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**SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR AND PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL,  
FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

**A MIXED METHODS STUDY**

by

Jackie LeBlanc, Ed.S.

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

May 2011

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Date

We hereby recommend that the dissertation prepared under our supervision by Jackie LeBlanc

entitled School Administrator and Parent Perceptions of School, Family, and Community Partnerships in Middle School A Mixed Methods Study

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to identify, analyze, and compare the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school-family partnerships in three middle schools in the State of Louisiana. The study investigated the similarities and dissimilarities between parent and school administrator perceptions, probed to determine underlying factors that may lead to apparent discrepancies, and solicited recommendations for improvements from parents and administrators. The study was based on Epstein's *Six Types of Involvement* framework which cites six specific areas of parental-school-community partnerships and explains how each component affects the educational process of students (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, et al., 2009). Parallel versions of the *Measure of School, Family and Community Partnership Survey* (Epstein, et al., 2009) were given to parents and administrators. A mixed-methods approach combined *t*-test analyses of survey results with interviews and document evaluation. The quantitative analyses revealed statistically significant differences in perceptions in the areas of parenting, communicating, and decision making; while the components of volunteering, learning at home, and collaboration revealed no significant differences. The qualitative analysis resulted in several overall emergent themes: misaligned perceptions of school administrators and parents concerning levels of needed middle student autonomy, a desire by administrators and parents for more parental volunteering, a disconnect between communication methods deemed effective by schools and used effectively by parents, parental perceptions of a lack in personal communication with educators, perceived

communication with educators, perceived inadequacies in the practice of schools sending correspondence to parents through their children, and a disconnect between how much decision making parents should have and how much they were getting. Although misaligned perceptions were noted, both quantitatively and qualitatively, it was evident that both parents and administrators had the best interests of the students in mind.

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Author Sackie LeBlanc  
Date 2-23-2011

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Accountability is a term that has become increasingly associated with the American education system. Over the last several decades, schools and school districts have been responsible for maintaining desirable levels of student performance. Students learn and grow, not only in the school setting, but also in the home and community. In order to serve the children more completely and help them to reach their academic potential, collaboration is needed among school, family, and community members (Hoffman, 1991; Sheldon, 2005). As students enter middle school, their affective and cognitive needs begin to change, necessitating a unique set of requirements to meet accountability expectations and to successfully educate adolescents. It is a time when interested parties need to work together effectively (Wentzel, 1998). In order to successfully develop and maintain school-family collaboration, middle school parents and educators should have a clear understanding of the need for and benefits of positive school, family, and community partnerships.

The existing body of knowledge contains various definitions of school, family, and community partnerships. However, there are commonalities among all of them. Traditionally, the idea of school-family partnerships has been referred to as parental involvement (Berger, 1991). However, the term “school, family, and community partnerships” is more complete, going beyond basic parental involvement. The concept

of “partnership” recognizes that parents, teachers, administrators, and community members share the responsibility for student learning and development (Cochran & Dean, 1991; Davies, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006). According to Epstein (2001), school, family, and community partnerships is a multidimensional concept made up of several types of involvement that help schools to develop programs to involve families and community members in various ways. Successful partnerships between families and schools play a vital role in establishing a culture of collaboration that assists schools in developing and sustaining programs to involve families and communities in productive ways (Epstein, et al., 2009).

The National Parent Teacher Association (2009) states in order for students to achieve at higher academic levels, more collaborative interactions between parents and schools are necessary. In addition, many theorists and practitioners have long recognized the importance of successful home and school relationships. As cited by Barbour, Barbour, and Scully (2005), theories developed by Bronfenbrenner and Epstein establish that interactions between home, school, and community affect children’s behavior and development in a multitude of ways. In addition, the extent to which adults in each of those settings maintain positive relationships with one another dramatically affects academic success of children (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). In order to achieve these higher collaborative expectations of schools and families, a consensus regarding the standards for effective school, family, and community partnerships is desirable.

Research shows that shared views of school and family partnerships are fundamental components to student learning experiences (Epstein, et. al 2009; Hoover-

Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Many studies have found that when schools involve parents, the parents feel more effective in assisting their children, develop more optimistic attitudes toward the school, and feel more confident as responsible partners in the education of their children (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Tatto, et al., 2001).

Parent and school partnerships in schools are strongly tied to many factors in the educational setting. In a study of school-parent programs, conducted by Iverson and Walberg (1982) family participation in education was twice as predictive of students' academic success as family socioeconomic status. Decades of research show that when parents are involved in their children's education students attain higher grades, perform better on standardized tests, have greater graduation rates, incur lower rates of suspension, have increased motivation, have better self-esteem, experience fewer instances of violent-behavior and absences, and decrease their use of drugs and alcohol (Brantlinger, 1991; Epstein, 2001; Jeynes, 2008; Olmsted, 1991; Thornburg, Hoffman, & Remeika, 1991; Swick, 2003). In addition, the more intensely parents are involved in their children's educational process, the more positive the achievement effects (Coll, et al., 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Meeks, 2005).

United States federal legislation mandates that if state departments of education wish to receive federal funding, all students attending public school in third through eighth grades must take standardized achievement tests (No Child Left Behind, 2001). In the State of Louisiana, public school students in grades three through eight take the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) standardized test or the Integrated Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (iLEAP) test. The test scores from the LEAP and iLEAP are used in various ways by local school districts. Many schools use

the standardized test scores from the LEAP and iLEAP to determine student placement, need for academic assistance, goal setting in the school improvement planning process, funding allocation, and program development and implementation (*LEAP, iLEAP, and GEE Overview, 2008*). In addition, the State of Louisiana mandates high-stakes criteria based on LEAP scores for fourth and eighth grade students, meaning students must pass the test in order to be promoted to the next grade (*What is High Stakes Testing?, 2008*). The standardized test scores are also used as a major part of the formula for determining the School Performance Scores (SPS) in Louisiana. SPS are used to rate schools, determine necessary growth patterns, and allocate funding. Schools that consistently drop below certain SPS levels are removed from the jurisdiction of the local school district and placed under the control of the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education as a Recovery School District (*Louisiana's Accountability System, 2008*). With such high stakes attached to standardized test scores, schools are consistently seeking ways to improve student scores. A study conducted by Sheldon (2003) noted that there was a direct correlation between the quality of school, family, and community partnership programs and student performance on state-mandated standardized achievement tests. The study showed that the stronger the efforts to improve school, family, and community partnership aspects the higher the percentages of students scoring above satisfactory on the standardized tests.

The federal, state, and district requirements along with the positive effects of parent-school collaboration clearly define the need for effective school, family, and community partnerships for all students. However, even though most schools conduct a minimal number of activities to incorporate family and community participation in the

education of students, most do not have well-organized, goal-linked, and sustainable parental involvement partnerships programs (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). The research literature demonstrates that unless schools make a concentrated attempt to involve parents school, family, and community partnerships are more likely to occur in some families and not in others (Rath, et al., 2008; Webster, n.d.). In addition, research demonstrates that even though most parents care about the educational success of their children, many parents need more information from schools to become prolifically involved in their children's educational growth (Long, n.d.; Schaefer, 1991; Tonn & Walheiser, 2005).

As children grow, they experience emotional, intellectual, and physical changes. The way they learn, feel and relate to themselves and others is altered throughout adolescence (Catsambis & Garland, 1997). Those types of changes along with present-day demands and peer pressure can create conflicts and tension in adolescents. They begin to withdraw more and seek a private life, leading to the need for more independence from their families (Jackson, Andrews, Holland & Pardini, 2004; MacIver & Epstein, 1993). This typically results in a decrease in parental involvement at the middle school level. Even those parents actively involved in their children's education in the elementary grades become less involved when the children enter middle school (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Parents are generally not aware of middle-level practices as their children enter adolescence, resulting in a need for middle school educators and school administrators to play a more active role in educating parents about the qualities and expectations of effective middle schools. Research has shown that when parents of middle school students are actively involved in their



children's education, the students attain higher levels of academic achievement and have more positive attitudes and behavior in school (National Association of Secondary Principals, 2005; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Epstein & MacIver, 1990; Epstein, et al., 2009).

The National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (U.S. Department of Education, 1988) conducted research focused on parental involvement by surveying eighth graders, their parents, and schools to determine if there were any patterns of parental involvement over a period of time. The findings revealed that most parents of middle school students were trying to supervise and guide their children with educational matters, but felt they were receiving limited assistance from the schools. The study also noted that parents felt they lacked communication from schools and failed to communicate with schools as frequently as necessary. The parents also felt uninformed about school activities and student progress.

The nature of school, family, and community partnerships is affected by various stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and administrators (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Parents potentially have a great deal to contribute to the education of their children. School administrators can do much to encourage teachers and parents to take an active role in making connections and working collaboratively for the benefit of all students (Davies, 2005). However, research shows that in some situations there can be discrepancies in what parents perceive as effective school-family partnerships and educator views of effective parental involvement techniques (Clark & Clark, 1993; Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Garcia, 2001; Lawson, 2003).

Parents frequently lack knowledge about the various levels of parental involvement. They may view entry-level participation in parental involvement aspects, which often include activities such as fund raising, attending one parent teacher conference a year, and volunteering to chaperone school field trips or dances as sufficient parental involvement (Lawson, 2003). One cause for the lack of knowledge by parents on their role in school partnerships is that throughout the history of the American education system, parental participation needs in the schools have changed several times (Long, n.d.). Frequently, in the current education system of America, the views of parents regarding parent, school, and family partnerships may not be in line with the needs of the school (Louv, 1999; Schaefer, 1991; Shannon, Dittus, & Epstein, 2007).

Parental participation activities are defined by parents as those activities that are easy to measure (Christie, 2005). Even in schools where there appears to be ample parental participation, all too frequently the involvement comes in the form of lower-level participation activities. However, there are other types of involvement where parents might have more significant impacts on the education of their children and others in the school setting. More meaningful parental involvement may take the form of attendance at school conferences, serving as representatives on school improvement committees, spending time in classrooms, and tutoring students. Christie also maintains that often it is easier for schools to tell parents what they can do to promote educational success for students rather than to listen to parents about what they know their kids need to be more successful. However, to be effective family and school partnerships need to be cooperative and collaborative.

