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# The relationship between Louisiana middle school parent perceptions of school effectiveness and school performance scores

Dana Autman Scott

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOUISIANA MIDDLE SCHOOL  
PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS  
AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SCORES  
by

Dana Autman Scott, B.A., M.Ed.

Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

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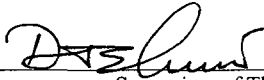
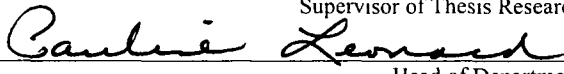
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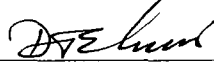
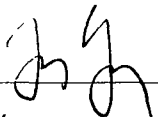
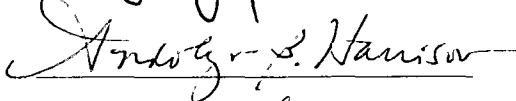
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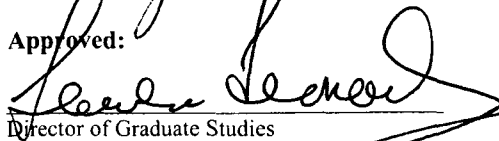
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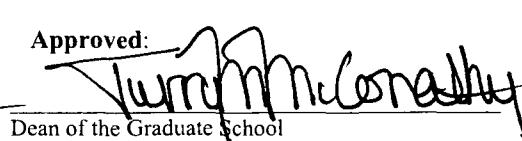
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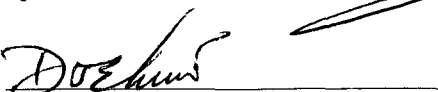


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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of parents of middle school students in Louisiana about the (a) culture; (b) climate; (c) leadership; (d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and (e) level of parental and community involvement at the schools that their children attend as it relates to school performance. The instrument used in this study was the Parent Questionnaire developed for the Louisiana Needs Analysis (LANA). Designed by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE), LANA is an internet-based tool provided to assist school administrators in evaluating school performance and planning for improvement.

During the data analysis, Pearson correlations were calculated. Additionally, the researcher conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by a post hoc Tukey HSD. The alpha level for the statistical analyses was  $p < .05$ . The findings from this study indicated a significant and positive relationship between school performance and each of the previously mentioned predictor variables. In addition to being highly correlated with school performance, school culture; curriculum, instruction, and assessment; family and community relations; school climate; and school leadership were also found to be highly correlated with each other.

The findings from this study support the previous findings of research about effective schools. Due to the focus on parental perceptions, these findings also reveal the impact of communication and collaboration between educators and parents on parental perceptions. These findings further imply that invitations for parental involvement from

school personnel may be the key to improving communication between home and school and to building more effective home-school partnerships.

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Author Dana Autman Scott

Date 05/05/2011

## DEDICATION

Blake and Bryce, mommy is finally finished with her homework. I adore you all and am so grateful to be your mom. At times, it has been your presence in my life that has kept me from giving up. I love you very much! Although, we can not get back the time that I have spent working on this project, I plan to make it up to you from this point on.

To my family, thank you for your support and encouragement throughout this journey. There are four of you without whom this accomplishment certainly would not be possible. Mamma, thank you for teaching me to be strong and independent and for being there waiting to step in at the times when I needed your strength. Aunt Dot, thank you for being there for us so much so that the boys think you are one of their grandparents. What can I say to you Granddad and Grammy? Thank you seems so inadequate for all of the time, energy, and support you have given us. I always know that I can call on you all no matter what and I can not find the words to express how much that means to me.

I have also been fortunate to have the support and encouragement of many of my friends while I have been in this program. I would like to acknowledge the extra special efforts of my friend, Felicia McGuire. Without your support, I don't know how I would have made it through my coursework. Thank you so much for the cooking, cleaning, and babysitting that you were so dedicated to provide every Tuesday, as well as, any other day that I needed it. Also, Cleoria Ross, thank you for always being willing to help,



regardless how short the notice. I love you both very much and I will never forget your sacrifices. When I began my coursework, I had only one ultimate goal – receiving the degree. However, this journey has netted so much more for me than a degree, a title, and additional earning potential. As a result of this program, I have grown immensely. I have also had the opportunity to meet some wonderful people. Although most of them have come and gone with the passing of each quarter and the beginning of new courses, one friendship has been consistent since August 27, 2004 (my first day of the program), that has been with Dr. Caroyl F. Townsend. Thank you, Caroyl, for your unwavering support in my academic, as well as, my personal life. I truly believe that you wanted this so much for me that you would have written this dissertation for me if I had let you.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The latest and most extensive reform legislation to date, The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), was officially signed into law on January 8, 2002. This Act was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which was enacted shortly after *Brown v. Board of Education* (Center for American Progress, 2008). Its purpose was to create a fairer education system that is more responsive and inclusive. The drafters of the NCLB Act sought to reform the education system by focusing on (a) students with disabilities, (b) economically disadvantaged students, and (c) students with limited English proficiency. The goal of this legislation was to provide a more equitable education experience for these students (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Statement of Purpose, 2002).

Many reform efforts predate the enactment of the NCLB legislation. For decades American leaders have been concerned about improving the current system of education and preserving the position of America as an international super power. After the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957 and forged ahead of the United States in the space race, federal officials turned their attention to public education which had previously been handled by local governing officials. According to Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, and Wirt (2004), this marked the beginning of massive federal reforms. These events also increase the involvement of state officials in local education since federal resources were filtered through state agencies.

More than two decades after Sputnik, concerns about the ability of the United States to compete globally in business, industry, and technology were revitalized. In 1981, this fear prompted then President Ronald Regan to establish the National Commission on Excellence in Education (National Commission on Education, 1983). This eighteen member group was charged with the task of presenting the American people with a report on the quality of education in America (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

The report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, was released in April of 1983. Its contents were bleak:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur – others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1).

This report further charged that for the first time in history, America was at risk of producing a generation of citizens that were less literate than their parents. In the report, the Commission reported that the current state of education was the result of a myriad of



educational deficiencies. This publication is considered to have initiated what has been referred to as “waves” of reforms. The first wave, which began shortly after the release of the report, focused on mandates and inducements. The second wave of reform incorporated the importance of capacity building along with the top down philosophy of the first wave (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Sergiovanni, et al., 2004).

On January 25, 1994, Congress enacted The Goals 2000: Educate America Act. The purpose of this legislation was to provide high quality educational opportunities for all students. The Act included several very ambitious goals to be attained by the year 2000. In order to reach the targeted objectives, the Act provided for the establishment of national frameworks for reform, research, and capacity building (Goals 2000, 1994).

The current NCLB legislation includes initiatives for the preparation of highly qualified teachers and the empowerment of parents. The Act also focuses on making parents more informed about school progress and makes provisions for parents to have the choice to transfer their children to another school if their current school fails to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Title V-Promoting Informed Parental Choice and Innovative Programs, 2002).

Unlike the initiatives that precede it, NCLB focuses heavily on informing and empowering parents to become involved in the education of children. Current research by DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) indicates that school, family, and community connections increase the likelihood of student success. Section 1118 of NCLB mandates that a school district that receives Title I funds must collaborate with parents in developing a parental involvement plan. The plan must include expectations for parents, as well as, a proposal for including parents in planning and implementing

activities to improve student achievement and school performance (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Parental Involvement, 2002).

“At the heart of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is a promise to strengthen the American education system and raise the academic achievement of all students” (DePlanty et al., 2007, p. 361). The Act recognizes that parents are the first and most important teachers that children will ever have; and for students to succeed in school, parents must participate actively in the academic lives of their children (DePlanty et al., 2007). Research indicates that when parents are involved in the education of children the likelihood for success greatly increases. Parental involvement has been shown to have a positive effect on student academic achievement as well as student motivation, behavior, and overall emotional well-being. Students with involved parents have been found to have better adjustment skills. There are various ways that parents can get involved with at school and at home. The provisions of the NCLB legislation are designed to aid parents in doing so.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As far as many educators, business leaders, and parents are concerned, American schools are broken and in desperate need of repair (United States Department of Education, 2004a). Many magazine articles and news reports feature business leaders claiming that American students are not graduating with the skills necessary for the job market. Graduating seniors report entering college without the adequate skills to survive mathematics, science, and engineering courses. Some Americans express concern that the current generation of American youth are in danger of fulfilling the grim prophecy of *A Nation at Risk*.

According to one of the leading school effectiveness researchers, Lezotte (2009), the current claims about the brokenness of the education system are false. Lezotte insists that one will not find an era in the history of American education when schools were more successful. Lezotte describes the current system as being designed to provide access to all students, but not designed to ensure that all students master high standards. He cites the current accountability movement as a “game changer”. Since the accountability movement has shifted the mission of the school system, Lezotte suggests that American schools must be transformed in order to accomplish the new mission of mastery for all students.

Whether the task is to “fix a broken system” or modify the practices to coincide with a new mission, most will agree that U.S. schools must undergo a significant transformation in order to provide equitable opportunities to all students. Over the past three decades, countless reform initiatives have been launched in an attempt to improve academic achievement for all students. This task has proven to be challenging.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parent perceptions about the (a) culture; (b) climate; (c) family and community relations; (d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and (e) school leadership of their schools and the effectiveness of the school as measured by the School Performance Score (SPS). According to DePlanty and colleagues (2007), strong family-school relationships have a positive impact on student achievement. In this study, parental perceptions will serve as an indicator of the nature of the home-school relationship. The researcher will investigate possible correlations between parental perceptions and SPS (DePlanty et al., 2007).

### **Significance of the Study**

With each new school year, standards for student achievement are raised. In 1999, when the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) was initially administered to fourth and eighth grade public school students, they were expected to score Approaching Basic on the English language arts and mathematics tests in order to be promoted to the next grade (see Appendix A). In the spring of 2006, the minimal standards were increased. In order to be promoted to the next grade, students were expected to score Basic in both mathematics and English language arts. However, students who achieved Basic in either mathematics or English language arts and Approaching Basic in the other subject received an automatic waiver and were allowed to move to the next grade. Scores in science and social studies did not affect promotion (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

Louisiana education officials developed a rating system to label student performance. The highest performance labels are Advanced and Mastery (see Appendix A). The level that all students are eventually expected to reach is Basic. There are also two categories to describe unacceptable student achievement. Those levels are Approaching Basic and Unsatisfactory. Currently, each school in Louisiana is expected to have 68.4% of the student body scoring Basic on the English language arts assessment and 65.2% scoring basic on the mathematics assessment. By 2014, 100% of Louisiana public school students are expected to have reached the Basic achievement level in both subjects (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

In an environment where the stakes are so high, it is imperative that all stakeholders are ready and willing to fulfill their responsibility to ensure student success. Academic achievement is very complex and has multiple influences. Variables from

home, school, and the community have an effect on student success. Various national, state, and local initiatives, such as the NCLB legislation, Comprehensive School Reform, and the Race to the Top Fund, have been established in order to support educators, parents, and students with efforts to improve student academic achievement.

As a part of the NCLB Act, local education agencies (LEA) were encouraged to develop a system to measure school effectiveness. In response, Louisiana officials developed the Louisiana Needs Analysis (LANA). The LANA process is very detailed and is designed to aid school personnel in diagnosing and addressing barriers to school success. One of the many instruments used during the LANA process is the LANA Parent Questionnaire (see Appendix B). This instrument which was used in the study measures parental perceptions about the (a) culture; (b) climate; (c) leadership; (d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and (e) parental involvement of Louisiana schools (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

To transform American schools and increase achievement for all students, all stakeholders, especially parents, must be embraced and included as an important part of the school improvement process. Gaining insight about parent perceptions about a school can be extremely valuable in guiding the school improvement process and in establishing connections between home and school (DePlanty et al., 2007). Studies have also shown that student achievement is impacted positively when there is a relationship between the adults at home and at school. Although they operate externally, parents are a vital part of the school community. It is unwise and unproductive when efforts are made to change a system and ignore such a critical component (DePlanty et al., 2007).

## Theoretical Framework

### Systemic Change

If one were to examine the school reform initiatives of the past 30 years, they would best be described as fragmented and chaotic. Even though the goal has been to enact significant whole school reform, the efforts have fallen short by focusing only on parts of the system with little consideration of the intricacies and operations of the entire system. This piecemeal approach has ignored the interrelatedness of the system components and has been proven ineffective (Jenlink, 1995).

Many educational researchers insist that no significant and sustainable reform to the education system will occur until the approach toward educational reform becomes more systemic. The current methods used for reform have been criticized as being out of date and out of sync with our current information age (Jenlink, 1995). Reform efforts often focus in one of the following areas: (a) curriculum, (b) instruction, or (c) organization. While work in these areas can lead to improvement, they stop short of providing a coherent, substantial change. One reason for this is that when seeking to change an organization, one must be mindful that the different components of the organization are connected and interrelated. Manipulation of one component may automatically have an effect on the others (Jenlink, 1995).

Much of the contemporary educational literature advocates the use of “systemic” reform. However, it is difficult to define what one actually means when using the term. Most researchers agree that a systemic approach to reform does not focus on one area of the system, but rather addresses each part as well as the environment in which the system exists. Systemic reform consists of three major components: (a) a unifying vision for the

system, (b) a consistent set of instructional guidelines that are aligned with the vision, and (c) a restructuring of governance (Hall & Hord, 2006).

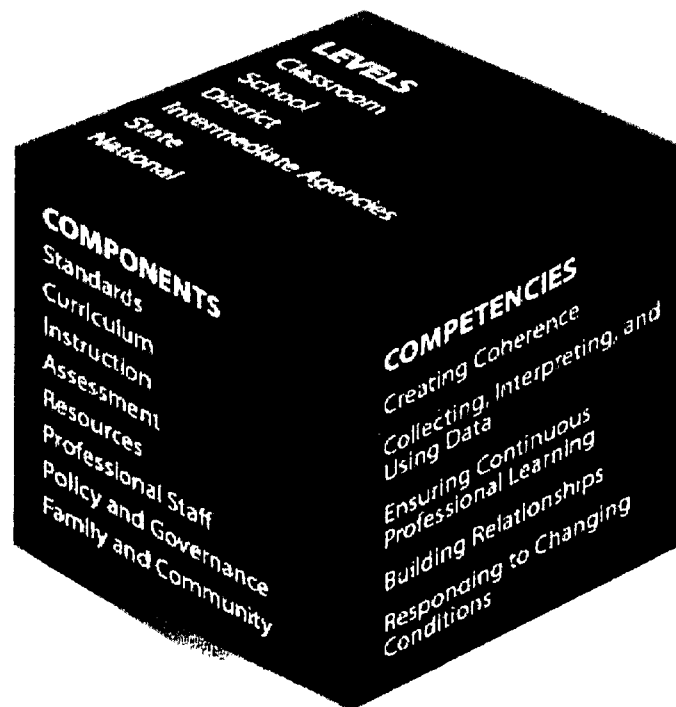
Hall & Hord also provide principles that should always guide systemic work. All systems are made up of components that must be properly identified before any plans for initiatives begin. When developing a strategy for systemic reform, plans should be made to attend to each component of the system. Sometimes within a system, components may exist at different levels. Consideration of the hierarchical layout of the components is critical.

For work in any system, there are competencies that are required; these should be identified and developed in the relevant individuals. There are also actions and conditions that serve to facilitate or impede systems work. Change agents must plan wisely if systemic efforts are to be effective and sustainable (Hall & Hord, 2006).

While operating under a five year grant contract from the United States Department of Education, the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) designed a model in order to support school districts in their efforts to implement systemic change. After reviewing over 30 years' worth of literature on school reform, SEDL researchers noticed that existing reform models utilized effective strategies to address one specific "gap" that exists between high performing and low performing schools. A certain model would fix a single identified issue with no consideration of the effect on other components of the system or organization.

Figure 1 depicts the Working Systemically Model developed by Herbert, Murphy, Ramos, Vaden-Kiernan, and Buttram (2006). Each level of the model addresses the essential components that must be in place in order to achieve student success and also the competencies that should be possessed by the leaders who are implementing the

reform. Each level of the education system plays a unique and vital role in achieving student success. If student achievement is to be sustained, the leaders at each level must coordinate policies, initiatives, and resources in order to provide adequate support. The eight components of the model, discussed below, are the areas where districts and states generally focus reform efforts. Rarely does a reform effort adequately target all components. In order to create meaningful reform, all eight components must be addressed. In order to ensure student achievement, great care should be taken to make sure that the efforts expended toward each component are aligned.



*Figure 1. The Working Systemically Model*



With any new initiative it is critically important that the stakeholders on each level coordinate efforts to ensure the alignment of the (a) standards, (b) curriculum, (c) instruction, and (d) assessment. Standards, typically developed by each state, outline the skills that students are expected to master at each grade level. The curriculum, generally established by the district, is aligned to the state standards and provides a scope and sequence to guide teacher instruction. Instruction encompasses the procedures and strategies used to teach the curriculum. Effective instructional strategies are challenging and engaging. Assessments are instruments used to measure student progress. Any new initiative that does not appropriately address these four components is incomplete (Herbert, 2006; Cowan et al., 2008).

The remaining four model components: (a) resources, (b) professional staff, (c) policy and governance, and (d) family and community provide scaffolding for new innovations. Resources, both fiscal and human, are always necessary. Additional support and materials are particularly important during the initial implementation of a new innovation. National, state, and local policies should also be considered when implementing reform efforts. It is important that the implementation of reform programs follow the guidelines of established policies. Also, new programs and reform efforts should not be introduced without informing parents and members of the community (DePlanty et al., 2007). Although parents and community members operate externally to the school, they have great influence on students. Parents and others in the community can provide various means of support during the implementation of a new initiative. A competent and knowledgeable professional staff is critical. The members of the staff must possess the wisdom and expertise necessary to effectively manage all of the other components.

The developers of the Working Systemically Model also state that the five competencies addressing the above eight components must be developed and implemented in order to effectively impact each component. The competencies are complex and require a great amount of time, effort, and commitment in order to develop. The first competency is creating coherence. During the process of creating coherence, professional staff must work to synchronize the individual parts of the system so that the efforts of all stakeholders will harmoniously lead to the goal of increased student achievement. Another competency addressed by the Working Systemically Model is collecting, interpreting, and using data. It is crucial that educational leaders analyze multiple sources of data. The data analysis process should include investigations to identify the causes of underachievement. In addition to student achievement data, staff members should also analyze attitudinal data to investigate stakeholder attitudes and beliefs that may be influencing actions (Herbert, 2006; Cowan et al., 2008).

Continuous professional learning is a third competency that is considered necessary to achieve and sustain any school improvement effort. Professional development should be relevant to the goals of the system, and it should focus on skills that are empowering to students and teachers. Impactful and sustained change is brought on by the investment of a lot of time and energy from various individuals in a system. Professional staff must be competent in cultivating professional relationships. System leaders need to be able to foster a sense of community and collaboration. Within the context of a collaborative and collegial environment, educators can support each other as they tackle the challenges of implementing reform. The fourth competency addressed in the Working Systemically Model is the ability to respond to changing conditions. In

order to respond to changing conditions, professional staff must always monitor emerging issues and be prepared to make necessary adjustments (Cowan et al., 2008).

Although systemic reform sounds ideal and is highly recommended by many educational researchers, it has several barriers that, if ignored, can make it almost impossible to implement. One of the most significant barriers is the mindset of those involved in implementing the reform. According to Jenlink (1995), changing the system begins first with changing ourselves. In order to embrace and implement systemic reform one must completely alter the way that they think about schools and education. Another barrier to systemic reform is the fact that very few understand the complexity of a system and how sensitive is the dynamic between the individual parts. (Hall & Hord, 2006; Jenlink, 1995).

### **Assumptions of the Study**

In this study, the researcher analyzed LANA Parent Questionnaire data. These data were collected during the LANA process for each of the schools included in the sample. Therefore, the researcher made certain assumptions. The first assumption was that parents understood the directions, items, and scale of the questionnaire. Parents without computer access were allowed to complete a pencil and paper questionnaire. The data were entered into the computer at a later time. The researcher presumed that any questionnaires that were completed by paper and pencil were accurately entered into the database. The researcher also assumed that parents were honest in their responses to each item on the questionnaire.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study shared one major limitation that is found in all correlational research. The researcher and others must be careful not to assume causality. Any significant

relationships found to exist between the variables can only be described as a relationship. No interpretations about causality can be made.

