in fifth grade in elementary, they had a parent night where they just had different forms. For example, just getting us ready for the school year, giving us the ideas of what we need to keep in mind for middle school and high school, and then what to do to get them ready for college. That was really important. Just any parent or teacher social would be another activity I would be involved in at the school.

Mr. Sonny Dills comments were similar to Mr. David Hampton's comments from East Hickory Heights. He stated:

I've done extra-curricular sports activities and read to classes. I've gone to Veterans' Day. I was asked to go speak to all the classes at a Veterans' Day and share military experiences. I thought that was a great experience for the students. Being able to volunteer and participate in activities is a good thing to do. I particularly like the sporting extra-curricular activities.

Mrs. Jessica Shaw shared activities that she would be likely to participate in as well. She stated, "A dance. Let's see, prom and graduation. When the band performs, I do a lot then. Being there helping the kids means a lot to them."

After the researcher asked the participants about parent activities they would participate in at their child's school, the researcher then asked the participants to discuss what types of parent activities they would like to see implemented at the school for them to volunteer. School dances, prep rallies, field day, band, parent-child orientations, and

parent support activities were common practices expressed by the participants to be implemented in both middle schools.

Mr. David Hampton from East Hickory Heights Middle School suggested two different activities that he would like to see implemented in the school. He stated:

I think there should be parental clubs that meet from time to time and to discuss programs or incentives that will be given by the administration and teachers. I would like to see teachers and parents sometimes even come and do a luncheon. I think they should have school picnics together as well. Not all the time discussing educational strategies, but sometimes just to show the kids that they are there to help them understand the importance of relationships, trying to be social with others, and helping them to create social skills. I think that everything children see, they're going to pattern themselves after those things and I think that's important.

Mrs. Kesha Holt stated:

I would like to see more fun things for the kids such as free dances and games. I realize that security and discipline is a main issue, but there needs to be more activities like prep rallies that can bring the kids to have more fun. I mean they don't do that, very rarely anymore. They should have just some kind of activity to let the kids know that the school and the parents appreciate their hard work. Like extra basketball games against the staff or teachers against the students.

Mrs. Sabrina Smith suggested activities that were similar to those expressed by Mrs.

Kesha Holt. She stated:

The schools should have more prep rallies or dances for the students to get a break away from academics and TCAP. They need to have a little extra time to have fun and socialize with their peers. Another activity would be having regular competition matches between the students and the teacher or the principal's staff. This would really be fun and I believe parents would come out and support it.

The participants from Rockhill Middle School were asked to discuss activities that they would like to see implemented at the schools. Their responses were similar to each other. Mrs. Jennifer Davis stated:

You know ideas that would help support the parents that would influence them to want to come out. Parent forums and family nights are other activities. This would give us information and offer us help in parenting or tell us different resources that are out there available. For example, last year in elementary school, they did a parent-student night that gave out information to parents to help prepare students for college. They had twenty minute intervals where you could go, kind of pick and choose what forum you wanted to go and sit in on and learn about what resources were available in the county. If you needed extra help or you felt like your child needed a tutor or maybe needed help in reading comprehension or what resources the county had available. Any kind of parenting and educational resources helps, especially if they're free.

The researcher summarized what Mrs. Davis suggested by asking her to clarify the comments on parent forum activities that would teach parents about parenting. She commented:

Parent forum activities that would give me resources or tools on how to be a better parent would be helpful. Other kinds of parenting ideas or suggestions would help. Even by providing fun activities to do with your child. Also, the kids love field day parent volunteers. Things like that are better for parents to be involved and do things with their child. A parent resource center could be something that the school could implement in the schools. They could have resources or other school materials in the center that would inform parents of what the curriculum was, what they would be doing the next nine weeks, things to that nature. Some parents simply don't get involved because they do not have the proper knowledge or skills to help their child. Some of them do not have a proper education or didn't even get a college degree. The schools now are more advanced. I sometimes struggle myself.

Mr. Sonny Dills suggested a few different activities than the other two participants at Rockhill Middle School that he would like to see implemented at the school. He stated:

I think there should be band or more sport activities like volleyball. I mean, I like to see them have you know, more activities. Like, for instance, at Rockhill you can take band or chorus or choir, but you can't do both. You know, I'd like to see some more of the arts, I guess. More theater you know. They've got a great band program and they've got a great choir, but you can't do both. I mean, I can play basketball and I can play football, but you have to choose.

Additionally he suggested activities such as physical activities. He stated, “I don’t think kids get enough exercise. They should run laps, play volleyball, or basketball in PT like we did in school.” Mrs. Jessica Shaw mentioned a similar activity like Mrs. Davis, which was implementing family night. She stated that this family night could include time for family night reading. Mrs. Shaw mentioned a different activity that she would like to see implemented in the school. This activity was a silent auction. Mrs. Shaw stated, “I’ve been trying to get them to implement this one.” The researcher asked Mrs. Jessica Shaw to further expound on what is a silent auction: She stated:

A silent auction could really help raise money for the PTO. I think a lot of the activities at the school are being conducted by PTO activities. That’s basically what we did at a previous school which I’ve been trying to get them to do at each grade level. Create a basket or whatever a theme basket and just do it like a little auction. Have the parents come and bid on it, you know what I’m saying? Then raise money for the school.

The researcher asked the participants in the first focus group to discuss various learning at home activities they conduct with their children that support learning activities that are being conducted at school. They expressed that they review the child’s homework assignments and projects on a daily or weekly basis. Participants from both schools shared that they take time to ask their child about the curriculum and what they learned each day to gain some insight of their academic progress. Mrs. Sabrina Smith stated that she conferences with her child’s teacher monthly to ensure that her child is on track and not missing any assignments. In addition to this comment made by Mrs. Sabrina Smith, Mr. David Hampton stated:

I make it a point every two weeks to stop by the school and check on my child to see his progress in each of his classes. I know since he has entered middle school, it has been a challenge for him to stay organized and focused. Elementary school

and middle school are two major areas that should be really given attention to by every parent whose child's leave elementary and goes to the sixth grade.

Mr. Sonny Dills also made a comment in reference to Mr. David Hampton's statements.

He stated:

I know when my child entered the sixth grade here at Rockhill, I was very cautious about other students picking on her and influencing her to become a gang member. Some students used to pick on her and she would not tell me. I eventually obtained this information after I started asking her about her day at school and what homework was requested for her to complete the next day. I learned from that first year that from then on I would make it a point to stay involved and building a relationship with her at home.

Mrs. Jessica Shaw stated:

There are school activities that occur throughout the week at the school, but as a parent I know I have to work as a team with the teachers. I check everyday to see if my son has homework. Even if he tells me he does not, I go behind him and clarify that he doesn't have any homework by asking what did he learn that day and what are you supposed to be doing tomorrow? I make it a point to talk to him regularly about his school projects or any missing reports, because I do not want him to fall behind and he is supposed to be going to high school next year. It is my priority to do these things with him when he gets home. I also take him on education sites outside of a school event to make sure my son is well versed with what is going on and historical events from the past. I should not have to wait for the school, I can help as well. Actually, sometimes I'm learning with him. I just try not to show it.

The researcher noted that Mrs. Shaw appeared to be very passionate about her responses she gave on the learning at home activities and how it is important for her to work with the school and work at home to ensure learning is taking place. After the researcher gained insight of what activities and programs would increase the involvement of parents, she asked the participants in the focus group what they attribute to the decline of parent involvement in middle school. The participants overall stated that parent work schedules, students developing their own identity, societal changes, and peer pressure

were some of the causes of the decline in parental involvement at the middle school level.

Mr. Dills from Rockhill Middle stated:

When I think of a decline in parent involvement, the first thing that comes to my mind is two parents working. When both parents are forced to work, I think that's whether it's the mother that stays home or the father that stays home, they're both working. The parents do not have time when they get home at 5:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. in the evening to do anything, but get the kids situated. The kids have chores and stuff that have to get done. Therefore, work and having this dual income society is a cause.

The researcher asked Mr. Dills to expound on the meaning of a dual income society. Mr.

Dills stated:

Well, I do not necessarily mean dual income society, but just two parents that are working. If mom and dad both have to be at work at 8:00 a.m. and the child has to be at school at 8:00 am, the mom is trying to get everybody's breakfast made. She's trying to get dressed and get ready. The dad is trying to get dressed and get ready. Then the kids have to finish getting ready as well. Everyone is rushing around, because everyone has somewhere to be and both parties are working on the same time agenda to get where they need to be. Therefore, if you are rushing around, and then the kids come home later on in the day around 3:30 pm, I think they are called latchkey kids or something. The mom gets home at 5:00 p.m. or 5:30 p.m. and the dad gets home at 5:00 p.m. or 5:30 p.m., it is hard to want to participant in any activity if there is not a designated time set for it. Yeah, I'd love to hear about your day, but I've got to get dinner ready. Then you know dad is like he would love to hear, but sports center is on the television. Then the basketball Celtics game comes on and they have to watch that around 7:30 p.m. Some kids are not as fortunate as I was when I grew up. My mother was home when I got home. She was there to make my lunch and to see me off to school. Then when I came home, mom was there for the most part. When mom finally got dinner cooked and the dishes done, she was finally ready to sit down for a minute. Then it was time for kids to go to bed. That's what I mean by that.

Mrs. Holt from East Hickory Heights Middle stated:

Also, things begin to change in the middle school grades, unlike it was when the children were in elementary school. The teachers are caring and try to be concerned about the students as much as they can, but they have a lot to focus on. They want the kids to kind of become more independent and not need mom and dad for everything. Also, another thing is not to go to them for everything. They become less involved as they did in elementary school with the kids. That's

healthy psychologically, because then you become more independent and more responsible. Some parents and teachers are more extreme about that. They don't want any parents bothering them getting in the way. Some aren't so extreme.

Mrs. Shaw from Rockhill Middle voiced similar comments to Mrs. Holt. She stated:

I agree about the independency. I do think the teachers aim to get the students to become more independent and not act too babyish. I also think the students start to change as well. You really don't see it much until your child goes to the seventh and eighth grade. I know my son acted liked he didn't want me around or even come to the school. I didn't know what was going on, because he was still so attached in the sixth grade. When I would drop him off in the mornings, he wanted me to go ahead and leave, so his friends would not see me. I started to take it personally for a while and would fuss. Eventually, I talked to him one afternoon and he stated that he didn't want to be embarrassed and he wanted some freedom sometimes to hang. I told him that I was still going to come up to that school and check on him and as long as he lives with me, I am forever gonna keep seeing what he is up too. I gave him his space. Now that he is in eighth grade and getting ready for high school, I give him more time to go places, but I still keep my eyes on him. There is too much going on with drugs, gangs, and peer pressure that I don't want my son to get caught up. It's hard raising boys. I think the schools should have more programs to help parents and teenagers when they go to middle school.

