An exploratory study on the effects of home-school communication on parental involvement

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL WORK

SPARKS-COOK, Verna Nicole B.A. Oglethorpe University, 2003

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Advisor: Dr. Sarita Davis

Thesis dated May 2007

This thesis was designed to study the effects of home-school communication on parent involvement by implementing the program Project S.P.E.A.K.: Students, Parents, and Educators Actively Keeping in Touch. The targeted population consisted of 24 certified general education teachers and 505 parents of students in kindergarten through Grade 5. The issue in this study is that parents and teachers were not communicating well with each other. At the targeted site, parent involvement and attendance at school functions had dropped drastically over the past five years. The data that was collected from the surveys suggested that poor home and school communication had an effect on the number of parents who were involved in the school.

Project S.P.E.A.K. was designed to improve communication between teachers and parents. Project S.P.E.A.K presented opportunities for all parents to become involved in their children’s learning and school by organizing a Project S.P.E.A.K. student council, utilizing grade parents more efficiently, recognizing stakeholders for their effort to increase parent involvement, and involving parents, students and teachers in the efforts to increase parent involvement. An analysis of the data revealed that the Project
S.P.E.A.K. initiative produced significant changes in behavior at the targeted site. This study also gives reference to school social workers and how they aid in the process of facilitating home-school communication. This study also gives implications for school social work practice, with recommendations for educators and recommendations for future research.
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
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ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 2007
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I would like to thank GOD for allowing me to pursue this dream, and keep a sane mind while doing it. It is through CHRIST that all things are possible. This thesis is dedicated to my father (Jessie Sparks, Jr.) who lost his battle with lung cancer on 10/8/88, and my sister (Venencia Sparks-Kelly) who lost her battle with breast cancer on 1/18/00. Both of them were true believers in me, and I thank them for inspiring me. I would like to give an overwhelming thanks to my husband and soul mate, Frederick Cooke, for his unconditional love and support, which helped me through this process. I thank my children, Kelly and Karly, for bringing so much joy into my life. May God bless them with all the goodness that He has to give. Thanks and love are extended to my mother (Margaret Bivins Sparks) for loving me, nurturing me, and teaching me how to be a GOD-fearing woman. Thanks to my sister Tammy for her love, support and advice on life, and to my mother-in-law (Vera Stripling) for all the home cooked meals and babysitting for my children. Thanks to my best friend, Karen Ware, for tolerating me since kindergarten and being a good friend. I love her for it. Special thanks to Melody Beasley for taking such good care of my children on a daily basis, for listening to all my complaints, C.A.U. war stories, and being a good friend. Thanks to Dr. Chandra Hall for support, guidance and advice on how to survive C.A.U. Thanks to Telana Hicks for helping to turn my dream into a reality. It is through GOD, family and friends that I was able to accomplish this goal. I’m extremely grateful to each of you!
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In most schools in North America, little attention is directed towards home to school communication strategies, cheating students of its benefits for their educational and personal success. Regular meaningful, two-way school to home communication has been claimed as a direct catalyst for student achievement (Georgia Department of Education, 2000). According to the Georgia Department of Education, 20 percent of parents in the state of Georgia participate and volunteer at their child’s school. These numbers are alarmingly low. Parents blame this problem on lack of communication from the school to the home, and from the home to the school. The minimal effort required to initiate home-school communication is well documented, by keeping the student focused on the appropriate aspects of his/her education, thus making obstacles easier to overcome. School to home communication is a highly valuable, yet an underused strategy to assist the educator’s goal of ensuring student success. The problem identified in this thesis is that parents and teachers do not communicate well with each other. At the targeted site, parental involvement and attendance at school functions had dropped drastically over the past five years. The survey data examines the level of home to school communication, its effects on parental involvement, and recommendations for school social work practice.
Statement of the Problem

There is a major effort to increase parental involvement in schools nationwide. Goals: 2000, National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) Standards, Title I, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act policies are geared toward effectively bridging the gap between home and school. Goals 2000: Educate America Act states, "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (Nakagawa, 2000, p. 416). Standards established by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) stated that beginning teachers must be able to collaborate “with school colleagues, parents, and agencies in the larger community for supporting students’ learning and well-being” (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 1994, p. 117).

In 1997, the National PTA developed the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs to help schools, communities, and parenting groups implement effective parent involvement programs with the aim of improving students’ academic performance. Additionally, eligibility for the Title I money is now contingent on the development of school-family collaborations in which families and schools declare their mutual responsibility for children’s learning. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has made parents’ involvement in their children’s education a national priority. To obtain ESEA money, a district must earmark at least 1% for parent involvement programs (Baker, 2000).
The study was implemented at C.H. Gullatt Elementary. It is located in Union City, Georgia. This school offers a host of resources and programs for families. Most school functions (Open House, Curriculum Night, PTA meetings, parent workshops, and parent-teacher conferences) are geared towards providing information for families that will benefit their children socially, emotionally, and academically. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of parents attended these functions. In the past five years, there has been a drastic decline in the number of parents attending school functions and parent-teacher conferences. During the 2004-2005 school year, the PTA reported a drop of parental support in meetings and fundraising. Parental attendance at meetings is down from an average of 120 parents to an average of 60 parents. Fundraiser support declined from $8,200 to $3,750.00 the following year. However, during the 2005-2006 school year, the PTA showed signs of recovery. In that year, $11,500.00 was raised by parents. The PTA president cited improved parent public relations as the cause for the increase in parent participation in school fundraising.

The drop in parent attendance at school functions was linked to poor home-school communication. Many of the students at the school reside in single-family homes. Unfortunately, working parents have less time to dedicate to their children’s learning and school. Information gathered through informal interviews revealed that parents found it difficult to contact teachers during the times that they have available (usually nights and weekends) and due to limited contact with teachers, parents were unaware of the school’s academic requirements. Parents reported that they received little or no information about conferences and other school events, and that they did not know how to acquire the information they needed to become more involved parents. Due to low parent
participation, teachers were less eager to contact parents about school events and to send reminders of scheduled-teacher conferences. The school made an effort to maximize the amount of positive communication and minimize negative communication between home and school by monitoring comments on progress reports and report cards and requiring revisions of comments that are worded negatively. Unfortunately, teachers were threatened by this approach. Teachers felt that parents should know what their children were doing at school, whether good or bad. Furthermore, the school relied on students to get information to parents, including monthly newsletters, calendars of school events, and other written correspondence. Unfortunately, students did not understand their role in involving parents in their learning and school. If students do not share school information with their parents, then parents are unaware of planned school events and other opportunities to communicate with school officials.

Parents' reluctance to communicate with teachers may have stemmed partially from their feelings of inadequacy in knowing how to help their children (Goldenberg, 1989; Nicholson, 1980). Many parents expressed a belief that their assistance was not needed by the schools or teachers (Barber, 1987). Studies report that parents hear from teachers only when there is a problem (Stallworth & Williams, 1982). The tendency to communicate only when there is trouble may also contribute to parents' general reluctance to approach the school uninvited.

Parents were not alone in feeling awkwardness at initiating conversation. Teachers, too, expressed a reluctance to involve families. Teachers' trepidation originates in concerns about their ability to effectively influence parents, whether parents have the necessary skills to become involved, whether it is fair to ask parents to work with their
children, and whether parents really want to know more about their children’s education (Epstein & Becker, 1982).