Research has shown that various factors affect and frame the parental paradigm in regard to school, family, and community partnerships. The predominant factors surfacing in the literary review were (1) parents' perceptions of how much involvement the schools and their children want, (2) the extent to which the parents believe they can have a positive influence and (3) parents' beliefs about what is important, needed, and allowed for them in the educational setting and in conjunction with the school (Epstein, et al., 2009). One clear conclusion evident from that study is that parental perceptions, values, and beliefs are related to the involvement of parents in the education of their children.

A research study conducted by Sy, Rowley, and Shulenberg (2005) on the predictors of parent involvement across contexts in Asian American and European American families discovered that cultural values can shape parents' perceptions in terms of various parent-school activities. The research study also noted that if the school is aware of the manner in which such perceptions influence parent-school relations, they can more effectively support and encourage involvement practices that are appropriate for each family. In order to accomplish this, school administrators and faculty need to consider the variety of ways in which parents view their involvement in their children's education and develop culturally sensitive practices for promoting and enhancing family support.

As school leaders and policy makers, school administrators play an active role in school-family partnerships. Various administrative activities, including leadership sharing, evaluation of current communication trends among all stakeholders, and incorporation of new policies and procedures can have substantial effects on parental

involvement (Hoerr, 2008). By working as change agents, school administrators can establish new approaches to school, family, and community partnerships that are designed to build trust and encourage joint efforts to increase student learning. Since effective school-parent relationships involve collaboration, school administrators must be willing to share leadership with parents, community members, and teachers. The ideas of democracy and shared leadership are relatively new to the school setting; however, few school administrators have been willing to relinquish some of the decision-making aspects to parents (Collins, 2008; Powell, 1991; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009; Valentine, Clark, Hackmann, & Petzko, 2004). According to the American Association of School Administrators (Collins, 2008) the principal's leadership style and openness to change greatly affect parent, student, and faculty tendencies to embrace active parental involvement strategies.

School administrators have unique responsibilities to support family and community involvement for student success. School administrators have the ability to allocate funding to involve parents in activities, work with community members, arrange professional development for educators, set up training for parents, let students know how important their parents are to their educational process, recognize efforts of various stakeholders participating actively in school, family, and community partnerships, and publicize the school's efforts to collaborate with families (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004).

In conclusion, it is evident that a necessary component to effective parental involvement in the public school setting is a clear consensus on the need for and benefits of effective school, family, and community partnerships by families and school

leaders. Various research studies conducted over the past few decades have indicated that there may be discrepancies between how school personnel and parents view parental involvement (Farkas, Johnson & Duffet, 1999; Langdon & Vesper, 2000; Lawson, 2003). It is also vital for accountability mechanisms and student success to increase stakeholder participation in effective school, family, and community partnerships. However, in many schools parents are still held at arm's length by school educators and few parents are actively involved in the school's efforts for school improvement (Davies, 2005). Add to the equation the difficulties normally associated with adolescence and the problem of parent-school partnerships becomes more severe in the middle school setting. Critics also state that many of the schools that claim to have increased family involvement efforts still have not linked school reform and accountability to family-school interaction levels (Davies, 2005; Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein, et al., 2009). These aspects would lead one to surmise that research identifying and evaluating perceptions of parents and school administrators of school, family, and community partnerships in the middle school setting is necessary. An exhaustive search of the current education literature has determined that an in-depth study of parent and school administrator perceptions regarding family-school partnerships in the middle school setting is an area that has not yet been sufficiently researched.

### **Statement of the Problem**

One of the problems that exist in regard to school, family, and community partnerships is the way that it is viewed differently by various stakeholders. The current body of knowledge demonstrates that parents view their role in the education of their

children as facilitators instead of active participants while school affiliates view the role of the parent much differently. A research study conducted by Langdon and Vesper (2000) showed that six times more teachers than parents viewed parental involvement as an important means to improving American education.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 requires schools, districts, and states to arrange programs of parental involvement and to communicate with stakeholders about the quality of schools and student academic achievement, and requires schools to involve parents when they write school improvement plans in order to comply with Title I (Hoff, 2007; *School Improvement Plan*, 2008). In order to comply with the NCLB (2001) mandates, stakeholders must at least have similar perceptions of the meaning and purpose of school, family, and community partnerships. Research that clarifies perceptions of stakeholders can help to open lines of communication and assist each in understanding its current state of participation in school-family relationships. Clearer understanding of the topic, insight into perceptions and expectations of self and others, and open lines of communication can assist in building stronger parent-school activities and policies (Farkas, Johnson & Duffet, 1999; Lawson, 2003; *Sources for the Family*, 2008). According to Epstein (2005), when strong school, family, and community partnerships take place, students benefit in a multitude of ways. In addition, open lines of communication lead to improved collaboration between schools and parents. As schools and parents collaborate more effectively, links are formed between home and school, providing a voice for the school as well as the parent. When parents and school administrators share common ground

and work together, the goal of educational success for all students is more attainable (Epstein, et al., 2009; Hoover-Dempsey, Green, Walker, & Sandler, 2007).

According to Epstein and Peterson (1991) parental involvement frequently declines as students enter the middle grades. Although the current body of knowledge gives many insights as to the reasons for such a decline, little is actually known about how parent and administrator perceptions in the middle school setting affect parental involvement. This topic is worthy of study to help supply schools and parents with in depth research data that will help identify parent and administrator perceptions, analyze those perceptions for areas of divergent and convergent orientations, and provide recommendations to stakeholders aimed at increasing effective parental involvement at the middle school level.

Various research studies have focused on comparing the perceptions of teachers and parents in regard to school, family, and community partnerships (Coll, et al., 2002; Iverson & Walberg, 1982; Rath, et al., 2008; Tatto, et al. 2001). Those studies have offered up a rich oasis of data. However, an analysis of the perceptions of school administrators and parents is an area that needs further study. While few studies of parent and school administrator perceptions of school and family partnerships do exist at the high school level (Batista, 2009), an exhaustive study of the available literature failed to identify published research that has used quantitative and qualitative research to conduct an in-depth study to identify, analyze, and compare the perceptions of parents and school administrators at the middle school level on family, school, and community involvement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify, analyze, and compare the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school-family partnerships in the middle school setting in three schools in the State of Louisiana. More specifically, this study investigated the similarities and dissimilarities between parent and school administrator perceptions in regard to school, family, and community partnerships. This study also gathered data on various school administrators' demographic factors such as (a) ethnicity, (b) gender, (c) educational experience, (d) school setting, (e) socioeconomic status of the school, and (f) school size. In addition, the study gathered parental demographic factors such as (a) socioeconomic status, (b) grade level of student (c) ethnicity of student, (d) gender of student, and (e) academic achievement of student as measured by current grade point average. This study probed to determine underlying factors that may lead to apparent discrepancies in perceptions and to determine what actions school administrators and parents suggest would improve the school, family, and community partnerships.

### **Justification of the Study**

A number of previous studies have indicated that school, family, and community partnerships remain critical for optimal student success. It is mandated by NCLB (2006) that each school and school district receiving assistance under Title I, must ensure effective involvement of parents and support a partnership among the school, the parents, and the community to improve student academic achievement through training, information, and coordination activities (*No Child Left Behind*, 2006). One of the most difficult tasks in increasing parental involvement is in developing successful family and



school partnership plans. This can be done if the goal is to create a unified, integrated school community that serves all students and families. In order to reach the goal of a unified school community through successful partnerships, it is critical for stakeholders to have a clear understanding of effective school-family partnerships, to maintain effective communication, and for each group of stakeholders to understand weaknesses and strengths in its current perspectives and practices (Epstein, et al., 2009; Louv, 1999; Gestwicki, 2004).

The role of school administrators in school-family partnerships is one that is frequently overlooked in research studies (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). However, school administrators are important contributors to the parental involvement equation because they are responsible for many of the aspects affecting parental involvement partnerships. School administrators are frequently responsible for developing and implementing policies and procedures; initiating involvement of parents in shared leadership roles; allocating necessary funding for implementation of partnership programs; providing the coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary in schools for planning and implementing effective parental involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance; coordinating and integrating parental involvement strategies to comply with district, state, and federal mandates; conducting annual evaluations of the content and effectiveness of the parental involvement policy; identifying barriers to greater participation by parents in parental involvement activities; and using the findings of the evaluation to design strategies for more effective parental involvement (Hoerr, 2008; Collins, 2008; Powell, 1991; Principal's Partnership, n.d.).

Collaboration between schools and parents becomes even more pertinent in the middle school years. Middle school seems to be a critical point for many students in terms of educational success. Several research studies have shown a correlation between middle school success and various high school factors, including high school drop-out rates, standardized test scores, college aptitude tests, and graduation rates (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2005). The research points out the need for schools to address problems with school success before students enter high school. Disengagement from education may not be a single event; rather it is often a culmination of a series of disconnection and withdrawal from education in general (Thomas, 1993; Sanders, 2001; Wentzel, 1998).

The purpose of this study was to identify, analyze and compare parent and school administrator perceptions of school, family, and community partnerships in the middle school setting. The study investigated various perceptions of parents and school administrators in the setting of three middle schools to gain an understanding of successful practices as well as possible remedies to any obstacles that may be uncovered in the research process. The revelation of significant variations or consistencies in perceptions can serve as a vessel for the educational leaders and parents to use in improving programs to increase school and family partnerships (Epstein, et al., 2009; Lawson, 2003; Olsen & Fuller, 2003). Recognition of areas of consistency or inconsistency in regard to school-family partnerships can also lead to identification of areas of need and open channels of communication to allow for increased collaborative efforts. As a result, gains in school, family, and community partnerships lead to more meaningful educational experiences for students, gains in student academic

achievement and standardized test scores, more meaningful parental interactions, and more effective schools (America's Career Resource Network, 2010; Bloomstran, 2002; Brantlinger, 1991; Center for Research on the Education of Students at Risk, 1997; Epstein, 2001; Farkas, Johnson, & Duffet, 1999; Lezotte & McKee, n.d.). The findings of this study provide significant information, which will yield knowledge and strategies to help align schools and families in the intricate process known as school, family, and community partnerships.