Mrs. Smith from East Hickory Heights stated:

Yeah. I think what Jessica brought up was a good point. You know they are becoming more independent. They are getting older, but a lot of times the kids don't come home and tell you about school. You're probably not going to ask questions, because you feel like things are going ok if the school is not calling home or they are not bringing bad grades to the house. Most cases the kids will not tell you what is going on and if the teachers aren't communicating, mom and dad think everything's great. Especially, if there is one single parent and they have to work. Sometimes, they don't have the time to get involved at the school, not to mention with the child either. They are probably trying to make ends meet with the rough times now.

Mr. Hampton from East Hickory Heights stated:

I think society too is another reason in itself. Although, in some ways has forced kids to act differently and seek other people and things instead of their parents. The entertainment industry and just society and everything are forcing kids to be more independent. I will even say they are forced to get more mature than they are. So, they think that they can handle it. They feel like I don't need my mom

and dad. I can just go by myself. I meet a lot of parents, younger parents anyway. I don't want to label people but, younger people especially feel like, their kids can be at home alone. They're fine, they're fine. There is no one really monitoring what they're watching, what they're doing, who they're doing things with. It's just society as a whole. I think the gradual shift away from values, Christian values, and morals. Some people will argue with the term "Christian", but it is good guidelines. What's right, what's wrong, what's true, what's not true, proper behavior, self control, self policing. We need to go back to those kinds of beliefs, because of all of the violence in the video games, movies, and television; we have to get more involved now more than ever before. Society now is taking over and we have to make sure we sit down and talk with our kids. I know they have to experience some things, but we sure don't want the world, gang bangers, drug dealers, or molesters teaching our kids when we could just take time out and be supportive. Take time out and spend some time with them and see what's going on in their minds, their activities, and their interests.

Mrs. Holt expressed comments on peer pressure. She stated, "The peers they hang around pressure them to do things or say things they shouldn't be saying." Additionally, Mrs.

Holt stated:

I know the kids are coming to school seeing what the other kids have, like the nice clothes and shoes. They are wearing one hundred dollar sneakers. When the other kids don't have those things and parents can't afford to buy it for them, they get teased at school. Then eventually seek gangs or something else, like stealing. I know all kids don't do that, but you know what I mean. They bring cell phones to school with nude pictures and crazy language in the text. You have to literally check their cell phones at times to see what they are doing. Cell phones should not be allowed in schools, but as you know, they will find some way to use them anyway.

#### *Essential Ingredients: Climate, Communication, and Collaboration*

The participants believe that school climate is important in influencing parents to become involved in the school. Climate, collaboration, and communication in the school were three overall aspects that the participants shared as being relevant to their perspective about the essence of parent involvement having a positive or negative impact

in the school. The researcher asked the participants in the initial interviews to tell why parent involvement is essential in the school climate. Mr. David Hampton stated:

First of all it enhances the child's desire to learn because the child is excited about the parent being a part and being sane and showing interest in their learning. It also shows to the administration what kind of parent that this child has and also helps them to understand why this child is being successful. It also builds relationships with the administration and it also produces an environment where the administration can also see and play a part in that parent continuing to thrive to cause their child to be successful.

The researcher asked Mr. David Hampton to further expound on his comments about the school climate to gain further clarity of his perspective of parent involvement in the school climate. Mr. David Hampton further commented by stating:

Well, it's the parent and the teacher working together. It's giving me a chance to become involved in the classroom. It also gives teachers a chance to become involved in what goes on in that child's environment at home and we both benefit from having those two categories taking place and it shows that we both have the interests of the child at hand.

Mrs. Kesha Holt expressed she believes that parents being involved at the school and disciplining their child could help to promote a better school climate. She stated:

I think parent involvement is essential because if a child knows that their parent is involved, they're more willing to want to get out there and make you happy, I guess or to please them. I think that their academics become important if they have accountability. Then they seem to want to do it. If there's no accountability, why should they do it? I think as far as discipline, it would be a huge one. If there's no discipline from the parents, then there's no discipline from the school. They can discipline, but they can't enforce, I guess. I guess, I mean really, for me it all comes back to their education and their social skills.

Mrs. Sandy Smith stated:

An inviting school climate is what determines if I am going to be involved at my child's school. If I come in a school and the secretary of the front office is not friendly, I can try to overlook it, but eventually it will cause me to feel as if I am not welcomed. At East Hickory Heights, I feel the school climate is good. They are friendly. The teachers and principal loves to have me at the school. At least

that is what they tell me. If you have a school climate that is positive, then you can begin to build relationships with the staff and you can be one big family trying to help the students.

Mrs. Smith further commented on things that can take away from an inviting school climate. She stated:

Although my child's school is welcoming and has a good school climate, I have been in schools where the morale in the school was so low I was going to take my child out of the school. Most teachers were negative. They didn't call you about positive things, only about negative things.

The researcher asked the participants from Rockhill Middle School to discuss why parent involvement is essential in the school climate. They responded with similar comments as the participants from East Hickory Heights. They also believe that parent involvement is essential in the school climate because it helps to build relationships and helps students feel you value them. A different perspective that was mentioned by the participants at Rockhill Middle School was discipline. They believe that parent involvement is essential in the school climate because it can help lower disciplinary referral rates, which helps to foster positive school morale. The researcher asked Mrs. Jennifer Davis to discuss why parent involvement is essential in the school climate. Mrs. Jennifer Davis stated:

Parent involvement is essential in the school climate because it gives parents an opportunity to be involved and get to know the teachers, students, and what's going on in the school. When parents become involved in the school it adds to the climate where everyone feels they have a part of the learning process. I don't want to feel like I can't be involved at the school my child attends.

The researcher asked Mrs. Davis did she want to make any additional comments on how parent involvement is essential in the school climate and Mrs. Davis stated:

Well, the only other thing I can say is when parent involvement is occurring in the school, students can feel like you have their backs and they can't try to get over on you because they know you know what is going on in the school. To me when parents are involved, it helps the teachers and principal. I say this to say, that discipline rates can go down, attendance can go up, and you have built a family atmosphere with each other.

Mr. Sonny Dills stated:

Well, I think if you've got 30 kids in a classroom, it's hard for a teacher, if not impossible, to control, to teach, or to do the things that they need to do. If you don't have discipline at home, when you get to school, you know, without discipline, without doing your work, without having done your homework, you're holding up the whole class. Therefore, if parents are involved at the school and are doing their part by being responsible parents, they can help when discipline problems occur at the school. Number one, kids are least likely to act up when they know their parents are around or will find out. Second, if they know at anytime you may come to the school; they may try to avoid doing foolish behaviors. Also, if kids know you are in the school, they will get their work done and show more promptness to doing what they know they should be doing.

The researcher noted that Mr. Dills feels deeply about parents taking an active role in the school and at home. The researcher asked Mr. Dills to comment on how he thought his child would feel with him being involved at the school and how this would possibly affect the school climate if any. Mr. Dills stated:

Well for my child, I think for any child to have your parent at your school can go either way. I mean this could be a bad thing or a good thing. My child loves to have me at the school when I can come and not at the military base. I try to be at the school as much as I can. When I do come to the school, my child feels special and has a sense of feelings that I care about her best interest. My child enjoys the relationship I have with her and it helps her to have a good relationship with her teachers, because the teachers see that I care about the best interest of my child and what they are teaching her and what is going on. I think other kids want their parents to come to the school as well. At first, my child acted like she didn't want me at the school, because her friends would laugh at her and think she was a baby. This year that is different, because the students and teachers know me. I speak to them often on days when I come to the school and I try to be a role model for them and give them someone to aim for as an adult.

The researcher asked Mrs. Jessica Shaw to discuss why parent involvement is essential in the school climate. Mrs. Shaw said, “It’s essential because we have a role to play by being there for our children.” She further commented:

They need to see our face and not feel like they are alone when they get to school. My child is in the eighth grade. He acts like he does not want me at the school, because of his friends, but I know he does, because he always asks me am I coming to some event at the school. Futhermore, I don’t really care if he acts like he does not want me there, it is my job to see what’s going on and how he is progressing in school. My presence at the school is embraced when I come by the staff and that in itself encourages me to want to come to the school.

The researcher asked Mrs. Shaw to clarify how parent involvement is essential to the school climate. Mrs. Shaw stated, “Well it’s simply helps to keep a good relationship with his teachers.” She also stated, “It helps my child to know I have his best interest and want to be involved with what he is doing in school. It makes the load a little easier for everyone.” Mrs. Shaw also advised the researcher that it helps her and her son communicate and have discussions at home.

Participants were also asked to tell about their experiences at the school in the one-on-one interviews. Many of the participants discussed the practices of being greeted with a smile and a friendly hello when they enter the school building. Mrs. Jennifer Shaw stated, “I like to see a warm smile from the office staff and the principal at Rockhill. This makes me feel like they appreciate me when I come to the school.” Mrs. Kesha Holt answered similarly. She stated, “Greetings, speaking to the students, smiling faces, and helping me if I was lost, made me feel welcomed at the school.” Participants expressed that communicating with parents, making them feel valued, and how you treat them when they are in the school are important aspects to influencing a positive or negative school

climate. Additionally, implementation of communication practices and opportunities to allow parents to volunteer at the school also impacted the participants' perspective about the school climate.

Another question the researcher asked the participants in the second one-on-one interview was for them to discuss what would need to occur to enable them to feel more comfortable in participating in parent activities at their child's school. The participants from both middle schools expressed comments that they would like for the schools to continue to build positive climates with them, revise current practices of recognition, and take initiative to collaborate more at the school.

The participants from East Hickory Heights Middle School expressed the importance of the school showing more interest in the students, continuing to collaborate, and communicate with parents by creating more ways to get parents involved with their children at school. Mr. David Hampton stated:

I know I would feel more comfortable and it would encourage me as a parent at East Hickory Heights to see the administration and teachers putting forth the effort to make it a priority to show me that they have a total interest in the well being of my child. I think that all parents would appreciate that because if you're trying to be involved in the well being of your child's education and you see the same involvement being given from the one who is teaching your child away from you that brings about somewhat of a spark to want to be more involved. I know this would keep me coming to the school and even to want to participate more in what my child is doing or even helping the school with needs they may have.

The researcher asked Mr. Hampton to expound on ways the school could show interest in the well being of his child or gives suggestions on how the school could increase parent involvement in the school climate by showing interest and communicating. Mr. Hampton stated:

Well, I think some ways to show interest is one, by doing a daily evaluation would be important. I think that when I say a daily evaluation, I'm talking about keeping notes, letting the parents know, keeping the parents informed even when you don't know what is going on at the school. It can be when the teacher is changing lesson plans or they're moving from one phase of teaching to the next phase of teaching, keeping the parents informed of the changes that are taking place. Therefore, when the child brings home new materials, the parents are already informed before time that there is going to be a shift in whatever learning skills that they are trying to implement to the child. Let's take for instance that they are learning Algebra 1, and the teacher knows in two weeks that they're going to be shifting from Algebra 1 to Algebra 2, I think it would be imperative that they would inform the parent ahead of time, to begin to share with parents what the curriculum is or give study material. This can help the parents feel knowledgeable to work with their child and share with them that they will be shifting to another level of learning and began to prepare them for it. It's just important that we know what is going on so we can help our children. This is adding to the parent involvement being essential in the school climate.