The targeted site is categorized as a at-risk school by Title I criteria, which is high student mobility, due to the high mobility rates and its large number of free and reduced-priced lunches. According to the research, parental involvement at high risk schools is a key strategy for increasing students’ success (Fulton County Schools, 2005). Previous solutions for increasing parental involvement had failed at the targeted site because educators focused primarily on those who were already involved in their children’s learning and school. Thus, those parents who were difficult for teachers to reach and who were unaware of how to initiate contact with teachers were overlooked. Instead of assuming that low parental involvement means non-caring parents, schools must understand the barriers that hinder some parents from participating in their child’s education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore new avenues of communicating from school to home and from home to school, in order to increase parental involvement at the targeted site. This question is examined through the implementation of Project S.P.E.A.K. The acronym S.P.E.A.K stands for Students, Parents, and Educators Actively Keeping in Touch. The program is designed to show where the breakdown in communication exists, and how it can be improved. The intended goal of this study is to increase communication between parents and teachers at the targeted site for the purpose of increasing parental involvement. This study shows how school social workers can aid
in this process and to show the value, importance, role, history of school social work and significance of the school social worker. Finally, this study discusses the implications of the findings on school social work practice.

Significance of the Study

Why do parents become involved in their children’s education? According to Epstein (1995), there are three involvement areas that offer special opportunities for parents and teachers to strengthen each other’s efficacy: communication, shared learning activities and collaborative supervision and guidance. Two critical elements occur when teachers and parents communicate and share in the learning and growing together, they form a bond in which the child’s well-being is more easily and effectively addressed, and they serve as a source of support and renewal for each other (Swick, 1995).

Communication with negative or insufficient information fails to establish a meaningful relationship between home and school (Lishka, 2002). Parents want relevant information (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Parents have an important influence on how children approach and engage in learning. Parents convey exceptional achievement of standards and attitudes as they talk about school and homework, review for test, interpret reports, and provide encouragement and support (Epstein, 1989). At the same time, there is evidence to suggest that teachers’ efforts in communication may be predictive of whether or not parents become involved (Epstein & Dauber 1991). These reports suggest that the child’s learning motivation is enhanced when improved connections to the home are made. Students notice how teacher communication practices affect parents’ beliefs about their children, their perceptions of the school, and their resulting involvement
(Lishka, 2002). Schools are beginning to recognize in policy and in practice that families are essential to their mission. This is why school social workers have been incorporated into the school system. Family partnership has become a major school policy objective.

Bristol and Gallagher (1982), Walberg (1984), and Carter (Carter & Cadre, 2002) have suggested a number of different ways schools can develop effective partnerships with parents. Programs can be made more flexible, with individual family plans, the establishment of meaningful parent roles, and the involvement of the father as well as the mother. Programs should focus on goals important to the family and should expect something of the parents. Parents often need help to see the importance of the small gains made. Meetings can be scheduled at times when parents are available. School personnel can be available who speak the native language of the parent, or translators can be present. School personnel can get involved with the community. School social workers can make home visits. The school social worker might help the parents develop their own support network of friends and relatives. A true partnership exists when there is time to listen and respond to all voices. This takes time but is well worth the effort, and can be achieved with the expertise of the school social worker. The following chapter reviews the literature in relation to home-to-school communication and parental involvement, followed by the theoretical framework and the Afrocentric perspective.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature presents a variety of causes of poor home and school communication. Past and current theories overlap in six key areas: (a) unclear definitions of parental involvement (Baker, 1998; Feuerstein, 2000), (b) cultural capital (Griffith, 1998; Kohl, Lengua & McMahon, 2000; Lareau, 1987), (c) the changing family structure (Balli, 1996; Duncan, 1992; Schurr, 1992), (d) ineffective home-school communication (Blackwell & Mannan, 1992), (e) limited background knowledge of the history of parental involvement in schools (Waterman & Zellman, 1998), (f) stakeholders are unclear of the benefits of parental involvement (Eldridge, 2001). These key areas are pertinent to the target site's existing problem.

Definitions and Types of Parental Involvement

A frequently asked question at the targeted site is, “What is parental involvement?” The definition of parental involvement is modified, in educational research and articles, to identify different situations, problems and solutions. Parents and teachers need a clear definition of parent involvement in order to meet students’ needs. Basically, parent involvement is an interaction between a parent and child that may contribute to the child’s development or direct parent participation with a child’s school in the interest of the child (Brandt, 1989; Reynolds, 1992). Epstein (as cited in Carter,
1993) sited five types of parent and school involvement that occur in different places, require different materials and processes, and lead to different outcomes. The following types of involvement were the most comprehensive definitions, thus they are the definitions that will be used in this study:

1. Type 1: Basic obligation of parents - Families have a responsibility to ensure children’s health and safety; to exercise the parenting and child-rearing skills needed to prepare children for school; to supervise, discipline, and guide children to each age level; and to build positive home conditions that support school learning and behavior appropriate for each grade level.

2. Type 2: Basic obligations of schools - Schools are responsible for communication to the home about school programs and children’s progress. Schools vary the form and frequency of communication such as memos, notices, report cards and conferences. These kinds of communication greatly affect whether the information about school programs and children’s progress can be understood by all parents.

3. Type 3: Parent involvement at school - Parent volunteers may assist teachers, administrators, and children in the classroom or in other areas of the school (performances, sports, or other events); parents may attend workshops or programs for their own education or training.

4. Type 4: Parent involvement in learning activities at home - These may be parent-initiated activities or child initiated requests for help. Schools can encourage this process by providing instructions to parents for assisting their children at home with learning activities that are coordinated with class work.

5. Type 5: Parent involvement in governance and advocacy - Parents may take decision-making roles in the PTA or PTO, advisory councils, or other committees or groups at the school, district, or state level. Parent and community activists in independent advocacy groups may monitor the schools and work for school improvement.

Nakagawa (2000) examined another side of the question, “What is parent involvement?” Many parent involvement policies and definitions describe parents as both the cause and the solution of problems within schools. This statement, which makes it
unclear what parents should do to support their child’s education. Expectations and perceptions about parents are created by the language of policies that guide parent involvement. These policies became school documents dictating what parents should do and, by countless manuals that outline desirable parent involvement. In the past, some parent manuals encouraged parents to organize as advocates for their children, even at the risk of bashing teachers and busting bureaucracies. More recently, however, parents are asked to act as culture-carriers and consumers (Nakagawa, 2000). Parents are told that they are the reason for failing schools.

Parents whose children traditionally have not been well served by the schools are those who lose out the most because these parents may have the least time and experience to meet the school’s expectations. Nakagawa (2000) argued that the parental involvement policies and definitions should be a way of persuading parents into the schools that will most benefit children.

Socio-economic Status as a Perception

Cultural capital examines the effects of social class on the level of student achievement and types of parental involvement (Lareau, 1987). The poor communication at the targeted site may be linked to the class difference between some parents and teachers. Past research revealed that some schools have been accused of institutional discrimination, claiming that they make middle class families feel more welcomed than working class and lower-class families (Lareau, 1987). Lareau, Griffith (1998) and Kohl, et al., (2000) agreed that class-related cultural factors shape students’ academic achievement and parents’ compliance with teachers’ request for parental participation in
school. Lareau and Griffith's research revealed that the level of student achievement is connected to the class position of the parents and to the social and cultural resources that social class yields. These differences in social, cultural, and economic resources between middle class and working class parents help explain differences in their responses to a variety of teacher request to participate in schooling. Parents with a higher class position are more willing and better prepared to meet school and teachers' requests (Beatson, 2000; Griffith, 1998; Knoff & Raffaele, 1999; Lareau, 1987).