In summary, research influences educational practices in several ways. Research can be used by schools to develop fresh ways to reflect on and improve educational policies and practices. Basic research has been conducted on parent and community involvement in various school settings over the past several decades. However, there is limited research that focuses on the perceptions of parents in the middle school setting and a gap in research that compares how those parental perceptions compare to the perceptions of school administrators in the middle school setting (Batista, 2009). In-depth research on administrator and parental factors, perceptions, and recommendations that are correlated with school, family, and community partnerships can provide a basis for design and evaluation of current partnerships programs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is based mainly on ideas from three classic education research theories. The first is the *Parent Role Construction Theory* of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The *Parent Role Construction Theory* affirms that responsibilities of parents, schools, and communities are a group of

expectations held by factions in consideration of the behavior of individual members. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's theory states that the role of parents is defined by individual belief systems and expectations of school, community, and family. The three major attributes that affect parents' roles in their children's education in the parent role construction theory are (1) parental views of their role and the activities they consider as valuable, (2) parents' sense of self-efficacy, and (3) the school atmosphere. Since Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model is defined by parental perceptions regarding the role they are expected to fill in their children's education and patterns of behavior that result from those perceptions, the researcher in this study felt that it was a good model to use in determining the importance of parental views of parent involvement and in probing for underlying factors and beliefs that may affect school-family partnerships (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005).

The next two theories used in the framework for this study were both developed by Joyce Epstein and associates. The first is Epstein's *Theory of Overlapping Spheres* (1995) which conceptualizes school, family, and community partnerships from a perspective that considers school, community, and family as overlapping orbs of influence. In that theory, the three key players are thought of as overlapping entities of influence that are intertwined in a complex set of interrelationships. Epstein notes in this theory that all three spheres can have internal and external components, which can both affect interactions between and among parents, schools, and community (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, et al., 2009).

The second of Epstein's theories is the *Six Types of Involvement* framework, in which six different components of parent and school partnerships are defined; those

components are (1) parents' basic obligation for establishing positive home learning environments, (2) parent-school communication in regard to student progress and school activities, (3) parental participation and volunteering in the school activities, (4) parent and school communications for home learning activities, (5) parental involvement in school governance and decision making, and (6) parental collaboration with community organizations that increase student learning opportunities (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Epstein, et al., 2009). In these components various interactions between parents and schools are defined. Systems for regular communication are developed. Parents and schools work together in designing the strategies and decision making processes. Schools share with parents student accomplishments, resources and strategies to help increase student experiences, and specific ways parents can volunteer and become more actively involved. Parents share cultural values, family goals, concerns and insights into student progress, and community resources. Parent volunteers are encouraged to share talents and time, to assist educators, administrators, and students and to enrich curriculum and instruction for all students.

Epstein's *Theory of Overlapping Spheres* (1995) and *Six Types of Involvement* (2004) models were considered as a basis for this research study because they explain the effect of interrelationships between school and family, and list specific components for effective school, family, and community partnerships. Parents and educators have varied backgrounds, viewpoints, and assets to offer to the educational setting. When the strengths of all are combined, they are likely to facilitate a stronger education for students. When the weaknesses are identified, they can be addressed through additional

support by other stakeholders. When schools and parents collaborate to develop and maintain effective schools, student success is maximized.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions served as parameters in the investigation of the problem stated:

1. What do parents perceive to be the nature and extent of school, family, and community partnerships in their schools?
2. What do school administrators perceive to be the nature and extent of school, family, and community partnerships in their schools?
3. How do the perceptions of parents and school administrators regarding school, family, and community partnerships compare?
4. What actions do administrators and parents suggest would improve school, family, and community partnerships?

### **Hypotheses and Nature of Study**

Illuminating parental involvement perceptions of various stakeholders provides benefits to various aspects of the educational setting. This research study sought to help develop a basis to improve communication and collaboration by identifying, analyzing, and comparing the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school, family, and community partnerships and to develop recommendations for improving those partnerships. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school-parent partnerships, a mixed-methods research design was used.

For the quantitative portion of the study, school administrators and parents completed parallel surveys. Three middle schools were randomly selected from the population of public middle schools in the State of Louisiana. All school administrators and 176 parents made up the sample for this study. This portion of the study sought to answer research questions one, two, and three of this research study. The null hypothesis of this section of the study was that there will be no significant difference in the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school, family, and community partnerships as indicated by survey results ( $H_0$ : parent perception = school administrator perception). The alternative hypothesis was there will be a significant difference in the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school, family, and community partnerships as indicated by survey results ( $H_1$ : parent perception  $\neq$  school administrator perception).

For the qualitative section of this study, telephone interviews and artifacts were used to help clarify and further investigate parental involvement perceptions of parents and school administrators. Two school administrators and seven parents from the sample of participants from each school surveyed in the quantitative portion of the study were questioned in the interviews. This portion of the study sought to answer research question four of the study and to delve more deeply into the responses given in the initial qualitative portion of the study. Telephone interviews were held with parent and school administrator survey volunteers randomly selected from the group. Also, various artifacts were analyzed in the qualitative section of the study. The artifacts included school policies and procedures manuals, school and district website data, and parental involvement manuals. The artifacts were retrieved from various sources,

including the school and district web pages, school administrators, school handbooks, and school improvement plans.

### **Delimitations**

The capacity to generalize the research findings are delimited to the three schools involved in the study. Due to the in-depth nature of the study, a relatively small number of parent and administrator participants were used in this study. Therefore, the results of this study may not be generalized to any other settings.

### **Limitations**

Concern of social desirability in participant responses is one area of concern in regard to limitations of the study. The research sample of participants for this study was expected to answer all questions honestly; however, participants may answer the survey from a perspective of what they think they should have answered. To help alleviate this situation, survey participants remained anonymous. To help increase participant tendencies to answer honestly no actual school or participant names are included in the study report.

### **Definitions**

*Middle School.* Middle school is a school at a level between elementary and high school, typically including grades five through eight. For purposes of this study, parents and school administrators of students in grades seven and eight will be used.

*Parent.* For the purpose of this study, the term parents will be used to describe guardians of middle schools students from the schools selected to participate in the study.



*School, family, and community partnerships.* According to the National Coalition for Parental Involvement (n.d.), school, family, and community partnerships are defined as the participation of parents in regular, meaningful communication with the school including student academic learning and other school activities.

*Partnership.* A partnership is a relationship between individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual cooperation and responsibility, as for the achievement of a specified goal.

*Perception.* Perception is defined as cognition or understanding, insight, sensitivity to a single integrated awareness resulting from sensory processes (Dictionary.com, n.d.).

*School Administrators.* For the purpose of this study, school administrator will be the term used to refer to school principals and assistant principals.

*Stakeholder.* A person who stands to gain or profit from selected activities in a school or community is how the term stakeholder is defined by Barbour, Barbour, and Scully (2005). Typically stakeholders are students, parents, administrators, faculty, staff, and community members.

*Family-School Partnerships.* Family-school partnerships is a term commonly used in place of school, family, and community partnerships. Family-school partnerships is used to refer to collaborative efforts on the part of schools, families, and communities to support student success (Parent Teacher Association, 2009).

### **Summary**

Many research studies have shown that one element of a positive school learning community is an organized program of family and school partnerships. These programs

reinforce families, improve schools, amplify community support, and increase student success (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Sheldon, 2003; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Some of those factors improved by effective school-family collaboration strategies are school attendance rates, school programs, lower drop-out rates, a reduction in violent episodes, increased academic achievement, and higher general school quality (Berger, 1991; Englund, Egeland, & Collins, 2004; Garcia, 2001; Olmsted, 1991; Shannon, Dittus, & Epstein, 2007).

When schools and families work together to form effective school, family, and community partnerships there is systematic strengthening that takes place. Research has shown that strong school administrative leadership is critical to developing effective school partnerships and increasing family involvement (Sacks & Watnick, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey, Green, Walker, & Sandler, 2007; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Ultimately, desirable change must happen within each school and each home because that is where the learning takes place. In order for change to take place, there must first be an understanding of the beliefs of self and others intertwined in the school, family, and community partnerships equation. There must also be a consensus between parents and schools regarding the picture of effective family-school involvement. Once those criteria are satisfied, policies, resources, professional development and support for all stakeholders can be sought and sustained. School administrators are often the missing link in the school, family, and community partnerships formula. However, school administrators are frequently responsible for developing school policies, arranging for professional development, and providing support for faculty, students, and parents.

Therefore, the initial stage of this study was to determine parent and school administrator perceptions of school, family, and community partnerships. The next step was to compare the two sets of views to determine areas of convergence and divergence in perceptions. Finally, participants were probed in interviews and artifacts were studied in order to get a more in depth look at the reasons behind perceptions. This study was important because it added additional data, knowledge, and insights to the current body of knowledge concerning parent and school administrator perceptions of school, family, and community partnerships and factors that may influence each in the middle school setting.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Many researchers have conducted studies resulting in a clear consensus of the benefits of parent involvement on a child's education (*America's Career Resource Network*, 2010; Belfield & Levin, 2001; Bloomstran, 2002, Brantlinger, 1991; Carter & Wojkiewicz, 2000; Center for Research on the Education of Students at Risk, 1997; Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein & MacIver, 1990; Fan & Chen, 2001; Gestwicki, 2004; Farkas, Johnson & Duffet, 1999; Harmon & Dickens, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Jeynes, 2008). However, there remains a discrepancy in the perception of parents and school personnel in regard to school-family involvement (Lawson, 2003; National Educational Association (n.d.). No Child Left Behind (2001) mandates placed accountability requirements on school administrators to create and maintain effective schools. One of the factors required by NCLB (2006) is for school administrators to facilitate effective schools based on four principles that provide a framework through which families, educators, and communities can work together to improve teaching and learning. These principles are accountability for results, local control and flexibility, expanded parental choice, and effective, successful programs that reflect scientifically based research. These provisions stress shared accountability between schools and parents for high student achievement, development of parental involvement plans with sufficient

flexibility to address local needs, and building parents' capacity for using effective practices to improve their own children's academic achievement (National Coalition for Parental Involvement, n.d.; No Child Left Behind, 2001; No Child Left Behind, 2006).