Mrs. Kesha Holt gave interesting comments on the school showing interest in the children. Initially she stated, "I like the school and it should continue the current practices they have in place. Then she further commented on an interesting point about the school showing interest in the children. Her responses were similar to Mr. Hampton's comments, but she stated that she felt the principal should show more interest in the students. Mrs. Holt stated:

I think the principal at East Hickory Heights is absolutely wonderful. I think the only thing that could help school morale and the school spirit get any better in the school is for him to be more involved in the children instead of the daily administrative duties. I mean, I understand he has a rough job and a lot to do, but I think he should show up at some of the sporting events and talk to the kids and let them know that he is there. Also, he could come up and be interested in all the sports not just football. He could go to the clubs sometimes. You know, not all kids are athletes and I think some of them would love to see their principal show up at their events. This would really make them feel good.

The researcher asked Mrs. Holt were there any other suggestions that she would like to give that the school could do to make her feel more comfortable. Mrs. Holt stated:

I think the school could focus on other kids a little bit more. The focus now is pretty much football. Then the other kids, like the kids that are in science club don't get to see any excitement from the school. They don't get the funding. They don't get to do as much fun stuff as the football team. For example, my daughter is a cheerleader. They are not recognized as a sport, so they have a football game and the booster club is the way they will provide. They will give the football team a snack and dinner or something, but the cheerleaders have to go with the football team in order to get recognized. They're never recognized from any of the groups as being a sport, so the parents and the coaches have to build them up and let them know that they are a part of everything. I feel the same way as far as the clubs. I do not think that the clubs get recognized at the level that they should. I mean every child deserves the same recognition whether they are the science club type or the art club type or the football player or the cheerleader or whatever. Whatever their passion is they should be recognized and told how proud we are of them. But they're not.

The researcher noted that after Mrs. Holt began to express her comments on the school showing more interest and recognizing other students in the school more, Mrs. Holt did want to see the school improve in some of their current practices, such as recognizing all students in some form and collaborating with parents.

Mrs. Sabrina Smith also expressed comments similar to the other two participants at East Hickory Heights Middle Schools. Mrs. Smith stated:

I personally feel very comfortable anytime I walk into that school, for any reason. They are doing a good job of making me feel comfortable by greeting me, keeping me informed of events, and just building a good relationship with their parents. You know if I have to say one thing that I probably would like to see changed, is when they have their report cards.

The researcher asked Mrs. Smith to expound on the change she would like to see occur as it relates to the school report cards. She stated:

Everybody goes at the same time to pick up their kids' report cards. For example, between 4:00 and 7:00. It would be kind of nice to be able to have more of a time schedule from 4:15 to 4:30 this is just for your daughter, rather than having six people being there at the same time while you are trying to pick up your child's report card and discuss any important information.

The researcher asked Mrs. Smith to clarify if this time was for a conference or for picking up the report cards. Mrs. Smith advised the researcher that they both occurred at the same time. She stated, “I wish they would give us a block of time to come or select from. Then we could have a little more personal time without other parents around or in one big group.”

The researcher asked the participants from Rockhill Middle School to discuss what would make them feel more comfortable in participating in activities at their child’s school and they expressed similar comments to the participants from East Hickory Heights. Mrs. Jennifer Davis stated:

I’m really comfortable already. I know that it would be helpful to anyone if the teachers would talk with parents frequently. They do a good job making me feel welcomed at the school. I always appreciate when the teacher even emails me directly. They could help increase the positive morale in the school if the other teachers would call and tell the parents how they appreciate their help when they came out to the school to volunteer or showed up at a game to assist. Just a friendly email or note from the teacher just asking for help that they need in the class or school, because we sometimes, do not know what is going on. Our school is good about sending out emails and keeping me informed, but it would be good to know if this is common for other parents as well that may not be as involved as me.

The researcher asked Mr. Sonny Dills what could the school do to make him feel more comfortable in participating at his child’s school and he expressed similar comments as Mrs. Davis. He stated there was really nothing that the school could do that they are not already doing. Mr. Dills stated, “I feel comfortable going in there and I’ve always been. We’ve been made to feel comfortable that we can go in there at anytime.” Additionally, Mrs. Jessica Shaw stated that she feels comfortable at the school and they have a climate that is inviting to her. After the researcher clarified her responses, Mrs. Shaw mentioned

a suggestion that was in contrast to the statement that Mr. Dills made about being able to go in the school anytime. Mrs. Shaw stated that the school could have a time when parents could come to the school to speak with a teacher and it is not the scheduled planning period for the teacher. Mrs. Shaw stated, “This would help the progress of things better. I know they have planning time, but a parent may want to speak with a teacher in the morning instead of waiting for a designated time.”

The researcher noted that although Mr. Dills stated that he feels comfortable with going in the school at anytime, Mrs. Shaw referenced being able to go at the school to see the teachers at any time instead of a specific allotted time that the school had in place.

The researcher asked the participants to discuss what they thought their child’s school could do to increase communication with parents. The researcher noted that participants from East Hickory Heights and Rockhill Middle Schools both utilize a variety of methods for communicating to parents in order to get them involved in the school. Both middle schools use common types of communication practices such as sending home written communications, conducting conferences, and open house at the beginning of the school year; Noteworthy, the participants from both schools expressed the need for middle schools to implement communication practices that were implemented at the elementary school level. If those same practices were implemented at the middle school level, it would be more conducive to an inviting school climate. Some of the ideas suggested included parent-student nights, informative newsletters, reaching out to an unfortunate family in the school, conducting town hall meetings, and

conducting muffins with mom and donuts with dad meetings. Mr. Sonny Dills further commented on this question stating:

We should have town hall meetings, you know, open house and more administration involvement; direct communication to the parents. It doesn't always have to be a teacher. The principals or assistant principals should be able to address some things sometimes. That's probably saying too much. A principal or assistant principal should contact every parent in the school at least once a year. They could also try when a parent comes to the school, for whatever reason, whether it's to pick up a kid, to drop a kid off or to drop something off, they could provide assistance. Anytime a parent walks through the door, a principal or assistant principal should meet that parent, I think. They should be involved as much as they can.

As the focus group discussion continued, Mr. David Hampton expressed the following concern for the well-being of students at the middle school level. He stated:

We just need to slow down, take a step back and look at what we are doing. They are producing something and we've got raw material in and a finished product coming out. Do we like what we're sending out the door? If we don't, we've got to get creative and figure out a way if the schools don't. If it's parental involvement, we as an administration have to figure out a way to increase parental involvement and increase lines of effective communication.

Mrs. Sabrina Smith further commented by expressing the following statements:

Administration is so focused on TCAP. They lose the sight of what would really help their TCAP scores, which is, getting the kids more involved. I agree we've got to teach, but that can't be their only focus. Once TCAP is over, the teachers are done and school is over. They should collaborate and communicate on a regular basis with parents and not just when TCAP is coming or TCAP is over to let us know how our children are doing.

Mrs. Jessica Shaw stated similar comments to Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Shaw stated:

I think the school does great with sending written notes home and letting me know what is going on when I come to the school, but I would like to see them do more to increase communication. I think this will help to get more parents involved in the school and include them more in decisions.

The researcher asked Mrs. Shaw to expound on a few suggestions that the school could do to increase communication. She responded:

Well, they are doing a good job as I said, but they could send out more emails to parents who do not come to the school. They could create a committee that called home to the parents to let them know something that was positive about their child or the school. Even reach out to a less fortunate student who is having difficulty at home with food or clothing. This would at least help the parents to feel the school cares about them and what they are going through. I bet the parents would show more interest in coming to the school.

After the researcher asked the participants to discuss what they thought the school could do to increase communication to parents, the researcher asked them to discuss what the schools could do to strengthen partnerships with families. Several of the participants mentioned that the schools could increase communication as a means to strengthen the partnerships. They stated that this could be done by having more than one open house, meet and greet events, and parent and student nights to get parents involved and more comfortable with being around. Mr. Hampton stated:

One way is to send home monthly newsletters to the parents. Back at the elementary school where my child used to attend prior to here, I would get a newsletter in the mail informing me of events and other things going on at the school. This newsletter included a calendar of events and a positive quote. Also, they invited us to come out to special events.

Mrs. Kesha Holt agreed with Mr. Hampton. She stated:

In our child's elementary school, they were very creative. We used to have parent nights such as "Muffins with Mom" and "Donuts with Dad." I have not seen that going on at East Hickory Heights. Maybe that is something too kiddie for middle school, but I bet the parents sure would love to come out and get the sweet treat. I know it's more than just about a muffin or a donut, but parents like incentives too. That's a positive way to communicate with a parent and strengthen the relationship with them. All schools should want their parents to be involved. This is one sure way that I know I would come.

Mrs. Davis further commented on the question. She stated, “I know that those things you just mentioned may cost some and the budget may be crappy as I hear, but you have to find a way.” The researcher asked the other participants would they like to make a comment or give any suggestions. Mr. Sonny Dills stated:

I am in agreement with them. We have to make a way if we want to keep our parents involved. I think our school does a good job communicating with us, but there is always some room for improvement. You have to reach out to people if you want them to participate. People can’t read your minds. The schools, I know have a lot going on, but it is important to keep the line of communication open if you want these partnerships to improve.

The researcher asked the participants how schools can reach out to parents who don’t get involved. They expressed comments such as reaching out through the media, conducting town hall meetings, using technology like twitter or facebook, and passing out flyers in the neighborhood. Mrs. Jessica Shaw stated:

The way times are now and how kids are so up on technology, the schools have to be up on technology as well to reach out to the parents. They have to continue to review their current communication practices and take surveys to really see what is working at their school. Just because you see a lot of parents, typically does not mean those are the parents whose child needs the help in school. Some of those parents are embarrassed to come to the school.

Mr. David Hampton stated that the schools should implement a “Big Brother, Big Sister” program and allow the parents to take on this role to encourage parents to come out. He stated:

I know that parents may not feel like getting involved, but we can’t afford not to be involved because we are losing our children everyday to gang members, drive bys, or other activities that draw the interest of our children. Our students are depending on the school to sometimes be another outlet for them to run to when they are not getting the care at home. So what do you do when you can’t reach out to the parents, keep trying even harder. If that doesn’t work, then the schools have to keep making sure that they have people working for them that really care about the best interest of our children. Communication is important.