Structural Barriers Affecting Parental Involvement

Another issue that is prevalent at the targeted site is the constant changes in the students' living arrangements. Eighty-three percent of the students live in the surrounding apartment complexes. In the informal interview process it was revealed that the head of household varies greatly from mother, to family friend, to grandparents. Changing family structures can have a negative influence on the level of parent participation. The traditional families are no longer the dominant family in America (Balli, 1996; Duncan, 1992; Schurr, 1992). Single parent families, remarried families, and parent-friend families are increasingly changing the norm of family living (Duncan, 1992). The varying family structures bring about confusion for parents, students, and teachers. Parents are uncertain of their role in a stepchild's schooling.

Educators are often uncertain as to whom the key contact person is in the child's family. There are also financial problems that may affect the non-nuclear families. Single parents may find it difficult to meet educators during school hours or assist their child with homework due to work (Duncan, 1992). It is not difficult to see how matters of
food, housing, and clothing can take precedence over education when funds are uncertain and/or inadequate (Duncan, 1992). Research indicated that changing family roles and increased work responsibilities have given rise to a climate of detached support in the home (Balli, 1996). Increasingly, parents and teachers at the targeted site noted that poor home and school communication is a major problem. Home and school communication can be hindered by a lack of clarity in written and verbal communication. Dwyer and Hecht (1992) pointed out that it is the school's job to reach out to parents in order to strengthen the partnership between school and home. A strong home-school partnership is based on clear communication and provides a foundation for parents and educators to begin working together.

Decker and Majerczyk (2000) argued that parents need a clearer understanding of expectations for themselves and their children in order for them to achieve a level of comfort that will allow them to be actively involved in the education process. A school’s written and verbal communication can often be a source that is misinterpreted by parents. Written and verbal communication should be clear, concise, and free of educational jargon. Research revealed that many educators use educational jargon, which parents may not understand (Dwyer & Hecht; 1992, Robinson & Fine, 1994). Poor communication may alienate parents and cause them to feel separated from the school. Some parents will be too embarrassed to ask teachers for clarification. Thus, the communication has not been successful, leaving parents and teachers without a clear understanding of procedures, expectations, and roles.

Students’ written assignments can also be a source of confusion and frustration for parents who want to be involved at home. For many parents, involvement at home is
the only way they can be partners with the school (Decker & Majerczyk, 2000). Robinson and Fine (1994) suggested that “the challenge for teachers is to be sensitive to how to communicate meaningfully” and to clarify any “ambiguities of perceptions and expectations between parents and teachers” (p. 4). Also, parents are uneasy communicating with teachers. In the urban areas there is a class distinction that separates many parents and teachers (Blackwell & Mannan, 1992). Parents feel unwelcome in the school and psychologically threatened in starting any communication with the teacher. The climate of the schools frequently contributes to this reaction by parents. Many teachers also lack the skills to communicate effectively with parents (Tichenor, 1998; Watkins, 1997).

Many parents also feel that they do not have to be involved because it is the school’s responsibility to educate their children. A result of this mistaken belief is that most parent participation and training programs designed by the schools are in many cases ill-attended (Blackwell & Mannan, 1992). Furthermore, many parents and educators do not understand their roles in parent involvement because they are not aware of the history of parent involvement in schools.

The History of Parental Involvement

Historically, parents have been considered, at best, to be the most integral part of student learning, and at worst, the most detrimental. In the last two centuries, interactions between families and schools have changed. Gradually, there has been more emphasis placed on the roles and responsibilities of parents in education by parents, policy makers, and educators. The interaction between schools and parents began in the 19th century.
During that time, American parents gave the responsibility for their children's education to professional teachers. Reformers bent on protecting schools from "promiscuous contact with local influences" includes parents in this group (Waterman & Zellman, 1998, p. 370).

During the 1920's, a larger role of parents became acceptable in schools, but school leaders dictated the level and type of parental involvement. During the 1940's, the possibility of interaction between home and school or student attachment to, and identification with, the school was unlikely. According to Comer (1984), during World War II, widespread poverty, and limited communication upstaged education. With the 1960's came the implementation of federal Head Start, Follow Through and Title I programs in preschool and in the early elementary grades (Epstein & Sanders, 2000). These programs focused on involving low-income parents in their young children's education. Thus, during this time, the subject of parental involvement gained prominence. The 1970's ignited educators' and researchers' interest in improving schools and learning for traditionally underserved students. Parents' involvement was one subject that research and practice suggested would improve schools and increase student success (Epstein & Sanders, 2000).

From the mid-1980's to the present, the importance of improving schools for all children gained urgency with a recognition of the needed level to maintain national competitiveness, leadership, and economic growth. Furthermore, researchers and educators have drawn attention to the growing social and economic problems faced by families in this country. There are many federal, state, and local social services and community programs, but they are neither organized nor stable (Epstein & Sanders,
This situation makes it difficult for families to obtain the assistance they need for their children from birth through high school. These and other issues increase the importance of good school programs and the need to redesign policies, programs, and practices that link schools, families, and communities (Epstein & Sanders, 2000).

Finally, stakeholders must gain a clearer understanding of the possible benefits of parental involvement in order to fully support the programs designed to improve involvement. Henderson (1987) reviewed 125 research studies investigating the effects of parental involvement, and found that the studies overwhelmingly documented benefits for students. These included higher grades, improved test scores, better attendance, more positive attitudes and behavior, and higher graduation rates (Aikens, 2001; Henderson, 1987).

Parents benefit by learning more about the school and teachers expectations and how the school operates. A parent who becomes involved may show positive and consistent knowledge of how they can better help their child academically, about school programs and how to better the child’s home environment to help improve school success (Eldridge, 2001). In some cases, teacher morale is heightened when parents and teachers have good relationships (Aikens, 2001). Teachers who involve parents in children’s learning are likely to report a greater understanding of families’ cultures, an increased appreciation for parental interest in helping their children, and a deeper respect for parents’ time and abilities (Eldridge, 2001). Also, teachers may reap significant positive benefits in terms of parental perceptions of their merits through leadership in school-home communication and involvement practices (Epstein, 2000).
Theoretical Framework

It is important to note that the quality of the relationship between parents and schools influences children and adolescents’ school success. Eccles and Harold (1993) indicated that active parents’ involvement in schools is a critical factor in children’s educational success at all grade levels, and good parent-school communication has positive effects on parents and teachers. While research suggests that parental involvement in the schools is important for parents, teachers, and students, parents are not always involved with their children’s school. This situation gets worse as children move from elementary to secondary school. According to Eccles and Harold, parental involvement in schools also plays a critical role in their children’s academic achievement and socio-emotional development (1993). Parental involvement in children’s education relates positively to achievement motivation and children’s perceptions of competence (Beyer, 1995; Paulson & Marchant, 1998)

Achievement Motivation Theory

Understanding the factors that affect achievement is important because motivation affects achievement and level of occupation (Farmer, 1985). Murray described achievement motivation as the desire to “accomplish something difficult… to overcome obstacles and attain a high standard; to excel oneself” (1938, p. 164). Burger (1997) indicated that high-need achievers are moderate risk takers, have an energetic approach to work, and prefer jobs that give them personal responsibility for outcomes.