The sample chosen for this study contained parents of middle school students throughout the state of Louisiana; therefore, generalizations about parental perceptions were limited to parents of middle schoolers. Also, the majority of the schools identified to participate in LANA were schools in danger of not meeting their growth target. In many cases, these schools were also low performing. Therefore, the responses received for this study may largely exclude the perceptions of parents of students from higher performing schools.

### **Research Questions**

In the present era of accountability it is important that all stakeholders participate in preparing students for academic success. Previous research suggests that when parents are more involved at school the likelihood of student success is increased (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; DePlanty et al., 2007). This research study was conducted to investigate parental perceptions about their schools. The researcher explored correlations between parental attitudes and school performance scores. The alpha level used for the study was  $p < .05$ . The results of the study added to the empirical knowledge concerning the impact of family, school, and community relationships on student achievement. The questions that will guide this study are:

1. Is there a significant relationship between parental perceptions about school culture and school performance scores?
2. Is there a significant relationship between parental perceptions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment and school performance scores?

3. Is there a significant relationship between parental perceptions about parental involvement and school performance scores?
4. Is there a significant relationship between parental perceptions about school climate and school performance scores?
5. Is there a significant relationship between parental perceptions about school leadership and school performance scores?
6. Is there a significant difference between the parental perceptions of parents from low performing, acceptably performing, and high performing schools?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The research hypotheses for this study are:

1. There is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about school culture and school performance scores.
2. There is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about curriculum, instruction, and assessment and school performance scores.
3. There is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about parental involvement and school performance scores.
4. There is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perceptions about school climate and school performance scores.
5. There is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perceptions about school leadership and school performance scores.
6. There is no significant difference between the parental perceptions of parents from low performing, acceptably performing, and high performing schools.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Acceptably Performing School:** An acceptably performing school is a Louisiana school with an SPS score between 75 and 99.9 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

**Administrative Leadership:** Leadership, as defined by the LANA User Guide, includes decision making, support for personnel, and support for change and school improvement. Leadership also includes communication with staff, parents, and community agencies (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):** As required by the No Child Left Behind Act, each state must establish a definition of adequate yearly progress. The definition is to be used to measure the annual progress of the schools within the state (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Title I, Part A, 2002).

**Advanced:** Advanced is one of the five achievement levels that a student can achieve on the LEAP Test. A student who has reached this achievement level has demonstrated superior performance above the level of mastery (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007b).

**Approaching Basic:** Approaching Basic is one of the five achievement levels that a student can achieve on the LEAP Test. A student achieving at this level has not completely demonstrated mastery over the basic skills and knowledge needed for the next grade (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007b).

**Basic:** Basic is one of the five achievement levels that a student can achieve on the LEAP Test. A student who reaches this achievement level has demonstrated mastery of only the fundamental skills and knowledge needed for the next grade (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007b).

District Assistance Team (DAT): The district assistance team is established by district administrators to assist a school with the development of the school improvement plan in accordance with the guidelines established by the Louisiana Department of Education (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

Graduate Exit Exam (GEE): The GEE is a part of the state of Louisiana criterion-reference testing program. It is a high stakes test given at grades 10 and 11 to measure how well a student has mastered the state content standards. Louisiana high school students must successfully complete this exam as a requirement for graduation (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007b).

Growth Target: Each year, every Louisiana school receives a target that shows the amount of progress it must make the goal of Louisiana for 2014. The goal of Louisiana is for each school to have a SPS of 120 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

High Performing School: A high performing school is a Louisiana school with a SPS 100 or more (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

*Integrated Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (iLEAP)*: The *iLEAP* is a part of the Louisiana testing program. The *iLEAP* consists of norm-referenced and criterion-referenced items. This test is administered to students in grades three, five, six, seven, and nine (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007a).

Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP): The LEAP is a part of the state of Louisiana criterion-reference testing program. LEAP is a high stakes test given at grades four and eight to measure how well a student has mastered the state content standards (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007b).

Louisiana Alternate Assessment1 (LAA1): LAA1 is a test developed by the Louisiana Department of Education for students with significant cognitive disabilities (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

Louisiana Alternative Assessment 2 (LAA2): LAA2 is a test developed by the Louisiana Department of Education. This test is designed to provide a testing option for students in grades four, eight, ten, and eleven that are functioning significantly below the grade of enrollment (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

Louisiana Needs Analysis: The Louisiana Needs Analysis was developed to guide school personnel in conducting comprehensive evaluations of schools based upon school effectiveness and productivity research. This evaluative process provides information regarding those inputs and the processes by which school personnel utilize human and material resources in the production of student learning (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

Low Performing School: A low performing school is a Louisiana school with and SPS of less than 75 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

Mastery: Mastery is one of the five achievement levels that a student can achieve on the LEAP Test. A student that performs at this level has demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter and is well prepared for the next level of schooling (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007b).

Parent: According to the No Child Left Behind Act, a parent is a legal guardian or other person standing *in loco parentis* (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child's welfare) (United States Department of Education: Parental Involvement, 2004).



**Parental Involvement:** As defined by No Child Left Behind, parental involvement is the participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring (a) that parents play an integral role in assisting their child's learning; (b) that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; (c) that parents are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child; and (d) the carrying out of other activities, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (United States Department of Education: Parental Involvement, 2004).

**Professional Development:** According to the LANA User Guide, Professional Development should focus on (a) instruction, (b) evaluation, and (c) follow up and support. Professional development should also focus on the establishment of learning communities (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

**School Climate:** School climate measures stakeholder (a) personal feelings of safety and respect, (b) discipline, (c) teacher attendance, (d) student attendance and dropouts, and (e) campus cleanliness (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

**School Culture:** School culture includes (a) student expectations, (b) collaboration, (c) communication, (d) cultural competency, and (e) equity and access (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

**School Performance Score:** The School Performance Score is determined by a weighted composite index derived from the (a) criterion-referenced tests (60%); (b) the norm-referenced tests (30%); (c) attendance (5% for high schools; 10% for K-8 schools); and (d) dropout rate (0% for K-8 schools; 5% for schools with twelfth graders enrolled) (Louisiana Department of Education: District Accountability, 2009).

**Systems Thinking:** This thought process acknowledges the interconnectedness among components (subsystems) within an organized system, such as an educational system. Through systemic thinking, stakeholders are encouraged to think outside of their present definitions of schooling (Jenlink, 1995).

**Unsatisfactory:** Unsatisfactory is one of the five achievement levels that a student can achieve on the LEAP Test. A student at this level has not mastered the basic skills and knowledge for the next level of schooling (Louisiana Department of Education, 2007b).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

In an effort to provide a background for the study, this chapter will address several topics concerning school effectiveness, student achievement and the impact of parental involvement. The chapter will open with a brief description of the Effective Schools Movement, including an overview of what has been learned about school effectiveness over the past four decades. This text will outline the essential components that are associated with effective schools, as well as, efforts, both national and local, that have been made to increase the effectiveness of all schools.

In addition to school effectiveness, this chapter will address parental involvement as a strategy to increase student achievement. Parental involvement will be defined and the benefits of actively engaged parents will be discussed. Research based strategies for building effective family, school, community partnerships will also be highlighted. Lastly, this review of research will provide information about the Louisiana Accountability System which has been implemented to improve the quality of education for Louisiana students.

In 1966, as an effort to address equity issues for students from diverse backgrounds, the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare commissioned a study that was intended to provide information to aid the agency in adequately addressing the needs of all students. The resulting report, known as “The

Coleman Study,” concluded that schools did not have the determining influence necessary to produce student achievement. Instead, Coleman’s report stated that factors such as poverty and lack of parental education hindered students from learning regardless of the instructional methods. The publication of this study sparked the interest of many educational researchers and sent them into the field to explore the factors that impacted student achievement. The body of research that began to develop stood in stark contrast to the Coleman report. This research, which later became the base for the Effective Schools Movement (ESM) illustrated that all students, regardless of their background, are capable of learning. Although the negative effects of poverty and other environmental factors could not be denied, this new body of research demonstrated that school-level variables were influential enough to create student academic achievement (Lezotte, 2009).

In the early years of the Effective Schools Movement (ESM), researchers set out to find schools that were successfully working with disadvantaged students and to identify their strategies. After identifying schools and spending many hours observing the daily interactions of those schools, the researchers identified six characteristics that existed within these schools. Each effective school had a strong instructional leader who maintained a safe and orderly environment and held high expectations for the students and teachers. These schools also had (a) a strong sense of mission, (b) effective instructional strategies, and (c) frequent monitoring of student achievement. After further investigations, researchers found that the schools also had strong relationships with the families of the students. These characteristics, which are discussed in further detail later in this text, eventually became known as the Correlates of Effective Schools (Lezotte, 2009).

After identifying the basic components of effective schools, the focus quickly shifted to the process involved in creating an effective school. Although they had been successful in finding successful schools and identifying their key components, the researchers had not had the benefit of participating in the process of establishing the components. Therefore, there was a lack of knowledge about how the correlates were established, and even less knowledge existed about how to instruct other schools to replicate the process.

It was obvious that for ineffective schools to transform into effective ones there would have to be a certain amount of change in the behavior of the staff and the organizational system. The investigators consulted available literature in the field of organizational development. As a result, they were led to establish a model of planned change that was to be centered around a collaborative leadership team. The researchers proposed that the process be data-driven and results oriented. They also suggested that a team be established to address each correlate (Lezotte, 2009).

Although the original research was conducted on the school-level, it became obvious that effective schools could not be sustained without receiving support from district personnel. Using funding from a grant from the United States Office of Education, a team of colleagues from Michigan State University developed a two-tiered school improvement approach. The first tier focused on training school-level personnel, while the second one focused on training a district level leadership team. The presence of district support allowed many more schools to increase their effectiveness and also helped other schools to maintain their level of effectiveness.

In the years since the beginning of the ESM, much has been learned about schools and student achievement. Contrary to what was once thought, it has been proven that all

children can learn, and schools should be held accountable for student academic achievement. As time has passed, the ESM has become more expansive. Almost every state has established an accountability system that is based largely on the knowledge established by this research community (Lezotte, 2009).

### **Comprehensive School Reform**

Many initiatives have been established on the national level to support state and local efforts to establish effective schools. For example, in 2002, Congress appropriated funds for the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Program. This program was included as part of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The intent for it was to support the implementation of effective practices so that all children will have the opportunity to achieve academically (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Comprehensive School Reform, 2002; United States Department of Education, 2002).

The program was based on the premise that a coherent, comprehensive program was more effective than implementing several different strategies in isolation. The CSR was not a prescribed program, but a framework that supported other educational initiatives. Before receiving CSR funds, schools were required to conduct a comprehensive needs analysis, create targets of improvement, and establish a plan to address the targets. School and district personnel identified innovations that focused on specific areas and incorporate them into a comprehensive reform design.

Unlike previous reform efforts, the CSR had 11 required components that had to exist for a model to be approved as a CSR program. The design of the program had to be comprehensive including strategies for (a) instruction, (b) assessment, and (c) classroom management with (d) professional development, (e) parental involvement, and (f) school

management. In addition, the methods and strategies included in the program must have been empirically proven to be effective. Goals for student achievement must have been established and benchmarks put in place to ensure that sufficient progress was being made. All CSR programs must also include frequent high-quality professional development activities (United States Department of Education, 2002).

By providing shared leadership and responsibility, CSR programs were designed to provide support for the school faculty and staff; in return, all staff members were expected to support the program. The CSR program also made provisions for parental and community involvement. One of the key components of a CSR program was that the instructional strategies must had to be scientifically proven to significantly increase student achievement or had strong evidence of potential to significantly impact student achievement. The remaining components were (a) external support and assistance, (b) annual evaluations, and (c) coordination of resources. The heart of any CSR is the activity of teaching and learning. The other CSR components were also vital to the effective daily operation of the school (United States Department of Education, 2002).

Approximately 400 CSR models have been approved nationally since the inception of the program. Unfortunately, there was a lack of rigorous empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of the CSR program or the specific CSR models. The studies that have been conducted revealed uneven progress (Munoz et al., 2007). The implementation of CSR models was plagued with issues such as inadequate resources, insufficient professional development, low teacher buy in, and conflicting district policies. Reforms have been especially difficult to establish in middle and high schools. Middle school reform is particularly challenging considering the unique issues faced by middle school students. Middle school students experience so many physical,

psychological, and social changes that their ability to cope with change and stress is greatly decreased (Munoz, et al., 2007; Ross et al., 2007).

One of the approved CSR programs was the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP). The KIPP concept was developed in 1994 by two students from Teach for America. The purpose of KIPP was to develop a whole school reform program to address the needs of at-risk urban students. The program was founded on five principals (a) high expectations, (b) focus on results, (c) power to lead, (d) choice and commitment from families, and (e) more time to learn. The KIPP program met all 11 CSR requirements and addressed almost every aspect of school management (Ross et al., 2007).

The KIPP program focused on graduation from high school and college attendance. The program components included: (a) extended school day, school year, and Saturday classes, (b) two to three hours of homework each night, (c) after-school access to teachers via cell phone, and (d) extensive professional development for school faculty.

In order to empirically establish the level of effectiveness of the KIPP program, Ross, McDonald, Alberg, and Gallagher (2007) conducted a study at the KIPP: DIAMOND (KIPP: DA) School in Memphis, Tennessee. The school consisted of fifth grade students only. The school day began at 7:30 a.m. and ended at 5:00 p.m. School also convened four hours each Saturday and one month during the summer. Additionally, students were able to contact teachers via cell phone during after school hours. There was no academic requirement for admission to KIPP: DA. However, parents were required to sign committing to support the mission and rigorous requirements of the school. The



teachers at KIPP: DA went through an extensive interview process and received higher compensation due to increased demands of working at KIPP: DA.

The question that guided the study was: Do KIPP: DA students achieve at higher levels than matched control students on the state-mandated tests in the areas of mathematics and literacy? In addition to answering the major research question, the investigators also collected perceptual data about the school including the following: (a) climate, (b) organizational structure, (c) utilization of resources, and (d) instructional strategies. Each KIPP: DA student was matched to another fifth grade student with similar demographics at a neighboring elementary school. In order to gain an in depth knowledge of the contextual factors involved, the researchers chose to implement a mixed-methods research design. Three of the researchers conducted site visits at KIPP: DA throughout the school year. Each time, half day classroom observations were conducted. In the spring, they administered surveys and interviews to the teachers, parents, and students (Ross et al., 2007).

The Qualitative data analysis revealed that KIPP: DA had high expectations for student conduct and academic achievement. One hundred percent of teacher responses to survey items and 96.5% of parent responses supported this finding. Data analysis also indicated that the stakeholders of the school felt that everyone was committed to and involved in implementing the KIPP pillars. One hundred percent of the faculty agreed that they made significant contributions to the school and that parents, as well as community members, were actively involved as well.

Teachers were also very supportive of the increased learning time and reported that the additional time was used for tutorials and extending lessons. All of the teachers agreed that the principal (a) protected instructional time, (b) communicated the idea that

all students were capable of learning, and (c) encouraged teacher creativity. Although KIPP: DA utilized the curriculum from the school district, the faculty focused on developing interdisciplinary lessons and writing across the curriculum. Teachers employed a wide variety of instructional strategies including (a) project-based learning, (b) cooperative learning, and (c) musical mnemonics. When responding to the items on the instructional survey, all of the teachers agreed that a variety of teaching strategies were being used and that activities were designed to support student needs. Seventy-five percent indicated that their students spent a minimum of two hours per day engaged in interdisciplinary or project based activities (Ross et al., 2007).

The principal and faculty of KIPP: DA unanimously agreed that the resources and organizational structure supported the mission and goals of the school. When asked to rate the progress of the school on a scale of one to ten, the consensus was a nine. Most of the parents (96.6%) expressed satisfaction with the learning process at the school. A classroom observation tool was used during approximately 60 class visits conducted throughout the year. The researchers found that direct instruction was the method of instruction 50% of the time. The observers also reported that in all of the site visits students were focused and highly engaged in academic content. Overall, the researchers concluded that KIPP: DA teachers employed more project-based learning and coaching strategies. When considered in its entirety, the observation data revealed that the teaching strategies used at KIPP: DA were slightly untraditional. KIPP: DA teachers were considered to be facilitators of learning more often than information presenters.

After analysis of the achievement data, the researchers reported that the results on the Criterion Referenced Language Arts and Mathematics favored KIPP. The control students had practically identical scores on the fourth grade tests as their KIPP

counterparts. By the end of fifth grade, 10% of KIPP: DA students scored advanced in English language arts, and 16% scored advanced in mathematics. This was compared to 2% and 0% of the control students. School change generally takes several years for successful implementation. The study findings from the first year of the KIPP: DA school were encouraging.

### **Comprehensive School Reform in Louisiana**

The Louisiana school improvement process is data-driven and focuses on collaboration from all stakeholders. The process is designed to be led by the school principal; however, faculty, parents, and community members are expected to be involved in the development and implementation of strategies. The school improvement process consists of three stages: (a) planning, (b) implementing, and (c) evaluating. This process continually cycles until changes become institutionalized (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

Each public school in Louisiana has a School Improvement Team (SIT) consisting of faculty members, administrators, parents, and members of the community. The team collaboratively develops a School Improvement Plan (SIP). The goals and objectives of the plan are largely based on the data from student academic results. Research based strategies are chosen and implemented in order to enrich the educational environment and increase student achievement. When deemed necessary, the SIT can seek assistance from a District Assistance Team (DAT). The DAT consists of professionals external to the school who can assist with conducting needs analyses and interpretation of data.

Schools that are considered to be at risk of not meeting their Growth Target are chosen to participate in the Louisiana Needs Analysis (LANA). The LANA was

developed to assist school administrators in conducting Comprehensive evaluations of schools. The purpose for conducting a LANA is to identify ineffective practices that should be changed and at the same time maintain school strengths (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009).

The eight school components measured through the LANA process are (a) school climate; (b) school culture; (c) family and community relationships; (d) leadership; (e) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (f) professional development; (g) coordinated resources; and (f) system issues. The remainder of this chapter summarizes the current research literature that supports the use of these variables as indicators of school effectiveness.

### **Culture and Climate**

Research has established a clear connection between student achievement and school culture and climate (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008). However, what is less clear is the definition of each construct and how they interact to effect student academic performance. There is actually a debate among researchers about whether culture and climate are different constructs or different levels of the same concept. Some researchers consider culture to be a subset of climate. However, others such as, Schoen and Teddlie proposed that school climate is, instead, a subset of the more comprehensive school culture. In many cases, the terms are either used together or as synonyms.

According to Schoen and Teddlie (2008), The term school culture was first used in the 1930s when a researcher named Waller began explaining the life inside schools. He expressed that each school possessed a unique set of rituals, relationships, and behaviors that created its own identity. After all of these decades, there is still no universally accepted definition for culture. According to Deal and Kennedy (1982), culture is the

shared beliefs and values used to closely knit a community. Hargreaves (1994) describes culture as being the lens through which participants view the world. Deal and Patterson (1999) suggest that culture consists of unwritten rules, traditions, norms and expectations. These are thought to influence everything from the way the people act and dress to the manner in which they interact and their feelings about their students and their work. Although the previous definitions give a general idea of the things associated with culture, they are still broad and vague (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Hargreaves, 1994; Deal & Patterson, 1999).

School climate also has a variety of definitions offered by researchers. One definition offered by Teddlie and Stringfield (1993) defined climate as a list of school social environmental variables. The list included items such as (a) student sense of academic futility, (b) student perception of teacher push, (c) student academic norms, (d) teacher ability, and (e) teacher expectation for students. Perceptions of principal expectations, student-teacher efforts to improve, and parental concerns for quality education were also included on the list (Teddlie & Springfield, 1993; Schoen & Teddlie, 2008).