After the researcher gained insight of the essential ingredients that influence parents to engage in parent involvement activities, she wanted to gain additional information that could assist schools in increasing parent involvement at the middle school level. The researcher asked the participants in the focus group what could be done to increase parent involvement at the middle school level. The participants overall stated there should be an increase of more effective communication and supportive programs for parents to keep track of what is taking place at school. Mrs. Davis from Rockhill Middle stated:

The school does a good job with trying to communicate with the parents, but they could do a little more to let us know what is going on with our child. Email is great, but there's nothing like a piece of paper coming home in a book to give to your mother. I know middle school students may not bring it home, but they should try another way. Maybe texting or the facebook thing.

Mrs. Holt from East Hickory Heights stated:

I do have to say, there was an award ceremony tonight and I got a phone tree call last night from the principal. I like that. At first, you know, I'm like, the school's calling. Why are they calling me? It was the principal calling to let me know what was going on today. I was like wow, I like that. The phone tree in schools is a good idea. I think other schools in this area are trying many different ways and that's one of the ways. It's basically a way to communicate with parents. I know one of my other friends whose daughter attends the school told me that teachers and other staff members rotate calling parents as well to let them know what's going on.

The researcher restated some of the suggestions expressed by the participants to gain clarification about communication practices and how the need for more teacher involvement could increase parent involvement at the middle school level. Mrs. Davis stated, "Definitely more communication." Mrs. Shaw stated, "More texts. I do not have time to check my email, but if I get a text to my phone, I will check it." Mrs. Smith

expressed similar comments. She stated, “I agree. A text or email sometimes is better than a handwritten note. If I got a handwritten note, it’s just like I didn’t get it. It may not even make it home.” Mr. Dills stated:

It goes back to the latchkey kids. The schools should have some type of after school program for kids whose parents have to work late, so they will not be at home doing nothing or unsupervised. I’m not talking about extra-curricular sports, but clubs, tutoring, learning a foreign language, or getting extra credit for a class by doing a typed report.

Mr. Hampton supported Mr. Dills’ comments by stating:

I also agree about the after school programs, but to take that further, the schools could have some afterschool programs for the parents. I think it is vital that if parents do have the time to come to the school and do something with their kids or even if they just wanted to come to the school, they should have help classes. Classes like for parents to get their GED, managing teenagers, math study, or academic prep things. I mean programs to help parents feel comfortable with helping their child with homework, peer pressure, bullying, and building self-confidence. Some parents don’t come out or try to help their kids, because they don’t know how to do the work, and they do not want to look bad in front of their kids. Also, some parents are just kids themselves. They really do not know how to take care of these kids. It’s hard these days raising kids, especially if the dad is not at home with the mom.

Mrs. Shaw stated:

If the schools work with the parents more and see what they could do to get them more involved that would probably help too. They should work with the parents and allow them to help with ideas. Believe it or not, some parents may want to be over the afterschool programs or school activities. It’s sometimes more than just telling me what’s going on at the school or with my son, let me get involved by giving my ideas and work together as a team. It just like we said earlier about collaborating with each other. The teachers should ask us sometimes what we like and what our children like, instead of them coming up with every program or event at the school. I know this may be asking too much, but it may be a start. I remember back at the other school where we lived, the elementary school. The principal let the parents get involved. It was positive. We didn’t take over, but you did see more parents happy, the school was in good standing, and our children learned. They even had a parent council. This helped students get closer to their parents.

Mrs. Holt stated, “Maybe things have changed where parents can’t get involved as much. You know they have all types of laws now that prohibit parents from getting too involved.”

The researcher was very interested in hearing the responses from all the participants, because she wanted to gain insight about what parents actually want the school to do to increase involvement from parents. The researcher is passionate about the success of students and valued the perspectives that the participants shared in the interviews and focus groups.

### Chapter Summary

The data that was analyzed from the interviews, focus groups, and fieldnotes demonstrated that East Hickory Height and Rockhill Middle Schools utilized a common set of parent involvement strategies. Many of these common parent involvement strategies were successful in assisting in the development of a positive school for the last three years. Although, East Hickory Heights Middle School did not make AYP this past school year and was not a Title I school, the common parent involvement practices and perspectives about what influences them to become involved in their child’s school was similar to the outcome of the Rockhill Middle School, which did make AYP last school term and is a Title 1 school.

The primary purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain a better understanding of what parental involvement means to parents and what influences them to become involved in a school and to provide a guideline of strategies for school districts, principals, and other school stakeholders to implement parent involvement

practices in their school to increase parents' participation at the middle school level. The majority of middle schools have some similarities, but there are also unique differences that require school districts to implement programs, policies, and support to meet their individual needs. Many of the responses made by the study participants echoed Epstein's typology of parent involvement. The researcher believes the interviews, focus groups, and field notes from this study have provided an effective template for other middle schools to use as they search for new and innovative ways to increase their level of parent involvement in their pursuit of increasing rigor in schools and academic excellence for all students. Additionally, the interviews and focus groups have unveiled the significance of creating a positive home-school partnership.

Based on the findings, Chapter 5 will entail the researcher's discussion, implications, recommendations and conclusion of parent involvement in middle schools.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Discussion

This study focused on a multi-site case study of two middle schools in the Riverwood Schools District. Data gathered for this study were synthesized and analyzed to understand what meaning parents attribute to parental involvement and what influences them to become involved in a school. The researcher reviewed parental involvement activities and practices used at both middle schools that involved any or all of Epstein's six types of parent involvement and explored how the responses given by the participants focused on parents getting involved, parent responsibility, school activities, and inviting school climate.

The researcher interviewed and conducted focus groups of six participants whose children either attended East Hickory Heights Middle School or Rockhill Middle School to determine what meaning parents attribute to parent involvement and what activities influence them to become engaged in a school. The information from the one-on-one interviews and focus groups for the participants were transcribed, coded, and analyzed in support of the two research questions. Field notes were taken to capture details not reflected in the interviews and focus groups. The results showed that many of the school practices that emerged that are currently being implemented or desired to be implemented in the school are consistent among the participants at both East Hickory Heights and Rockhill Middle Middle Schools.

Findings are organized under the themes to reflect the responses given from the participants at East Hickory Heights Middle School and Rockhill Middle School in response to the overarching research questions:

1. What does parental involvement mean to parents?
2. What influences parents to engage in parent involvement?

The researcher will answer the overarching research questions by stating the results of the participants' responses for defining parental involvement and influential factors that engage parents. Additionally, this chapter will situate the findings in this study to confirm the existing literature to provide contributions to the existing literature.

#### *Defining Parental Involvement*

Data collected from the participants' responses in the interviews, focus groups, and field notes help to answer the first research question. Two themes emerged from the data and were used to reflect the definition of what meaning parents attributed to parental involvement. The two themes were *Mission Possible: Parents as Advocates for Student Success* and *Partnering with Parents: Walking the Journey Together*. Participants' from this study attribute parental involvement to mean parents being advocates for their children's success in school and as future adults thriving in the world. The participants from Rockhill Middle School and East Hickory Heights shared the common belief that their main role in their children's lives is to be an advocate by ensuring they receive the best education and have the best resources available to them to be successful.

As parents of students in middle schools, the participants of this study expressed the importance of sharing responsibility with the school and taking ownership of their

role as active parents in their children's lives. They acknowledged the fact that schools should not be fully responsible for ensuring students succeed at high levels without the partnerships of parents. In addition to parents taking ownership of their responsibilities as a parent and being advocates for their children, they believe that the school administrators, teachers, students, and other staff members should gain responsibility and take action for their role in this collaborative school-family partnership.

### *Influential Factors that Engage Parents*

Data collected from the participants' responses in the interviews, focus groups, and field notes help to answer the second research question. Two themes emerged from that data and were used to reflect what influences parents to become engaged in parent involvement. The two themes were *Bridging the Gap: Engaging Activities and Supportive Programs* and *Essential Ingredients: Climate, Collaboration, and Communication*. Research has found that school events that feature some interaction with students, parents, and teachers appear to attract more parents than those that only exhibit performances or students demonstrations alone (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Participants from this study expressed that middle schools should implement engaging activities and supportive programs at the middle school level. Many of the activities and programs that the participants and their children experienced at the elementary school level were essential in their parental involvement at the school. The transition from elementary school to middle school resulted in a decline of parental involvement from the participants of this study due to disengaging activities and minimal varieties of support programs for students and parents. The participants suggested activities such as free

dances, Muffins with Moms, Donuts with Dads, parent resource centers, and school transition programs as activities that were implemented at the elementary level and should be implemented at the middle school level.

Research suggests that the most effective forms of parent involvement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children in learning activities at home (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989). Some of the participants from this study expressed that they desired for the middle schools to develop after school resource centers or a parent program after school that would help them with learning about their children's academics and what they were learning in school. The participants expressed that on many occasions the homework that the children brought home was sometimes too difficult for them to comprehend. They expressed that if the schools would have more supportive programs for parents to assist their children at home, they would be more involved with their children at home. Also, several of the participants expressed that the schools should implement a program for parents to complete their high school diploma or simply learn parenting tips on how to become a better parent. The participants believe that parents could improve their knowledge of how to support, encourage, help their children at home, and gain a deeper understanding of instructional programs if the schools would offer supportive programs to assist the parents. Additionally, the participants of this study believe that by offering those supportive programs, it would increase communication with their children at home about school, homework, classwork, school activities, and future plans.

School climate, collaboration, and communication were factors that participants of this study expressed would increase or decrease their involvement at the middle school level. Research suggests a connection between a school's climate and the extent to which parents, families, and community members are involved in students' education. When schools create a positive school climate by reaching out to parents and students, and provide structures for them to become involved, the result is effective school-family partnerships (Communtzis-Page, 1996). Riggins-Newby (2004) stated that when families feel they are genuinely welcomed at school, they are more likely to participate.

Participants at both middle schools expressed that on some occasions they were greeted with a smile or a warm welcome and that made them feel valued at the school. It is critical that school administrators and the front office staff acknowledge parents when they are in the building and make them feel welcomed at the school at all times. The participants of this study expressed if they feel welcomed and respected at the school, then they would feel motivated and encouraged to become involved at the school.

Findings from this study revealed that some parents believe that a welcoming school climate begins with greetings by the front office staff and recognition by the school administrator when parents are visiting the school or as volunteers to assist in activities and programs. Parent volunteers should be recognized throughout the school year to remind the parent that their time and services are valued. Although the participants of this study expressed that their children's schools hold an open-door policy for parents, they sometimes did not feel welcomed at the school to come as their scheduled permitted them to visit. Therefore, school administrators, teachers, and other

school staff should collaborate and communicate and with parents to gain a clear understanding of the guidelines of the school's open-door policy. Revisions to the existing policy may be helpful to the school district in Riverwood and other school districts to improve parental involvement practices at the school.