McClelland and Pilon (1983) proposed that parents promote the need for achievement by providing support and encouragement. However, as Burger indicated it is
important that parents provide support to allow the child of independence and initiative (1997). That is, parents must reward their children's accomplishments, but too much involvement might leave a child with an undermined sense of accomplishment. A theoretical model was created to ascertain the extent to which parents and schools influence adolescents' achievement motivation. Parental level of education influences parental involvement and parental support of the educational expectations for their children. In turn, parental involvement and support and expectations for their children's education influence adolescents' achievement motivation.

School climate, home-school communication and parental involvement are also expected to influence. Finally, as seen in Figure 1, it is hypothesized that the school climate, home-school communication, and parental involvement have a direct relationship with achievement motivation. The following three questions represent the issues relevant to the Achievement Motivation Theory:

1. I have received a call from grade parents to inform me of school events.
2. I have attended at least two school functions (PTA meetings, Parent Appreciation Luncheons, Workshops, etc.)
3. I have attended at least two parent – teacher conferences.
The Afrocentric Perspective is grounded in humanistic values and transcends the conventional pathological view that blacks, poor and oppressed people experience social dysfunction primarily due to internal deficits and character disorders. It places primacy on the strengths and uniqueness of differential populations as well as their ethos, talents and creative cores. It is widely speculated that low-income urban parents are reluctant to be involved in their children's education.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) identify three psychological factors contributing to this problem. First, the family's perceptions of their role and their responsibility in their children's education are the most important factors predicting parental involvement. Middle class parents, for example, feel that they should collaborate...
with school efforts, but low-income families often perceive themselves as outside the school system and feel it is the school’s responsibility to do the teaching. Second, parental feelings of efficacy contribute to their involvement in their children’s school. Parents who believe they can make a difference in their children’s education are more likely to visit and participate in school activities than those who feel ineffective. Third, some schools are more welcoming than others and the extent to which schools make parents feel comfortable and valued contributes to the adults’ participation in their children’s education.

Schools serving low-income, ethnically diverse neighborhoods, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler argued, must make greater efforts to welcome families, because those are the parents who often feel excluded because of differences in their ethnicity, income and culture. There are a variety of reasons why low-income urban parents resist involvement in school activities, but certainly cultural and communication differences between teachers and families lie at the heart of the problem.

Au and Mason (1981) found that when teachers’ conversation styles match that of the community, children are more able and eager to participate in classroom activities. Urban teachers often lack knowledge and respect of the ethnicities and culture of the children they teach. Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Piotrokowski, and Parker (1999) discovered that teachers often have limited knowledge of what parents do at home to help children in school. Pianta, Cox, Taylor, and Early (1999) found that most teacher communication with low-income families consists of “low-intensity” letters and flyers with little face to face interaction with the parents. Moreover, as their number of African American and
Latino children increased in a school, fewer “high intensity” teacher contacts with families ever took place.

Linek (1997) argued that many urban teachers possess a “We-Them” attitude toward urban parents and do not view them as collaborators in children’s education. Valdez (1996) found that even well-meaning teachers do not recognize the impact of family beliefs and values about schooling; consequently, some parent education projects, such as those designed for Mexican American immigrants, do more harm than good because they do not build on the families’ cultural capital.

Recently, Nieto (1999) and Bloom, Katz, Slosken, Willet and Wilson-Keenan (2000) have emphasized that teachers must establish respectful, and trusting social relationships with children and families, and this is essential for any efforts to improve urban education. According to the Afrocentric Perspective; the individual or community identity is the social reality resulting from the combined economic, social and cultural factors that prevailed during the formation and development of the individual or community. The Afrocentric Perspective provides reinforcement for continual sensitivities to the need for filtering all social, economic and political phenomena through this decontaminating screen, so as to understand the consequences both affectively and effectively on Black and other oppressed people. The following four questions represent the issues relevant to the Afrocentric perspective agenda:

1. I feel welcomed at my child’s school.

2. Students play a role in the effort to increase parent involvement by sharing school information with their families.
3. The school effectively informs parents of school functions (PTA meetings, workshops, etc.)

4. My child regularly talks to me about school.

Summary

Research has suggested many strategies for improving parent involvement through the use of communication tools. Communication can begin to create a partnership between home and school with parents, teachers and school social workers all being collaborators for children (Swick, 1995). Furthermore, research findings suggest that teacher communication can increase many forms of parent involvement (Deslandes, et al., 1997; Epstein, 1995; Feuerstein, 2000; Grossman, 1999; Healey, 1994; Jonson, 1999; Kirshenbaum, 2000; Watkins, 1997).

Dwyer and Hecht (1992) stated:

Whatever the reason (or reasons) for low parental involvement, one point remains consistent and clear throughout the literature. The first step in any parent involvement program must involve the school reaching out to the parent. The exact ways and means of the involvement must vary according to the situation of the school and the parents, but all programs must begin with the simple act of communicating” (p. 15).

If effective communication is incorporated into building collaboration between home and school, then a family's social and economic background would have a minimal
Influence on the level of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The following chapter includes the methodology section which includes the sample, setting, measure, design, procedures, and analysis.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Setting

This study took place at an elementary school located in Union City, Georgia with a population of 11,761. The community population consisted of 63% African American, 25% Caucasian, 5% Hispanic, and 1% Asian students. The socioeconomic status of the population is mostly low-income, and 33% are lower middle class (2006, Georgia Bureau of Census). Eighty-four percent of the students receive free or reduced-priced lunches and only 1% of the school population is non-English speaking. The school once prided itself on the stable homogeneous community that surrounded the area. Now the mobility rate has risen 51% and most of the population is served from the 15 surrounding apartment complexes.

The mobility rate exceeds the country's average of 35%. The rate of growth in the areas surrounding the school continues to be slow. The majority of the students come from single-parent households located around the community. Less than 15% of the students live within walking distance of the school and the system-supported transportation or personal vehicles transport the remaining 85%. The residential status of the community has changed drastically over the years. Only 17% of the students reside in
single-family dwellings, leaving 83% to reside in apartment complexes with public housing components.

Business and commercial development in the area has suffered a tremendous loss over the past 10 years. Several businesses have closed due to lack of support by local residents. The community also suffered the brunt of the economic problems with the loss of three anchor stores at the community mall and the closing of two movie theatres located in the area. One reason for the lack of support could be attributed to the inaccessibility to public transportation.

The school in which this study was conducted was built in 1976 as a small neighborhood school of 211 students from grade kindergarten through seventh. Thirty-one years later, it has evolved into a school of 565 students from pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. There are two pre-kindergarten classes, four special education classes and four regular education classes on each grade level. The school is staffed with 32 certified teachers, 14 paraprofessionals, a school counselor, a technology specialist and a curriculum support teacher (CST). The school has many resources available to the students, parents, and teachers. There is a computer lab, which consist of 35 computers, a television, a videocassette recorder, a scanner, digital cameras, and a laser printer. Also on the site is a Macintosh lab that houses 10 Macintosh computers, which were donated to our school by local business.