Creemers and Reezigt proposed a model for school climate. Their model focused on (a) the physical school environment, (b) the school social system, including the relationships and interactions between its stakeholders, (c) the orderliness of the environment, and (d) the expectations concerning student outcomes and teacher behavior. Both school climate and school culture have been empirically shown to have an impact on student achievement. However, when analyzing empirical results, the confusion about the difference between the two constructs often becomes an issue (Creemer & Reezigt, 1999; Schoen & Teddlie, 2008).

In an effort to determine the difference between culture and climate, some researchers describe climate as focusing on the behaviors of school stakeholders, and culture is explained as the beliefs and norms of the faculty and students. Definitions of school climate usually include specific components, but culture is often defined using broad and generic terms. Quantitative analyses are usually used to investigate school climate. By contrast, qualitative methods are usually used to research school culture. It is believed by some researchers that the confusion about the terms culture and climate is due at least partly to the fact that the terms originated from and are researched in different research communities. Considering the fact that the terms have been researched in different research communities, many scholars believe that instead of being separate concepts, culture and climate are components of a broader construct (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008).

Schoen and Teddlie (2008) reviewed current literature on culture and developed a logical model explaining the concept. The researchers focused on research published in 1980 and beyond. They used theoretical sampling to determine the works to be used in the review of literature. For their review, a total of 69 articles, 24 chapters, and 53 books, and three doctoral dissertations were consulted. The literature review led to great confusion and the discovery that there was a lack of a solid conceptual framework. Therefore, the authors set out on an extensive content analysis process. The goal of the researchers was to develop a conceptual definition of culture that would also illustrate the difference between culture and climate. The ultimate goal was to operationally define school culture in order to enable researchers an opportunity to effectively develop studies to explore the relationship between school culture and student achievement.

The literature review by Schoen and Teddlie (2008) was conducted in several phases. During their literature review, Schoen and Teddlie found that organizational culture, school culture, and school climate were treated very similarly in spite of the fact that they were associated with different research communities, methodologies, and traditions. The researchers noted that the term climate was used more often by quantitative researchers. Qualitative researchers, such as anthropologist, more frequently used the term culture. Although the researchers used the terms differently, there was considerable overlap in the variables used in their investigations. There was also an overlap in the definitions of the terms. This overlap was found to be consistent even among researchers from the same field. The conclusions of the studies on climate were also similar to the conclusions from culture studies. All of these occurrences supported the theory that rather than being two separate constructs culture and climate are in fact different aspects of the same construct (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008).

As a result of their review, Schoen and Teddlie determined that climate was a subset of culture. They came to this conclusion after reviewing the available definitions for the terms culture and climate. The definitions for culture were very broad, but the climate definitions were more specific. Most of the climate definitions fit within the more extensive definition of culture. The authors gathered a list of variables that served as indicators for culture. These indicators were grouped by similarity. This process yielded four different groups of variables which became known as “The Dimensions of Culture”. The four dimensions comprised the Schoen and Teddlie integrated model of school culture. The dimensions are (a) Professional Orientation, (b) Organizational Structure, (c) Quality of the Learning Environment, and (d) Student-Centered Focus.

- Dimension I: Professional Orientation - deals with the professionalism of the teachers in a school. It focuses on determining a teacher's level of individual and collective involvement in professional growth specifically in the area of student learning.
- Dimension II: Organizational Structure - addresses the organizational factors that influence the way business is conducted at the school level.
- Dimension III: Quality of the Learning Environment - explains the extent to which students are involved in meaningful and challenging experiences. This dimension is particularly focused on the rigor of the learning environment.
- Dimension IV: Student-Centered Focus - measures how well the school's programs and policies meet the needs of each student. This dimension is concerned with differentiated instruction, parental involvement, and student support services.

The four dimensions outlined in the model exist at three different levels. The levels are (a) artifacts, (b) espoused beliefs, and (c) basic assumptions. The dimensions of the model are fit together like interlocking puzzle pieces. This design illustrates the complementary and overlapping nature of the dimensions. The dimensions are considered to overlap because certain concepts can fall in more than one dimension. For example, teacher leadership could be considered a function of Professional Orientation (Dimension I) or Organizational Structure (Dimension II).

In addition to the new model for school culture, Schoen and Teddlie also developed a new definition for the term school culture. They defined culture as:

The shared basic assumptions and espoused beliefs that exist in the Professional Orientation, Organizational Structure, Quality of the Learning Environment, and Student-



Centered Focus of the school that determine and sustain the norms of behavior, traditions, and processes particular to a specific school. (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008, p. 139)

This new model of culture creates a need for new research designs that provide a variety of data sources for all of the dimensions. This model also provides key elements of culture that will aid researchers who have previously found school culture research difficult due to its broad and abstract nature. Many researchers believe that school culture has a vital impact on school improvement and reform efforts. The Dimensions of Culture now provide a more specific definition and indicators that will aid in future research.

Recently, MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between school culture and climate and student academic achievement. The sample consisted of 29 schools located in a southeastern Texas school district. The district was located in a large suburban area. Each of the schools had been rated by the Texas Education Agency and assigned one of three ratings. Each school was rated either Exemplary, Recognized, or Acceptable. The ratings were based on the test scores of the 24, 684 students that attended the schools. An Exemplary rating was assigned to a school in which at least 90% of the students passed the state examination and less than one percent of the students in grades seven through twelve dropped out. A school achieved Recognized status if 80-89% of the tested students passed the state examination with less than three percent student drop outs for grades seven to twelve. An Acceptable school had at least a 50% passing rate on the examination with less than a 5.5% drop out rate.

The examination administered to the students was the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The TAAS is a criterion-referenced exam used to measure student achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics. The TAAS has a Kuder-Richardson 20 reliability that ranges from the high .80 to the low .90. Researchers also

administered the Organizational Health Inventory (OHI) to 1727 teachers in the sample school district in order to measure the organization health of the school. The OHI includes 10 key dimensions. The dimensions include (a) Goal focus, (b) Communication adequacy, (c) Morale, (d) Innovativeness, and (e) Autonomy. The OHI also measures (a) Optimal power equalization, (b) Resource utilization, (c) Cohesiveness, (d) Adaptation, and (e) Problem-solving adequacy. The OHI has 80 items that are evenly distributed across the 10 dimensions. It is widely used, and it has a reliability of .76.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to compare the subtests of the schools. Significant differences were found to exist between the schools with the different levels of achievement. Additional univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were also performed along with Tukey's Honestly Significant Differences (HSD). The schools with higher student achievement also exhibited healthier school climates. The schools that were rated Exemplary also scored significantly higher on the school climate survey than the Acceptable schools. Interestingly, a statistical difference was not found to exist between the scores of the Exemplary Schools and the Recognized schools. Neither was a statistical difference found between schools rated as Recognized and those rated Acceptable. When the researchers took a closer look at the subtests, there were two areas that yielded significantly different scores between Recognized and Acceptable Schools. The dimensions were Goal focus and Adaptation. The findings indicate that Goal focus and Adaptation are critical components to the academic success of students (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009).

Educational research supports the theory that a positive school culture impacts student achievement. Recently educational researchers have begun investigating the potential effect that the school district culture may have on student achievement. In their

recent study Pritchard, Morrow, and Marshall (2005) set out to expand insight on school culture by soliciting the perceptions of students. The researchers set out with three goals (a) to develop a description of school culture from the perspective of students, (b) to determine if there is a relationship between the perceptions of students about school culture and district culture, and (c) to determine the relationship between school culture and student achievement.

Eighteen school districts were randomly selected from a national sampling frame of more than 1500 sites that had participated in a staff development project on writing. The researchers spent a total of five days conducting site visits in each district. During that time, they conducted interviews with teachers, principals, trainers, and central office administrators. One purpose of the interviews was to gain insight about the characteristics of the system. Over 2,000 randomly selected fourth, eighth, and eleventh graders wrote essays describing their schools.

Two of the researchers independently rated each school district using the District Culture Scale. The District Culture Scale defined a “Culture of Pride” as being one that allows the people within to feel that they belong to something meaningful that will allow them to contribute to the realization of something that is significant. School districts with scores ranging between 12-20 were considered to have a high culture, and districts with scores below eight were labeled as having a low culture. The seven highest scoring and the seven lowest scoring districts were used in the final analysis. The sample represented five regions of the United States. The Socio-Economic Status (SES) of the students in the high culture districts was comparable to that of the students in the low culture districts. The high culture districts consisted of 27% minority students compared to the 23% composition of the low culture districts.

In order to gain insight about the perceptions of the students about their schools, students from two classes in each school were asked to write comments about their schools. Students were instructed to focus on the positive. This resulted in 2275 essays from 62 schools. In order to establish categories for analysis, all of the essays were read. During the reading, clusters and categories were developed. At the end of this process seven categories were developed. A table of random numbers was utilized to select the essays that would undergo a more detailed analysis. The researchers chose 248 essays from 35 schools. Two trained raters read and coded the essays. Inter-rater reliability was established. The frequency of each type of comment was tallied. Using ANOVA, the means were compared by grade level. Each essay was rated negative (a), neutral (b), or positive (c). Several t-tests were run to determine the variability of the content (Pritchard, Morrow, & Marshall, 2005).

Each of the school districts had participated in the National Writing Project. After the four districts with middle scores were eliminated, there remained 1,973 essays from the high and low culture districts. Each of these essays was scored for writing quality. A six point rubric was used, and raters were trained to properly score the essays. An ANOVA was utilized to compare the scores of the essays with the District Culture ratings. This was done to determine any relationship that may have existed between the writing achievement of the students, the student grade levels, and the district culture. The t-tests were also used to determine the relationship between the writing achievement scores and the positive or negative classification of the student essays.

The data analysis revealed a significant relationship between district culture, writing achievement, and the nature of student comments. Students with high writing scores more often made positive comments concerning the Extracurricular Activities, and

Social, and Educational aspects of their schools. Also, more students in the high culture districts made positive comments than in the low culture districts. Student essay comments in their essays were coded using six categories. They were (a) Social/People, (b) Codes/Rules, (c) Education/Curriculum, (d) Extracurricular Activities, (e) Physical Facilities, and (f) Location and Community. Students from all districts and grade levels commented the most on the (a) Social/People, (b) Extracurricular Activities, and (c) Education/Curriculum (Pritchard et al., 2005).

Compared to their older counterparts, elementary students were more concerned about the social and educational components of their schools. They also mentioned the school principal more often than the older students. The majority of the students that made positive comments about the social aspects of their schools were from high culture districts. These students often commented about the caring behaviors exhibited by their peers and the adults in their school

In relation to the Education and Curriculum category, students most often mentioned the lessons that they considered to be meaningful and engaging. Although students from all three levels commented frequently about the curriculum, elementary students commented more often about academic issues than did middle and high school students. More students from positive culture districts made positive comments about the curriculum than in low culture districts. Also, students with higher achievement usually made more positive comments about the curriculum. Students from high culture districts more often mentioned group activities for learning. Students from low culture districts commented less on the curriculum. These students commented more often on their friends and extracurricular activities. This finding suggests that the students from low

culture districts did not consider the school to be focused on learning (Pritchard, Morrow, & Marshall, 2005).

The comments of 51% of students from positive culture districts were about extracurricular activities. Comparably 49% of students from districts with low culture ratings also mentioned extracurricular activities. Students who offered positive comments about extracurricular activities scored significantly higher writing scores than those students who made negative comments. Participation in extracurricular activities was associated with a sense of pride in positive culture districts. In districts with lower culture ratings, these activities seemed to serve as an escape. Many students in the lower culture districts viewed the non-academic activities as the only positive thing about school.

The responses of the students about the codes and rules of their schools did not differ significantly by achievement level. However, the nature of the student comments was significantly related to the district culture. Students from positive culture districts communicated positive reasons for the rules. Also, older students in both cultures seemed to resist adult values. When it came to physical facilities, even students from poorer school districts were proud of their schools when a positive climate was in place. School location was also viewed by the students in the study as a positive school aspect (Pritchard et al., 2005).

The factors that distinguished the high culture districts from the districts with lower culture ratings were social, educational, and extracurricular activities. These three categories were found to have a positive relationship with school culture. The culture of an individual school has long been considered to have an impact on student achievement. The results of this study support the idea that the culture of the overall district can also

influence student achievement. Overall, students from the high culture districts outperformed their counterparts in low culture districts. This study also lends credibility to some of the research about school leadership. Many of the comments from the students, whether negative or positive, were based on the perceptions of the students about teacher and administrator behaviors (Pritchard et al., 2005).

### **School Leadership**

For many years researchers have been investigating the link between principal leadership and student achievement. Research has shown a relationship between strong leadership and increased student achievement. Much of the impact of the school principal has been found to be indirect. For example, a principal can promote the mission of the school and establish a positive school climate.

“Leading learning communities” is how the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) defines instructional leadership (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). Although the definition contains only three words, the task described is very complex and multifaceted. When describing what educational leadership should look like, different researchers list a variety of indicators. There is no list that all would agree upon, but there are some indicators of strong leadership that are widely agreed upon. Most educational researchers would agree that an effective instructional leader (a) maintains a safe and orderly learning environment, (b) promotes the mission and vision of the school, (c) involves all stakeholders in the school improvement process, (d) maintains a school-wide focus on instruction, and (e) frequently monitors school progress. Effective principals have also been found to have high expectations for student performance and provide quality professional development for the school faculty and staff (Nettles & Herrington, 2007).

Educational leadership has been defined in terms of desired behaviors. Effective leadership behaviors that have been suggested for school principals are (a) giving feedback, (b) making suggestions, (c) modeling effective instruction, (d) supporting collaboration, (e) soliciting opinions, (f) providing professional development, and (g) giving praise for effective teaching.

The task of leading an instructional staff can be overwhelming. There are many matters to attend to, and they all seem critically important to building an effective school environment. Research on effective leaders, suggests five priorities upon which principals should focus in order to increase the effectiveness of the school. Those priorities are (a) defining and communicating the school's mission, (b) managing curriculum and instruction, (c) supporting and supervising teaching, (d) monitoring student progress, and (e) promoting a learning climate (Nettles & Herrington, 2007).

According to Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005), leadership may be the most important determining factor of an effective learning environment. In the current climate of accountability, principals must be capable of handling the complexities associated with school reform. It is imperative that principals become facilitators of continuous improvement.

Although there is an extensive body of research on educational leadership, whether a causal relationship exists between principal leadership and student achievement is still unclear. A principal's greatest impact is believed to be mediated through the culture and climate of the school. An unhealthy school culture can be detrimental to teacher morale and student achievement. In order to build a strong learning environment, principals should pursue long-term cultural goals. However, researchers caution that before attempting to implement cultural changes, it is vitally



important for a principal to understand the schools current culture. An understanding of the culture provides a frame of reference that the principal can capitalize upon in order to deal with problems that may arise. This knowledge will also be beneficial as the principal begins to reshape the culture (MacNeil et al., 2009).

Kelley et al. (2005) examined the relationships between certain aspects of leadership and school climate. The study consisted of 31 elementary principals and five teachers from each of the 31 schools. The principals chosen were all full-time principals serving without an assistant. The school population for the sample schools was between 100 and 649 students.

Two instruments were used to measure teacher and principal perceptions. The first instrument, the Leader Behavior Analysis II (LBAlI) was used in order to assess leadership styles. The LBAlI consists of 20 leadership scenarios. Participants choose between four different leadership styles for each scenario. The median reliability coefficient for the LBAlI is .74. The Staff Development and School Climate Assessment Questionnaire (SDSCAQ) was the other instrument. It was used to assess the school climate. The instrument has six scale scores each of which has a reliability coefficient over .80 (Kelley et al., 2005).

During the study, the principal and one teacher from each school rated their perceptions of the leadership style of the principal using the LBAlI. Two scores were yielded one for leadership effectiveness and the other for flexibility. The four other participating teachers from each school completed the SDSCAQ. On the SDSCAQ, the teachers rated the school climate in terms of the (a) communications, (b) innovativeness, (c) advocacy, (d) decision-making, (e) evaluation, and (f) attitudes toward staff development.

The relationship between the variables was calculated by utilizing Pearson product moment correlations. Significant positive relationships were found between teacher perceptions of the effectiveness scores of the principals and all of the six climate scores. However, the teacher perceptions of principal flexibility were negatively related to the climate scores. Of the negative relationships only the relationship with the Communication Scale and the Advocacy Scale were statistically significant. This finding interestingly indicates that teachers believe that less flexible principals provide more information and support for teachers. After analysis of the principal self ratings on the LBAll, the researchers found no significant relationship between the principal self ratings and the teacher ratings (Kelley et al., 2005).

The findings of this study support the idea that the school principal can have a positive influence on the school climate. They also point out the importance of consistency to teachers. An interesting discrepancy emerged in the study between the teacher perceptions about the leadership styles of the principals and the principal self assessment. This discrepancy could be due to some bias among participants. Whatever the reason for the disconnection, it raises an issue about awareness. If principals are going to be effective leaders, they must be aware of proper leadership strategies (Kelley et al., 2005).

### **Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction**

The NCLB Act requires that the education officials of each state develop a uniform set of challenging academic standards. Personnel at the Louisiana Department of Education began the process of increasing academic standards for K-12 students in the early 1990s. Content standards were developed for (a) English language arts; (b) mathematics; (c) science; and (d) social studies, as well as for, (e) foreign languages and

the (f) arts. Grade-level expectations (GLEs) which identify skills that students must master at each level were released. In 2005, the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum was released. This curriculum was based on the GLEs and includes sample activities and assessments designed to help teachers teach the content standards. In 2008, the Comprehensive Curriculum was revised. In addition to new activities, blackline masters and literacy activities were included in the revised version (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: State Plans, 2002).

Louisiana also administers various statewide academic assessments. Beginning in 2006, Louisiana students in third, fifth, sixth, seventh, and ninth grades began taking the *integrated* Louisiana Educational Assessment Program *iLEAP*. This exam integrated a norm-referenced instrument to also include standards-based items. The *iLEAP* replaced the IOWA Tests of Basic Skills which had been given since 1998. Fourth and eighth grade students in Louisiana are given the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) test. Students with disabilities who require testing accommodations are given the Louisiana Alternate Assessment (LAA 1 or LAA2). Louisiana high school sophomores and juniors are required to take the Graduation Exit Evaluation (GEE) (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

In addition to annual assessment of student progress, The NCLB Act requires that school progress is also evaluated. In Louisiana, each school is assigned a school performance score (SPS). The SPS is determined by using a weighted composite index. Depending on the grade levels at the school, three to four indicators are used to determine the SPS. The criterion-referenced exams given in the fourth, eighth, tenth, and eleventh grades comprise 60% of the school SPS. Thirty percent of the SPS comes from the Norm-reference tests given in grades three, five, six, seven, and nine. The remaining 10%

comes from the school attendance rate. In a school that has a twelfth grade, 5% of the SPS is derived from the attendance rate and the remaining 5% results from the dropout rate. The goal of Louisiana education officials is for each school to have an SPS of 120 by 2014 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009b).

Reeves (2003) conducted research with the “90/90/90 schools” that has been very informative concerning curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This research was mostly addressed through the Center for Performance Assessment. The term “90/90/90 school” is defined as a school with (a) more than 90% of the students eligible for free or reduced lunch, (b) a student population that exceeds 90% ethnic minorities, and (c) at least 90% of the students attaining high academic success on standardized tests (Reeves, 2003).

Reeves research included test data collected during the 1995-1998 academic school years. The study collected data from elementary, middle, and high schools. The research involved 130,000 students from 228 school locations. The schools involved in the research were inner-city, suburban, and rural. The students included in the study were also from a variety of ethnicities. The family incomes of the students ranged from the poorest to the economically advantaged.

The districts that participated in this study closely documented their instructional strategies. This documentation gave researchers an opportunity to examine the relationship between instructional strategies and academic achievement. The research methodology for this study included an analysis of accountability data and site visits. During the site visits, the researchers conducted a categorical analysis of instructional strategies. After the data analysis, there were five practices found to be common to all “90/90/90 schools”. These practices were (a) a focus on academic achievement, (b) clear

curriculum choices, (c) frequent assessment of student progress which provided opportunities for improvement, (d) an emphasis on nonfiction writing, and (e) collaboration with scoring the work of students (Reeves, 2003).