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

Because "school, family, and community partnerships" is an extensive term that can refer to a broad range of behaviors, it is important to identify how the existing literature typically defines it. Many researchers traditionally define parental involvement primarily as the participation of parents in school activities and attending school events (Olmsted, 1991; Pitino, 2003; Ramirez, 2001). A more complete definition of school, family and community partnerships is defined as (a) parents possess a consciousness of and involvement in all aspects of their child's educational process, (b) families and schools understand and embrace the relations between parenting skills and student success in school, and (c) a commitment by families, schools, and community to maintain consistent contact and collaborative efforts (National Coalition for Parental Involvement, n.d.; Parent Teacher Association, 2009; Gestwicki, 2004).

Frequently, criteria are used to explain effective school, family, and community partnerships. The criteria, although not identically defined by all researchers and theorists, typically includes aspects of home study, parental volunteering, communication, shared decision making, and community involvement (Epstein, 2001; Epstein, 1995; Gestwicki, 2004). Unfortunately, not all parents, teachers, and school administrators are knowledgeable about each aspect of parental involvement and not all schools successfully incorporate all of the aspects. Generally, educators and school

administrators take professional responsibilities seriously. They recognize the need for the support of parents (Principal's Partnership, n.d.; Sanders and Sheldon, 2009; Valentine, Clark, Hackman, & Petzko, 2004). More than three decades of research shows that family involvement promotes student success. No matter what their family income or background may be, students with involved parents are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, have social skills, adapt well to school, graduate, and go on to college. In addition to increased benefits for students, when families and schools work together, teacher morale rises, communication increases, and family, school, and community connections multiply (Bessell, Sinagub & Schumm, 2003; Englund, Egeland, & Collins, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Garcia, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Swick, 2003). The body of knowledge is consistently compelling: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school. When schools, families, and communities work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, schools become more successful and families grow stronger.

### **History of School, Family, and Community Partnerships**

Philosophical orientations have influenced perceptions regarding education throughout history. Educational theorists, including John Lock and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the seventeenth century and B. F. Skinner and Arnold Gessell in the 1900s, concluded that adults play active roles in the lives and education of children, rather it be through active adult participation evident in conditioning and environmental influence or through passive roles as facilitators to naturally unfolding development. Social-cultural-context theorists including Lev Vygotsky and Urie Bronferbrenner and cognitive theorists including Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson noted that children adjust to

their environmental factors to incorporate new knowledge through various stages of development. Many of those theorists contended that children must have their needs met and emotional growth obtained sufficiently at one stage in order to move successfully to the next (Barbour, Barbour, & Scully, 2005). Throughout history, these different aspects of development posed by various theorists have influenced how parents, schools, and communities view their roles in the education of children.

The terms “school, family, and community partnerships” and “parental involvement” are relatively new terms in relation to the educational system of America. However, relationships between schools and families are not new phenomena. In the beginning of society, families played the role of educator for the children in their families (Berger, 1991). Children learned through examples, oral communications, direct instruction, and observations from family and community. In the original English colonies of America, community exerted pressure on families to teach what society deemed important; however, it was the families’ responsibility to educate. Parents taught their children how to read and write, perform basic mathematical computations, and perform vocational skills, along with morals and ethics that often reflected their religious beliefs. As cities began to form, the establishment of public education began. In 1647, the Old Deluder Satan Law was passed that required towns with fifty or more families to provide a teacher for young children. These actions led to the beginning of shared responsibility between parents and schools for educating children (Barbour, Barbour, & Scully, 2005).

With the advent of the industrial revolution and the movement of more families to urban settings, the 18<sup>th</sup> Century became a time of great growth for public education in

America. States began to pass laws that allowed for taxation to support schools. By 1918, all states had compulsory attendance laws in place for children. Those acts caused parents to relinquish to schools the majority of the responsibilities for the education of their children. Some collaboration between school and home continued and society continued to influence many educational trends; however, often parents were excluded in the decision making processes and left out of the school day (Gestwicki, 2004).

During the early 1900s, educators held more of the responsibility for education and parents were no longer considered experts in learning. For the most part, the American public viewed all education to be the responsibility of schools by the middle of the twentieth century. Parents, at that time, were expected to play passive roles and merely support schools. Educators took active roles during this time in history, frequently advising parents on their roles and responsibilities. By the late twentieth century, parents and community members had begun to pressure schools to change the way they operated (Barbour, Barbour, & Scully, 2005). New legislature began to get passed, requiring effective change and accountability on the part of the schools. However, also in the later portion of the twentieth century large numbers of mothers began to work outside of the home, making parental involvement in education even more difficult (America's Career Resource Network, 2010). These changing circumstances in society led to the call for a new system of collaboration between parents and school.

By the late twentieth century, partnerships began to form between parents, schools, and community (Olmsted, 1991; Redding & Thomas, 2001; Rycik, 2007).



These partnerships also helped to improve education for students who throughout the American educational history had been deprived, including many minority children, special needs students, English as a second language learners, and students of poverty. The inclusion of parents and community back into the educational setting brought to the forefront the needs of all children. The family began to take on active roles in providing a connection from the family's diverse backgrounds and needs to the school. By the 1980s it became clear that strong relationships between school and family were necessary if schools were going to accomplish teaching all students and reaching established accountability goals (Brantlinger, 1991; Christie, 2005; Epstein & Peterson, 1991; Fan & Chen, 2001; Redding & Thomas, 2001).

### **Legislature Supporting School, Family, and Community Partnerships**

Students are being educated in an age of standards. Since the introduction of *A Nation at Risk* in the early 1980s (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the United States has focused on increasing accountability for students and schools. The concern of American businesses about the quality of education resulted in the establishment of the Educational Partnerships Act of 1988. The purpose of that act was to encourage businesses, community service groups, and government agencies to form partnerships with schools. In 1994, the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* was signed into law. It mandated increased graduation rates, competency at several grade levels, literate adults, and promotion of partnerships to increase parental involvement (*Goals 2000*, 1996). In 1996, the *America Reads Challenge* was added to the *Goals 2000*. It added an initiative to involve community organizations and homes to help

ensure all children could read by the end of third grade (Barbour, Barbour, & Scully, 2005).

The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2001) called for the improvement of student achievement and change in the culture of schools in America, (No Child Left Behind, 2001). One key aspect of NCLB (2006) required schools to implement effective family involvement activities. School administrators are change agents in the school setting, entrusted with the responsibility of leading and overseeing the various aspects necessary to build effective schools and fulfill NCLB expectations. The definition for parental involvement included in NCLB (2006) is the two-way substantial communication between parents and schools involving academic achievement and other school activities ensuring (1) parents play an essential role in their children's education; (2) parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school; and (3) parents are full partners in their child's education and are included in decision-making and on committees to assist in the education of their child (No Child Left Behind, 2006).

### **School, Family, and Community Partnerships in Middle School**

Parent involvement is important to the educational success of a young adolescents and, yet the extent of that involvement generally declines when a child enters the middle grades (Epstein, 2005; Jackson, Andrews, Holland & Pardini, 2004). Schools serving adolescents have unique challenges in developing and keeping up parental involvement partnerships and programs. As students enter middle school, they typically strive for more autonomy and many parents believe that adolescents should be more independent (Wentzel, 1998). As parents, students, and school personnel try to

negotiate their way through this movement toward more autonomy, parent-school partnerships tend to suffer. Making a difficult situation even worse, frequently, middle school teachers have more students than elementary teachers, thereby making parental contact more difficult. Despite these dilemmas, research shows that parent-school partnerships in the middle school setting remain important for student success.

Adolescents typically are trying to balance needs for greater independence with needs for support and guidance. In a case study conducted by researchers at Michigan State University (Tatto, et al., 2001) the challenges and tensions in reconstructing teacher-parent relations in the context of school reform were studied. The participants in the study were a group of inner-city middle school teachers, parents, and university personnel who were all involved in a project to improve parental involvement. The study found that school organizational structures failed to reach all parents, the balance of power and control within the school was consistently disadvantaged for minority parents, and the views held by teachers of parents and their children conditioned school-family partnerships. The study attempted to provide a closer look into the processes that schools need to engage in order to positively change the school culture and involve parents in meaningful involvement. They found that effective school-family partnership modifications required profound changes in the organization of the school, in the balance of the power, and in the beliefs that teachers and parents hold of each other.

Findings from an investigation by Catsambis and Garland (1997) into parental involvement in students' education during middle and high school indicated discrepancies in parental ideas and actions. The investigators analyzed data from the

*International Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988* to determine what types of changes in family involvement occurred for students between grades eight and twelve. The study found that many parents of middle school students were willing to participate in the decision making processes of secondary schools. However, the findings demonstrated that family involvement in school activities decreased dramatically between eighth and twelfth grade. Parents tended to become less involved with monitoring their children's individual behaviors and more concerned with the opportunities at school that would promote post secondary learning.

Middle school teachers and administrators have a massive amount of expertise and experience to offer parents in terms of effectively improving the middle school experience. Middle school educators can plan and execute activities and offer support to parents to help them comprehend the adolescent behavior. Schools can also provide information on student transitions into middle school and about barriers that students may face in the middle school setting. Parents also have expertise to offer schools in order to increase the middle school experience. Fan and Chen (2001) examined multiple measures of parent involvement using the methodology by analyzing multiple research studies. The researchers identified three paradigms of parental involvement that were present in many of the studies: (1) communication, (2) supervision, and (3) parenting style and expectations. Communication was described as frequent and systematic discussions between parents and children about schoolwork. Supervision included monitoring students when they return home from school and overseeing homework. Parenting style and expectations was the manner and extent to which parents communicate their academic objectives to their children. The researchers

concluded that parenting style and expectations was the most critical of the three and that high expectations and positive perceptions were most highly associated with enhanced achievement.