Each classroom has three to five computers, a television, VCR/DVD player, and other technological teaching and learning tools such as CD players, tape recorders, and overhead projectors. Each computer in the school has access to the Internet, e-mail, accelerated reader tests and a variety of educational software. The library is equipped
with 10,000 books, 700 accelerated reader books, 39 magazine titles, 200 books on tape, and 17 computers. Also, the library houses the Parent Workroom, which is equipped with a variety of resources and materials for parents to check out.

Sample

The sample consisted of 505 parents of students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, and 24 certified teachers. The majority of the sample consisted of African-American participants with the majority of them being female. The sample was selected because of a breakdown of communication between school personnel and parents. The study was approved by the IRB approval board (see Appendix A), and consent forms were distributed and signed by all participants (see Appendix B).

As evidenced by Table 1 below, the majority of the sample was African American with 80%, and the majority of the gender was female with 80%.

Table 1.

Demographic Table (n = 389)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ETHNICITY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measures

The following instruments were used to measure and analyze the data: teacher survey (Appendix D), Parent survey (Appendix E), Telephone data collection log (Appendix F), Parent-teacher conference collection log (Appendix G) and Parent sign-in sheets (Appendix H).

The teacher and parent surveys consisted of six questions, five structured items and one free response item, pertaining to the influence the program had on home and school communication and parent involvement. The participants rated the program’s performance using a Likert scale where the response format was 1 = strongly agree, 2 = disagree, 3 = not sure, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly disagree. The teacher survey was administered to 24 certified teachers in grades kindergarten through fifth three times during the program implementation. Teachers completed the surveys after scheduled faculty meetings.

Before distributing the surveys to teachers, the researcher gave instructions on how to complete the surveys; therefore, giving the participants anonymity. The parent surveys were sent home inside student report card envelopes. The students were encouraged to share the survey with their parents and return them to school within days. The classroom teachers collected the surveys and submitted all surveys to the Parent Involvement Committee chairperson.

In conjunction with surveys, teachers and grade parents maintained phone logs. Grade parents were instructed to make bi-weekly calls to parents to inform them of upcoming school events. Grade parents recorded the type of contact made with parents. Teachers were instructed to record the number of calls made to parents regarding parent-
teacher conferences and school events. The phone logs were collected from teachers and grade parents three times during the program's implementation. Also, teachers maintained a parent-teacher conference log. Teachers recorded the number of formal parent-teacher conferences held during the project's implementation. The final instrument was the parent sign-in sheet. At all school functions, parent sign-in sheets were placed at the front entrance for parents' signatures. The sheets were collected at the end of each function to determine the number of parents in attendance.

Design

This is a one-shot exploratory study on the effects of home-school communication on parental involvement. This study is non-experimental in the format of O. The design notation for this study is O. The O is equal to parental involvement. The internal validity threats that apply to this study are:

1. Mortality threat because some parents may not return the survey.
2. Selection bias because this may not be representative of the rest of the people in the community.

Procedure

In order to measure the issue of home and school communication at the targeted site, data from the parent, and teacher surveys, parent-teacher conference logs, and parent sign-in sheets were assessed. The surveys and data logs were collected and analyzed by the strategies planning committee. The information was used to determine the effectiveness of home-school communication and perceived barriers and benefits of parental involvement as seen by parents, and teachers. The surveys were collected by the
researcher and placed into the school’s vault until they were to be analyzed. Teachers were required to maintain accurate parent-teacher conference logs.

The teacher surveys were administered to 24 general education teachers in grades kindergarten through fifth. Also, teachers were required to maintain accurate phone logs. The phone logs measured the number of times the teacher tried to contact the parent. The phone logs were then verified by the classroom grade parent, and collected at the end of every week. The teacher surveys were inserted into a box once finished and the box was collected by the Parent Involvement Committee Chairperson.

Finally, parent sign-in sheets were displayed at all four school functions. Parents signed for and received a name tag before entering the building. Once collected, the surveys were stored in the school vault, and were analyzed by the Parent Involvement Committee Chairperson. The information from the study was distributed to stakeholders by posting monthly announcements in the school’s newsletter, calendar, and community report. Information regarding the program’s goals and expected outcomes were published in the S.P.E.A.K. handbook which was distributed to every parent and teacher. Regular meetings were held with stakeholders to share information about the program’s progress and to discuss parental involvement issues.

Various approaches to increase parental involvement through effective home and school communication were researched, and one approach was chosen that involved all stakeholders in the decision-making process. Student success is related to good communication practices between schools and families. Two-way communication is integral in involving parents in schools. Two-way communication implies that there is a back-and-forth flow of ideas (Lishka, 2002). Schools can promote two-way
communication by sending home surveys or letters that ask parents to respond. Project S.P.E.A.K. participants worked to involve students, parents, teachers, and administrators in the effort to increase parent involvement through effective communication. The school wide program encouraged students and teachers to improve how information about school wide events was communicated to parents. Teachers and the most active parents, grade parents, were asked to maintain an active phone log and to make phone calls to parents regarding school events and conferences.

Furthermore, each parent and teacher received a Project S.P.E.A.K. handbook, which outlines the programs’ expectations and goals. Regular meetings were held with stakeholders to discuss parental involvement issues. The program was designed to increase the sense of community through communication. This connection between home and school is linked to students’ development of intrinsic motivation, achievement motivation, concern for others, democratic values, and positive interpersonal behavior in class (Lishka, 2002). Schools with a strong sense of community help students feel like they belong, and offer a positive connection with peers and adults. It also offers opportunities to engage in meaningful experiences (Schaps & Lewis, 1999).

Analysis

This study seeks to assess whether or not home-school communication has an effect on parental involvement. The data compiled on all 389 parent surveys and 24 teacher surveys were analyzed by using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and discussed to reveal sample characteristics. The Pearson’s r parametric
statistical test is used to measure the relationship between home-school communication and parental involvement.

Summary

As stated earlier, the setting of the study took place at an elementary school located in a rural area in Georgia. The participants of this study are mostly African American and live in households with only one income. The design of this study is a one-shot exploratory study on the effects of home-school communication on the level of parental involvement. In order to measure the issue of home-school communication, data from the parent, teacher surveys, and parent-teacher conference logs, and parent sign in sheets were assessed. The chapter continues with a description of the four elements that compromise parental efficacy. Finally, to record unexpected outcomes and events, the researcher maintained a parental involvement journal and conducted informal interviews with stakeholders. All categories were analyzed to determine the key links between the topics. The following chapter includes a presentation of the findings and results.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The purpose of the study was to explore the effects of home-school communication on parental involvement. This chapter discusses data as it relates to the research question, the theoretical framework, and the Afrocentric perspective. Ancillary data are detailed in the item-level analysis (see Appendix C). The results of the study revealed that there was a significant change in behaviors at the targeted site. According to the data, phone logs and parent/teachers surveys, it was revealed that 24 teachers made regular phone calls to inform parents of conferences and upcoming school events, teacher conference logs and parent and teacher surveys revealed that 240 parents attended at least two parent-teacher conferences, and parent surveys and parent sign-in sheets revealed that an average of 274 parents attended at least four school functions.