The researchers noticed striking differences between the instructional and assessment practices of “90/90/90 schools” and low performing schools. One major difference was that the “90/90/90 schools” displayed charts and graphs with student achievement information pervasively throughout the school. These charts were updated weekly showing student improvement. These schools also displayed excellent academic work in trophy cases throughout the building. School personnel also paid close attention to students whose inadequate reading and/or writing skills could potentially have an adverse affect on their academic achievement in other content areas. When deemed necessary, students spent multiple hours per day receiving literacy interventions.

Educational leaders in the “90/90/90 schools” made clear curriculum choices. The most common example of this was that these schools decreased the academic time in other subjects in order to spend more time focusing on reading, writing, and mathematics. Also, instead of attempting to cover the entire curriculum, they chose to focus on the core skills that affect student academic achievement in a variety of areas. Although less time was spent in these schools teaching science and social studies, the students still outperformed other students in these subject areas.

Another strategy used by the high poverty, high performing schools in this study was frequent assessment of student progress. This assessment was prescriptive in that students were not graded and advanced to another unit. Instead, after assessment, students were given opportunities for improvement. This strategy increased the value of teacher feedback. Unlike in a traditional setting, students were able to review their

deficiencies, complete additional assignments on the topics where they were deficient and retest. One of the most common characteristics of the schools in this study was the focus on performance assessments and written responses. Less successful schools utilized oral and multiple choice assessment formats. In contrast, the “90/90/90 schools” used writing assessments in all subject areas. In most cases, a general scoring rubric was utilized to assess all writing assignments. In order to maintain a focus on writing, the schools sacrificed time in other subject areas. However, of the 135 elementary schools in the study, 80% of them improved their scores in science and social studies (Reeves, 2003).

Another unique characteristic of the schools in this study was collaborative scoring of student work. Most schools rely on the independent judgment of classroom teachers to define proficient work. The high performing school in this study developed common expectations and assessments. After establishing a uniform criterion for work, teachers would grade then exchange papers. As teachers worked together to come to a consensus on the quality of the student work a couple of other important things occurred. First, students were protected from the unstated and subjective scoring criteria of individual teachers. For example, some teachers deducted points on an essay because he or she felt that the student should have written in cursive although the use of cursive writing was not required on the rubric. Secondly, as they collaboratively reviewed student work, teachers found that the instructions and/or rubric did not clearly specify the performance expectations. Both these occurrences were beneficial for the students.

An important point made by the author was that none of the “90/90/90 schools” experienced their success as the result of any specific proprietary program. The success experienced by these schools was the result of hard work and collaboration between effective teachers and administrators. The results achieved by these schools are totally

replicable without an expensive investment in any special programs or material. In the words of Reeves:

...we cannot depend upon proprietary programs to save us. It is the collective work of teachers, students, parents, and leaders that will ultimately lead us out of this malaise. Every one of the 90/90/90 schools had academic content standards, but so do many ineffective schools. The distinguishing characteristic of the 90/90/90 Schools was not merely that they had standards, but rather, how the standards were implemented, monitored, and assessed. (p. 7)

Although they are not necessary to produce student academic success, there are quality proprietary programs available to guide administrators and teachers through the process of improving the instructional program of a school. Many of these programs do not have empirical evidence to substantiate their effectiveness, but some programs, such as (a) Direct Instruction, (b) Success for All, and (c) the School Development Program have demonstrated strong evidence of effectiveness. There are also many other quality programs that due to lack of interest or opportunity have not been validated by research (Munoz, et al., 2007).

Munoz, Ross, and McDonald (2007) carried out an investigation to explore the effectiveness of the Different Ways of Knowing Model (DWoK). The DWoK Model was a multi-year comprehensive program based on the premise that all students can become proficient. Although it incorporated other research-based strategies, the DWoK model focused on (a) “multiple intelligences” and (b) the use of thematic units. The model was designed to allow students to utilize their “multiple intelligences” to develop their language, social, mathematic, and artistic abilities. Student learning was supported by the preparation of instructional lessons that integrated literacy, mathematics, and the arts with

science and social studies. The development of the DWoK Middle Grades program began in 2000 as part of a grant contract with the United States Department of Education.

The goal of the designer was to create a program that was responsive to the (a) academic, (b) developmental, and (c) social needs of middle school students. Key components of the DWoK model were the use of “varied instructional pathways” and integration of visual and performing arts. These strategies were chosen to (a) encourage creative thinking, (b) motivate students, and (c) increase content acquisition across all content areas. Additional components of the DWoK model included: (a) standards-based planning for curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (b) student inquiry and self-directed learning; (c) comprehensive literacy instruction; (d) shared leadership; and (e) organizational support structures for teaching and learning (Munoz et al., 2007).

Previous research had been conducted on the DWoK elementary program. In a three year program that followed 1000 children, the students that had been exposed to the DWoK program for two years experienced average gains of 16% compared to much smaller gains demonstrated by control students. After the third year of DWoK instruction, students displayed an increase in engagement and motivation compared to a decrease in motivation of control students. The purpose of the current research was to investigate the effectiveness of the DWoK middle grades program in raising student achievement. The research question that guided the investigation was: What is the impact of the DWoK model on raising middle school student achievement?

The current investigation was a continuation of a preliminary study of the first two years of implementation of the DWoK Middle Grades program. The research was conducted at three middle schools in Louisville, Kentucky. The district was located in a large metropolitan area that served a total of 96,000 students. A high percentage of the



students in the district were from high poverty backgrounds. Each of the three DWoK schools was matched with a control school that was similar. School-level data for the schools was analyzed using descriptive statistics. In order to control for prior achievement, student-level data was analyzed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). As a result of the data analysis, the researchers found that the DWoK schools greatly outperformed the control schools in sixth and seventh grade language arts and eighth grade humanities. The results also indicated that DWoK positively impacted student (a) engagement, (b) sharing, and (c) enthusiasm (Munoz et al., 2007).

The Norfolk Public School System in Norfolk, Virginia was a part of the “90/90/90 school” research. In this urban district, 65% of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch. Sixty-seven percent of the students were Black, 28% were White, and the remaining 5% were from other ethnic minority backgrounds. In the Norfolk School District 100% of the schools met the state benchmarks in writing. Also, all of the middle and high schools met the benchmarks in science and showed positive trends in language arts. In third, fifth, and eighth grades the achievement gap between White and minority students was reduced with all groups improving. Disciplinary actions were decreased by 15% with suspensions going down by 14%. The district had two “90/90/90 schools”. A few of the schools had recently experienced a 20% or more gain in the academic scores in all core subject areas. The gain in scores could not be attributed to demographics or school funding. All schools received similar funding and the schools experiencing the growth were demographically dissimilar.

At the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year, accountability reports were examined, and site visits and interviews began at each school. Reeves found nine strategies that distinguished the high achieving schools from others and attributed to their

extraordinary success. The strategies included (a) teacher collaboration, (b) feedback, (c) creative time management, (d) constructive data analysis, (e) common assessments, and (f) cross-disciplinary integration. The schools also (a) aligned teacher assignments with teacher preparation, (b) conducted action research and made mid-course corrections, and (c) used each adult in the system as a valuable resource (Reeves, 2003).

The first strategy was developed to allow time for teacher collaboration. This strategy involved principals changing the purpose of the school faculty meeting. In these schools, all announcements were transmitted in writing. During faculty meetings, teachers were allowed time to collaborate and examine student work. When collaborating over student work, the goal was for teachers to reach a consensus on what proficient work looks like. This experience was very helpful. Teachers were surprised to see the variety in their responses and ratings. Administrators also utilized professional development days to allow time for teacher collaboration. Instead of inviting outside consultants in to conduct a workshop, the majority of the time was allotted for collaborative scoring of student work.

The second strategy found in use at the significantly improved schools was the sharing of frequent feedback with the students. This strategy was based on research that stated that feedback would have a significant impact on student achievement when it was timely, accurate, and specific. The third strategy involved schools making drastic changes in their daily schedule. Elementary schools devoted three hours each day to literacy which included two hours of reading and one hour of writing. Similarly, secondary schools provided two periods of mathematics and English. A fourth strategy used by some of the schools with the greatest gains was action research. Administrators and faculty at these schools constantly reviewed the goals and strategies included in their

accountability plans. When a strategy was determined to be ineffective, adjustments were made immediately (Reeves, 2003).

A fifth strategy that was given credit for attributing to great gains was aligning teacher assignments with teacher preparation. The principals that utilized this strategy reviewed the undergraduate background of the teachers and reassigned them to grade levels and content areas for which they were best prepared. The sixth strategy employed in the effective schools was constructive data analysis. Using this strategy, teachers focused on student data from multiple sources with an emphasis on cohort data. Teachers were more concerned about the growth in proficiency of their current students than about comparing them to the students from the previous year.

The schools in Norfolk district with the greatest gains implemented a practice of using common assessments. The use of common assessments maintained the consistency in expectations without stripping the teachers of their flexibility and discretion. The teachers in these schools also worked to ensure that the students were truly being assessed rather than tested. In order to do so, they made sure that students received immediate feedback that was designed to help the students improve their performance. In the effective schools, each adult was valued and utilized. The administrators recognized that the teachers were not the only people interacting with the students. As a result, they determined that it was important to include staff members, such as custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria staff, in training on student behavior. The administrators promoted the idea that each adult at the school was a leader with responsibility for the students and deserved their respect.

In many cases, schools that are trying to increase scores do so by neglecting physical education, the arts, and other elective courses. In Norfolk, rather than ignoring

the importance of their elective courses, the teachers engaged in collaborative data analysis to find the lowest scoring areas in the core courses and developed ways that the elective teachers could effectively address those topics. In one case the art, music, and physical education teachers worked together to develop a social studies unit on African studies. The engaging activities were integrated into every discipline, and they not only supported targeted areas in the core classes, but the social studies scores increased as well (Reeves, 2003).

Successes similar to that found in Norfolk are not isolated (Reeves, 2003). Many districts across the nation are experiencing great success as a result of making sound decisions in the area of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The Wayne Township Metropolitan School Corporation in Indianapolis, Indiana has experienced results similar to those reported in Norfolk. The students in Wayne Township spoke 26 different languages and approximately 80% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Between 1999 and 2003 the district focused heavily on collaboration, academic standards, and non-fiction writing.

When the district received the accountability results for Spring 2002, they revealed that significant gains in mathematics and language arts had been made in every school. The gains for many of the schools exceeded 20%. The schools with the greatest levels of poverty experienced the greatest growth. In order to improve academic achievement in their schools, the administrators and teachers in Wayne Township used many of the strategies mentioned earlier in this text. The strategies upon which they focused the most were changes in (a) schedules, (b) instructional practices, (c) building-level assessment, and (d) leadership. It is also important to note that they did not eliminate elective courses such as music, art, physical education, and technology. Instead

the teachers of these courses were provided with the mathematics and language standards with which the students needed the most help. Another important component of the success at Wayne Township was the involvement of the principals in the evaluation of student work (Reeves, 2003).

In addition to a rigorous curriculum and engaging instructional activities, accurate assessment of student performance is essential in order to increase student academic achievement (Burke & Wang, 2010). Meaningful assessment strategies have a dual purpose: (a) to discover the strengths and weaknesses of students and (b) to provide information teachers can use for instructional planning. Recent research conducted by Burke and Wang investigated the methods of assessment techniques employed by reading and mathematics teachers in the Mississippi Delta region. The data collection process focused on calculating the frequency of assessment techniques used in five school districts.

After analyzing the data, researchers found that the most commonly used forms of assessment were (a) observation of students, (b) questioning techniques, and (c) pencil and paper tests. Assessment strategies that were used sparingly were (a) portfolios, (b) student made questions, and (c) computer-assisted testing, and (d) checklists. Some of the less frequently used strategies, such as portfolios, have great potential for increasing student academic achievement. Performance based assessments and portfolios allow students a chance to display their abilities. These strategies also help students learn to evaluate their work and become reflective learners. When asked to identify barriers to improving classroom assessment, the responses from the teachers included: (a) a lack of time to create and grade quality assessment instruments and (b) the need for professional development. The teachers also indicated that support from the building administration

and the state Department of Education along with time to collaborate with other teachers would be beneficial in improving everyday classroom assessment (Burke & Wang, 2010).

The researchers further advocated the importance of teachers finding ways to pinpoint the development of each student in relation to the standards. In order to achieve the task, they recommended an increase in the use of performance based and integrated assessments in order to support daily instruction. The authors also suggested that teachers utilize assessment strategies in order to make informed decisions about how to address the needs of each child. This is especially important when dealing with children who are struggling academically (Burke & Wang, 2010).

The increasing pressure to improve student test scores has forced school leaders to re-evaluate their assessment practices. In order to properly prepare students for high stakes testing, educators are endeavoring to develop data-driven practices that provide ongoing information for benchmarking student academic progress. Halverson (2010) conducted research to examine the use of formative feedback systems. Formative feedback is defined as data that can be used to guide teaching and learning. This assessment strategy has benefits for teachers and students. Formative assessment provides teachers with the outcomes of student learning which can be used to determine proper instructional planning. Students are also allowed an opportunity to accurately assess their personal learning progress.

In the absence of timely and accurate feedback, teachers are uninformed about the amount of learning that is taking place in the classroom. Once in place, formative assessment systems provide meaningful and timely information. However, the development and daily implementation of these systems is challenging for school

personnel. A formative feedback system has four major components: (a) signals, (b) sensors, (c) signal processors, and (d) controllers. Signals provide information about the system. This information may originate from either an internal or external source. Sensors notice the existence of signals. Processors determine the significance of the signal and interpret its meaning. After the signal has been processed, the controller establishes the action to be taken. When put in place this type of system extends the perspectives beyond the classroom to view the school as a learning organization. These systems (a) develop informative signals to measure student performance on instructional targets, (b) create sensor and processing strategies to interpret the information signals, and (c) determine controllers that will determine necessary instructional changes (Halverson, 2010).

Formative feedback systems consist of three functions: (a) interventions, (b) assessments, and (c) actuations. Interventions are the programs used by teachers and administrators to guide the instructional process. Examples of interventions are (a) textbooks, (b) experiments, (c) computer programs, and (d) Individualized Educational Programs (IEP). When all the interventions are combined they make up the instructional program of the school.

Assessments detect the signals (learning) that result from the interventions. Operating as sensors, the assessments inform teachers about the learning that has transpired. By examining the results, teachers can determine whether students have mastered the current standards. Actuation is the steps used by teachers to interpret the assessment results and determine instructional actions and adjustments (Halverson, 2010).

The research conducted by Halverson further investigated how administrators and teachers used assessment data to restructure instructional and assessment practices. The data were collected as a part of a five year research project funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). From a larger sample of schools, Halverson selected four schools that utilized formative assessment systems. These schools had strong records for improving student achievement. The data collection process included: (a) 107 interviews with school teachers and leaders, (b) 135 classroom observations, and (c) observations of faculty meetings, professional development workshops, and data retreats.

As a result of his research, Halverson found that most instructional interventions were brought in from outside the school. School district personnel were usually responsible for selecting and distributing the material. This limited the influence of school level faculty on the types of interventions available. Artifacts developed locally most often included (a) lesson plans, (b) IEPs, and (c) after-school activities. Halverson also noticed that interventions evolved over time as teachers collected more resources.

In a formative feedback system, the purpose of the assessment is to detect the signal from the intervention and report it in a manner that will guide teacher instruction. In his analysis, Halverson noted a variety of formative assessments utilized by teachers to monitor student progress. These assessments included: (a) benchmark testing, (b) teacher-created quizzes, and (c) homework checks. Some of the benchmark assessments were locally developed and others were purchased. These assessments generally selected items to match specific state standards. After measuring student learning, the assessment instruments provided results which informed teachers about the level of mastery on each standard. These reports allowed teachers to take the appropriate actions to meet the academic needs of the students.



A critical part of the formative feedback process is the provision of time for teachers to make sense of assessment data and plan appropriate interventions. Each of the schools in the study provided actuation spaces which allowed time for teachers to reflect on the assessment data and instruction. Actuation spaces were often allowed during grade level and faculty meetings. The researcher found three elements that differentiated between meetings and actuation spaces. The first difference was found on the meeting agenda. The agenda for an actuation space devoted most of the time to discussions about data. Secondly, in an actuation space, faculty members were actively engaged in developing interventions and assessments. The third difference was school leaders worked diligently to schedule appropriate time and resources for actuation spaces. Leaders also empowered teachers by giving them the flexibility to choose appropriate actions (Halverson, 2010).

Concerns about student performance on high stakes tests have not only caused educators to focus more on finding timely and accurate methods of formative assessment, but have also motivated school officials to search for ways to predict student performance on the critical end of the year examinations. In an effort to prepare students for high stakes tests and to gain insight about possible performance, many teachers use practice tests that are aligned with the state test and released test items. In addition to requiring a lot of extra work, this method also utilizes an immense amount of instructional time. Teachers often have to grapple with the decision of whether to invest time in working to develop the ability of the students or to assess these abilities (Feng et al., 2009).

The United States Department of Education provided grant funding to support the development of a web-based system designed to assess student knowledge and provide simultaneous tutoring assistance in mathematics. The system, called the ASSISTment,

collected assessment information and, at the same time, aided students by breaking difficult problems into sub-steps. As students worked on the website each week, the system collected cumulative data on the academic ability of each student. This data allowed the system to provide an accurate prediction of how well each student would perform on the high stakes mathematics test. The ASSISTment system was considered very powerful because of the ability to provide automatic, continuous, and accurate feedback without disturbing the learning process. When students completed a problem correctly they were given another one. When an incorrect answer was given, students received a mini-tutoring session which broke the problem into smaller steps (Feng et al., 2009).

In 2004, the ASSISTment system was developed using 10 years of eighth grade mathematics released test items from the Massachusetts State Department of Education. During its first school year, the ASSISTment system was utilized by over 600 students and eight teachers. The students used the system on a bi-weekly basis. The access was expanded to reach an excess of 3,000 Massachusetts students in 2008.

In the research conducted by Feng et al. (2009), the researchers found that the ASSISTment system was better at assessing student knowledge than traditional assessment methods. More traditional methods of assessment were usually only able to detect correct or incorrect answers. The ASSISTment system was able to detect (a) response time, (b) the number of attempts made before reaching the correct answer, and (c) the amount of tutoring assistance needed. The researchers also concluded that continuous assessment systems, such as the ASSISTment system, provided accurate data in a timely enough manner to have an impact on student academic achievement. The results were considered important because it provided evidence that accurate assessment

and quality instruction could be packaged together. The results of this research could potentially influence the future of everyday classroom assessment, as well as evaluations of teacher performance. State education officials from several states have considered moving to “value added” compensation. Systems like the ASSISTment would allow the tracking of achievement and the gains to be credited to specific teachers.

When planning the curriculum, instruction, and assessment for students, teachers must plan for students who have specific academic and behavioral needs. The NCLB Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) stress the importance of scientifically based strategies to increase student achievement. There are at least two research based strategies that have been developed in recent years that address the needs of all students, particularly those with special needs.