Communication is an extremely important function between administrators, teachers, parents, students, and other school staff members. Payne (2006) stated websites, school newsletters handbooks, and informal notes, to and from school, in addition to phone calls are ways in which school staff can communicate with parents. To engage in effective communication with parents, direct modes of communication can increase parent participation. Participants of this study expressed various views on how they desired increased communication to occur from the middle school level. They would like for the school to send out emails, text messages, newsletters, and even call them personally on the phone from time to time. One participant expressed how the need for the administrator to communicate more with the students and parents by approaching the car in the afternoon afterschool and speaking sometimes, rather than just waving his hands would be greatly received. Additionally, some of the participants expressed that they would still like to receive a notice in the mail or sent home by the student to advise them of what is going on at the school or dates of upcoming programs and school activities.

Participants of the study expressed how they would like for their children's teachers to communicate more often with them. They would like for teachers to call and give them updates on their child's performance both academically and behaviorally. The

participants did acknowledge that they know teachers have several responsibilities and could not call all the parents, but the teachers could alternate among themselves by taking turns to call parents on a regular basis. They stated that they wanted to have more positive relationships other than receiving phone calls for negative behavior or poor academic status. Research shows that teachers use an authority-base for communicating with parents. Highly formal, authoritative communications lack the two major components vital to involving parents in meaningful and active partnerships: closeness and mutuality (Swick & Graves, 1991). Swick (1991) found that parents under heavy stress need the closeness that exists in responsive and supportive communication. They also need a feeling of mutuality and a sense of togetherness with significant others as they attempt to resolve problems and stressors. Tone of voice, body language, facial expressions, and word choice all communicate respect or a lack of it (Center for the Education and Study of Diverse Population, 2006). Claudet (1999) points out that all communication, micro and macro communicative elements, is essential in professional learning environments resulting in school outcomes of effectiveness, organizational effectiveness, productivity, and school holding power.

#### *Confirmation of Existing Literature*

This study confirms the existing literature relative to the importance of parental involvement and the types of parental involvement that influences parents to engage in a school. Epstein's (1995) framework of six types of parent involvement and the themes mentioned above are used in this study to represent what parents attribute to the meaning of parental involvement and what influences them to become engaged in a school.

Thus the answer to the research questions, lie within the practices and activities suggested in the existing literature. Noteworthy, the data finds the answers to the overarching research questions to be replete with participant quotes, interviews, focus groups, and fieldnotes which are indicative of why including parents and implementing Epstein's (1995) six types of parent involvement (Type 1- parenting, Type 2- communication, Type 3- volunteering, Type 4- learning at home, Type 5- decision-making, and Type 6- collaborating with the community) are important in middle schools. These documented participant experiences confirm what the literature has to say about incorporating a comprehensive program of parent involvement activities as mentioned above. The two rural mid-south middle schools in this study mirror parent involvement activities presented in the research. Table 4 illustrates an overview of the four themes, five of Epstein's (1995) Six Types of Parent Involvement, and significant literature that supports the existing research. The four themes are 1) Mission Possible: Parents as Advocates for Student Success, 2) Partnering with Parents: Walking the Journey Together, 3) Bridging the Gap: Engaging Activities and Supportive Programs, and 4) Essential Ingredients: Climate, Communication, and Collaboration. The five types of parent involvement are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, and decision-making. Noteworthy, parent involvement Type 6- collaborating with the community was not indicated by the results of this study to support or confirm the literature. Table 5 illustrates how the four themes and five types of parent involvement support the entire body of existing research in this study.

Table 4

*Connection between the Themes, Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and*

*Significant Related Literature*

Theme	Parent Involvement Type	Related Literature
Mission Possible: Parents as Advocates for Student Success	Type 1-Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parenting refers to the basic levels of support for health, safety, nutrition, and housing to the development of parenting skills that prepare children for school and the continual need to supervise, discipline, and guide children (Epstein, 1987).</li> </ul>
Partnering with Parents: Walking the Journey Together	Type 1-Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) helps to ensure that all children receive a high quality education and holds schools responsible for making sure all students are learning.</li> </ul>
Bridging the Gap: Engaging Activities and Supportive Programs	Type 3-Volunteering Type 4-Learning at Home Type 5-Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Turning Points (Jackson &amp; Davis, 2000) viewed volunteering as schools considering all ways family members can participate in supporting student and school programs.</li> <li>Learning at home supports parents' knowledge of their child as a learner and refers to parent-initiated or child-initiated requests for taking part in learning activities at home (Epstein, 1987).</li> <li>Turning Points (Jackson &amp; Davis, 2000) viewed decision-making as schools giving families meaningful roles in the school's collaborative decision-making process and provide training and information to support and encourage participation.</li> </ul>
Essential Ingredients: Climate, Communication, and Collaboration	Type 2-Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Turning Points (Jackson &amp; Davis, 2000) viewed communicating as schools using a variety of methods to stay in touch with families about school programs and student progress, not simply behavior problems or academics.</li> </ul>

Table 5

*Connection between the Themes, Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and Related Literature*

Theme	Parent Involvement Type	Related Literature
Mission Possible: Parents as Advocates for Student Success	Type 1-Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting refers to the basic levels of support for health, safety, nutrition, and housing to the development of parenting skills that prepare children for school and the continual need to supervise, discipline, and guide children (Epstein, 1987).</li> <li>• Turning Points (Jackson &amp; Davis, 2000) views parenting as the schools learning about families as it relates to their cultures, goals, talents, and needs.</li> <li>• Comer and Haynes (1991) stated that meaningful parent participation is essential for effective schooling.</li> <li>• Peterson and Skiba (2001) stated, “increased parent involvement has been shown to result in increased student success, teacher satisfaction, and improved school climate” (p. 168).</li> </ul>

Table 5 (Cont.)

*Connection between the Themes, Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and Related Literature*

Theme	Parent Involvement Type	Related Literature
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The view of treating and acknowledging parents as partners in schools have increased and the view of them as the consumers of an education provided by teachers and administrators has declined (Davies, 1991).</li> <li>• Parent involvement is important to the educational success of a young adolescent and yet generally declines when a child enters the middle grades (Epstein, 2005; Jackson &amp; Andrews, 2004; Jackson &amp; Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2003).</li> <li>• Current research clearly demonstrates that parental involvement in schools can significantly enhance student achievement (Becker &amp; Epstein, 1982).</li> <li>• Feuerstein (2001) says that parent involvement encompasses a broad range of parenting behavior, ranging from discussion with children about homework to attendance at parent-teacher organization (PTO) meetings.</li> </ul>

Table 5 (Cont.)

*Connection between the Themes, Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and Related Literature*

Theme	Parent Involvement Type	Related Literature
Partnering with Parents: Walking the Journey Together		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental involvement creates a better understanding of roles and relationships between and among the parent-student-school triad (Epstein et al., 2002).</li> <li>• Dauber and Epstein (1993) conclude that the involvement of parents in their children's schooling depends chiefly on how schools seek to involve parents than on the status of parents.</li> <li>• The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) helps to ensure that all children receive a high quality education and holds schools responsible for making sure all students are learning</li> <li>• Under the provisions of the <i>Elementary and Secondary Education Act: No Child Left Behind</i> (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001), direct parental involvement and schools are required to emphasize the acquisition of parental participation in both the school and classroom.</li> </ul>

Table 5 (Cont.)

*Connection between the Themes, Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and Related Literature*

Theme	Parent Involvement Type	Related Literature
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The view of treating and acknowledging parents as partners in schools have increased and the view of them as the consumers of an education provided by teachers and administrators has declined (Davies, 1991).</li> <li>• Mutual responsibility is exemplified in Epstein's (1990) belief that successful overlap in school-family partnerships helps students know that their teachers and parents are working together to help them set and reach important goals.</li> <li>• School administrators, guidance counselors, and teachers alike have a shared responsibility for meeting parents on their terms and training them to effectively work with their children (Ferrara &amp; Ferrara, 2005)</li> <li>• Henderson and Berla (1994) cite specific benefits for schools and communities as 1) improved teacher morale, 2) higher ratings of teachers by parents, 3) more support from families, 4) higher student achievement, and 5) better reputations in the community.</li> </ul>

Table 5 (Cont.)

*Connection between the Themes, Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and Related Literature*

Theme	Parent Involvement Type	Related Literature
Bridging the Gap: Engaging Activities and Supportive Programs	Type 3-Volunteering Type 4-Learning at Home Type 5-Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Epstein (1992) suggests that schools should establish comprehensive school-family partnership programs in order to alleviate families reporting that they are unable to assist their children and understand the schools.</li> <li>• Partnership programs can provide substantial benefits for students which include: improved academic achievement (including classroom grades and standardized tests), improved attendance, homework habits, attitudes toward school, behavior, and increased completion rates for secondary and postsecondary education (Henderson, 1987; Epstein, 1986).</li> <li>• Turning Points (Jackson &amp; Davis, 2000) viewed volunteering as schools considering all ways family members can participate in supporting student and school programs.</li> <li>• The nature of parent involvement then may need to change in middle school years (Epstein, 1995).</li> </ul>

Table 5 (Cont.)

*Connection between the Themes, Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and Related Literature*

Theme	Parent Involvement Type	Related Literature
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning at home supports parents' knowledge of their child as a learner and refers to parent-initiated or child-initiated requests for taking part in learning activities at home (Epstein, 1987).</li> <li>• Bright (1996) found that home-based involvement such as encouraging students and helping students with homework creates a useful link between the home and the school.</li> <li>• Feuerstein (2001) says that parent involvement encompasses a broad range of parenting behavior, ranging from discussion with children about homework to attendance at parent-teacher organization (PTO) meetings.</li> <li>• Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found that activities such as parent workshops, home visits, counselors following-up on student absentee referrals, and the use of truant officers in family and community involvement have been proven to positively affect the rates of attendance when involving parents in the school.</li> </ul>

Table 5 (Cont.)

*Connection between the Themes, Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and Related Literature*

Theme	Parent Involvement Type	Related Literature
Essential Ingredients: Climate, Communication, and Collaboration	Type 2-Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="967 527 1430 743">• Parents often have the desire to help their children succeed in school but lack the knowledge, time, or necessary skills to assist their children (Epstein &amp; Jansorn, 2004b)</li> <li data-bbox="967 785 1430 1037">• Epstein (1987) refers to decision-making as active parental participation in school councils, PTA/PTO, school improvement committees, and any other decision-making body associated with the school (Epstein, 1987).</li> <li data-bbox="967 1079 1430 1404">• Turning Points (Jackson &amp; Davis, 2000) viewed decision-making as schools giving families meaningful roles in the school's collaborative decision-making process and provide training and information to support and encourage participation.</li> <li data-bbox="967 1446 1430 1732">• Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) noted that whether at home or at school, parents became involved if they perceive that teachers and students expect or desire their involvement and increasingly so if this perception is united with an inviting school climate.</li> </ul>

Table 5 (Cont.)