The data collected from teachers, grade parent phone logs, and parent and teacher surveys revealed that 24 out of 24 teachers made regular phone calls to inform parents of conferences and upcoming school events. The phone logs revealed that teachers and grade parents called parents four to five times during the project’s implementation. Grade-parent phone logs revealed that calls were made to inform parents of school wide events such as PTA meetings, parent workshops, and informal gatherings such as the
Parent Appreciation Luncheons, Father and Son Breakfast, Mother and Daughter Breakfast, and Writing Fair.

The teacher surveys were administered to 24 general education teachers. As seen in Table 2 below, the teacher surveys assessed teachers’ views on parent involvement in relationship to stakeholders’ responsibilities, the school’s methods for distributing information to parents, and the usefulness of the Project S.P.E.A.K. initiative.

Table 2.

Results of Teacher Survey (n=24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher survey questions</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students play a role in the efforts to increase parent involvement by sharing school information with their families.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school effectively informs parents of school functions (PTA meetings, workshops, etc.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade parents have been beneficial in increasing parent awareness of school functions.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve notice an increase in the number of parent-teacher conferences.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Project S.P.E.A.K. handbook is helpful in the efforts to increase parent involvement.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; NS = not sure; A = agree; SA = strongly agree.*
The results revealed that 22 teachers agreed or strongly agreed that students played a role in the efforts to increase parent involvement. Twenty-three teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the school effectively informed parents of school functions. Eighteen teachers agreed or strongly agreed that grade parents were beneficial in increasing parents' awareness of school functions. Sixteen teachers reported an increase in parent-teacher conferences, and 18 teachers reported that the S.P.E.A.K. initiative was helpful to participants in the effort to improve home and school communication. Data collected from the parent-teacher conference logs revealed that 24 teachers reported meeting with at least 10 parents in their classrooms two times during the project implementation, which equates to 240 parent-teacher conferences.

The parent surveys reported that 324 parents attended at least two parent conferences. The discrepancies between data collected from teachers and parents may be directly related to what parents and teachers perceive as formal conferences. Parents may consider a brief discussion in the hall or a discussion during an informal school function to be a conference, and teachers do not. The parent surveys were completed by 389 of 505 parents of students in Grades kindergarten through 5. Table 3 contains the results of the parent surveys.
Table 3.

Results of Parent Survey (n=389)

Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent survey questions</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>NS</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel welcomed in my child’s school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child regularly talks to me about school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the school’s efforts to increase parent involvement.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have received a call from grade parents to inform me of school events.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Project S.P.E.A.K. handbook is helpful in the effort to increase parent involvement.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have attended at least two school functions (PTA meetings, Parent Appreciation Luncheons, workshops, etc.) so far this year.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have attended at least two parent-teacher conferences.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; NS = not sure; A = agree; SA = strongly agree.

Overwhelmingly, the majority of parents (354) reported that they felt welcome at the school, were satisfied with the school efforts to increase parent involvement, had received a phone call about school functions, had attended two school functions and
parent-teacher conferences, believed that the S.P.E.A.K. initiative was helpful, and reported that their child spoke to them regularly about school. The parent sign-in sheets showed an increase in the number of parents attending school functions compared to an average of 152 parents at school functions during the 2003-2004 school years. The greatest attendance was recorded at two parent luncheons, 255 and 260, respectively, where parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles were invited to eat lunch with students; and the attendance at the Father and Son Breakfast and Mother and Daughter Breakfast were unprecedented, at 331 and 272, respectively. During the 2003-2004 school years, parent attendance at school functions averaged 272 parents.

The results from this study show that increased home-school communication has a significant correlation with parental involvement. The data collected from the questions pertaining to the theoretical framework showed a significant correlation between home-school communication and parental involvement at the p< 0.01 level and at the 0.05 level. Also, the data collected from the questions pertaining to the Afrocentric perspective were statistically significant at the p<0.01 level. All other results are in the item level analysis (see Appendix C).

Listed below are the significant findings based on the information gathered from the free response item on the surveys, parent involvement journal and informal interviews:

1. Parents in this study were more comfortable attending informal school functions.
2. The parents surveyed wanted to be more involved in their children’s education.
3. Parents reported that they believe it is the school’s responsibility to develop programs geared toward keeping parents informed and involved.
4. Frequent calls by teachers and grade parents encouraged parents to attend school functions and made a difference in attendance rate.

5. The majority of the teachers agreed that students play a role in the efforts to increase parental involvement by sharing school information with their families.

6. The majority of the teachers and parents noticed an increase in attendance at parent-teacher conferences and school functions since the implementation of Project S.P.E.A.K.

7. Project S.P.E.A.K. formally communicated to parents that the school was interested in increasing parent visibility and involvement in the school and in student learning.

Summary

Presented in this chapter were the findings of this study. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that increased home-school communication has a positive effect on parental involvement. In the chapter to come (chapter V) we will discuss the conclusions of this study.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

The problem addressed in this thesis was that parents and teachers were not communicating well with one another. Many studies identified several rational solutions for overcoming barriers to parent involvement including: developing a clear definition of parent involvement (Baker, 1998; Feuerstein, 2000; Grossman, 1999); engaging in teacher education in the area of parent involvement (Broderick, Lazar, Mastrilli, & Slostad, 1999; Tichenor, 1998); implementing effective home and school communication (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Jonson, 1999); extending multiple invitations to parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997); and recognizing parents for being involved (Blackwell & Mannan, 1992). Grossman (1999) stressed the importance of defining parent involvement by schools. A clear definition of parent involvement will help stakeholders identify problems and implement logical solutions.

Teacher education in the area of parental involvement is an essential element in building connections between home and school (Grossman, 1999; Ramirez, 2000). It is recommended that teachers review current research, attend parent involvement in-service Programs that are held by the school social worker, recognize that parents are partners in education, and survey parents’ attitudes regarding parent involvement to further their knowledge in that area (Ramirez, 2000; McWilliam, Maxwell, & Sloper, 1999). Teachers
and school personnel must continually examine their preconceptions about parents, broaden their definition of parent involvement, and recognize that they must find new ways to include parents in their children’s education (Grossman). Parent involvement education may strengthen teachers’ knowledge on how to make parent-teacher communication more of a “conflict-prevention approach” than a “problem-solving approach” (Deslandes, Royer, Turcotte, & Bertrand, 1997, p. 27). The research recommended that schools assess the need for teacher training in family involvement and provide the necessary support and assistance to increase the effectiveness of their parent involvement programs and practices (Baker, 2000).