The first of these strategies is called Responsiveness-to-Intervention (RtI). The RtI program is an alternative approach for identifying students with learning disabilities (LD). With RtI, a tiered approach is used to watch the progress of students in order to provide interventions. In some cases, the appropriate intervention may be recommendation for special education services due to LD. The program is organized to provide increasing support as determined by the needs of each student (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

The concept of the RtI program was developed due to concerns about screening and addressing the needs of LD students and gained momentum after the establishment of the “Learning Disabilities Initiative” by the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs. The RtI program has six core features. Interventions utilized through the RtI program must (a) be supported by research, (b) be organized along a tiered continuum with increasing intensity, (c) utilize standardized

problem solving protocol for assessment and instructional decision making, (c) use data-based decisions for assessment of student progress and making instructional interventions, (e) ensure implementation integrity, and (f) include regular and systematic screening for early identification of students whose performance is not responsive to classroom instruction. Although there is some support for RtI, the research base is still limited and there are legitimate concerns about the process (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

The second strategy that has been found to be beneficial for students with special needs is the School-Wide Positive Behavior Supports program (SWPBS). After the reauthorizations of IDEA in 1997 and 2004, there has been more attention focused on using research based interventions and supports for behavior. Programs such as SWPBS are critical for addressing the needs of students with behavioral problems and for preventing the onset of behavior problems in others. In 1997, the National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) was established by the United States Department of Education, Office of Sponsored Projects. The PBIS Center organizes resources concerning interventions and practices and provides access to all schools (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

The SWPBS is a framework for prevention and focuses on the implementation of research-based interventions for all students. The SWPBS framework includes interventions that are organized into a continuum. The continuum consists of three tiers and begins with the consideration of the behavior supports required for all students. It then continues into a variety of specialized interventions designed to address increasingly severe behaviors. The SWPBS program provides behavioral interventions for five school areas. These areas are: (a) school-wide, (b) classroom, (c) non-classroom, (d) the family, and (e) the individual student (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

The PBIS Center has developed a professional development approach that focuses on the integration of the four interactive elements. The procedure for integration begins with the collection and analysis of data to determine problems and contexts. During this step, measures of progress are also established. Next, objectives are created based on the data and priorities established by the SWPBS team. After the objectives are established, practices and interventions are selected. Finally, organizational supports and systems are established to ensure accurate, sustained, and comprehensive implementation of the SWPBS plan (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

There is a body of solid research building to support the effectiveness of the SWPBS program (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Empirical results specifically point out the effectiveness of primary tier interventions included in SWPBS. Also many of the interventions designed at the school-wide, classroom, non-classroom, and individual student levels have been found to have great impact.

The SWPBS program is based on the same operating features as RtI: (a) early intervention and universal screening, (b) data-based decision making, and (c) scientifically based interventions. Due to their similarities, Sugai and Horner (2009) suggested that RtI and SWPBS could be implemented together to aid in addressing the diverse needs of students. The researchers provided information to support implementing SWPBS within the framework of RtI. The RtI framework provides the ability to coordinate a number of curriculum and behavioral based interventions. Although the processes are similar, SWPBS cannot just be added to the RtI program and could potentially take four years to reach full implementation. Before implementing, SWPBS, an audit would have to be conducted to determine the current programs to modify or eliminate. Ongoing job-embedded professional development would be required to assist

teachers, and the initiatives could not be viewed as special education initiatives, rather as programs designed to benefit the entire school. The implementation process would also require active leadership support from district personnel (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

The debate about the ability for economically disadvantaged students to succeed in spite of the challenges they face will likely continue. However, the empirical evidence in this area is growing and indicates that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are not doomed to life without academic success. Research indicates that teacher quality is an important determining factor in academic success for students. While demographic variables are important and cannot be ignored, the research indicates that the choices teachers make about curriculum, instruction, and assessment have a profound impact on student academic achievement (Reeves, 2003).

One of the most heavily researched domains of LANA is school, family, and community relationships. The importance of parental involvement is supported by research. Now researchers are reporting that it is important for parental involvement to advance along the continuum to develop into true partnerships between schools families, and the community. In order to accomplish this task, school personnel must utilize available resources to discover the fears, concerns, and barriers that prevent meaningful parental involvement. After retrieving the perceptions of parents, efforts must be made to collapse the barriers that alienate parents and teachers and keep them from forming effective partnerships. The following paragraphs will outline the available research about the impact of parental involvement on student achievement. They will also explore the motivational factors that influence parental involvement as well as the barriers that prevent parents from being actively involved with the education of their children. This

section will conclude with advice from research about ways to establish effective family, school, and community partnerships will be offered.

### **Parental Involvement**

It has often been said that parents are the first and most influential teachers. There is a growing and substantial body of research that supports this statement. Parental involvement has been shown to have a positive impact on the (a) academic achievement, (b) behavior, and (c) emotional and social well being of students. According to the United States Department of Education (2004), parental involvement is defined as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities. Parental involvement activities ensure that (a) parents play an integral role in assisting the learning of their children; (b) parents are encouraged to be actively involved in the educational program at school; (c) parents are full partners in the education of their children and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees; and (d) other activities, such as those described in section 1118 of NCLB are conducted (United States Department of Education: Parental Involvement, 2004).

In addition to a biological parent, any adult with whom a child resides and who is legally responsible for the child is considered a parent. This includes grandparents and or stepparents that may be standing *in loco parentis*. As school administrators and faculties endeavor to implement effective reform initiatives, it is important to include parents in order to assure that the efforts are impactful and sustained (United States Department of Education: Parental Involvement, 2004).

## **Impact of Parental Involvement**

Englund, Egeland, and Collins (2008) conducted a study to investigate the effect of parent-child relationships on high school graduation. In the study, the researchers separated the participants into four groups. The first group was called the expected dropouts. These students were ones who were expected to drop out of school. The second group included students who were from the expected drop out group that actually managed to stay in school and graduate. These students were referred to as the unexpected graduates. The third group of students was called the expected graduates. As expected, these students remained in school to graduate. The fourth group, the unexpected dropouts, consisted of the students who were expected to graduate but dropped out.

In terms of academic achievement and behavior, few significant differences were found between the different groups of students. However, the researchers found that students who had positive parent-child relationships during early childhood and parents who maintained involvement throughout adolescence were more likely to graduate.

One way in which a parent can be extremely instrumental in the lives of their children by providing them the skills to be ready for school. Students who enter school with readiness skills are better prepared to adapt to school and excel academically and socially. Throughout the years, there are many home visiting programs that have been established with the goal of assisting parents to prepare their children for future success. These programs are usually either focused on (a) changing the behavior of the parent or (b) educating the parent in an effort to improve the functioning of their children (Zigler et al., 2008; Kim, 2009).



A replication and extension study was conducted on the Parents as Teachers Program (PAT). This program was found to have both direct and indirect effects on school readiness and third grade achievement. The indirect effects were the increased likeliness of a PAT parent to read to their children and/or choose to place the children in preschool. The PAT program was found to have a direct effect on school readiness because it changed parental behaviors in ways that were beneficial to the development of the children (Zigler et al., 2008).

Although poverty remained a significant indicator of achievement, participation in the PAT program greatly reduced its effect. Participation in the PAT program along with preschool attendance almost closed the gap between low socioeconomic students (SES) and those from higher income homes. On the kindergarten entry exam, test scores of students who participated in PAT and attended preschool were almost as high as students from more privileged backgrounds who did not attend preschool (Zigler et al., 2008).

Research is inconsistent about the effectiveness of home-based interventions programs such as PAT. Some researchers suggest that the reason for this inconsistency is the fact that all home-based programs are not created equally. The effectiveness of the program is determined by the program curriculum and activities. More importantly, the impact made by the program staff greatly depends on the quality of the relationship between the parent and the home visitor (Zigler et al., 2008).

Student academic achievement is obviously very complex. There are a myriad of factors that influence how well or poorly a student performs scholastically. There has been much interest and discussion about the factors that have the most impact on academic achievement. Stewart (2008) recently conducted a study to investigate the impact of individual-level and school-level characteristics on student academic

achievement. The results suggested that the two factors used to measure student effort (a) school attachment and (b) school commitment have positively significant relationships with grade point average (GPA).

Although it is commonly believed, and supported by some research, that there is a positive relationship between student involvement in extra-curricular activities and GPA, that hypothesis was rejected by the study results. However, peer associations had a positive and significant relationship with GPA. Although parent school involvement did not have a significant relationship with GPA, parent-child discussion did indicate a significant and positive relationship. This result suggested that parental school involvement, although critical, has a lesser impact on student academic achievement than some other forms of parental involvement. The findings also suggested that a cohesive school environment involving all stakeholders can positively impact student achievement and provide further support for the importance of a systemic approach to school accountability and reform. The findings from the literature clearly show that all stakeholders play an important role in building a culture that fosters academic success (Stewart, 2008).

Parental involvement is extremely important for promoting school readiness and assisting students in the formative years of early elementary school. Although students become more independent as they age, parental involvement continues to be an essential component of student success throughout middle school and high school as well.

Parents are often unaware of how important it is for them to be involved in assisting their older children adjust to transitions as they progress to middle and high school. Input from parents is particularly important in order to help students and teachers navigate through the infamous “fourth grade slump”. The fourth grade slump has been

defined as a declining interest in reading and a gradual disengagement from school. This condition usually begins between second and fifth grade. The concept of the fourth grade slump was first discussed in the 1960s. As a result of this phenomenon, the academic achievement of American students becomes flat and eventually decreases as they progress from elementary school on into middle and high school. Educators offer a variety of explanations for this phenomenon. They include increased attention to video games, organized sports, and other extracurricular activities. Some suggest that students may be burned out from testing. Also research has documented that as students get older they begin to read less (Tyre & Springen, 2007). Whatever the reason for this event, meaningful family involvement can help alleviate its impact on student academic achievement.

Simons-Morton & Crump (2003) conducted research that focused on examining the effect of (a) parenting behaviors, (b) school factors, and (c) personal factors on students' school adjustment and school engagement in middle school. This experiment was conducted in four middle schools from one Maryland school district. The district was a suburban district with approximately 24% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. Data collection began during the 1996-1997 school year and was completed in the 1998-1999 school year. Two trained proctors administered a student questionnaire to sixth grade students. These data collection processes were conducted once at the beginning of the sixth grade year and again toward the end of the year.

School adjustment, social competence, school climate, and parental involvement were found to be significantly associated during the cross-sectional analysis. Like with school attachment, the association with parental monitoring and expectations was not found to be significant. However, social competence and parental involvement were

associated positively with school engagement. Only parental involvement and social competence independently predicted both school adjustment and school engagement. The findings suggest that school engagement may serve to influence school attachment.

The findings also supported previous research about the importance of a positive school climate. Researchers found school climate was positively associated with school adjustment and school engagement. Parental involvement was associated with school adjustment and school engagement during both cross-sectional and prospective analyses. The data analysis actually indicated that parental involvement is a better predictor of school adjustment than other parenting behaviors such as monitoring and expectations (Simons-Morton & Crump, 2003).

The benefits of parental involvement for children is heavily supported by research but what is less researched and discussed is the benefits that parents receive from being involved with the education of their children. Parents who become more involved in school-based activities reveal that over time their confidence builds. They also often discover personal skills of which they were previously unaware. Parents become more knowledgeable about the operations of the school and the expectations of the administrators and faculty. When parents are more involved on the school-level, they meet other parents and gain an opportunity to learn more about the experiences and expectations of others. In addition parents report feeling more respected by teachers and a greater sense of belonging at the school (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Comer, 2005).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) have conducted extensive research about the factors that motivate parents to become involved in the education of their children. They found sufficient evidence to support the positive impact of parental involvement on student success. However, in these authors' opinions, two critical questions remained to

be answered. First, what motivates parents to become involved in the education of their children? Second, how does parental involvement have a positive effect on academic success? “In most circumstances, parent involvement is most accurately characterized as a powerful enabling and enhancing variable in children’s educational success... Its absence eliminates opportunities for the enhancement of children’s education; its presence creates those opportunities” (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, p. 319).

In order to answer their questions, the pair focused on research that addressed specific aspects of parental involvement, as well as, studies about the outcomes of parental involvement. As a result, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler developed a model that is designed to explain why parents choose to become involved in the education of their children.

The researchers identified three key factors that influenced the decision of a parent to become involved. The factors included (a) their personal belief about the role of a parent, (b) their feeling of efficacy for helping with school, and (c) the opportunities and demands received from the children and/or the school. These factors did not guarantee that parents would become more involved, but they did offer insight into the motivating factors that may affect parental behavior. This information can be used by teachers and administrators to reach out to parents and develop effective outreach strategies (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

### **Parental Involvement Levels**

How can I get involved with the education of my child? What is it that I can do to help her succeed? These are the questions asked by many parents. The questions that often go unasked and when asked is many times still not answered. Many researchers have identified levels of parental involvement. Some of the most popular current

research in this area is that done by Dr. Joyce Epstein. Epstein has identified six levels of involvement. They are (a) parenting, (b) communication, (c) volunteering, (d) home-based learning, (e) school decision-making, and (f) school-community collaborations (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995).

The model for parental involvement developed by Epstein recognizes that each student is the determining factor in his own success. The model identified three major contexts in which students develop. The three contexts, described by Epstein as overlapping spheres of influence, are (a) the family, (b) the school, and (c) the community. The above six types of involvement were designed to help school personnel conduct quality activities that integrate the three spheres of influence. Frequent activities that involve members of the family, school, and community provide opportunities for students to receive encouragement and motivation to succeed (Epstein, 1995).

Although many researchers such as Epstein and Comer have developed levels and models for school-based parental involvement, there are some very basic ways that parents can have meaningful home and school based involvement in the education of their children. One way that parents can majorly impact their children is through the behaviors, attitudes, and values they express when interacting with them. These attitudes and behaviors known as parenting styles can have a profound effect on student beliefs and behaviors. According to Cripps and Zyromski (2009), there are three widely researched parenting styles (a) authoritarian/autocratic, (b) authoritative/democratic, and (c) permissive/laissez-faire.

The authoritarian/autocratic parenting style is described as confining and punishing. These parents enforce restraints and strict boundaries. A parent that utilizes this style allows little communication or room for compromise. Children of these parents

are generally unhappy and anxious. For fear of punishment, these students will not initiate activity. The polar opposite of the authoritarian/autocratic parenting style is the permissive/laissez-faire parent. The parents who utilize this style do not seek to establish much control or provide guidance to children during the decision-making process. This parenting style is actually divided into two categories. These categories are (a) permissive/indifferent and (b) permissive/indulgent. Children of these parents generally lack self-control and social competence. These students often have a disregard for rules and expectations (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009).

The parenting style that has been empirically shown to develop the most desirable student attitudes and behaviors is the authoritarian/democratic style.

Authoritarian/democratic parents enforce guidelines, limits, and expectations. These parents are warm and loving, but they are firm and consistent at all times. Unlike their autocratic counterparts, authoritarian/democratic parents allow flexibility and communication. These parents also allow their children to establish independence and autonomy. Children of these parents are generally cheerful, self-controlled, achievement oriented, and cope well with stress (Cripps & Zyromski, 2009).

A study conducted by Hill and Tyson (2009) utilized meta-analytic techniques to determine the influence of parental involvement on achievement outcomes in middle school. The researchers also investigated the effects of three different types of parental involvement (a) home-based involvement, (b) school-based involvement, and (c) academic socialization to determine the one with the strongest relation to achievement. In order to eliminate cohort effects, the researchers limited their review to studies that were published between 1985 and 2006. After a careful selection process 50 studies were used for the meta-analysis.

After the coding and analysis were completed, the researchers found that a positive relationship existed between general parental involvement and achievement in middle schools. Of the three types of involvement that were focused on in the study academic socialization was found to have the strongest relationship with student achievement. Academic socialization includes (a) communication of expectations, (b) fostering a value for educational goals, (c) discussing learning strategies, and (d) planning for the future. Although the relationship between school-based involvement and student academic achievement was not as strong a positive relationship was found to exist.

The results for home-based involvement were mixed. While other types of home-based involvement were found to be positively related to student academic achievement, helping with homework was not consistently associated with achievement. This inconsistency may reflect the inconsistency of the various strategies and responses used by parents (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

In another study conducted by Sirvani (2007) the effects of home-based parental involvement in mathematics was explored. This study involved 52 freshmen students enrolled in four different math classes taught by the same teacher. Two classes of students were assigned to the control group and the other two classes received treatment. The treatment used for the study was the use of a monitoring sheet which reported the homework progress and test grades of the students. This sheet was sent home two times each week.

After the 12 weeks of treatment, the researcher used benchmark tests, examinations, and homework to compare the achievement of the students in the experimental group to that of the students in the control group. T-test results conducted using the scores from the benchmark testing conducted during the previous school year



confirmed that the students in the control group and experimental group performed on the same level. After the treatment, the statistical analysis revealed that the students from the experimental group significantly outperformed their peers in control group. The researcher performed multivariate tests to determine the effectiveness of the treatment on the lower performing students. The results revealed that the low performing students in the experimental group had also outperformed the low performing students in the control group. The researcher concluded that the success of the experimental group was contributed not only to the monitoring by parents but also by the increased student motivation produced by the knowledge that parents would be keeping up with student progress (Sirvani, 2007).

Depending upon their knowledge, skills, and background, the parental activities in which a parent chooses to partake may vary greatly. Much like it influences the likeliness of a parent to become involved, self-efficacy will also determine the level of involvement a parent decides to choose. Another motivator for school involvement identified by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) is the context of life for the parent which includes elements such as their SES, life skills, time, and culture. In addition to parental self-efficacy, job and family demands also impact the type and level of involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

### **Barriers to Parental Involvement**

The work of Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) provided a context for understanding the motivating factors, as well as, the barriers to parental involvement. There are other specific barriers identified by researchers that prevent meaningful parental involvement. Some barriers, such as (a) low self-efficacy, (b) parental role construction, and (c) low education levels have been mentioned earlier in this text. However, there are a myriad of

other issues that constrain parents from being more actively involved with the education of their children. The researchers further state that in recent years, the structure of American families, along with the issues and challenges they face, has changed significantly. The increase of single parent families and mothers in the workplace, along with many other issues associated with the evolution of society has served to place a strain on the time available for parents to be actively involved at school.

In the past 40 years there has been a significant decrease in the number of children growing up with both biological parents (Kim, 2009). About 88% of children lived in two parent households in 1960. By 2007, this number decreased to 68%. In 1960 only 5% of children were born to unmarried mothers; however, this number soared to 38.5% by 2006. Extensive research in the area of family structure and student achievement indicates that (a) the number of parents in the home and (b) their relationship to the children, have a positive influence on student achievement. Students living in households with parents who are married also fare better on cognitive, behavioral, and emotional assessments. A major factor contributing to the benefit of a two parent home is the increase in time and money available to invest in the education of their children (Kim, 2009).

Although maintaining an appropriate level of school involvement is a more challenging issue for parents in our current society than in times past, the educational benefits for children deem it a challenge worth the effort of overcoming. In this current era of accountability it is critically important that educators and parents work together to ensure student success.

Another factor that affects the level of parental involvement in schools today is maternal work. In 1970, only 43% of the women in the United States participated in the

workforce. By 1999, 60% of American women were in the workplace. In previous generations, the role of the mother was largely focused on caring for the home and children. This role allowed ample time for mothers to be involved with school-related activities both at school and at home (Weiss et al., 2007).

As more and more women have entered the workplace, work schedules and other family responsibilities have competed with the time available for parental involvement activities. Mothers, especially those with a low education level, may work jobs with inflexible hours and no leave time. Researchers for the Harvard Family Research Project recently conducted a study that explored the connections between the parental involvement of low income mothers and their work. The study was conducted in order to discover (a) how low income mothers maintain involvement in the education of their children at the elementary school level and (b) if the involvement of low income mothers was associated with their work (Weiss et al., 2007). This research pulled data from the School Transition Study (STS). The STS is a longitudinal evaluation of the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP). During the study, researchers employed a mixed-methods approach in order to analyze the complex relationship.

The above study was conducted in three regions of the United States. Data from 390 low income mothers were used to conduct the quantitative analysis. The mothers included in the sample were 37% Black, 36% White, and 24% Hispanic. For the quantitative analysis, researchers collected data about (a) the total number of hours each mother worked and/or attended school and (b) their involvement at school. For the qualitative analysis, an ethnographic study was conducted on 20 of the families. In addition to conducting observations of the school, home, and neighborhood, researchers

questioned the mothers about their (a) family life, (b) school, (c) community, (d) family involvement, and (e) child (Weiss et al., 2007).

Working mothers were found to be more actively involved with the schooling of their children than those mothers who chose not to work. However, an inverse relationship existed between their number of hours worked and their level of school involvement. Although the time demands of employment limited their opportunities for school involvement, these mothers employed four major strategies to aid them in maintaining a certain level of school involvement. In order to make time to visit the school, the working mothers often requested special times for their lunch and/or breaks. Working mothers also used their place of employment as a resource. In order to manage their multiple responsibilities, these mothers had to establish a network of support. Members of this support system performed tasks such as picking children up from school and helping with homework (Weiss et al., 2007).