*Connection between the Themes, Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and Related Literature*

Theme	Parent Involvement Type	Related Literature
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Claudet (1999) recognizes the importance of the administrator's behavior and actions in developing positive school climate in schools.</li> <li>• According to Epstein (1987), "The 'maximum' overlap occurs when schools and families operate as true partners with frequent cooperative efforts and clear, close communication between parents and teachers in a comprehensive program of many important types of parent involvement" (p. 128).</li> <li>• Mutual responsibility is exemplified in Epstein's (1990) belief that successful overlap in school-family partnerships helps students know that their teachers and parents are working together to help them set and reach important goals.</li> <li>• Collaboration results from improved attendance, behavior of students in classrooms, and ease of parent-teacher relations have caused a higher level of self-confidence in parents who assist their children in succeeding academically in school (Fleet, Conderman, &amp; Lock (2001).</li> </ul>

Table 5 (Cont.)

*Connection between the Themes, Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and Related Literature*

Theme	Parent Involvement Type	Related Literature
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turning Points (Jackson &amp; Davis, 2000) viewed communicating as schools using a variety of methods to stay in touch with families about school programs and student progress, not simply behavior problems or academics.</li> <li>• School administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors share the responsibility of effectively communicating with parents (Epstein &amp; Jansorn, 2004a).</li> <li>• Epstein (1995) points out that when schools and families connect, the outcome is a caring community that helps all children within it to be successful in life and in school.</li> <li>• Epstein (1995) notes that while students are the primary focus of partnerships, there also are various outcomes for parents and teachers, such as more positive relationships between teachers and parents.</li> </ul>

### *Contributions to the Literature*

This study contributes to the existing literature by supporting research that suggests that increasing parental involvement is essential to the school-home partnership. Researchers such as Comer (1996, 1999), Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994), and Hoover-Dempsey and Sander (2005) have developed parental involvement models which incorporate similar components of Epstein's (1995) Six Types of Parent Involvement Typologies. These parental involvement models support Epstein's (1995) research and suggest using these models as a guide when establishing a comprehensive parent involvement plan. Comer's (1995) School Development Program incorporates school-based and home-based involvement. School-based involvement includes volunteering, parent-teacher conferences, participation in school governance, and being present at the school. Home-based involvement includes parental reinforcement at home and learning at home activities. Grolnick and Slowiaczek's (1994) framework incorporates behavioral, cognitive-intellectual, and personal involvement. Behavioral involvement includes active connections and communication between home and school, assisting with homework, and volunteering at the school. Cognitive-intellectual involvement includes parents exposing their children to stimulating educational activities and experiences. Personal involvement includes attitudes and expectations about school, conveying the enjoyment of learning, and parental socialization around the value of education. Hoover-Dempsey and Sander's (2005) Model of Parent Involvement includes five levels which are predictors of parent involvement. Level 1 is personal motivation; Level 2 is parent mechanisms of involvement; Level 3 is mediated by child perceptions of parent mechanism; Level 4 is

student attributes conducive to achievement; level 5 is student achievement. Table 6 illustrates how Comer (1996), Grolnick and Slowiaczek's (1994), and Hoover-Dempsey and Sander's (2005) parental involvement models contribute to the existing literature by supporting Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement.

Table 6

*Connections between Epstein's (1995) Parent Involvement Types and Comer (1996), Grolnick and Slowiaczek's (1994), and Hoover-Dempsey and Sander's (2005) Parent Involvement Models*

Epstein (1995) Six Types of Parent Involvement Typologies	Comer (1996, 1999) School Development Program	Grolnick & Slowiaczek (1994) Three Dimensions of Parent Involvement	Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005)
1. Parenting	Home-Based	Personal (attitudes/expectations)	Level 2 Level 1
2. Communication	School/Home Based	Behavioral Cognitive-Intellectual	Level 1
3. Volunteering	School-Based (conferences, providing assistance)	Behavioral	Level 1 Level 3
4. Learning at Home	Home-Based	Behavioral Cognitive-Intellectual	Level 2
5. Decision-Making	School-Based		Level 1
6. Collaborating with the Community			

This study contributes to the existing literature by supporting research that suggests that incorporating parental involvement activities will enhance school-family partnerships and increase parental involvement in schools. The absences of supportive programs and parental involvement activities that will influence parents to become involved in middle schools result when school districts and administrators fail to recognize parents as important stakeholders of the schools and incorporate parental involvement activities that will promote school-family partnerships. Strained school-family partnerships develop when school district leaders, administrators, teachers, staff members, and parents do not collaborate and work together to promote school-family partnerships, which can help foster positive school environments for student success. School district leaders and administrators need to revisit current parent involvement practices at their respective schools and develop comprehensive programs that will gain input from all school stakeholders and parental involvement activities that support Epstein's (1995) six types of parental involvement. Epstein points out that when schools and families connect, the outcome is a caring community that helps all children within it to be successful in life and in school.

The researcher's study adds to the literature by suggesting that school districts and middle school administrators view the following types of parental involvement as important components in developing a comprehensive program and promoting positive school-family partnerships: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Although five of Epstein's (1995) six types of parental involvement were essential in this study as it relates to

answering the two overarching research questions and directly correlating to the themes which are illustrated above in Table 4, all six types of parental involvement were important to the participants of the study and suggested by Epstein and related research to be important types of parent involvement to incorporate in school programs to promote school-family partnerships. The participants in this study described a sincere desire to promote all six types of parent involvement and demonstrate an effort to collaborate and participate with middle schools to ensure all six types of parent involvement were incorporated into their comprehensive program.

### Implications

The results of this study have several implications for middle schools. School districts can promote stronger home-school partnerships at the middle school level by maintaining a commitment to parent involvement throughout all grade levels and by seeking input from parents about parental involvement activities that influence them to become engaged at the school. Many of the suggestions given by the parents of the two middle schools of the Riverwood Schools District would be a good start in establishing plans for implementation of various programs and activities to increase parents becoming engaged at the middle school level.

School districts should develop and implement specific plans that meet the needs of families they serve at the middle school level. These plans should include efforts to enhance school-family partnerships at the district and school level (Epstein, 1990). Suggestions and collaborative ideas for implementation should include efforts by the parents, teachers, and students at the middle school level. Results from this study suggest

implications for a comprehensive plan to encourage parental involvement and enhance school-family partnerships at the middle school level that might include the following components: opportunities for development of programs, implementation of school events and activities, shared responsibility for collaborative home-school partnerships, and establishing positive relationships.

#### *Opportunities for Development of Programs*

This study highlights the need for school districts, administrators, school staff, and parents to collaborate together to develop and implement programs that will implement the policies on parent involvement in the No Child Left Behind Act, (2001). With increasing focus on the NCLB and its mandate for schools to show Adequate Yearly Progress, each school should be committed to utilizing every stakeholder to participate in programs and schools activities that will promote student achievement. School administrators should make efforts to ensure community stakeholders are able to collaborate with parents and offer viable resources that may be available to assist them.

Middle school administrators, teachers, and parents have several reservations when they begin to view various aspects of implementing and maintaining parental involvement. School districts and middle school administrators can provide teachers and parents with opportunities that will enable them to become knowledgeable about effective parent involvement strategies; however those parent involvement strategies should be inclusive of suggestions and ideas expressed by parents. One way to increase teacher and parent knowledge and awareness of parent involvement is through the use of a district training program. Participants from this study referenced the importance of

including some type of parent resource center or support program to help them increase their knowledge about what is going on in the school, the curriculum, and how they can help support their child with his or her learning in school. Additionally, teachers can benefit from training programs which can enable them to learn more about effective school-family partnerships and increasing parental involvement at the middle school level. The idea of implementing parent resource centers and training programs to educate teachers and parents on school-family partnerships indicates that middle school development opportunities should actively involve middle school administrators, teachers, and parents in the development and implementation of these programs. Also, gaining input from the students and teachers is valuable in this process as the schools strive to promote and increase parent involvement at the middle school level. For this reason, the researcher emphasized the importance of school districts being able to provide middle school development programs to include parents, teachers, and students in the planning and implementation process.

There are various resources available for implementing middle school teacher and parent development programs. School districts and administrators from other states may be familiar with current research relative to effective home-school partnerships. Schools in various districts may be able to share effective practices and programs that they have implemented with their teachers and parents that have been successful in promoting parent involvement in the school. Teachers that have been successful in getting parents engaged in the school are another valuable resource, because they work closely with the parents and are able to hear some of the suggestions, concerns, or ideas they would like to

see implemented within the school. Lastly, one of the most valuable resources that school districts or middle schools can utilize to promote and increase parent involvement at the school is the parents. Parents have their own perspective and previous experiences about what activities and programs influence them to become engaged in a school. If parents can assess their own involvement and trace its development from year to year, they may hold the key as to why involvement begins to decline at the middle school level.

Parent involvement begins to decline at the middle school level, unlike parent involvement at the elementary school level (Epstein, 2005; Jackson & Andrews, 2004; Jackson & Davis, 2000; NMSA, 2003). Many parent involvement opportunities at the elementary level tend to influence parents to become involved than opportunities at the middle school level. Elementary schools provide valuable information for fostering home-school partnerships and incorporate parent involvement activities that influence parents to work together with the children, teachers, and other school stakeholders. Some of the participants from this study referenced how they would like for their child's middle school to implement programs and opportunities that they once participated in at their child's elementary school, such as parent nights, muffins with mom, donuts with dad, etc. They commented on how those opportunities provided them with information about what was going on at the school and gave them an opportunity to network with other parents, learn about their child's academics, and feel more involved as a parent. School district support in developing teacher and parent development programs could lead to a more positive outcome in maintaining parent involvement and school-family partnership in the latter K-12 years. Using those resources and familiar activities from the elementary level

may increase parents' comfort level and encourage further parental involvement. School recruitment practices and activities may also serve as a bridge for the transition from elementary to middle school.

Time constraints create difficulties for implementing teacher and parent development opportunities (Epstein, 1987). Payne (2006) stated factors such as inadequate transportation, conflicting work schedules, and illness can affect the ability of parents to attend school meetings or events but have no impact on the parents' desire to see their children succeed in school. For example, results from this study revealed that many parents have conflicting work schedules during the day and many teachers may not be able to meet with parents after school hours. However, some parents would like to meet with teachers during the day hours and the teachers can not meet with the parents until after school or at a specific time frame. Revising the time schedule to allow parents to come to the school to meet with teachers was a suggestion for implementation mentioned by a few of the participants of this study. Traditionally, parent involvement activities at schools, such as open house, PTA meetings, and conferences, were scheduled to provide parents with opportunities to meet with teachers. Participants from East Hickory Heights and Rockhill Middle Schools value the opportunity to be able to participate in open house, conferences, and PTA, but some of them indicated a desire to have a flex schedule to meet with teachers and increased opportunities to become involved in the school as result of time constraints from their personal schedules.