Researchers have suggested many strategies for improving parent involvement through the use of communication tools. Communication can begin to create a partnership between home and school with parents, teachers and school social workers all being collaborators for children (Swick, 1995). Furthermore, research findings have suggested that teacher communication can increase many forms of parent involvement (Deslandes et al., 1997; Epstein, 1995; Feuerstein, 2000; Grossman, 1999; Healey, 1994; Jonson, 1999; Kirshenbaum, 2000; Watkins, 1997). Dwyer and Hecht (1992) stated: Regardless of the reason (or reasons) for low parental involvement, one point remains consistent and clear throughout the literature. The first step in any parent involvement program must involve the school reaching out to the parent. The exact ways and means of the involvement must vary according to the situation of the school and the parents, but all programs must begin with the simple act of communicating. If effective communication is incorporated into building collaboration between home and school, then a family’s social and economic background would have a minimal
influence on the level of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Effective home-school communication is two-way, positive, frequent, and offered in different ways: by writing, phone, e-mail, and formal and informal meetings (Epstein, 1995; Grossman, 1999; Watkins, 1997). The different forms of communication are informal conversations (Grossman, 1999; Karther & Lowden, 1997), informal school wide events such as Family Friday, Breakfast with Dad, student dances (Karther & Lowden, 1997), regular phone calls (Epstein, 1995), electronic and written communication (Jonson, 1999), newsletters (Healey, 1994; Jonson, 1999), home visits (Grossman, 1999), conferences (Epstein, 1995), parent workshops (Healey, 1994) and personal attention (Lindle, 1989).

Parents want personal attention. Lindle noted that parents reported that a personal touch is the most important component in developing a home-school connection. Parents want to be equal partners with schools and in the education of their children. Parents expressed their dissatisfaction with school officials who are overly professional or patronizing. Swick (1995) stated, “A priority for parents is having a teacher who cares about them and their children” (p. 21). Caring between parents and teacher is accompanied by mutual respect for each other. Although a teacher may care greatly for the students' personal and academic success, communication is necessary for the child and the parents to recognize this caring (Berger, 1996).

Parent surveys serve as an effective method for supporting two-way communication and for teachers to gain valuable information from parents regarding their needs and concerns. The survey can be used as a vehicle for gathering information regarding issues that directly affect a child's learning. It can also serve as an evaluative
tool regarding units of study or classroom activities (Decker & Majerczyk, 2000). This can assist teachers in evaluating the effectiveness of programs and teaching styles. Foster-Harrison (1995) recommended that surveys be used to keep needs updated to make sure classroom strategies are relevant and practical. Surveys by the type of question asked also informs parents about the school’s concerns.

Another method for increasing parent involvement is to send multiple invitations to parents from the school. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) argued that multiple invitations, opportunities, and requests presented by children and their schools are effective methods for increasing parent involvement. The extent to which parents believe themselves to be invited to participate actively in the educational process will exert important influence on their basic decisions about involvement. This influence may be particularly important if a parent’s sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school does not encourage involvement. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, the considerable evidence on teacher practices intended to support parental involvement and parents’ sensitivity to teacher attitudes about their involvement underscores the importance of school-generated invitations and opportunities for positive parental decisions about involvement.

Finally, parents, as well as teachers, school social workers and students, must be recognized for their efforts to increase parental involvement. Parents’ efforts to be involved receive little recognition by the schools or by either public or private sectors of the society (Blackwell & Mannan, 1992). Many teachers and parents believe that parents are supposed to be involved because they are parents. Few schools have any programs to reinforce parents by recognition or otherwise (Blackwell & Mannan, 1992). Parents hear
from the school when their children are not disciplined nor have academic problems, but rarely do parents hear or receive good words about their children. It is even rarer that parents hear or receive positive strokes about their parenting efforts. The communication from school is more punitive rather than reinforcing in nature. Society as a whole displays the same negative attitude towards parenthood (Blackwell & Mannan, 1992). Therefore, it is essential that school programs are geared towards recognizing parents, students, and teachers for their efforts to increase parent involvement; this is called bridging the gap between home and school which is a specialty area of practice for the school social worker as a whole.
CHAPTER VI
IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The issue of communication between home and school was a major theme throughout the program implementation. Based on the literature that was evaluated and the data gathered, the hypothesis has been proven that high levels of home-school communication increases parental involvement. Formal and informal two-way communication helped the school, teachers, and parents understand their roles in improving home and school relationships. The one important limitation to this study is as follows: the findings of this study cannot be generalized to the general public, and the findings of this study can only apply to populations that are similar to the ones participating in this study.

Based on the data collected, the implications for school social work practice are as follows:

• School social workers should acquire various sources to fund parental involvement programs such as, gaining more financial support from the PTA to support the cost of informal school wide events. Also, school social workers can advise all teachers to maintain consistent contact with parents through monthly class newsletters, regular progress reports, phone calls, and e-mail.
• School social workers, along with administrators, can incorporate staff development for teachers in the area of parental involvement, which works to strengthen teachers' skills in relating to diverse conditions and groups.

• School social workers can distribute need assessments to determine what types of workshops parents are interested in attending, and can advocate to school districts to promote in-service programs on parent education and support the utilization of existing staff.

• School social workers can organize and develop a parent volunteer program that encourages volunteerism, organizes various activities for volunteers, and recognizes the parents' involvement. They can advocate to school districts to maintain program incentives that recognize parents and teachers for their efforts to increase parent involvement such as volunteer luncheons, distribute certificates of participation to parents during Awards Day ceremonies, and recognize a parent each month in the school newsletter for his or her contribution to the school.

• School social workers can encourage educators to maintain innovative methods for involving students in the efforts to increase parent involvement such as encouraging students to talk to their parents every day about school, share school correspondence with
their families, and recognize classes with the highest parent attendance at school functions.

• School social workers can encourage educators and school administrators to maintain the level of parent involvement in the schools by assessing and improving existing school programs and exploring new techniques in encouraging parent participation.

• With the assistance of parents, school administrators and teachers school social workers can develop written policies legitimizing the role of parents in the school, and school social workers can aid in the process of creating a school and classroom environment that welcomes families.

• School social workers can develop workshops to encourage school staff to be sensitive to the unique characteristics and circumstances of individual families, and can develop evaluation programs geared toward informing stakeholders about the value of parent participation.

• School social workers can network in the community by distributing school information to surrounding churches, apartment complexes, and businesses. The school social worker must realize that cultures are complex and that there is no single American culture. They must also realize that diversity is important and it is to be acknowledged and valued, and that members of each cultural
group are diverse and that acculturation is a dynamic process. Additionally, school social workers must realize their own attitudes about cultural pluralism, particularly whether you tend to promote assimilation into the dominant societal values or to stress the maintenance of traditional cultural beliefs and practices.

- School social workers must keep in mind that there are no substitutes for good clinical skills, empathy, caring, and a sense of humor. They need to understand and be able to take the perspective of the other in building relationships and coming to common grounds, as well as valuing differences (Miller Brown Helen, Constable & Lee, 2004). The school social worker can assist particular groups and individuals to build their own identity in ways that also regard the identities and needs of others.

- The school social worker can assist in the formulation, development and the implementation of respectful school policies and practices, and can assist in building a school community of safety and respect where conflicts and differences are resolved in a creative way.

- Finally, school social workers can engage in multiple forms of practice, intervening at different system levels (microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem levels) to promote respect for cultural differences and address issues of a state and civil

Recommendations for Educators

There are several things that must happen in order to ensure increased parental involvement in an effort to decrease truancy problems among our students. First, educators must realize that all students are individuals -- every student cannot be treated with a "cookie cutter approach" -- and that in order to work with a child, you must also work with that child's family. Educators must also realize that truancy is a symptom of an underlying problem, and that academic success cannot be achieved until truancy issues are resolved.

Additionally, educators should take into consideration school and classroom environment is essential and critical in keeping students interested in school, and that a welcoming, inviting, and warm climate is more likely to keep students engaged and keep parents involved. Finally, educators must realize that they are the key to high levels of parental involvement and home-school communication.