Also as the American population becomes more diverse, family culture is more of an issue. Many parents are immigrants who may have limited language skills and knowledge concerning how to help their children. As a result of the increased diversity, culture and language differences have presented a challenge for teachers and parents. Research indicates that parents from ethnic minorities believe in the importance of parental involvement. However, they are reported as being less involved than majority parents. The cultural backgrounds of minority parents seem to result in varying definitions for parental involvement, as well as, a variety of strategies and approaches to involvement. As opposed to majority parents, minority parents take more of a passive role in parental involvement. These parents wait for the school to provide opportunities for involvement rather than initiating contact with the school. In addition to the varying

perceptions about parental involvement, language barriers are also an obstacle for some immigrant parents. Limited English proficiency is a major obstacle for the parents, as well as, students and teachers (Wong & Hughes, 2006).

Wong and Hughes (2006), researchers at Texas A & M, conducted research to explore ethnic group differences in certain aspects of parental involvement. Only Black, White, and Hispanic participants were chosen for this study. Hispanic parents were divided into two groups, (a) English-speaking and (b) Spanish-speaking. This determination was based on the level of language proficiency they reported on an acculturation survey.

During the fall of 2001 and 2002, questionnaires were mailed to parents. A total of 481 (64%) of questionnaires were returned. Of the returned questionnaires, 22% were from Black parents, 34% were from parents who reported being Hispanic, and 44% were from White parents. One hundred seventy-nine teachers also participated in the study. The participants completed a total of 648 questionnaires.

The results of the study indicated that Hispanic parents were more trusting of teachers than the other ethnicities; but they were shown to be less comfortable in school settings. Hispanic parents, especially the Spanish-speaking parents, reported having less shared responsibility for learning than White parents and Black parents. In addition to their feelings of discomfort, this finding may be due to their lack of language skills and low self-efficacy.

It is possible that parents from different ethnicities have different definitions and approaches to parental involvement. However, it is hard to determine because there is no universal approach to parental involvement within or between minority groups. "Most studies investigating ethnic differences in parent involvement have confounded ethnicity

with other socioeconomic variables, such as parents' education level, parents' employment status, and family income" (Wong & Hughes, 2006, p. 647).

Other factors such as race and socioeconomics have been researched to find links to parental involvement. Parents from different socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds tend to have different involvement strategies. Evidence is inconclusive on whether or not SES is correlated to parental involvement. However, it is clear that SES has a direct influence on the life context of parents which includes their time and energy.

Often parents from low SES backgrounds work inflexible schedules. Parents that have lower SES also often have low education levels and less access to resources to help their children. Research also revealed that many of the constraining variables are interrelated. They co-exist and influence each other. It is well documented by research that parents become less involved as their children age. This is sometimes due to a lack of content knowledge on the part of the parent, but in even more cases, as their children become more independent parents are not sure about the appropriate strategies to use (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Wong & Hughes, 2006).

According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), in order for parental involvement activities to have an optimal outcome, the activities should be (a) developmentally appropriate and (b) must fit with the expectations of the school. The children must also be able to accept the activity as reasonable. As children develop, the process can become a formidable task. When they are young, they thrive on parental attention and involvement. Therefore, almost any type of involvement activity taken on by the parent is considered acceptable. However, as children begin to mature and enter

adolescence, parents must begin to choose their activities more carefully. More overt activities must be replaced with less obvious ones.

### **Parental Involvement and School Practices**

It has been said that boundaries to parental involvement lie more in school practices than within parents (Wong & Hughes, 2006; DePlanty et al., 2007). Parents report that they want to be more involved, but in many cases, they do not know how to help their children. In addition to not knowing how to help, parents report that they feel uninvited and many times even unwelcomed to participate in the schooling process (Wong & Hughes, 2006; DePlanty et al., 2007).

According to research conducted by Epstein in 1986 (as reported in DePlanty et al., 2007), parents want to be more actively involved in the education of their children. The parents in this study also reported that they did not receive adequate communication from teachers. Teachers reported believing that parental involvement was important, but they also admitted that they did not initiate frequent contact because of a lack of time. In addition, many times teachers feel that parents should take a more active role at school. On the other hand, parents reported that they feel that it is the job of school personnel to provide opportunities for involvement (Wong & Hughes, 2006; DePlanty et al., 2007).

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) point out the importance of a simple invitation. Invitations from (a) school administrators, (b) teachers, and (c) students have been shown to increase parental involvement. Receiving invitations to be involved communicate to a parent that they are welcomed and valued. Invitations also let parents know that the school faculty expects them to be actively involved in the education of their children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; DePlanty et al., 2007).

After reviewing the findings of their study with working mothers, researchers from the Harvard Family Research Project provided suggestions for school practices. They proposed that school administrators (a) partner with local employers, (b) collect information about parental work settings and afterschool arrangements, (c) create flexible times and locations for parental involvement activities, and (d) offer strategies and tools to facilitate parent and teacher communication at the workplace. These practices would not eliminate the challenges faced by low income working parents, but they would aid parents in maintaining a quality level of involvement with the education of their children (Weiss et al., 2007).

The researchers also proposed that the definition of parental involvement be broadened. A broader view of family involvement would recognize the less traditional strategies developed by working parents trying to adapt to their time challenges. As a component of this extended view, the authors suggested that school administrators and teachers should make efforts to communicate with and involve other interested friends and family members. The culture and climate of a school have also been found to have an impact on student academic achievement. Results from Stewart (2008) suggest that the educational ills commonly associated with large, urban, minority schools are mitigated by a cohesive school environment.

Students with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) have challenges with academic achievement as well as social well-being and adjustment. Rogers, Weiner, Marton and Tannock (2009) conducted a study that revealed the benefits of parental involvement for students with ADHD. Parents of these students often report feelings of low self-efficacy for helping their children. They also report feeling less welcomed and supported by teachers than other parents.



The previous study focused on 101 students between the ages of eight and 12. Fifty-three of the students were diagnosed with ADHD. The remaining 48 did not have an ADHD diagnosis. Parallel criteria were used for the selection of the non-ADHD students. During the study, the students completed a four hour long battery of assessments. While in the waiting room, parents completed two questionnaires. The Parental Involvement Project-Parent Questionnaire designed to measure the psychological and contextual reasons that cause parents to be involved with education. The second questionnaire used was the Family School Questionnaire which is a tool designed to separately measure the perceptions of fathers and mothers about their home-based involvement in student learning (Rogers et al., 2009).

Consistent with previous research, the parents of the ADHD students reported more stress and frustration when working with their children at home. Although the ADHD parents received more invitations to participate in the learning process, they reported feeling less welcomed than parents of other students. In order to build better relationships with parents of students with special needs, school personnel must reach out and provide parents with resources and strategies to help their children succeed (Rogers et al., 2009).

### **Building School, Family, and Community Partnerships**

Families and schools are linked only by the children they share. Daily children have the task of operating in the family setting and in the school setting. It is more harmonious for children when there is cohesiveness between the two (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Adolescents tend to be affected positively when a relationship is sustained between their home and school environments (DePlanty et al., 2007; Hoover Dempsey et al., 2005; Wong & Hughes, 2006). As the bar for academic success is

continually being raised, schools, communities, and parents need to join forces to build a more seamless effort toward preparing students for success in school and beyond.

However, in order to build effective partnerships, there are some challenges that must be addressed. These challenges include (a) the varying perspectives that exist between parents and school personnel; (b) current school practices; and (c) the need for training for parents, teachers, and school administrators (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Wong & Hughes, 2006; DePlanty et al., 2007).

Stakeholder perceptions play a vital role in building relationships. Many times contrasting perspectives can exist between parents and teachers. In many cases parents report, themselves as being actively involved at school. However, teachers and principals credit parents, especially minority ones, with much lower levels of involvement. Without knowledge or consideration of the challenges that may be hindering some parents' participation, teachers and principals often attribute less than desirable levels of parental involvement to parental lack of concern (Lopez, 2001). These views automatically establish an invisible wedge between teachers and parents that serves to decrease the likelihood of communication and the quality thereof if it should occur (Lopez, 2001; Wong & Hughes, 2006).

Recent research revealed that White parents often report having a higher level of parent-teacher responsibility than minority parents. Black parents report higher levels of communication and parent-teacher responsibility than Hispanic parents. English-speaking Hispanic parents report a significantly higher level of parent-teacher shared responsibility than Spanish-speaking Hispanic parents. The teachers often rate White parents higher on general parent involvement than Black and Hispanic parents. However Hispanic parents receive higher ratings for alliance and general parent involvement than Black parents.

These ratings are in sharp contrast with the perceptions of Black parents who generally rate themselves highest among the four groups in communication with the school and in school-based involvement. Although Black parents rate themselves relatively high in all areas of parental involvement, teachers rate them lowest of all the groups in allegiance and overall parental involvement. These discrepancies may be due to the combined effect of teacher stereotypes and parent response biases (Wong & Hughes, 2006).

Research indicates that a quality home-school relationship more strongly effects student achievement than parent-school involvement (DePlanty et al., 2007). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (as found in Wong & Hughes 2006), when parents are from a different culture than teachers, it is more difficult to establish trust and understanding. The NCES research studies also found that teachers at schools that serve mostly Black students are unlikely to initiate parental involvement. Without respect to ethnicity, research, such as that conducted by Reynolds (1991), indicates that correspondence between parents and teachers is very low. For these reasons, the researchers suggested that school psychologists must find ways to help teachers connect with minority parents. The authors also suggested that future research in this area should explore the changes in different dimensions of parental involvement as children progress through school (Reynolds, 1991; Wong & Hughes, 2006).

In order to develop effective partnerships between parents, schools, and communities, there is a need for training. In 1980, a regional study was conducted including 133 colleges and universities in the southwest. At that time 4-15% of the schools offered training on parental involvement. Less than half of the teacher educators reported spending at least one class period covering the topic. The topic was mostly addressed in courses for early childhood and special education majors. There was a

consensus among the respondents that there was a need to better prepare future teachers in the area of parental involvement. Over 70% of the faculty members surveyed believed that a required course on parental involvement should be included at the undergraduate level (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

After analyzing the responses of the participants, Epstein & Sanders (2006) found that no state required a full course on parental involvement. Eleven states required coverage of the topic for early childhood teachers, and 15 states required it for special education teachers. Very few states had course requirements in parental involvement for middle and high school teachers. Only seven states required principals and district administrators to be proficient in the area of family involvement.

Through the years, progress has been slow, but efforts have been made to increase coverage of parental involvement topics for pre-service teachers. Educational agencies such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) and others have identified competency in the area of school, family, and community partnerships as essential knowledge for teacher preparation (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

Epstein and Sanders (2006) also conducted a study of deans of schools, colleges, and departments of education (SCDE) across the United States. The conceptual framework for the research was the theory of overlapping spheres of influence. This theory proposes that family, school, and community are three contexts that have an impact on students. When the three are merged through communication and collaboration student learning is increased. In the study, a random sample of 500 deans in education departments across America received surveys. Over half of the institutions represented (59.6%) offered a full course on family and community involvement. About

two-thirds (67.5%) of the courses were required. Many of the courses were graduate courses. Only 8.7% of the SCDEs offered two full courses. Ninety-two percent of teacher educators indicated that one of their current courses addressed partnership topics. Thirty-five and six tenths percent indicated that two or more required courses addressed the topic and 12.8% of the respondents were aware of more than two courses at their institutions that addressed parental involvement issues (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

In keeping with the traditional pattern, survey respondents indicated that family and community involvement issues were mostly covered in courses required for early childhood and special education majors. There was a consensus among the respondents about the importance of teachers being proficient in conducting practices to foster school, family, and community partnerships. Of the total participants, 69.8% strongly agreed and 26.4% agreed that competence in this area was important. The consensus was even stronger when assessing the importance of such competencies for principals and counselors with 89.2% of the respondents strongly agreeing for principals and 85.3% for counselors (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

About 13% of the survey participants in the study above were unaware of any state laws or recommendations for teacher training on partnerships. However, 40% of the professors indicated that their state did require training about family and community partnerships as a requirement for certification. The majority of the respondents (92.9%) stated that their SCDE was accredited by at least one national accrediting agency. Of these 57.6% indicated that at least one of their accrediting agencies required competency in home, school, and community partnerships.

Two-thirds of the educational leaders surveyed admitted that school, family, and community partnerships should be given more priority in the curriculum. Several

methods for improvement were suggested. While most respondents stated that the number of required courses on family, community, and school partnerships at their schools should be increased, others recommended that partnership topics should be covered more adequately in the current courses.

In some cases, state guidelines served as an impetus for curricular change as well as a constraint. Some survey participants indicated that it would be unlikely to add a course on family, school community partnerships because their states had a limitation on the number of hours that could be required for certification and their programs were already too full.

Much can be done at the school level to build partnerships between schools and families. But districts have the greater challenge of establishing system-wide solutions to address the needs of students and parents. Members of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids conducted a study of several school districts in an effort to identify best practices for addressing the needs of disadvantaged students (Simons & Freidman, 2008).

The researchers conducted site visits and interviewed superintendents in four school districts. The districts were (a) Miami-Dade County Public Schools in Miami, Florida; (b) Montgomery County Public Schools in Rockville, Maryland; (c) Cleveland Public Schools in Cleveland, Mississippi; and (d) Federal Way School District in Federal Way, Washington. Research and phone interviews were also conducted with officials from (a) Boston Public Schools, (b) Chicago Public Schools, and (c) Union City Schools in Union City, New Jersey. All of the districts included in this study were geographically, culturally, and linguistically diverse. As a result of the data analysis, four challenges emerged as an issue for each district. The challenges were (a) the achievement gap, (b)

lack of parental involvement, (c) students beginning school unprepared, and (d) the teacher quality gap.

Simons & Friedman (2008) reported that leaders in these districts used creative measures to address these challenges. In 1999, Montgomery Public Schools conducted a comprehensive analysis which revealed that students occupying high poverty, high crime areas referred to as red zones were performing significantly lower than students from the high income low crime areas which were referred to as green zones. The district launched a campaign to “green the red zones”. As a part of this campaign, class sizes in the red zone schools were limited to 15 students. The lower elementary curriculum was also reorganized to focus on literacy. As a result of this campaign, the achievement in the red zone schools increased resulting in a significant improvement in the overall district performance.

The researchers reported that in order to address the achievement gap in Federal Way, Washington, district officials established an Office of Equity and Achievement. The purpose of this office was to examine student data and develop effective interventions. Since the creation of this office, the achievement gap in the district has narrowed significantly. The achievement gap in Union City Schools was effectively addressed by the development of a technology program utilizing i-Pods.

As in many districts across America, lack of parental involvement was an issue in Federal Way Public Schools. The Superintendent created a Family Partnership Office in order to be more responsive to the needs of parents. The director of this office sets regular meetings with parents. In preparation for these meetings she only prepares a partial agenda in order to leave time for parents to address issues that are concerning them. In Miami-Dade Public Schools, the vision of the superintendent was to include all

parents in the educational process. The district actually funds a program that trains parents to challenge the districts policies as a means of advocating for their children.

In an effort to ensure that students entering kindergarten possessed the readiness skills necessary to achieve, the Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools established a free pre-kindergarten program in the schools serving at-risk students. The curriculum was aligned with the Head Start Program. In Cleveland, Mississippi once a month students are released early so that Head Start teachers can participate in vertical team planning with the elementary teachers. The students in this district are very mobile. Therefore, teachers across the district participate in horizontal planning in order to maintain a uniformed and structured curriculum. As a result, when students move from school to school they are unlikely to be more than a few weeks ahead or behind (Simons & Friedman, 2008).

In order to decrease the teacher quality gap, officials in the Chicago Public Schools implemented performance based pay. Their program is called REAL which stands for Recognizing Excellence in Academic Leadership. The program began in 40 high needs schools which served approximately 24,000 students. Each school employs three mentor teachers who earn an additional \$7,000 annually in order to mentor other teachers. There is also a lead teacher assigned to each school. The lead teacher makes an additional \$15,000 annually. This person is responsible for overseeing and supporting the mentor teachers and for helping the principal evaluate teachers. As a result of this program, school faculties have rallied together in order to ensure student success (Simons & Friedman, 2008).

The seven districts in the previous study faced challenges very similar to those of every district in America. The leaders in these districts consistently analyzed student data



and devised strategies to address student issues. The strategies highlighted here were innovative as well as prescriptive. Contrary to the criticism these strategies are responsive to the needs of diverse students—not “one size fits all”.

### **Parental Involvement and No Child Left Behind**

As mentioned earlier, on April 12, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. The passage of this legislation marked the birth of the Title I program and other titles established to benefit American students. The passage of ESEA marked the beginning of federal funding for American elementary and secondary schools. Throughout its 45 year history, Title I has sparked much controversy and has gone through many overhauls (Center for American Progress, 2008).

On January 8, 2002, Public Law 107-110, also known as The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), was enacted. This Act was designed to close the achievement gap by increasing (a) accountability, (b) flexibility, and (c) choice. The NCLB legislation served as a reauthorization of the ESEA and included several repeals, redesignations, and amendments to other statutes.

The No Child Left Behind Act offers a comprehensive vision for improving student achievement. Among the many statutes amended by the NCLB legislation is Title I. With this legislation, the original purpose statement for Title I was amended to express the desire of the current Congress to improve academic achievement for all students through offering high quality academic assessment, systems of accountability, quality teacher training, and instructional material aligned with challenging standards. Title I consists of several parts and subparts, such as, Part A which is designed to improve state and local programs and Part F which provides financial incentives to motivate schools to

implement comprehensive school reform. (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Improving Basic Programs Operated by LEAs, 2002).

In order to achieve the ambitious goals of the NCLB legislation, its drafters recognized the necessity for families to be involved in school related activities. The NCLB Act includes provisions to encourage cooperation between families and schools. The first goal of the Act in relation to parent and family involvement is to make sure that parents are adequately informed. Title I, Part A includes a section called Parents Right to Know. In this portion of the legislation, schools receiving funds from Title I, Part A are responsible for informing parents that they may request information about the professional credentials of any teacher or paraprofessional that works with their children.

In addition, schools are required to notify parents at any time that their children have been taught for four consecutive weeks by a teacher who is not highly qualified. Schools are also required to provide parents information about the achievement level of their children on state academic assessments. All information should be understandable and in a uniform format. It should also be distributed in a manner that protects the privacy of all children (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Title V-Promoting Informed Parental Choice and Innovative Programs, 2002; United States Department of Education, 2004b).

In addition to the Parents Right to Know, local education agencies (LEA) who receive funding from NCLB legislation must develop and implement a Parental Involvement policy. Section 1118 of the Act provides specific guidelines for each LEA to follow during the development of this policy. Each LEA is expected to involve parents in consistent and meaningful collaboration throughout the program implementation (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Parental Involvement, 2002).

Parents are expected to be involved in the development of the parental involvement policy which must be distributed to the parents of every student in the LEA. The parental involvement policy for each LEA must express the expectations for parents, as well as, its plan for consistently involving parents in the development, review, and improvement of the plan. The policy must also express how the LEA plans to assist each school in planning and implementing effective parental involvement activities. The plan should also include strategies for building teacher and parent capacity and integration of parental involvement strategies with other school programs. Also included in the NCLB legislation is a provision for parental choice. Title V, Promoting Informed Parental Choice and Innovative Programs, was developed to support reform efforts and the implementation of education programs to improve school, student, and teacher performance (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Parental Involvement, 2002).

### **Summary/Conclusions**

For the past several decades, Americans have been concerned about the state of the education system. This concern has escalated at times to extreme alarm. The quality of the education offered to the students of our nation is a vital key to our position internationally. The global community is becoming increasingly more competitive. In order for America to maintain its status as an international “super power”, American students must receive a challenging, quality education that will prepare them to compete globally.

Much progress has been made in previous years. According to the United States Department of Education (2004), more American students are completing high school and obtaining bachelor degrees. Also in school districts across the country new “research based” initiatives are being launched to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Although reform efforts are making a positive difference, there is still much room for improvement. A large percentage of American fourth graders still score below proficiency level on national reading and math assessments, and many of our high school graduates do not have sufficient knowledge in math and science to pursue degrees in math, science, and engineering fields (United States Department of Education, 2004a).

In order for powerful and sustainable changes to occur, schools, families, and communities must integrate their time and resources to invest in the future of America—our students. Educational reform must include a systemic approach that recognizes and embraces all stakeholders.