Payne (2006) suggested the use of technology to increase the level of parent involvement present in schools specifically recommending training videos which are

child-focused and short in length as a means to facilitate engagement. Alternative opportunities for teacher and parent development may be implemented by video technology such as, webinars, video presentations, and on-line program development. For example, open house or PTA meetings could be video taped for parents who were unable to attend the meeting. These videos could be sent via email to parents upon request that were unable to attend. Another option would be to keep the videos in the library for parents to be able to access them at their convenience. A web conference is another way to give parents an opportunity to gain information through the use of the internet. Many parents are very knowledgeable of utilizing the computer and may see this as a valuable resource to prevent time constraints on their schedules. Additionally, presentations and round table discussions including various school stakeholders (elementary teachers, middle school teachers, community members, or parent liaisons) concerning parent involvement can be created and shared through the use of video or web conferencing.

#### *Implementation of School Events and Activities*

One of the research questions asks what influences parents to become involved in a school. Participants from this study reported school events as being one of the areas that influences them to become involved in the school. Events and activities such as school conferences, open house, and volunteering for extracurricular activities are some of the common practices at both middle schools. According to Hopkins (2000), many administrators and teachers find it difficult to engage parents in meaningful ways. Therefore, based upon the findings of this study, middle school administrators and other stakeholders should incorporate suggestions from parents about events and activities to

include in the school that will increase parent involvement. These suggestions imply that middle schools should incorporate events and activities that many of the elementary schools incorporate in their schools to involve parents, such as parent orientation sessions, Muffins with Moms, Donuts with Dads, and various in-school activities that include parents. Additionally, participants from both middle schools reported that the schools should implement engaging activities such as free prep rallies, parent nights, silent auctions, dances, prom, and elementary to middle school transition programs. If middle schools plan to incorporate collaborative efforts from parents by gaining their perspective on what activities and events to include in the school that would influence them to become involved, parent opportunities would be valued by the parents.

#### *Shared Responsibilities for Collaborative Home-School Partnerships*

The idea of united responsibility and collaborative home-school partnerships emphasizes administrators, teachers, parents, and middle school adolescents all have an important role in maintaining home-school partnerships. The participants of this study expressed that many of the parent involvement activities were primarily initiated by the school staff. The participants expressed that they believed that all stakeholders, such as the administrators, teachers, and students should take a vital role in becoming responsible to ensure that the students succeed and parents become involved at the middle school level.

Administrators, teachers, and parents have an important responsibility to communicate and collaborate with each other on a regular basis. Findings from this study suggest that communication, parent recruitment, and having a positive school climate

were important factors in influencing parents to become involved at the school. Appointing parent liaisons at the schools, allowing parents to give suggestions on decision-making and gaining parent input on various ideas and programs may provide effective collaborative networking partnerships to become established at the school level. Parents can share the responsibilities of planning programs, recruiting other parent volunteers, and facilitating communication between the school and families. Additionally, parents may be available during or after school to assist the school administrator or teachers in various activities, tutoring, or school council events.

Administrators or team leaders at the middle school level can implement practices that motivate and encourage adolescents in taking an active role and being responsible in the school-family partnership. Administrators, teachers, and parents can begin by taking the initiative to foster and support the actions and views of middle school students as being an important and valuable aspect of the middle school culture. Middle school adolescents are the center of school-family partnerships and play a key part in disseminating information to parents and advising them of what is going on at the school. The academic and social successes of the middle school students are the primary reasons for families and schools to develop collaborative relationships. Middle school students need guidance to take an active role in establishing school-family partnerships. Epstein and Sanders (1996) stated that partnerships are three-way at the middle school level. Therefore, administrators, teacher, and parents can provide guidance to middle school students. This guidance may be provided through after school programs, mentoring, and

seeking feedback concerning activities that both the parents and students can be involved at the school.

Developing effective school-family partnerships can be enhanced by providing opportunities for administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, students, and other school staff members to collaborate with each other and establish clear expectations for what parental involvement and united responsibility for collaborative home-school partnerships at the middle school level.

#### *Establishing Positive Relationships*

Findings from this study implied that parents value positive relationships with the school administrator, teachers, and other staff members at the school. The participants of this study expressed how the relationships they have with the school administrator, teachers, and other staff members can positively or negatively affect their involvement at the school. Additionally, the findings from study implied parents desire to be involved in school programs and activities, but desire their input to be included when asked to participate in various programs and activities are offered at the school. Therefore, middle school administrators and the school leadership should provide structures within their school programs to incorporate parents. When schools incorporate parents in their school, they begin to establish a foundation that allows the parents, teachers, principal, students, and community members to build positive relationships. For example, teachers may be provided a portion of a school day every six or eight weeks to contact parents through email, letters, a personal phone call to advise parents of the status of their child's academics status, share something positive about the school or their child, or advise them

of current parent involvement activities they have at the school. One of the participants from Rockhill Middle School commented on how she wished the school could sometimes contact them directly to let them know what was going on at the school.

Developing a positive relationship between schools and families means opportunities are needed for teachers, parents, the administrator, community members, and the students to get to know each other personally. Participants at East Hickory Heights and Rockhill Middle Schools reported how conducting activities such as Muffins with Moms, Donuts with Dads, parent night, and other activities would be beneficial to establishing good rapport and building relationships. Increasing those opportunities might encourage parents to attend more parent activities and become more involved than normal. As mentioned by a participant from Rockhill Middle School, she would like to see the school administrator initiate more casual conversation with the parents and students and make himself available more at extracurricular activities. Those types of personal one-on-one contacts can help to build school-family relationships.

Another way for middle schools to build relationships is to provide a variety of ways for parents to communicate with the staff and the administrator. At East Hickory Heights and Rockhill Middle Schools, the parents communicated through conferences, phone calls, and letters. Participants from both schools reported, however, that sometimes they might not have gotten the letters sent home or the phone calls, but suggested that they increase other forms of communication with them. Alternative forms of communication such as email, monthly newsletters, automatic phone updates, and phone texts about what is going on at the school may provide opportunities for parents to

receive communication from the teachers and the principal. As technology continues to be a more convenient form of communication, email may be one the most economical and effective ways to communicate with parents with access to computers. Of course, parents who do not have accessibility to computers may have to receive communication from the school through newsletters, flyers, phone texts, or even personal phone calls.

Findings from the study suggests that institutional communication, such as phone calls or sending letters home, are not as effective as individual communications from teachers and the administrator when recruiting parents for volunteering, getting involved for other parent involvement activities, or advising them about things occurring at the school. This does not suggest that such communications should be abandoned. One reason that letters are ineffective is because they are not always delivered by a student to the parent. Several suggestions may help ensure that parents receive the information in the letters. First, middle schools may produce letters in various formats in addition to the traditional copies usually distributed to the students. For example, parents could have access to the letter through email, a file base at the school library, or a link provided on the school's website. Secondly, students can assume responsibility for producing the letters that are sent home. When students share this responsibility, they may be more apt to deliver the newsletter or direct their parents to the school's website. In turn, parents may be more apt to examine the information. Thirdly, developing a separate letter for each grade level may provide an opportunity to include more relevant, detailed information for parents of students in each grade. Teachers, the school facilitator, or

administration could take turns coordinating information, working with students to create the letter.

### Recommendations

This study is qualitative and utilizes the case study approach to determine what factors influences parents to become involved at a school and what parent involvement activities would increase engagement from parents at the middle school level. A case of a school can be defined by the systematic gathering of enough information about a particular organization to allow the investigator insight into the life of that organization (Berg, 2004). Data from this descriptive case study will add to the present body of knowledge on increasing parental involving at the middle school level. The collection of the data was accomplished by the researcher interviewing parents from East Hickory Height Middle School and Rockhill Middle School in the Riverwood Schools District. The findings from this study suggested that parent involvement is essential to the school-family partnership. Future studies should be done to replicate the findings of this study in other middle schools that made AYP and/or did not make AYP in their schools as well as being a Title I school or not being a Title I school.

It is the hope of the researcher that middle schools supporting and promoting school-home partnerships implement some of the activities, programs, and suggestions for parental involvement from this study as a catalyst for developing or revising their own parent involvement activities and programs. Readers of this study should review parental involvement activities and programs suggested by parents of this study and based on their

understanding, determine how they could be incorporated into various school environments and the effectiveness of them when they are implemented in those settings.

Based on the data analysis and findings of this study, the researcher will present recommendations for practice. Additionally, to enhance this study, the researcher will present recommendations for further research.

### *Recommendations for Practice*

School district leaders and school administrators should revise current middle school practices and take measures to ensure that all parents, including those who are considered actively engaged, have an accurate, working definition of parental involvement, whether it is commonly agreed upon by the key stakeholders in the schools or using the six types of involvement identified by Epstein and Jansorn (2004a). Based upon the responses from the participants in this study, activities that were similar to Epstein's six types of parental involvement typologies included parenting (Type 1), communicating (Type 2), volunteering (Type 3), learning at home (Type 4), and decision-making (Type 5) were activities that influenced them to become engaged in the school. Although very few participants identified activities associated with collaborating with the community (Type 6), school administrators could implement activities and programs that could promote parents and communities to engage with each other and build collaborative relationships.

Middle school administrators and teachers seeking to increase parental involvement might consider collaborating with elementary schools in their school zones to gain ideas of parental involvement activities and programs they have implemented in

their respective schools. Participants from this study expressed the need for middle schools to establish grade level transitional programs to prepare elementary level students entering middle school. Additionally, participants expressed the need for middle schools to implement activities that allow parents and students to build positive relationships together. Many of the activities that middle schools exclude such as Muffins for Moms and Donuts for Dads may be considered inappropriate for middle school activities, but the participants of this study stated those were activities that influenced them to become involved.

School districts and middle school administrators could utilize their district's parent school climate survey data to revise and implement new activities and programs for parents. The researcher recommends that the parent climate survey be administered each semester instead of the school year. Utilizing the data could increase parent involvement and build positive relationships that could prove essential when students transition from middle school to high school. Additionally, utilizing the data can help school administrators establish programs and create activities based upon Epstein's six types of parent involvement strategies. Based upon the responses from participants of this study, activities could include the following:

- *Parenting practices:* parent workshops, videos, computerized phone and email messages on parenting adolescents, and provide a parent resource center with literature on strategies for helping adolescents address social issues in middle school.

- *Communicating*: conferencing opportunities, newsletters, flyers, information about school events listed on student report cards, and parent bulletin boards with general information about the school, activities, homework tips, community events, and parent workshops.
- *Volunteering*: invite parents to come to the school to volunteer, recognize parents for previous and current volunteering time at the school, train parent volunteers on their roles and responsibilities, and seek ideas from parents about specific activities they would be interested in participating in at the school
- *Learning at Home*: educate parents on the school curriculum, standardized test information, homework tips for parents to implement at home, provide interactive homework for parents and students, conduct parent homework, curriculum, and collaboration sessions so parents can help their children improve academically and socially.
- *Decision-Making*: allow parents to become partners with the decision-making process: PTA, parent committees, advisory board, volunteer groups, parent council, and advocacy groups.
- *Collaborating with the Community*: inform parents about community activities, establish network programs for parents and community members, conduct community/parent panels, and provide information to families on health, career, and social supports.