Recommendations for Future Research

Suggestions for future research include: expanding studies to include other schools in order to compare parent participation; developing evaluation programs geared toward informing stakeholders about the value of parent participation; and developing evaluation teams to study the effects of social work in schools.
Summary

Social workers have traditionally been agents of change. If any large change is made in any school system, the board of education must have a hand in it. Although the board is bound to act within the legal framework of the state and follow state directives, there are large discretionary powers. The board of education must be responsive to public opinion and have support of the public in order to have the funds to carry out the plans.

School social workers can channel their observations regarding underlying problems in the system as they perceive them, through the superintendent, to the board of education. In areas where board meetings are open to the public, the school social worker can take the time to be familiar with board procedures by visiting meetings. School social workers also might consider setting up citizen advisory committees for their schools and include a school board member. This would be an excellent means to acquaint and involve board members with problems as they occur (Hancock, Betsy Ledbetter, School Social Work, 1982).
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs
223 James P. Brawley Drive, S.W. • ATLANTA, GA 30314-4391 • (404) 880-8000
Formed in 1988 by consolidation of Atlanta University, 1865 and Clark College, 1869

September 28, 2006

Ms. Verna N. Sparks-Cooke <cookv@fulton.k12.ga.us>
School of Social Work
Clark Atlanta University
Atlanta, GA 30314


Principal Investigator: Verna N. Sparks-Cooke

Human Subjects Code Number: HR2006-08-190-1

Dear Ms. Sparks-Cooke:

The Human Subjects Committee of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your revised protocol and approved of it as expedited and exempt from full IRB review in Accordance with 45 CFR 46.101b.2. You may begin your study one week from the date of this notice.

Protocol Approval Code is HR2006-08-190-1/A

This approval is valid for one year from the date of this notice. This permit will therefore expire on September 30, 2007. Thereafter, continued approval is contingent upon the annual submission of a renewal form to this office. Any reaction or problems resulting from this investigation should be reported immediately to the IRB, to the Department Chairperson and any sponsoring agency.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Georgiana Bolden at the Office of Sponsored Programs (404) 880-6979 or Dr. Paul I. Musey, (404) 880-6829.

Sincerely:

Paul I. Musey, Ph.D.
Chair
IRB: Human Subjects Committee
cc. Dr. Sarita Davis (sdavis@cau.edu)
Office of Sponsored Programs, Dr. Georgiana Bolden (gbolden@cau.edu)
I, Verna N. Sparks - Cooke will be conducting a research study on "The Effects of Home - School Communication on Parental Involvement". There will be 640 participants in this study. This study will be conducted in order to improve communication between home and the school which will ultimately increase parental involvement. The study will be conducted at C.H. Gullatt Elementary School which is located at 6110 Dodson drive Union City, Ga 30291. The duration of the study will be from October 1, 2006 until November 30, 2006. Surveys will be sent home along with homework and everyday informational papers. No risks will be posed to the subjects. Participation in this study will only take a couple of minutes to fill out the survey. No additional participation will be required. There will be no benefits for participating in this study (monetary) or otherwise. You may withdraw from the study by not filling out the survey at any time. You may refuse to answer any of the questions on the survey. This study is voluntary. This is an anonymous study due to the fact that no names will be on the surveys. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this informed consent.

Signature of subject and date

___________________________________________

Signature of principle investigator or authorized representative and date

___________________________________________
APPENDIX C
ITEM LEVEL ANALYSIS

Table 5. Item Level Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The project S.P.E.A.K initiative is helpful in the efforts to increase parental involvement.</td>
<td>4.3077</td>
<td>.8748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Grade parents have been beneficial in increasing parent awareness of school functions.</td>
<td>3.9923</td>
<td>1.2326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have attended at least two school functions.</td>
<td>2.9767</td>
<td>1.2690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My child regularly talks to me about school.</td>
<td>4.4107</td>
<td>.7060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I feel welcomed at my child’s school.</td>
<td>4.2757</td>
<td>.7083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Students play a role in the effort to increase parental involvement by sharing school information with their families</td>
<td>3.7647</td>
<td>.66426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The school effectively informs parents of school functions (PTA meetings, workshops, etc.)</td>
<td>4.4167</td>
<td>.5836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I’ve noticed an increase in the number of parent-teacher conferences.</td>
<td>3.5833</td>
<td>.8805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I’m satisfied with the school’s effort to increase parental involvement.</td>
<td>4.3077</td>
<td>.8943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I have received a call from grade parents to inform me of school events.</td>
<td>3.4545</td>
<td>.9117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The Project S.P.E.A.K initiative is helpful in the efforts to increase parental involvement.</td>
<td>4.0000</td>
<td>.7071</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

TEACHER SURVEY

Project S.P.E.A.K.
Teacher Survey

Grade Taught (circle one) K 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th
Instructions: The purpose of this survey is to assess teachers perceptions of home-school communication and parental involvement, circle the number that best describes your feelings.

1. Students play a role in the effort to increase parent involvement by sharing school information with their families.

2. The school effectively informs parents of school functions (PTA meetings, workshops, etc.)

3. Grade parents have been beneficial in increasing parent awareness of school functions.

4. I've notice an increase in the number of parent-teacher conferences.

5. The Project S.P.E.A.K. initiative is helpful in the efforts to increase parent involvement.

6. Comments regarding Project S.P.E.A.K. and or parental involvement.

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

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APPENDIX E

PARENT SURVEY

Project S.P.E.A.K.
Parent Survey

Child’s Grade (circle one) K 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th

Instructions: The purpose of this survey is to assess parent’s perceptions of home-school communication and parental involvement, circle the number that best describes your feelings.

| 1. I feel welcomed at my child’s school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. My child regularly talks to me about school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I am satisfied with the school’s efforts to increase parent involvement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I have received a call from grade parents to inform me of school events. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. The Project S.P.E.A.K. initiative is helpful in the efforts to increase parent involvement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I have attended at least two school functions (PTA meetings, Parent Appreciation Luncheons, workshops, etc.). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I have attended at least two parent-teacher conferences. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

8. Comments regarding Project S.P.E.A.K. and or parental involvement.
APPENDIX F

TELEPHONE DATA COLLECTION LOG

Project S.P.E.A.K.
Grade Parent Phone Collection Log
Month _______________________

Grade Parent’s Name______________________________

Classroom Teacher’s Name______________________________

Check one of the boxes next to each parent’s name.
C = contact made; L = left a message; D = phone disconnected; W = wrong number; N = no one answered the phone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents’ Name</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>N</th>
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APPENDIX G

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCE COLLECTION LOG

Project S.P.E.A.K.

Parent-Teacher Conference Collection Log

Teacher’s Name/Grade ____________________________

Directions: Write the number of conferences you have had with the parents next to their name for each month. Turn in a copy of your log on the first Monday of each week to Mrs. Cooke.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent’s Name</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
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54
APPENDIX H

PARENT SIGN IN SHEET

Visitors Sign In Sheet

WELCOME VISITORS

Date ___________ Event ___________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitor’s Signature</th>
<th>Child’s Name</th>
<th>Child’s Grade</th>
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REFERENCES


Hancock Betsy Ledbetter; School Social Work (1982).