The educational system is not an abstract machine. It is people. To change a system is to change what those people value, where they think they are headed, what they talk about, how they talk to one another and what they do day to day. It is to change the policies that give the system direction. and the rules and regulations that specify how individuals work and what they work on. It is to change how the system is managed and how it inspires or crushes initiative and creativity. It is to create new incentives and disincentives, new norms, new cultures, new forms of leadership. In short it is to change every aspect of the system. (Education Commission of the States as in Jenlink, 1995, p. 69)

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY/PROCEDURES**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of parents of middle school students in Louisiana about the (a) culture; (b) climate; (c) leadership; (d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and (e) level of parental and community involvement at the schools that their children attend as it relates to school performance and ultimately academic success. The research reviewed in the previous chapter revealed the strong positive relationships between these variables and student academic achievement.

The instrument used in this study measured parental perceptions about five of the eight domains of the Louisiana Needs Analysis (LANA). Designed by the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE), LANA is an internet-based tool. The purpose of LANA is to assist district administrators in evaluating school performance. The ultimate goal of the LANA process is to aid schools in developing strategies for school improvement.

The eight domains of LANA are (a) school climate; (b) school culture; (c) family and community relationships; (d) leadership; (e) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (f) professional development; (g) coordinated resources; and (h) system controls. The LANA process utilizes several different instruments for data collection. The LANA Parent Questionnaire utilized in this study does not collect data about professional development or coordinated resources. This instrument does have items measuring

parental perceptions about systems controls; however, the researcher determined that the term was ambiguous and difficult to define. Data analysis for the two items concerning this domain will be excluded from the results of the study (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

### **Research Design**

One component of LANA involves collecting attitudinal data from parents, teachers, administrators and students. For this study, the researcher focused on the data from the parent questionnaires. Data collection was conducted during the LANA process. This researcher analyzed the parent data collected from 51 different middle schools throughout the state of Louisiana. A correlational research design was utilized for this study. The researcher chose this design because correlational studies detect statistical association between two or more variables (Crowl, 1996). The variables of interest in this study are the perceptions of the parents about the school (a) culture; (b) climate; (c) leadership; (d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and (e) parental involvement and the school performance as measured by the school performance score (SPS).

“With few exceptions, a consensus has been reached that parents play a central role in the development of their children” (Zigler et al., 2008, p. 103). Studies have shown that children whose parents are involved in their school activities fare better academically, behaviorally, and socially (Kim, 2009). Research also indicates that a positive home-school relationship improves the quality of the educational experience. In addition to the importance of family, school, and community relationships, school effectiveness research indicates the importance of (a) school culture, (b) school climate, (c) leadership, and (d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In this era of accountability, educators are constantly looking for ways to increase student achievement. The results of this study will

offer insight on the relationship between parental attitudes and school performance.

### **Sample**

Each school year, Louisiana school district personnel select schools that are considered to be in danger of not meeting their growth target to participate in LANA. Any school with an SPS that is less than 60 is considered academically unacceptable according to the guidelines of the Louisiana Department of Education. A school with an SPS between 60.1 and 74.9 is considered on academic watch. These schools are required to participate in the LANA process. At times, district personnel also elect to choose higher performing schools to go through LANA as well. This often happens when a school is preparing for accreditation reviews. Schools that have experienced significant change or have not conducted an official needs assessment within the past three years are also eligible to undergo LANA.

LANA is conducted in a three year cycle. During the initial year, the school undergoes the entire process as described below. For the next two years, the school conducts what is called a Petit LANA. A Petit LANA consists of only the (a) faculty needs assessment and (b) classroom observations performed by the District Assistance Team (DAT). This study focused on middle schools that went through the LANA process during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years. The sample consisted of 51 schools from throughout the entire state of Louisiana. The participants included 6,453 parents of the middle school students that attend these schools. The parents surveyed came from various economic and cultural backgrounds. The sample size for each school varied depending on the population of the school and the return rate of the questionnaires. The LANA Parent Questionnaire is administered to the parents of the students who are chosen to complete the student questionnaire. However the parent questionnaires are limited to one per household

for families with multiple children attending a school. The LANA User Guide requires that at least one class per grade level, for grades four through twelve, is administered the LANA Student Questionnaire. Small schools with enrollments less than 200 must administer the questionnaires to all eligible students and their parents. The sample size for schools with 201-799 students is expected to be at least 200. For schools with 800 or more students, the recommended sample size is 25% of the eligible student population. If the sample size is not large enough after being offered to the parents of the students in the selected grade levels, the questionnaires can be administered to parents of students in other grade levels. This process is to be done one grade at a time until the desired sample size is reached (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

### **Instrumentation**

The LANA process is comprehensive and utilizes 14 different instruments for data collection. The LANA User Guide recommends a 90 day timeline for schools that have not conducted a LANA within the previous three years and need the data to complete a school improvement plan. This process usually includes two to three days on site. During the process, the District Assistance Team (DAT) conducts site visits and uses the LANA instruments to collect (a) attitudinal, (b) contextual, and (c) behavioral data. Attitudinal data are collected via focus groups, interviews, questionnaires and needs assessments. The Archival Data Organizer and classroom observation forms are used to collect behavioral data. Contextual data are collected from the counselor and instructional staff interviews, as well as, the Contextual Observation Checklist, and the Archival Data Organizer. Data are collected from (a) students, (b) teachers, (c) counselors, (d) administrators, (e) parents, and (f) community members.



Many of the data collection instruments are commonly used in research. However, a few of the instruments are specific to LANA. The Archival Data Organizer is used to collect and organize various data such as (a) demographics, (b) financial information, (c) data on student behavior, and (d) student and teacher background information. The Contextual Observation Checklist is used to collect data about the behaviors of (a) students, (b) teachers, and (c) all other school personnel during an academic day. The Faculty Needs Assessment, which is available online or in print form, is an open-ended instrument and allows instructional staff to identify areas of strength and areas of weakness for the school. This study will focus on the questionnaire data collected from the parents (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

### **Parent Questionnaire**

The parent questionnaire is available online at <http://ossp.doe.louisiana.gov/LANA/>, but can also be printed and distributed to parents (see Appendix B). This questionnaire is designed to assess the attitude of the parents concerning six of the eight domains of LANA. Each item has a closed-ended response. The response options are designed on a likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The Parent Questionnaire consists of 32 items. The questionnaire includes six items in each of the following domains (a) climate, (b) culture, (c) curriculum and instruction, (d) parent and school relations, and (e) administrative leadership. There are also two items on the questionnaire about systems controls. There are no items on the Parent Questionnaire for the staff development and coordinated resources domains (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

### **Procedural Details**

The LANA process includes the use of (a) attitudinal, (b) behavioral, (c) cognitive, and (d) contextual data. Selected personnel from each district are chosen to serve on the DAT and receive training from educational consultants from the Louisiana Department of Education (LDE). There are eight steps involved in conducting a LANA. The process begins with district administrators identifying schools for participation. After schools have been identified by the parish supervisors, the district accountability contact completes an online registration.

Next, the DAT creates sampling frames. Sampling frames consist of (a) a faculty needs assessment, (b) classroom observations, (c) a summary form, (d) questionnaires, (e) interviews, and (f) focus groups. The sampling frames provide a detailed view of the daily operations of the school. The LDE sends usernames and passwords to district officials so that collected data can be entered online. The DAT visits the school and performs the data collection.

All administrators and instructional staff complete questionnaires. Only a sample of the students is chosen to complete student questionnaires. The parents of these students are also expected to complete the Parent Questionnaire. After the DAT members collect the school data, the district accountability contact submits the data online and generates reports. Personnel at LDE complete the LANA Data Notebook and e-mail it to the district accountability contact. The LANA notebook contains data from the faculty needs assessment, classroom observations, questionnaires administered to parents, teachers, students, and administrators. The information in the LANA Notebook is used to inform the school improvement process.

Prior to conducting the study, the researcher contacted the director of the Louisiana Division of Student and School Learning Support to obtain permission to receive and analyze LANA data. After consulting with legal council, the permission was granted (see Appendix C). The researcher also submitted paperwork to the Louisiana Tech Office of University Research for a Human Subjects Review and was approved (see Appendix D).

The researcher received raw data from the LANA Parent Questionnaires via e-mail from a consultant in the Louisiana Department of Education School Improvement division. The data were transmitted in Excel 2007 format. After receiving permission from the doctoral committee, the researcher created an excel worksheet with the following information included for each school: (a) the school name (solely for the purpose of locating the SPS), (b) site code, (c) district, (d) grade configuration, and (e) SPS. After initial analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel 2007, the data were imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program for additional analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The research hypotheses were used to direct the data analysis process. During data analysis, the researcher sought to detect and describe any significant relationships that existed between the predictor variables and the criterion variable. The predictor variables were the parental perceptions about the (a) school culture; (b) school climate; (c) school leadership; (d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment of the school; and (e) parental involvement. The criterion variable was the school performance as measured by the school performance score. In order to determine the relationship between the variables, the researcher imported the raw data in Microsoft Excel 2007 into SPSS to calculate the Pearson correlation coefficients and conduct further analysis. Using SPSS, a correlation matrix was created to determine the correlation between the SPS and each of the five predictor variables

an ANOVA was also run to compare the means of parents from schools of different performance levels. During the hypothesis testing, the alpha level of .05 was used to determine significance.

### **Hypotheses**

The hypotheses for this study were chosen because they are the school effectiveness variables that are measured by the LANA Parent Questionnaire. The hypotheses are:

1. There is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about school culture and school performance scores.
2. There is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about curriculum, instruction, and assessment and school performance scores.
3. There is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about parental involvement and school performance scores.
4. There is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about school climate and school performance scores.
5. There is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about school leadership and school performance scores.
6. There is no significant difference between the parental perceptions of parents from low performing, acceptably performing, and high performing schools.

In order to describe the relationships between the variables, the researcher used Excel 2007 and SPSS to determine the correlation coefficients for each set of data. The correlation coefficient measures the relationship between two variables. It describes both the nature and the magnitude of the relationship. The correlation coefficient that was used in this study is the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Hinkle et al., 2003).

### **Validity and Reliability**

The reliability for the LANA Parent Questionnaire was established in 1999. The questionnaire was administered to 5,493 parents. The Cronbach's alpha for the instrument was found to be .92223 (Louisiana Department of Education, 2009a).

### **Limitations**

This study shared one major limitation that is found in all correlational research. The researcher and others must be careful not to assume causality. Any significant relationships found to exist between the variables can only be described as a relationship. No interpretations about causality can be made.

The sample chosen for this study was parents of middle school students; therefore, generalizations about parental perceptions are limited to parents of middle schoolers. Also, the majority of the schools identified to participate in LANA are schools that are in danger of not meeting their growth target. In many cases, these schools are also low performing. Therefore, the responses received for this study may largely exclude the perceptions of parents of students from higher performing schools.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between parental perceptions about the (a) culture; (b) curriculum, assessment, and instruction; (c) family and community relations; (d) climate; and (e) school leadership of Louisiana middle schools and their effectiveness as measured by the school performance score (SPS). The contents of this chapter will describe the procedure followed for data analysis and report the results of the study.

The sample for this study originally consisted of participants from 60 Louisiana middle schools. Two schools were discarded because of problems identifying the school site code. Incorrect site codes make it impossible to correctly identify the school and find the proper SP; therefore, the data from the schools were excluded from the analysis. Five newly formed schools were also excluded due to the lack of an SPS score. Also, two Recovery District schools were excluded from the analysis due to the timing of the data collection. Many citizens of the Recovery School District were experiencing frustration due to the slow and frustrating process involved with reestablishing the community and schools. The responses of these parents likely would have been affected by their frustration concerning this important though unrelated issue. The final sample consisted of 51 schools. Eighty-five of the original 6,538 Parent Questionnaires from these schools were excluded because they did not provide an adequate number of responses in each

category to allow Microsoft Excel 2007 to compute a mean for one or more of the predictor variables. The remaining 6,453 surveys were used in the data analysis.

The Louisiana Needs Analysis (LANA) is a school evaluation procedure undergone by designated Louisiana schools in order to assist in the school improvement process. LANA is a comprehensive program that collects (a) attitudinal, (b) contextual, and (c) behavioral data through the use of 14 different instruments. One of the LANA instruments was used to measure the perceptions of the parents in this study. The LANA Parent Questionnaire uses 30 items to assess parental attitudes about the following LANA domains: (a) school culture; (b) school climate; (c) family and community relations; (d) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (e) school leadership; and (f) coordinated resources. Responses are measured using a Likert scale with responses ranging from one to four with four being the most favorable. With the exception of coordinated resources, these LANA domains served as the predictor variables for the study. Upon review of the definitions of the domains, the researcher determined that the term coordinated resources was ambiguous. As a result, the four items measuring this variable were excluded from the data analysis process. The data analysis focused on the remaining 26 questionnaire items.

As part of the data analysis, each item on the questionnaire was scored to determine the variable that it measured. Using Microsoft Excel 2007, a mean was calculated for the parental responses for each predictor variable. The means representing the perceptions of each parent about each of the five predictor variables were combined to calculate a school mean. The school means were then placed in a spreadsheet along with the SPS scores of the schools. The data was imported into SPSS in order to

calculate the correlation coefficients and conduct other higher order statistical analysis. During the hypothesis testing, the alpha level of .05 was used to determine significance.

### **Research Questions**

During the data analysis, the researcher sought to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between parental perceptions about curriculum instruction and assessment and school performance scores?
2. Is there a significant relationship between parental perceptions about parental involvement and school performance scores?
3. Is there a significant relationship between parental perceptions about school climate and school performance scores?
4. Is there a significant relationship between parental perceptions about school leadership and school performance scores?
5. Is there a significant difference between the parental perceptions of parents from low performing, acceptably performing, and high performing schools?
6. Is there a significant difference between the parental perceptions of parents from low performing, acceptably performing, and high performing schools?

### **Findings**

#### **Null Hypothesis 1**

Null hypothesis 1 is stated as there is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about school culture and school performance scores. As displayed in Table 1, The Pearson correlation between parental perception of school culture and SPS was found to be  $r = .658$  with  $p = .000$ . Thus, this analysis found that a statistical relationship did exist between parental perception of school culture and school performance. Null Hypothesis 1 was rejected.



Table 1

*Pearson Correlation between Parent Perception Scales and SPS*

Predictor variable	Pearson correlation
School Culture	.658 **
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	.547 **
Family and Community Relations	.331 *
School Climate	.504 **
School Leadership	.612 **

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

As mentioned in the literature review, culture can be defined in many ways. The concepts used by the researchers who developed LANA to define culture included (a) collaboration, (b) student expectations, (c) communication, (d) cultural competency, and (e) equity/access. Among other things, the questionnaire items asked parents about the amount of communication received concerning the progress of their children and the efforts of the school to improve learning. The questionnaire items for this variable also asked parents if they felt students were treated fairly and held to high expectations.

From this finding a major indication can be drawn. In order to gain parents as partners in school success, teachers and administrators must make every possible effort to communicate with parents about the progress of their students and the school improvement efforts of the school. Communications such as weekly progress reports, calendars, and monthly newsletters can increase communication with parents and potentially increase their perception and involvement in the education of their children.

## **Null Hypothesis 2**

Null hypothesis 2 is stated as there is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about curriculum, instruction, and assessment and school performance scores. The Pearson correlation between parental perception of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and SPS, as displayed in Table 1, was found to be  $r = .547$  with  $p = .000$ . Thus this analysis found that a statistical relationship did exist between parental perception of curriculum, instruction, and assessment and school performance. Null Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

The components used to define the curriculum, instruction, and assessment variable were (a) instructional strategies, (b) curriculum content, (c) assessment content and structure, and use of technology. Responses were elicited from parents about the frequency of homework and the variety of instructional and assessment strategies. The questionnaire items also inquired about the availability of additional support for struggling students and provisions made to address individual student needs.

This finding highlights the importance of using a variety of methods for instruction and assessment, as well as the importance of providing additional support for student learning and modifying for individual differences. Additionally, this finding supports the previously mentioned finding about the importance of communication. In order for parents to provide effective support at home, it is important to be familiar with the instructional and assessment strategies employed at school. Parents also need to be aware of the additional assistance provided by the school in order to take advantage of the services that may be beneficial for their children.

### **Null Hypothesis 3**

Null hypothesis 3 is stated as there is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about parental involvement and school performance scores. The Pearson  $r$  found to represent the relationship between parental perception of parental involvement and SPS was  $r = .331$  with  $p = .018$  (see Table 1) Thus, this analysis found that a statistical relationship did exist between parental perception of parental involvement and school performance. Null Hypothesis 3 was rejected.

The term used for parental involvement by the LANA researchers is Family and Community Relationships. This variable is defined by support for education and school involvement. Parents were specifically asked if they visited the school to support the instructional activities and if they felt welcome at school. Research by Deplanty et al. (2007) reported that parents generally express a desire to be involved; but they don't know how to be effectively involved. Parents also report being discouraged by unwelcoming school practices. A section of the literature review was dedicated to barriers to parental involvement and school practices. The findings of this study support the findings of DePlantey et al. and other educational researchers. In order to establish effective relationships between home and school, educators must eliminate the practices that alienate parents and provide opportunities and invitations for increased involvement.

### **Null Hypothesis 4**

Null hypothesis 4 is stated as there is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about school climate and school performance scores. The relationship between the parental perception of school climate and SPS was represented by a Pearson correlation value of  $r = .504$  with  $p = .000$ . Thus, this analysis found that a

statistical relationship did exist between parental perception of school climate and school performance. Null Hypothesis 4 was rejected.

School climate was defined by the following components: (a) personal safety and respect, (b) discipline/positive behavior, (c) teacher attendance, (d) student attendance/dropout, and (e) campus cleanliness. One of the questions for this variable asked parents if they felt that their children were safe at school. Parents were also asked about their knowledge of the discipline and crisis management plans for the school. One of the early findings of school effectiveness research was the importance of an orderly and safe learning environment (Lezotte, 2009). This finding from the current study not only supports the importance of establishing a safe and orderly learning environment; but it also supports the previously mentioned finding about the importance of communication. In order to increase parent perceptions of the school climate, school administrators should make sure that parents are aware of the school discipline policy. In addition to sending the written school policy home in the handbook, the discipline policy should also be addressed at meetings and assemblies as well as posted throughout the school and on the school website. Parents should also have a general understanding of how crisis will be managed and the proper procedures for responding during an emergency situation.

#### **Null Hypothesis 5**

Null hypothesis 5 is stated as there is no significant relationship between the measure of parental perception about school leadership and school performance scores. The Pearson correlation between school leadership and SPS was found to be  $r = .612$  with  $p = .000$ . Thus, this analysis found that a statistical relationship did exist between

parental perception of school leadership and school performance. Null Hypothesis 5 was rejected.

The components used to define school leadership were (a) decision-making, (b) support for personnel, and (c) support for change/school improvement. Parents were asked about the accessibility of the school administrators and whether they felt the administrators supported the instructional program of the school. Although school administrators are extremely busy, this finding indicated the importance of principals making sure that parents, teachers, and students can have access to them. This finding also highlights the importance of principals taking an active role in the teaching and learning process.

#### **Null Hypothesis 6**

Null hypothesis 6 is stated as there is no significant difference between the parental perceptions of parents from low performing, acceptably performing, and high performing schools. After calculating the Pearson  $r$  values, the schools in the sample were divided into the following three categories using their SPS scores: (a) Low Performing (SPS < 75), (b) Acceptably Performing (SPS between 75 and 99.9), and (c) High Performing (SPS > 100). The current guidelines established by officials of the Louisiana State Department of Education were used to determine the categories. The guidelines state that a school with an SPS of less than 75 is considered Unacceptable or on Academic Watch. Schools with SPS scores exceeding 100 are considered high performing. An ANOVA was run in order to test the difference in the means between the three categories. Table 2 displays the results of the One-way ANOVA. The results of the test revealed that there was a significant difference between the means for the three groups of parents. Null Hypothesis 6 was rejected.