Lastly the researcher recommends that middle school administrators provide training to the school staff on how to communicate with parents, provide supplementary

materials that will assist parents with their child's academic studies, and promote a positive school climate which could help parents to feel welcome and appreciated at the school. Additionally, administrators could implement professional development sessions for teachers on how to develop partnerships with parents. According to Epstein, (2001) teachers should not only be required to be proficient and highly qualified in their subject area, but they should also be proficient in effective practices to promote school-family partnership.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

The following is a list of suggestions for future research:

1. The framework for further research may also be a comparative case study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Future studies could be expanded to include interviews and observations from parents whose children attend middle school in other districts who did achieve AYP and is a Title I school as a comparative to parents whose children attend middle school in other districts who did not achieve AYP and is not a Title I school. Comparing data on these two groups would enhance insight on similarities and differences in activities and programs that influence parents to become involved at their schools. This data would help district and school administrators make more informed decisions on what parental involvement activities, program, and policies they currently have in place or could be implemented to increase parent involvement.
2. Research is needed to address the reasons for decline in parent involvement as students progress from elementary school to middle school. This research can be conducted by examining elementary school parent involvement practices with the middle

school parent involvement practices. Longitudinal studies of families' involvement, beginning when students are in pre-kindergarten and continuing through high school may be beneficial in tracing changes that occur in home-school partnerships as students get older. Additionally, the school-family partnership should be continued by linking parent partnerships and student achievement to the high school level. Epstein (2001) has encouraged high schools to develop partnership programs that incorporate school-home partnerships that meet the needs of the students, parents, and teachers from the middle school level. Additionally, they should document when school-family partnerships are developed, implemented, and have successful results.

3. The topic of school-family partnerships and student achievement should be studied to examine teachers' and administrators' own perceptions around parent involvement at the middle school level. Many of the partnerships stop at the front door of the school, the classroom, or the school administrator. School administrators and other school leaders that make decisions need to examine their motives and perceptions around the topic of parent involvement and to re-examine their practices in light of their new understandings. Additionally, including parents' suggestions and ideas of what activities and programs to implement in the schools to increase their involvement could be beneficial to the success of the school.

4. Further research on differentiation of parent involvement practices and their effects on student achievement among various racial and ethnic groups should be conducted. Presently, the cultures of East Hickory Heights and Rockhill Middle School do not reflect the total commitment of the administrators, teachers, or parents. The

school climates at both middle schools suggest the need for more positive collaboration from both the school and parents. According to the Riverwood School Climate Surveys for both middle schools, the majority of the population of students that attend both schools are Caucasian. Therefore, further research on other racial and ethnic groups in other middle schools may enhance the literature of what practices, activities, and programs influence parents to become involved in at the middle school level. Middle class parents may find the school climate positive to become engaged. However, culturally diverse parents and disadvantaged parents may find the school culture impossible to penetrate. For various reasons, those parents may need additional incentives such as programs or activities to learn how to support or help their children succeed academically and socially school or at home. Research has shown that all parents want the best for their children (Epstein, 2001). They may need some support and guidance from the school to achieve it. Schools reaching out to these families may make the difference between parents being involved at the school and other parents not being involved at the school.

5. Further research exploring how teachers use parent involvement in their classroom practice would be beneficial to schools. This study did not examine how teachers use parent involvement strategies to increase involvement at the middle school level, but it would be beneficial to further examine the actual practice of teachers to see if those practices increased the involvement of parents to participate more at the school. Such a study would extend this research to go beyond parent reported data. Secondly, this research provides the rationale for further study examining how parent involvement

practices actually impact student achievement. Thirdly, this study would explore the effects of parent involvement on student grades, behavior, and test scores. This could help administrators and teachers identify and encourage practices of involvement that lead to certain results for specific students. Lastly, a study of individual teachers and parents of students in the same class would provide a more balanced approach to this work.

6. Research is needed to investigate various kinds of staff development available to provide administrators, teachers, and other school staff members with resources that will enable them to create and maintain effective parent involvement programs at the middle school level. Staff development should include various strategies of how to communicate with parents, share clear expectations for parent involvement, align goals, and empower parents with tips on how to actively become involved and supportive of their children academically at the middle school level.

7. Interestingly to the researcher, it is recommended that future research be conducted to see if there is a difference in what parents perceive as parental involvement or what parents perceive as parental engagement. For years, parental involvement has been a familiar term used by various researchers, school districts, policy makers, and educators. The researcher has found in many cases that the terms parental involvement and parental engagement may have different meanings to parents, which may be important to consider when we view what influences parents to become involved or how they define involvement in a school.

## Conclusions

This study described what meaning parents attribute to parent involvement and what influences them to become involved in a school. The researcher concluded based on the findings that there is not one specific plan or specific set of activities that will engage all parents to become involved at the middle school level. The researcher did discover that collaboration from stakeholders at the school and the parents can be a vital component in getting parents involved in the school and to maintain high levels of participation on a consistent basis. It is important to reference that based on the findings of this study, positive relationships, communication, school climate, engaging activities, supportive programs, and collaborative school-family efforts are beneficial factors in increasing and maintaining parent involvement at the middle school level.

The findings from this study support and enhance existing literature on school-family partnerships and Epstein's (2001) Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence, which emphasizes the dynamic, complex nature of school-family partnerships. Epstein's (2002) collective research on school-family partnerships discussed six types of parent involvement activities that were found to be similar activities expressed by participants from this study to being influencing factors to them becoming involved at the school. Parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, and decision-making were five of the six activities that participants from this study found as influencing activities for them to become involved at home and at the school. Additionally, Table 1 lists data from the Riverwood School District's Parent Climate Survey that support high levels of parent involvement activities at Rockhill Middle School and East Hickory Heights

Middle School in those five areas as well. Participants from this study expressed the desire to increase collaboration with the school administrator, teachers, and other staff members as opposed to community members as suggested by Epstein's (2001) six types of parent involvement activities.

In conclusion, it is important for the researcher to express that future researchers of home-school partnerships should consider all stakeholders of school-family partnership as valuable sources of information. Failure to obtain administrators, teachers, parents, students, community, and other staff members' perspectives may lead to limited information and may not represent an accurate view of effective parental involvement practices. Future research must tap into what middle school adolescents have to offer as active agents in their own education. A synthesis of the views of administrators, teachers, parents, students, community, and other staff members is necessary to provide understanding for effective school-family partnerships.

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Appendix A  
Sample Consent Letter

Date

Name

School District

Address

City, State Zip Code

Dear Participant:

My name is Tishsha Miller and I am a graduate student in the College of Education at University of Memphis. I am conducting research for my dissertation on parent involvement to develop a better understanding of what meaning do parents attribute to parental involvement and what influences them to become involved in a school. I would like to invite you to participate in this study.

As a participant of the study, you will be interviewed twice (in a location of your choosing, i.e., off campus). The time frame will be for approximately 30-45 minutes. I will consult with you to find a time that will be least disruptive to your regular schedule. These interviews will be tape recorded with your permission. In addition to the one-on-one interviews, you will be asked to participate in two focus groups with five other parents from the two selected middle schools. Your name will be changed so that your identity remains anonymous. All information shared in the one-on-one interviews will remain confidential. However, there is no guarantee that information shared in the focus groups will remain confidential, since other participants will be present. All data collected during the research will be kept confidential within the limits allowed by law.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and it will be greatly appreciated. Choosing to participate or not participate will not result in negative outcomes. Findings from the study will be shared with participants and other interested parties upon completion of the dissertation or upon request. If you have questions about the research or other issues please contact, Dr. Larry McNeal, Dissertation Chair at 901.678.3009 or [lmcneal1@mcneal1](mailto:lmcneal1@mcneal1). You can also contact me at 901-351-5557.

If you would like to participate in my study, please read and complete the consent form attached to this letter and return it to me. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Tishsha Miller

Appendix B  
Sample Participation Consent Form

“I agree to participate in a study titled “Parental Involvement: A Qualitative Multi-Site Case Study of Parental Involvement in Two Rural Mid-South Middle Schools.” I understand that there is no payment for participation in this study. I am aware that every response is important, therefore, I will respond as accurately as I can. I am also aware that my identity and information shared in the one-on-one interviews will be kept confidential and there is no guarantee that group responses will be kept confidential since other participants will be present. I am also aware that I can choose to discontinue participating in the research study at any time. Upon the completion of this study, I may obtain a copy of the findings from this research.”

Please return this Participation Consent Form in the stamped self-addressed envelope prior to \_\_\_\_\_. Your time, consideration and participation are highly valued.

Yes, I will participate in the study:

Participant’s name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

Middle School: \_\_\_\_\_

School District: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerely,

Tishsha T. Miller

Appendix C  
Questions to Guide the Interview Process

Parent's Name:	School:	Grade Level:
<b>Background</b>		
Years of parental involvement at school		
Years child has attended this school		
Gender		
<b>Central Question 1: What does parental involvement mean to parents?</b>		
What does the topic of parental involvement mean to you?		
Tell why parent involvement is essential in the school climate.		
<b>Central Question 2: What influences parents to engage in parental involvement?</b>		
What influences you as a parent to participate in school activities?		
What inhibits you as a parent to participate in school activities?		
What do you see as barriers to parent involvement?		
What more could staff, parents and community members do to remove the barriers?		
<b>Subquestion 1: What meaning and interpretations do you give parent involvement?</b>		
Describe your experiences with parental involvement at your child's school. Share how these experiences were initiated.		
How did you feel about parent activities in which you were involved?		
How does parent involvement influence your relationship with your child, teacher, and/or administrator?		
What role do you think parents should play in the child's education?		

<b>Subquestion 2: What parent activities influence you to engage in a school based on Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement?</b>	
Tell me about a time when you were involved in your child's school?	
What parent activities do you attribute to increasing student achievement?	
Can you give me an example(s) of parent activities that you are likely to participate in at the school?	
What types of parent activities would you like to see implemented in the school?	
What would need to occur to enable you to feel more comfortable in participating in parent activities at your child's school?	
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Other:</b>	

Appendix D  
 Questions to Guide the Focus Group Process

Parents' Names:	Schools:	Grade Levels:
<b>Focus Group 1:</b>		
Talk about parent activities that you have experienced at this middle school level.		
What are the benefits of parent involvement at the middle school level?		
In regards to your own child, what parent activities would you like to be implemented in order to better serve you and your child?		
Describe what makes you feel welcomed at your child's school. What makes you feel unwelcomed?		
What do you think your child's school can do to increase communication with parents?		
<b>Other:</b>		
<b>Focus Group 2 (Questions will be Guided by the Initial Focus Group)</b>		
How important do you believe parent involvement is in your child education?		
What can schools do to strengthen partnership with families?		
How can schools reach out to those parents who don't get involve?		
How can family and school partnerships help to support you as a parent?		
<b>Other:</b>		
<b>Other:</b>		