One solution for establishing and maintaining successful parental involvement in the middle school setting is Jansorn and Epstein's *Goal-Oriented Approach*. In the *Goal-Oriented Approach* the school's family and community partnership plan is linked directly to the school improvement plan (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). Jansorn and Epstein state that the first step to connecting the two is to develop action teams for partnerships. The purpose of the action teams is to evaluate the current status of parental involvement and perceptions in the school, choose specific goals for improving weaknesses in current parental involvement strategies, and plan specific improvement strategies that are included in the school improvement plan annually.

### **Theoretical Models**

Several theories of school, family, and community partnerships make up the theoretical framework currently in existence. This section summarizes the three basic models which support this study, as well as, other models prevalently referred to in the literary review. Various aspects of each of these theories have factors relevant to this research study.

#### **Parent Role Construction Theory**

In the *Parent Role Construction Theory*, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) contend that roles of specific stakeholders are thought to be clusters of expectations held by groups in regard to the behavior of individual members. This means that parents' roles in their children's education are defined by the parents' belief systems, as

well as, expectations by various stakeholders, including, school, community, family, etc. The model offers a look at the school, family, and community partnership process focusing on understanding why parents become involved in their children's education and how their involvement influences student outcomes. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler identified three major attributes that affect parents' roles in their children's education, including (a) how parents view their role and the activities they consider as valuable, (b) parents' sense of self-efficacy, and (c) the atmosphere of the school. The model also suggests that parents must have a sense of personal or shared responsibility for their children's educational outcome and believe they should be engaged in supporting the school. In the self-efficacy portion of the model, parents also have a sense that their personal actions will help their children learn (Hoover-Dempsey, Green, Walker, & Sandler, 2007). The suppositions in this theory maintain the importance of understanding parental perceptions, evaluating school atmosphere, and providing supportive environments for collaboration and growth among and between parents and schools.

### **Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model**

In the mid-1980s, Epstein and fellow researchers developed a theoretical perspective titled *Overlapping Spheres of Influence*. The message of the overlapping spheres concept is that parents, school, and community act as three spheres that must interact together in conditions and relationships that have common characteristics in order to effectively influence the education of children in the public school setting. Epstein points out that children grow and learn simultaneously and continuously in three spheres: home, school, and community. The three spheres cannot function as

independent identities. Just as the students function in all three concurrently, adults in all three spheres must also be able to collaborate and work in partnerships to bridge the spheres (Epstein, 2001; Epstein, et al., 2009). This model establishes the need for collaboration between parents and schools in order to assist students in reaching their highest potentials and becoming successful, productive adults.

### **Six Types of Involvement Framework**

Epstein has conducted a multitude of studies over the past three decades on school, family, and community partnerships. She joined forces with several other researchers to perform and evaluate an abundance of rich data, published many studies and research articles, and co-authored various books that outline obstacles and methods for improving parental involvement. Positive school, family, and community partnership beliefs and actions by all stakeholders is the first step to developing effective programs. A well-organized partnership begins with teams made up of all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, students, administrators, and community members who all have a clear understanding of parental involvement, as well as knowledge of perceptions and barriers to embracing the concept (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Epstein, et al., 2009).

According to Epstein and Salinas (2004), six types of involvement are components to effective educational partnership teams. The six components are (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision making, and (6) collaborating with the community. The focus of the parenting component is to assist schools and families to understand backgrounds, culture, and goals while assisting with support, skill acquisition, and learning. In the

communication aspect, the focus is on two-way communication conduits between home and school. The volunteering segment cites techniques for improving training, schedules, activities, and recruitment procedures in order to involve families and to enable parents, faculty, and administrators to work together to improve school, family, and community partnerships.

Involving families with homework and encouraging schools to design homework policies that enable students to share home learning tasks with families are the activities that make up the learning at home component. For the shared decision making aspect, the goal is to include parents and students as participants in school governance, decisions, and advocacy through parent organizations, school improvement teams, and committees. The final component of the *Six Types of Involvement* framework is collaborating with the community. Involving community requires coordinating services and resources for parents, students, and the school with community members including businesses, service organizations, and government agencies (Epstein et al., 2009).

### **Partnership Comprehensive School Reform Model**

The Partnership Schools Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) model for school improvement promotes directing federal funds to state departments of education in order to encourage school change that will lead to improvement in student success levels (Epstein, 2005). The Partnership CSR model originated from the National Network of Partnerships Schools (NNPS) (2007) which strives to assist schools in improving school, family, and community partnerships as a module of any school reform program. In the Partnership CSR model, schools develop action teams that work



on school improvement aspects, subject areas, and family partnerships in the elementary, middle, or high school setting.

The goals of the CSR model are to implement 11 criteria required for federal funding. Those criteria are (1) strategies for improving student achievement, (2) coordination of resources, (3) evaluation strategies, (4) external technical support and assistance, (5) parental and community involvement, (6) support for educators and school leaders, (7) support for the program within the school, (8) measurable goals and benchmarks, (9) professional development, (10) effective, research-based methods and strategies for improvement, and (11) comprehensive design with aligned components (Epstein, 2005). The CSR model is considered as a school-wide change option that is founded on parental and community involvement.

### **Parents as Teachers Concept**

Olmstead (1991) notes “parents are teachers every time they interact with a child. However, many parents do not perceive themselves as teachers” (p. 226). Since it is a widespread belief that a child’s chances for success are maximized when school and family are actively involved, it would benefit students to have their parents develop an awareness of teaching practices. Schools can guide parents through this process by providing parents with opportunities and guidance. The concept for *Parents as Teachers* was developed in the 1970s when Missouri educators noted that children were beginning kindergarten with varying levels of learning readiness. Research showed that greater family involvement in children's learning is a critical link in the child's development of academic skills. Early childhood professionals suggested that a program to help parents understand their role in encouraging their child's development right from

birth could help prepare children for school and life success. The program has since spread to all states. In the *Parents as Teachers* model, families are considered the top priority. The goals include (1) increase the number of programs and families served through collaboration and training, with an emphasis on vulnerable families, (2) put into action comprehensive quality improvement and evaluation systems to measure and share the impact of parental involvement, and (3) increase recognition and understanding of parental perceptions, needs, and strengths (Parents as Teachers, 2009).

### **National Parent Teacher Association Framework**

In order to achieve higher and higher accountability requirements set in place by national and state mandates, schools must work toward achieving higher levels of academic achievement. The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has stated that the responsibility for such high expectations cannot be rested on the shoulders of the students and schools alone. In order to achieve higher accountability requirements, it is imperative that families and community also join in the fight. The National PTA identified six standards to facilitate parent and school collaboration at the elementary and middle school levels. These standards are referred to as the *PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships* (National Parent Teacher Association, 2009). The first standard encourages schools to welcome all families into the school community by making family members active participants in school life and making them feel welcomed, valued, and connected to the learning process and the school in general. Standard two deals with communicating effectively. In this standard, parents and schools are encouraged to have two-way meaningful communication regarding student achievement and school improvement on a regular basis. Supporting student

success is the topic of standard three, which involves collaboration among families and schools. Standard four is titled *Speaking up for Every Child*. In standard four, families are given power to be advocates for all students to help them reach goals. Sharing power is the subject of the fifth standard where parents and schools work together as equal partners to make decisions, create policies, develop programs, and alter practices. The final standard deals with collaborating with community. In standard five, community members collaborate with parents and schools to connect all stakeholders with learning prospects, community services, and government assistance (Parent Teacher Association, 2009).

### **Maryland Parent Advisory Council Model**

While most state boards of education have developed parental involvement plans in order to comply with NCLB (2001) requirements, the Maryland Department of Education has developed a parental involvement plan that includes a Parent Advisory Council along with a specific parental involvement model. With the intention of changing the nature of parental involvement, the Maryland Parent Advisory Council set a goal to develop big-picture thoughts on improving relations between schools and parents of adolescents. Included in the plan were recommendations that were based on five themes: (a) communication, (b) partnership, (c) leadership, (d) training, and (e) accountability. In the accountability theme, school administrators and teachers were directed to provide information on curriculum, programs, and suggestions for improving student achievement. The partnership component encourages schools to work with community and parents to form a team to provide for the whole child. Included in the leadership aspect was the request to include on the state board of education at least two

parents with children in public schools. The training aspect pushed for training opportunities for parents and school employees to assist in all aspects of parental involvement and for the hiring of family involvement specialists to assist families, advocate for all students, and maintain a family friendly culture in the school.

Accountability dealt with making sure the parental involvement systems in place in each school are regularly assessed for effectiveness and to develop improvement plans as necessary (Maryland Parent Advisory Council, 2005).

Various models and frameworks for school, family, and community partnerships have been described in this theoretical framework section. Although, varied in approach, all of the models share the goals of assessing, analyzing, and improving techniques for involving family, and community members in collaborative partnerships with schools.

### **Factors Affecting School, Family, and Community Partnerships**

Positive factors associated with school, family, and community collaboration include areas of improvement for students, parents, schools, and communities. The areas of potential benefits for students include (1) improved educational performance, (2) better classroom behavior, (3) enhanced student emotional well-being, and (4) improved school attendance. The potential positive factors for parents, in addition to more academically successful children are a healthier understanding of roles and relationships between and among schools, parents, and students; parents who participate in the empowerment process through shared decision making techniques feel a sense of ownership of the school; and parents who are more devoted to supporting effective educational practices (Berger, 1991; Epstein et al., 2009; Fan & Chen, 2001; National

Middle School Association, 2006; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Van Voorhis, 2003). The community and society benefit in a majority of ways including fewer behavioral problems, reduced number of drop-outs resulting in higher levels of educational achievement, and communication with schools and families that help turn out more productive adults capable of filling the needs of the business world. Of course, all of the factors that benefit parents, students, and community also benefit schools. In addition to those benefits, schools have open channels of communication with parents, opportunities for increased school improvement, volunteers to help with implementation of various goal-oriented activities, and compliance with district, state, and federal requirements.