Table 2

*Analysis of Variance for Parental Perceptions of Low Performing, Acceptably Performing, and High Performing Schools*

Name of Variable	F	Sig.
School Culture	19.224	.000**
Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment	10.653	.000**
Family Community Relations	7.174	.002**
School Climate	10.830	.000**
School Leadership	14.069	.000**

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

A subsequent Tukey HSD was run to compare each variable between groups in order to find the variables with the greatest amount of variance. The results of the Tukey HSD are in Table 3. When compared to the perception of the parents from acceptably performing schools, the perceptions of the parents from low performing schools differed on only one of the predictor variables, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. But when compared with the perceptions of parents from high performing schools the perceptions differed significantly for all five of the predictor variables.

Table 3

*Post hoc Analysis (Tukey) by School Performance Level*

Predictor Variable	(I) Performance Level	(J) Performance Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Standard Error	Significance
School culture	Low	Acceptable	-.03	.02	.415
		High	-.24 *	.04	.000
	Acceptable	Low	.03	.03	.415
		High	-.21 *	.04	.000
	High	Low	.24 *	.04	.000
		Acceptable	.21 *	.04	.000
Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment	Low	Acceptable	-.07	.03	.064
		High	-.22 *	.05	.000
	Acceptable	Low	.07	.03	.064
		High	-.14 *	.05	.016
	High	Low	.22 *	.05	.000
		Acceptable	.14 *	.05	.016
Family, Community Relations	Low	Acceptable	.04	.03	.291
		High	-.12 *	.04	.015
	Acceptable	Low	-.04	.03	.291
		High	-.16 *	.04	.001
	High	Low	.12 *	.04	.015
		Acceptable	.16 *	.04	.015
School Climate	Low	Acceptable	-.06	.03	.126
		High	-.25 *	.05	.000
	Acceptable	Low	.06	.03	.126
		High	-.18 *	.05	.004
	High	Low	.25 *	.05	.000
		Acceptable	.18 *	.05	.004
School Leadership	Low	Acceptable	-.07	.04	.116
		High	-.30 *	.06	.000
	Acceptable	Low	.07	.04	.116
		High	-.22 *	.06	.001
	High	Low	.30 *	.06	.000
		Acceptable	.22 *	.06	.001

\*  $p < .05$ .

Perceptions of parents from the high performing schools differed significantly with the perceptions of parents from both of the lower performing categories. These results provide additional support to the Pearson correlations that indicated significant differences in parental perceptions. Although causation can never be inferred as the result

of correlational research, this finding greatly substantiates the positive relationship between the predictor variables and school performance. It is not clear whether the higher performing schools are actually better than the lower performing schools or if they are just better at communicating their practices to parents which leads to more favorable perceptions. Whichever the case, educators from low performing schools would do well to study the practices of schools that are higher performing to find out how they can improve their educational practices and connect with parents.

In addition to being good predictors of school performance, the predictor variables were highly inter-correlated and therefore were also high predictors for each other. As shown in Table 4, the correlation coefficient between school culture and school climate was  $r = .830$ . The Pearson coefficient between school culture and school leadership was  $r = .824$ , and the correlation coefficient between school culture and curriculum, instruction, and assessment was  $r = .811$ . The other inter-correlations were of lesser magnitude but were all significant.



Table 4

*Inter-correlations Between Predictor Variables*

Predictor Variables	School Culture	Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Family and Community Relations	School Climate	School Leadership
School culture	1				
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	.811**	1			
Family and Community Relations	.698**	.477**	1		
School Climate	.830**	.558**	.543**	1	
Leadership	.824**	.648**	.610**	.781**	1

\*\*  $p < .01$  .

### Summary

During data analysis for this study, Pearson correlations indicated that all five of the chosen predictor variables had significant and positive relationships with school performance and were good indicators of the SPS of a school. Of the predictor variables, (a) school culture, (b) school leadership, and (c) curriculum, assessment, and instruction were found to be the best predictors. Although weaker in magnitude, school climate and family and community relations, were also found to have significant relationships with school performance. In order to analyze the parental perceptions by school performance level, the researcher divided the schools into three categories which were determined by the SPS of each school. Schools with SPS scores of less than 75 were considered low

performing. Schools with an SPS between 75.1 and 99.9 were labeled acceptably performing; and schools with an SPS over 100 were considered high performing.

An ANOVA was run to determine if a significant difference existed between the perceptions of the parents from the three categories of schools. The ANOVA determined that significant differences did exist (see Table 2).

A post hoc Tukey was run in order to gain insight into the differences in the parental perceptions. As displayed in Table 3, there was not a significant difference found between the perceptions of parents from low performing and acceptably performing schools. However, significant differences in perceptions were found to exist between parents from the high performing schools with parents from the low and acceptable performing schools.

During the data analysis, it was also found that all of the predictor variables were highly correlated with each other. Due to the high inter-correlations, it is likely that rather than measuring the individual predictor variables the LANA Parent Questionnaire actually measured the overall perception of each parent about the school. The findings of the study imply that leaders interested in reaping the benefits of increased parental involvement would be wise to transform the culture of the school. A school culture that welcomes parents and provides accessibility to and support from the leaders will result in higher parental perceptions which will increase the likelihood of establishing more meaningful and effective home-school partnerships.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between parental perceptions about school (a) culture; (b) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (c) parental involvement; (d) climate; and (e) leadership and school performance. During this study, the researcher also compared the differences in parental perceptions of parents from schools of different performance levels.

The initial motivation for this study was for the researcher to investigate parental perceptions in order to gain insight about ways to help schools “bridge the gap” that often exists between educators and families. Study results underscore the importance of school reform efforts being comprehensive and including all stakeholders in the education system. It is the opinion of this researcher that educators have consistently ignored an important part of the system, parents. Although they generally operate outside of the school, the participation of parents in the education of their children is critically important.

#### **Summary**

When testing the five hypotheses for this study, the researcher found that there was a significant relationship between parental perceptions of all of the predictor variables: (a) school culture; (b) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (c) family and community relations; (d) school climate; and (e) school leadership with school performance. The variables found to be the best predictors of school performance were

(a) school culture; (b) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and (c) school leadership; with school culture being identified as the single best predictor of school performance.

In a previous study conducted by Hood (2001), the researcher measured parental perceptions using a parent questionnaire developed for the School Analysis Model (SAM). The School Analysis Model was the Louisiana school evaluation procedure that preceded the Louisiana Needs Analysis (LANA) which was used in the current study. The previous study investigated the same variables and had similar findings.

As with the current study, school leadership and curriculum, instruction, and assessment were found to be in the top three best indicators of school performance. However, the third and strongest predictors of school performance differed. In the current study, the research findings indicated that the best indicator of school performance was school culture. However, the best predictor of school performance in the previous study was found to be school climate. This is likely due to the use of different defining factors for the scales in the two instruments. As discussed in the literature review, there are various definitions for school culture and school climate. In many cases, the two constructs overlap. Some researchers even suggest that instead of being separate concepts, culture and climate are actually subsets of the same construct (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008).

When parental perceptions were compared by the school performance level, it was found that there was no significant difference between the perceptions of parents from low performing and acceptably performing schools. However, there were significant differences between the perceptions of parents of high performing schools with those from low performing and acceptably performing schools. This finding implies that although parents operate externally from the school, they are familiar with the

operations of the school. It is also possible that the differences in perceptions may be partially due to better communication strategies employed by the higher performing schools.

In addition to having strong correlations with SPS, the predictor variables were also highly correlated with each other. This result indicates the possibility that the questionnaire items may have been measuring the overall perception of parents about the school rather than specific aspects of the school.

The results from this study were also similar to the findings of McCoach et al. (2010). The researchers identified Connecticut schools that were “positive outliers”. These schools exceeding their expected performance based on the demographic makeup of the school. They also identified Connecticut schools that were considered “negative outliers” meaning that the actual school performance did not meet expectations. Surveys were distributed to the teachers, parents, and administrators at each school. Although the parents from the positive outlier schools indicated more satisfaction than the parents from the negative outlier schools, all of the parents overall expressed satisfaction with their school.

### **Implications for Education**

As a result of over 40 years of school effectiveness research, certain practices and concepts have become associated with effective schools. The results of the Effective Schools research have served as the basis upon which many school reform efforts have been built. Although some of these reform efforts can be given credit for helping improve schools. The efforts to this date have failed to close the achievement gap and provide equity for all students. The 2002 enactment of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation is the latest and most extensive reform effort launched by United States

education officials. Unlike previous federal legislation aimed at improving American schools, NCLB has a heavy emphasis on the involvement of parents in increasing student achievement.

Research indicates that strong school-home connections greatly increase the likelihood of student academic achievement (DePlanty et al., 2007). It is the belief of this researcher that building powerful and effective family, school, and community partnerships may be the key to successful and sustainable school improvement. Unfortunately many barriers exist that prevent meaningful working relationships between parents and teachers. The results from this study and others like it can help educators in the quest to improve schools by understanding the perceptions of the various stakeholders and taking actions to build meaningful and effective partnerships between home and school.

Specifically, the results of this study indicate that teachers and administrators need to focus efforts on improving the (a) culture; (b) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; (c) family and community relations, (d) climate, and (e) leadership of their schools. The findings of the study indicate that teachers should use a variety of instructional and assessment strategies, as well as provide additional support to address the needs of students. Educators also need to be aware of the barriers that prevent parents from being involved. These barriers are discussed in detail in the literature review. Efforts should be made to eliminate practices that increase barriers and develop strategies to reduce them.

Additionally, because this study focuses on the perceptions of parents, individuals who generally operate externally to the school, the findings of this study highlight the importance of frequent and effective communication. In some cases, the parental

perceptions reported may not have reflected the true practices of the school. This is important because it does not benefit the students if there are services available of which parents are unaware. It would be wise for administrators to in-service parents on the major instructional and assessment strategies employed by the school so that parents could also utilize the strategies during home learning. Weekly progress reports, along with monthly calendars and newsletters are great strategies for communicating with parents.

In addition to communicating with parents, inviting them to participate in the learning of their children is important. Parents often report feeling unwelcomed and out of place at school. Efforts by teachers and principals to let parents know that they want their participation could potentially increase parental perceptions, parental involvement, and student achievement.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

During the literature review and data analysis phases of this study, several topics that would potentially add to the research literature in this area emerged. There is a need for research to explore the varying perceptions of parents and teachers in order to better understand the barriers that prevent harmonious collaborations.

In the current study parental perceptions about certain school effectiveness variables were explored. Parental perceptions were compared by school performance level. There are other current educational topics that could be explored in order to gain more insight into the parental perceptions of schools. One such topic is teacher quality. Part of the NCLB legislation is dedicated to the hiring, training, and retaining of highly qualified teachers. The number of teachers at each school who are highly qualified and who hold master's degrees is documented in each composite report for each district. A

study investigating the relationship between parental perceptions and the number of highly qualified teachers and/or the number of teachers with advanced degrees could offer insight into the impact that teacher quality has on parental perceptions. There is also some research that suggests that school size has an impact on student achievement and student overall educational experience. Parental perceptions could be compared by school size in order to learn whether parents from smaller schools are more satisfied than those associated with larger schools.

Although they operate externally, parents are an important part of the overall school system. Therefore, understanding their perceptions and motivations toward school involvement is important. However, future research comparing the perceptions of parents with teachers could be beneficial in pinpointing the areas where parents and teachers have contrasting perceptions. Even more informative would be research comparing and contrasting the perceptions of parents and teachers with those of students.

In the study by McCoach et al., (2010) the parents from the low and high performing schools reported similar perceptions. However, the same was not true for the teachers and administrators. Teachers in the positive outlier schools reported the parents as being engaged in the learning process, but the teachers from the negative outlier schools reported much less positive perceptions of the parents. Further research investigating the perceptions and misconceptions of teachers about parents would be helpful in the efforts toward building home school partnerships.

Improving the academic achievement of American students is crucial to ensuring that the United States maintains its status as a global super power. In order to compete internationally in the increasingly technological society, American students must be able to comprehend complex problems, devise strategies for success, and effectively



communicate. Many researchers agree that relationships between the adults at home and school increase the likelihood for student success. The findings from this study, as well as other similar studies, can help reveal the issues that may prevent meaningful parental involvement and provide insight for devising effective collaboration strategies between parents and educators.

**APPENDIX A**  
**LEAP ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS**

## LEAP ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS

Grade 4	English	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
Achievement Level	Score Range	Score Range	Score Range	Score Range
Advanced	408-500	419-500	405-500	399-500
Mastery (Proficient)	354-407	370-418	360-404	353-398
Basic	301-353	315-369	306-359	301-352
Approaching Basic	263-300	282-314	263-305	272-300
Unsatisfactory	100-262	100-281	100-262	100-271
Grade 8	English	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
Achievement Level	Score Range	Score Range	Score Range	Score Range
Advanced	402-500	398-500	400-500	404-500
Mastery (Proficient)	356-401	376-397	345-399	350-403
Basic	315-355	321-375	305-344	297-349
Approaching Basic	269-314	296-320	267-304	263-296
Unsatisfactory	100-268	100-295	100-266	100-262

**APPENDIX B**  
**LANA PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

1.	I have a clear understanding of how students are performing academically at my child's school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I am satisfied with my child's academic progress.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I am always welcome at my child's school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Teachers in my child's school help students to achieve state and local standards.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	My child frequently does homework.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	I am familiar with the discipline rules at my child's school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	My child's standardized test results are given to me in a way that is clear and understandable.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	The classrooms at my child's school are comfortable and support learning.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	My child is assessed through tests, quizzes, projects, portfolios, and presentations to show his/her knowledge.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	My child gets to work with technology at school (for example, computers and Internet).	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	Teachers regularly communicate with me about my child's progress.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	I feel my child is safe at school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	My child is NOT struggling with school homework.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14.	I know what to do for an emergency at my child's school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	My child's school provides after-school, weekend, or summer school tutoring programs for students who need them.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16.	My child is challenged to do his/her best at school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17.	The school my child attends is clean and well maintained.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18.	My child's school provides a variety of instructional activities that give students multiple options for learning.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19.	I know what my child's school is doing to improve student learning.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20.	My child frequently uses the library.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21.	When I visit my child's school, student work is clearly visible.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22.	Additional support and instructional time is available to my child if he/she needs it.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23.	The administrators (principals and assistant principal) at my child's school are accessible.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24.	Teachers provide for my child's individual needs by modifying instruction.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25.	Teachers have high expectations for themselves and the students at my child's school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
26.	School administrators in my child's school support instructional programs that help students learn.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

27.	I feel that my child is treated fairly at his/her school.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28.	I believe my child has been prepared to succeed in the next grade.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29.	Teachers at my child's school develop assignments reflecting our culture.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30.	I frequently visit my child's school to support instructional activities.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**APPENDIX C**  
**PERMISSION TO RECEIVE LANA DATA**



## PERMISSION TO RECEIVE LANA DATA

104 Pecan Bayou Drive  
Monroe, La 71203  
September 15, 2010

Michael K. Coburn, Division Director  
Division of Student Learning and Support  
P.O. Box 94064  
Baton Rouge, La 70804-9064

Mr. Coburn:

My name is Dana Scott. I am a doctoral candidate at Louisiana Tech University. I am currently working on my dissertation proposal. The current title of my study is *The Relations between Middle School Parents' Perceptions and School Growth*.

Current research states that strong parent, school, community partnerships have a positive impact on student achievement. In my study, I would like to investigate the relationship between middle school parents' perceptions about their school's climate, culture, leadership, parent and community relations, curriculum and instruction, and staff development with the growth in the school's performance score.

In order to conduct this study, I am requesting LANA parent questionnaire data from 100 middle schools across the state that have conducted LANA within the past 3 school years. My institution will not allow me to identify any schools in my dissertation; however, I am also requesting that the sites be identified. This will allow me to look up school performance scores in order to compare the perceptions to the schools' growth. Additionally, I would also need any reliability or validity information available for the parent questionnaire.

Thank you so much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

*Dana Autman Scott*

Please see the email from our attorney. Approved as long as no students are identified.

Please call Tasha Anthony should you need any additional information.

Thanks

*Mike*

Michael K. Coburn, Division Director  
 Division of Student and School Learning Support  
 Louisiana Department of Education  
 Office of Federal Programs Support  
 P.O. Box 94064  
 Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804-9064  
 (225) 342-3338 (Secretary)  
 (225) 342-3344 (Desk)  
 (225) 219-4454 (Fax)

"Create a world-class education system for all students in Louisiana"  
 "Student Centered - Data Driven"

**From:** Joan Hunt

**Sent:** Wednesday, September 15, 2010 2:33 PM

**To:** Michael Coburn

**Subject:** RE: LANA data request for dissertation

Yes, as long as no students are specifically identified.

**Joan E. Hunt, Deputy General Counsel**

Office of Legal Services  
 Louisiana Department of Education  
 Post Office Box 94064  
 Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804-9064  
 (225) 342-3572 (phone)  
 (225) 342-1197 (fax)  
[joan.hunt@la.gov](mailto:joan.hunt@la.gov)  
<http://www.louisianaschools.net>

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**From:** Michael Coburn

**Sent:** Wednesday, September 15, 2010 1:43 PM

**To:** Joan Hunt

**Subject:** FW: LANA data request for dissertation

Joan

Can this person receive local district information and use for her dissertation??

*Mike*

Michael K Coburn  
Division Director  
Division of Student and School Learning Support  
Louisiana Department of Education  
Office of Federal Programs Support  
P O Box 94064  
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(225) 342-3344 (Desk)  
(225) 219-4454 (Fax)

"Create a world-class education system for all students in Louisiana"  
"Student Centered - Data Driven"

**From:** Dana Autman Scott  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 15, 2010 12:25 PM  
**To:** Michael Coburn  
**Cc:** dascott@opsb.net  
**Subject:** LANA data request for dissertation

Good afternoon Mr Coburn,  
As you requested, I have attached a letter discussing my dissertation and the data that I am **requesting. If I need to provide any additional details or information, please don't hesitate to contact me via e-mail or at (318) 235-8512**

Your assistance is greatly appreciated

Dana Autman Scott  
Curriculum Coordinator  
Richwood Junior High School  
5901 Highway 165  
Monroe, La 71202  
(318) 651-0200  
(318) 398-9825 (fax)

**APPENDIX D**  
**IRB APPROVAL**



LOUISIANA TECH  
UNIVERSITY

MEMORANDUM

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

TO: Dr. David Gullatt, Dr. Tony Young and Ms. Dana Autman Scott  
 FROM: Barbara Talbot, University Research  
 SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW  
 DATE: October 25, 2010

In order to facilitate your project, an EXPEDITED REVIEW has been done for your proposed study entitled:

**“The Relation between Parent Perceptions and School  
Growth of Middle Schools”**

# HUC-810

The proposed study's revised procedures were found to provide reasonable and adequate safeguards against possible risks involving human subjects. The information to be collected may be personal in nature or implication. Therefore, diligent care needs to be taken to protect the privacy of the participants and to assure that the data are kept confidential. Informed consent is a critical part of the research process. The subjects must be informed that their participation is voluntary. It is important that consent materials be presented in a language understandable to every participant. If you have participants in your study whose first language is not English, be sure that informed consent materials are adequately explained or translated. Since your reviewed project appears to do no damage to the participants, the Human Use Committee grants approval of the involvement of human subjects as outlined

Projects should be renewed annually. *This approval was finalized on October 25, 2010 and this project will need to receive a continuation review by the IRB if the project, including data analysis, continues beyond October 25, 2011.* Any discrepancies in procedure or changes that have been made including approved changes should be noted in the review application. Projects involving NIH funds require annual education training to be documented. For more information regarding this, contact the Office of University Research.

You are requested to maintain written records of your procedures, data collected, and subjects involved. These records will need to be available upon request during the conduct of the study and retained by the university for three years after the conclusion of the study. If changes occur in recruiting of subjects, informed consent process or in your research protocol, or if unanticipated problems should arise it is the Researchers responsibility to notify the Office of Research or IRB in writing. The project should be discontinued until modifications can be reviewed and approved.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Mary Livingston at 257-4315.

A MEMBER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA SYSTEM

P.O. BOX 3692 • RUSTON, LA 71272 • TELEPHONE (518) 257-5075 • FAX (519) 257-5079

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