Even though various research studies have shown that there are a number of positive benefits associated with effective parent-school partnerships at all grade levels, school officials and educators still know little about what factors actually lead parents to decide whether to become involved in the educational process of adolescents and to what degree they will become involved. A study conducted by Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) on the motivation of parental involvement in secondary-level schooling used the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (1997) of the parental involvement process to examine four psychological constructs of parent-school partnerships in more than 700 parents of adolescents in five schools from Quebec. Of the 770 parents, 354 were parents of seventh grade students, 231 were parents of eighth grade students, and 185 were parents of ninth grade students. The constructs examined were (1) relative strength of parent role construction, (2) parental self-efficacy for helping adolescents be successful in school, (3) parental perceptions of teacher invitations to become involved

in the educational setting, and (4) parental perceptions of student invitations to become involved in the educational process. The results of the study noted that there was a difference in parent-school partnerships based on grade-level of the students.

Regardless of various family characteristics, including race, socio-economic status, etc. the more that parents of children in seventh grade believed that parental involvement in the educational setting and home were part of their responsibilities the more involved they became. For eighth grade students, parents tended only to be involved if they perceived invitations from their children and from teachers to be more active. Parents of ninth grade students tended to need both constraints. They needed to see parental involvement as their parental responsibility and needed to feel invited to participate by the school and their children. Overall, parental perceptions of student and teacher invitations were the most powerful predictors of parental involvement in all grade levels. The Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) study demonstrated that parental perception is a major factor that may hinder effective parental involvement practices in middle school.

Parents may also avoid school and family partnership activities and be less involved in the education of their children due to their own negative past experiences in the school setting, either as parents or students. Many parents have the perception that schools are responsible for education and their role is merely to be supportive. Parental feelings of inability to offer anything positive or other feelings of inadequacy frequently stop parents from becoming active participants in their children's schooling. Social and educational factors have many families today focusing on basic survival needs. These factors often include high poverty, single-parent homes, living in areas of high-crime,

disabilities, limited English proficiency, and limited literacy. Practical issues, including no child care, limited transportation, and limited time for working parents are also factors that negatively affect parental involvement in education (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Garcia, 2001; Long, n.d.; Olsen & Fuller, 2003; Sy, Rowley, & Sheulenberg, 2005).

Schools may also inadvertently discourage parents from being active participants in the education of their children. Parents are still viewed as outsiders in many school settings. They are held at arm's length. The inability or unwillingness to share power and decision making is another factor that negatively affects parental involvement in many schools (Principal's Partnership, n.d.; Powell, 1991; Shaefer, 1991). Also, unclear expectations and perceptions of parents, administrators, and teachers are large barriers that inhibit parental involvement (Epstein, et al., 2009; Lawson, 2003). Fan and Chen (2001) found that parents and schools reported significant differences in expectations and perceptions of parental collaborative techniques in the school setting. The schools tended to rate themselves much higher than the parents rated them.

Other obstacles affecting school, family, and community partnerships in the middle school setting are the time constraint and lack of communication between educators and parents. Middle school teachers tend to teach more students in a day than do elementary teachers. The larger number of students makes parental contact and involvement a more time-consuming task for middle school educators. Parents also have a larger burden with communicating with middle school parents, because their child may have as many as seven to eight different teachers in a day (Lafon, 2006;

Jackson, Andrews, Holland & Pardini, 2004; Johnson & Friedman, 2006). The challenge facing school educators is establishing effective school, family, and community partnerships.

The National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools (2003), funded through the Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory (SEDL), states that strong parent, school, and family involvement bridges research and practice to remove barriers to student achievement. The implications associated with school-family collaboration for all involved are high. It is one of the key components in the school improvement process frequently undervalued. One of the first steps to reducing the barriers to parental involvement is for schools to conduct, with the involvement of parents, an evaluation of the content and effectiveness of the parental involvement practices in their school setting.

Identifying barriers helps to create increased communication among parents and schools while specifying areas of strength and weakness in family and school collaborations. A major focus of removing the barriers should center on increasing the participation in involvement activities for parents of students who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background (National Coalition for Parental Involvement, n.d.; No Child Left Behind, 2006).

### **Parent and School Administrator Roles**

Three decades of research provide convincing evidence that parents are an important power in increasing effectiveness of schools. When schools collaborate with parents to help their children learn and when parents participate in school activities and



decision-making, children achieve at higher levels. Research on parental involvement in the middle school setting shows that many parents have questions about how to relate to and support their children through adolescence. Parents are frequently unsure about their roles in family, school, and community partnerships (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Hill, 2002; Epstein & Peterson, 1991). With the accountability standards that affect American schools today, it is vital that parent, family, and community involvement programs are evaluated annually for strengths and weaknesses, be goal oriented, contain shared leadership, and link partnership activities to school improvement goals (Jackson, et al., 2004). When schools, families, and communities work together to support learning there are a multitude of benefits for all stakeholders.

Parents are the first teachers of their children. In 1959, the United Nations adopted the *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* which urged individuals and governments to strive toward observation of rights for children. One of those recommendations was that children have the right to receive a free education and parents' have the first responsibility for providing education for their children (*Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, 1959). Throughout periods of history, parents have even been the main teachers of their children. However, that role has been transferred to the educational system for the most part. Parental perspectives regarding community views, self evaluation, perceived school needs, and the wishes of their children all dramatically affect parental involvement in their children's education. The school plays an important role in determining the levels of parental involvement. Many parents need schools to clearly relay their expectations of parental involvement and regularly communicate with parents. Schools are responsible for establishing clear roles

and responsibilities in collaborative efforts with parents and community members.

Schools also can provide opportunities for parents to talk with school personnel about parental roles and opportunities to increase successful partnerships. The National PTA recommends that parent-family involvement programs welcome parents as volunteer partners in schools and that these programs invite parents to act as full partners and share leadership in making school decisions that affect children and families (Parent Teacher Association, 2009).

Students are able to make great gains when schools engage families in ways that improve learning and support parental involvement at school and at home. When schools build partnerships with families that are responsive to the concerns of parents, respect parental involvement, and share decision making, they are able to maintain connections aimed at improving student achievement.

School administrators have strong influences on the probability of success or failure of any school improvement plan (Collins, 2008; Gestwicki, 2004; Principal's Partnership, n.d). In order to increase school, family, and community partnerships, school leaders need to be able to work with parents, faculty, and students to evaluate, plan, and implement improvement and involvement strategies. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) has developed professional standards for school administrators to guide them in all aspects of school leadership. One of the six standards developed by ISLLC specifically focuses on community, parent, and school partnerships. The standard states that the school administrator is an educational leader who encourages the success of all students by working together with faculty and community members, taking action to diverse community interests and needs, and

organizing community resources (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 2008).

According to the Title 1 criteria under NCLB (2006), school administrators' responsibilities in parental involvement are (1) involve parents in the development of school wide partnership programs, (2) hold meetings to inform parents of their rights, (3) provide parents information in a timely manner about programs that include a description and explanation of the school's curriculum, and (4) provide opportunities for regular meetings to allow parents to formulate suggestions and to participate in decisions about the education of their children. It is also recommended that in the formulation and maintenance of school, family, and community partnership programs, the school administrator is responsible for the collection and distribution of effective parental involvement practices. Those practices should be based on the most current research on effective parental involvement that promotes high standards of achievement for all children. In addition, those practices must be aimed toward reducing barriers for greater participation by parents in school planning, review, and improvement experiences (No Child Left Behind, 2006).

Throughout the school improvement process, school administrators are responsible for having in place a parental involvement policy that establishes the school's expectations for parental involvement. They also provide the coordination, technical assistance, and other support necessary to assist in planning and implementing effective parental involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein, et al, 2009; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

The school's ultimate responsibility is to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables children to meet the state's student academic achievement standards. Through effective parental involvement techniques, schools can be more successful in that endeavor. One recommendation by NCLB (2001) is to have specific criteria for such techniques. Those criteria established by NCLB are (1) clearly define specific ways in which parents will be responsible for supporting their children's learning which may include monitoring attendance and homework completion, volunteering in the classroom, and participating in decisions relating to the education of their children (2) helping parents understand topics that will allow them to become equal partners with educators in improving their children's academic achievement and (3) educating faculty and staff on how to work with parents as equal partners, communicate with parents, implement and coordinate parental programs, and build ties between parents and the school.

In order to meet professional standards and government mandates, school administrators must be aware of the current status of the parental involvement programs and practices in their schools (Olsen & Fuller, 2003). Administrators also need to be aware of current research regarding school, family, and community partnerships needs, models for successful parental partnerships, and national trends for best practice. As school leaders, administrators play important roles in parental involvement of their schools. They can work with faculty, staff, community members, and families to help promote positive change. School administrators are entrusted to be effective change-agents willing to exercise leadership that promotes positive interrelationships, motivates stakeholders, develops and maintains a mission and vision for the school, and creates an

environment that nurtures success (Olsen & Fuller, 2003; Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 2008). According to Sanders and Sheldon (2009) as school leaders, principals “establish the tone at a school and are highly influential actors who shape how school staff and practitioners treat families...” (p. 75).

In order to meet all of the mandated criteria associated with parental involvement, school administrators must also see themselves as team members of collaborative efforts. The evaluation of collaboration between parents and school and perceptions helps to discover ways to improve effectiveness (Sanders & Epstein, 2005). Such evaluations can help school administrators clarify which aspects of the parental partnership program are working and which ones are not. This information can then be used to make plans and put necessary change into effect.

### **Summary**

Continued research over the past several decades has noted that effective school, family, and community partnerships are vital to student success. However, by middle school, family involvement tends to decrease. There are many reasons behind the decrease in parental involvement including students’ desire for autonomy, schools being unsure of specific strategies that will help connect parents and schools, and parents who are undecided on how to continue to be involved. Add to these obstacles, misperceptions, lack of knowledge, social factors, and a lack of consensus regarding what parental involvement partnerships should be by various stakeholders and the result frequently is a school with stalled school, family, and community partnerships measures. One of the themes that emerged throughout this literature review was that the component of family-school partnership is among the many factors that lead to

effective education. Another concept prevalent in the literature was the notion that stakeholder perceptions tended to significantly affect family, school, and community partnerships.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed-methods approach in order to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem. According to Creswell (2003), mixed-method research refers to the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative research can have areas of weakness in probing into the context of the situation being studied; while qualitative data can have areas of weakness in the methods of interpretation exhibited by the researcher. Mixed methods research provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research by allowing a look into both aspects.

Quantitative research involves the collection of statistical data in order to answer research questions or test hypotheses. Quantitative data were gathered by using parallel surveys based on Sanders, Epstein, and Salinas' *School and Family Partnerships Survey* titled *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey* (Salinas, Epstein, Sanders, Davis, & Albersbaes, 2009). Three middle schools in the State of Louisiana were the setting of the study and were used to select research participants. The participants were selected from the population of all middle school parents of the three schools with students in grades seven and eight as well as all school principals and assistant principals from the three schools. The participants were divided into two groups, parents and school administrators, which served as the quasi-independent

variables. School administrators received the *Measure of School, Family and Community Partnerships: Administrator Survey* (see Appendix A). Parents received the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Parent Survey* (see Appendix B). Survey responses were categorized according to perceived school, family, and community partnerships which were considered the dependent variables. Written permission was granted by the authors to edit and use the surveys in this study (see Appendix C).

Qualitative research in the form of interviews consisting of open-ended questions posed to both parents and administrator participants were also used to probe for underlying variables and perspectives. Furthermore, school documents relevant to school, family, and community partnerships were analyzed in the qualitative segment of the study. Some of the pertinent documents included those addressing school policies, parent-teacher association meetings, and district guidelines. The survey artifacts and interview data were used to triangulate the research findings in order to enhance credibility.

This research study sought to answer the following questions.

1. What do parents perceive to be the nature and extent of school, family, and community partnerships in their schools?
2. What do school administrators perceive to be the nature and extent of school, family, and community partnerships in their schools?
3. How do the perceptions of parents and school administrators regarding school, family, and community partnerships compare?



4. What actions do school administrators and parents suggest would improve the school, family, and community partnerships partnership?

The null hypothesis of the study is that there is no significant difference in the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school, family, and community partnerships as indicated by survey results ( $H_0$ : parent perception = school administrator perception). The alternative hypothesis is there is a significant difference in the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school, family, and community partnerships as indicated by survey results ( $H_1$ : parent perception  $\neq$  school administrator perception). These two hypotheses will be addressed with research questions one, two, and three. The qualitative portion of the research study, consisting of the interviews and document analysis, was used to clarify survey results, to address research question four, and to triangulate survey data. Methodological triangulation was used to enhance confidence of the findings by using more than one method for gathering data.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to collect, analyze, and compare perceptions of parent and school administrators on school, family, and community partnerships in the middle school setting. Parallel surveys, document evaluation, and interviews were used to collect data. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed in this study.

### **Survey Data**

A survey design that utilized numeric descriptions of perceptions of the population by studying a sample of the population was utilized. The surveys produced

numeric data from a Likert-scale with ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 representing lowest level of agreement and 5 representing highest level of agreement. Survey data were analyzed using parallel independent t-tests applied to each of the survey questions. The data from the open-ended questions on the survey were analyzed descriptively to identify if there were any major areas of apparent difference in parent and administrator opinion. This information was used to probe further in the interviews and to triangulate such data with artifact information obtained during the study from each of the three schools.

The quantitative portion of this study began in late spring of 2010. Schools were selected by putting the names of all public middle schools into a box and pulling three names. School administrators were then contacted by the researcher to request permission to participate in the study. When school administrators chose not to participate in the study, a new school was randomly selected from the box. Eleven schools were selected from the box in order to find three schools willing to participate in the study. After school administrators agreed to participate, then written permission to conduct the study was obtained in writing from each of the three school districts (see Appendix D), and Louisiana Tech University Human Subjects Research Review Committee. Following receipt of written permission to begin the study, surveys were delivered to each school for parents and school administrators. All school administrators from each school were given questionnaires and consent forms (see Appendix E). From each school, 50 parents with seventh graders and 50 with eighth graders were asked to participate in the study. Parental surveys and consent forms (see Appendix F) were sent home with students. All surveys had blank envelopes attached for privacy purposes.

Participants were also given the option to either complete surveys online or use the printed copies. If respondents opted to use the printed surveys, they were asked to mail the surveys sealed in envelopes to the researcher. The goal was to receive surveys from a minimum of 60% of the participants.

In addition to the survey, parental participants were asked to complete a separate card listing their names and phone numbers in order for the researcher to have contact information regarding the interviews. The cards were mailed to the researcher separately from the surveys. Letters were sent to the administrators (see Appendix G), to parents (see Appendix H), and to teachers (see Appendix I) explaining the research process. Evaluation and analysis of the survey data was conducted in summer and fall of 2010.

### **Artifact Evaluation**

The qualitative section of this mixed methods research study included artifact analysis and interviews. Artifact evaluation took place throughout the summer and fall of 2010. School administrators and parent-teacher association leaders from each of the three schools were asked to provide access to family-school documents relevant to this study. These artifacts consisted of school and district website data, school and district policies and procedures manuals, school parental involvement plans, and student handbooks.

### **Interview Collection and Procedures**

In the summer of 2010, telephone interviews were conducted with the school principals, assistant principals, and selected parents of middle school seventh and eighth grade students from each school. Parents and administrators who were unavailable for

telephone interviews were interviewed through email correspondence. The parent interview participants were selected from all returned survey participants. All of the parents given a survey were also given a printed index card that requested their names and phone numbers. The participants were directed to mail the cards in when they turn in their surveys. The participants were also given the option to call or email the researcher to leave their names and phone numbers instead of turning in the cards. A total of 39 parents returned cards indicating they were interested in participating in the interview process. From the cards, seven parents were randomly selected from each school. The participants were selected by putting their cards into a box and pulling seven from each school.

The purpose of the interviews was to explore any underlying factors that may contribute to parent and administrator perceptions regarding school, family, and community partnerships and to request suggestions for improving the nature and extent of current partnerships. In addition, the interviews were used to clarify the quantitative data collected from the surveys.

### **Setting and Sample**

Three public middle schools were selected to participate in the study. Random sampling was used as the selection method for choosing the schools in this study. All public schools in the State of Louisiana that teach students in seventh and eighth grade were included in the selection process. School names were placed on slips of paper and three schools were randomly selected for the study. In the spring of 2010, the researcher placed the slips of paper into a box and randomly selected three schools for the study until three school administrators agreed to participate. Each school is located

in a different Louisiana school district. To ensure anonymity, the schools selected for the study are referred to as Middle School A, Middle School B, and Middle School C.

The first school randomly selected to participate in this study is referred to as Middle School A. The school is located in the geographic middle of the state. The student population of Middle School A was about 600 students in the fall of 2009 with grades seven, eight, and nine. The administrative staff consists of one principal and one assistant principal. The student-to-teacher ratio for Middle School A is 17:1.

Socioeconomic and racial information of students attending the schools were used to establish similarities of the schools in terms of student demographics. In the fall of 2009, 51% of students were eligible for the free or reduced lunch program at Middle School A (see Table 1). The ethnicity composition of students at Middle School A was 48% white, 43% African-American, 6% Hispanic, 2% Asian or Pacific Islander, and less than 1% American Indian as of fall 2009 (Great Schools, 2010).

Table 1

*Ethnicity of Students, Fall 2009*

Population	African American	White	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian
School A	48%	43%	6%	2%	<1%
School B	43%	51%	5%	<1%	<1%
School C	49%	49%	2%	<1%	
State of Louisiana	46%	49%	3%	1%	1%

Middle School B had approximately 450 students in the fall of 2009; all of which were in grades six through eight. The school is located in the southeastern section of the state. The school had two administrators, comprised of one principal and one assistant principal. The student-teacher ratio at Middle School B is 17 students per teacher. The ethnicity of the students is approximately 51% white, 43% African-American, 5% Hispanic, less than 1% American Indian, and less than 1% Asian or Pacific Islander (see Table 1). Seventy-five percent of students attending Middle School B were eligible for the free or reduce-priced lunch program, which is higher than the 63% state average (Great Schools, 2010).

The third school selected, Middle School C, is located in the southwestern part of the State of Louisiana. It houses students in grades six, seven and eight. As of fall 2009, there were approximately 550 students attending Middle School C. The school had three administrators, comprised of one principal and two assistant principals. The student-teacher ratio was 16 students to every teacher. The ethnicities of the students are diverse. Approximately 49% of students were African American, 49% white, 2% Hispanic, and less than 1% Asian or Pacific Islander. These statistics compare to the state average of 49% white, 46% African-American, 3% Hispanic, and 1% Asian or Pacific Islander. Currently, 63% of students attending Middle School C are eligible for the free or reduce-priced lunch program (Great Schools, 2010).

Standardized test scores were used to establish similarities in schools participating in the study in terms of student academic achievement. Students in fourth and eighth grade take the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program test (LEAP) annually. The LEAP test is a Louisiana state mandated test for all students in fourth

and eighth grade attending public schools. LEAP is a high-stakes test that requires students to pass the mathematics and language arts sections of the test in order to be promoted to the next grade level. Students in all other grades from third through ninth grade are required to take the Integrated Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (iLEAP) test annually. Test scores from the iLEAP are used by schools to determine student placement and need for remediation. Table 2 demonstrates the percent of eighth graders in the State of Louisiana scoring basic or above on the LEAP assessment in the spring of 2009 was 59% in mathematics, 62% in language arts, 55% in science, and 58% in social studies. For seventh graders, the percent of students scoring basic or above on the iLEAP assessment in the State of Louisiana in the spring of 2009 was 63% in mathematics, 62% in language arts, 59% in science, and 65% in social studies (*District Accountability Reports, 2009; LEAP, ILEAP, and GEE Overview, 2008; Professional Development Standards, 2008; School Accountability Reports, 2009*).

In Middle School A, students in seventh grade scoring basic or above in the spring of 2009 on the iLEAP assessment were 74% for mathematics, 76% for language arts, 66% for science, and 74% for social studies (see Table 2). For eighth graders, in the spring of 2009, the percent of students who scored basic or above on the LEAP assessment were 59% in mathematics, 67% in language arts, 65% in science, and 72% in social studies (*District Accountability Reports, 2009; School Accountability Reports, 2009*).

In Middle School B, students in seventh grade scoring basic or above in the spring of 2009 on the iLEAP assessment were 60% for mathematics, 63% for language arts, 51% for science, and 65% for social studies (see Table 2). For eighth graders, in

the spring of 2009, the percent of students who scored basic or above on the LEAP assessment were 63% in mathematics, 65% in language arts, 54% in science, and 57% in social studies (*District Accountability Reports, 2009; School Accountability Reports, 2009*).

At Middle School C, students in seventh grade scoring basic or above in the spring of 2009 on the iLEAP assessment were as follows 58% for mathematics, 58% for language arts, 54% for science, and 65% for social studies (see Table 2). For eighth graders, in the spring of 2009, the percent of students who scored basic or above on the LEAP assessment were 64% in mathematics, 59% in language arts, 57% in science, and 64% in social studies (*District Accountability Reports, 2009; School Accountability Reports, 2009*).

Table 2

*Students Scoring Basic or Above on Standardized Test Scores for Spring 2009*

Population	Mathematics	Language Arts	Science	Social Studies
School A: 7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	74%	76%	66%	74%
School A: 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	59%	67%	65%	72%
School B: 7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	60%	63%	51%	65%
School B: 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	63%	65%	54%	57%
School C: 7 <sup>th</sup> Grade	58%	58%	54%	65%
School C: 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	64%	59%	57%	64%
State of Louisiana: 7 <sup>th</sup>	63%	62%	59%	65%
State of Louisiana: 8 <sup>th</sup>	59%	62%	55%	58%



All school administrators from the schools were asked to participate in the study. There were two-to-three administrators from each school, with a total of seven potential administrative participants in the study. One hundred parental surveys were sent out to parents of middle schools students from each of the selected schools, resulting in a total of 300 parental surveys sent out. The parental participants were selected through a type of stratified random sampling from the population of all middle school parents from the three schools. The parent sample was determined according to the homeroom class attended by their children during the 2009-2010 school year. A list of homeroom classes was obtained for each school participating in the study. Two seventh-grade homeroom classes and two eighth-grade homeroom classes from each school were randomly selected by putting the homeroom teachers' names on slips of paper and pulling them from a box. Twenty-five students in each selected homeroom class were given surveys to take home to their parents. Teachers were instructed to hand out surveys in homeroom by passing them out down each row until they ran out of surveys. If any surveys were left over, teachers were instructed to give them to any seventh or eighth grade student they teach by simply handing them down each row until they ran out. Parents were given a printed version of the survey along with a plain white envelope. In addition, the parents were given the option to fill out the surveys online. Parents were asked to either complete the printed version of the surveys and return them anonymously in sealed envelopes or to complete the online version of the survey within a two-week period.

### **Instrumentation**

The survey used in this study is the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey* (Epstein, et.al, 2009). Although this survey instrument is relatively new in the research field, it is based on previous surveys developed and implemented by Epstein and associates. The questions in the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey* have been part of Epstein's family involvement surveys since 1993. The newer version developed at Johns Hopkins University is simply a shortened instrument designed to assess whether schools are involving parents, community members, and students in meaningful ways. The survey is based on the framework of six types of involvement and focuses on how well activities are meeting challenges to involve parents in their children's education. When used as parallel surveys, with the same questions posed to school administrators and parents, the instrument can be used to determine areas of convergent and divergent perceptions regarding family-school relations in particular school settings (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2007).

The survey was revised slightly for use in this study. Two sections were added to the instrument. The first section asked for demographic data from parents and school administrators. For school administrators, the survey asked for the administrator's (a) ethnicity, (b) gender, (c) educational experience, (d) school setting, (e) socioeconomic status of the school, and (f) school size. Parents were asked for their (a) socioeconomic status, (b) grade level of student (c) ethnicity of student, (d) gender of student, and (e) academic achievement of student as measured by current grade point average. If parents have more than one student attending the school, they were asked to answer

demographic data based on their older or oldest child attending the school. The demographic data was used to gain a better scope of the participants.

The second area altered from the original survey was the addition of two open-ended questions at the end of the survey. The two questions asked, “Do you have any additional comments or concerns pertaining to school, family, and community partnerships at your (or your child’s) school?” and “Do you have any recommendations for improving family-school relations in your (or your child’s) school?” The open-ended questions were added to the survey to assist in the probing for this study that is necessary for the interview discussions. Responses from the open-ended questions and areas of divergence in the artifacts and survey responses were used in the interviews to guide the questions posed by the researcher.

Parallel surveys were used in order to quantitatively compare parent and school administrator perceptions on identical family-school partnership characteristics. The surveys were rated with a Likert-scale with response choices for each question ranging from 1 to 5. One was the lowest frequency and stood for the choice of “never”, meaning that the participants perceive the strategy never happened in their school or their child’s school. The choice of “2” in the survey represented the choice of “rarely” and denotes the participants’ perception that the strategy was conducted in one or two classes with few families and was not emphasized in the school. The choice of “3” on the survey denotes a response of “sometimes” which indicates that the strategy implementation needs improvement, was conducted in a few classes or with some families, and received minimal emphasis in the school. The choice of “often” was denoted by the number 4 which indicates that participants perceive the strategy to be

conducted in many, but not all classes and families. It indicates substantial emphasis was given to the strategy by the school and that the strategy quality was high resulting in the need for only minor changes. The last choice option was “5” which stood for strategies that are noted frequently in all classes with most families. It denotes a strategy that was implemented with quality and was an important part of the parental involvement plan (Epstein, et al., 2009).

Although new, the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey* is a condensed version of Epstein and Salinas’ (1993) survey, which was found to have participant response scales ranging from a low of alpha equals .44 to a high of alpha equals .91 using Cronbach’s alpha reliability formula. The estimated reliability mean is alpha equals .81. The survey has also been found to have low standard errors of measurement. These factors led to the decision by the research to use this survey (Epstein, et al., 2009).

Epstein and Salinas’ (1993) original survey has been used in many parental involvement research studies over the past 20 years. It has also been revised, shortened, and lengthened by various researchers over the past several decades. It is considered in the research field to be reliable and valid. The reliability of the instrument has been established over decades of usage. The survey was originally used in the State of Maryland with a sample of over 2,000 parents and approximately 200 teachers in 15 inner-city elementary and middle schools (Epstein, et al, 2009). The surveys were purchased by the researcher from the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.

### **Survey Data Collection and Procedures**

Since the purpose of this mixed-methods research study was to discover, evaluate, and compare parent and school administrator perceptions in school, family, and community partnerships, quantitative and qualitative data was collected, analyzed, and compared. The initial portion of the study was to collect quantitative numerical data from parent and school administrator surveys. The data addressed the six areas of Epstein's (1995) six types of school, family, and community partnerships, which are (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision making, and (6) collaboration. Various demographic factors of school administrators such as (a) ethnicity, (b) gender, (c) educational experience, (d) school setting, (e) socioeconomic status of the school, and (f) school size will be collected along with parental demographic factors such as (a) socioeconomic status, (b) grade level of student (c) ethnicity of student, (d) gender of student, and (e) academic achievement of student as measured by current grade point average.

The purpose of the qualitative portion of the study was to undertake an in-depth investigation of the phenomena of perceptions of parental involvement in the middle school setting in Louisiana. In the qualitative portion of this study, artifacts were evaluated and interviews were conducted. Qualitative data traditionally consist of open-ended information that is gathered through interviews, observations, and artifact evaluation. Open-ended questions are frequently used by qualitative researchers to allow participants to give more in-depth responses. Qualitative data may be analyzed by combining the statements into categories then presenting the ideas in strands (Creswell, 2003). The data collected from the qualitative portion of this proposed study

were analyzed descriptively. Interview responses and artifact data were also categorized based on Epstein's (1995) six types of school, family, and community partnerships. The artifacts include data from school and district websites, parental involvement plans, and school handbooks. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The data were then categorized by both the researcher and an assistant to help assure inter-rater reliability. Using Epstein's *Six Types of Involvement Framework*, categorizing was conducted independently by the researcher and assistant. The researcher assigned a different color to each category and highlighted the transcribed data based on which category it fit into. The assistant researcher used cutting and sorting as the basis for categorizing. He cut apart the data and placed each segment into the corresponding category. The researcher and assistant then independently analyzed the categorized data for word or concept repetition. When areas were identified, they were clustered into groups by category. The categorizations were then analyzed to identify areas of divergent and convergent perceptions by both groups of participants and to identify participant recommendations for parental involvement in the middle school setting.

### **Validity and Reliability**

To help maintain the reliability of the study several steps were taken by the researcher. The researcher was not a member of the sample group or population in the survey process and acted as a facilitator only in the collection of data. The role of the researcher was that of an independent observer. The parents were selected by stratified random selection. All participants were asked to remain anonymous during the survey process, intended to help to elicit honest responses. Minor changes were made to the

survey instrument, which has been tested many times for reliability over the past twenty years (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2007). Inter-rater reliability was also used by having an assistant researcher independently code the interview data to help to ensure reliability of those findings. The researcher and assistant researcher also identified emergent themes in the research data in order to increase reliability. During the coding process, areas of divergent responses from parents and administrators were discovered by the researcher and assistant. Those areas were then coded, either through the color coding process or by moving the cut segments. In order to increase validity of this study, methodological data triangulation was used. The purpose the triangulation was to substantiate the research results and enhance confidence in findings.

Triangulation was performed by the collection and coding of data from surveys, interviews, and artifacts.

### **Data Analysis**

The goal of this research study was to identify, analyze, and compare parent and school administrator perceptions of school, family, and community partnerships. In order to accomplish this task, parallel surveys were used in the quantitative portion of the research study. Identical surveys were given to parents and school administrators. The survey was divided into three major sections. The first section asked for specific demographics about school administrators and parents. This section was different for parents and administrators. The second category of the survey consisted of Likert-response questions divided up into six categories based on Epstein's (1995) framework of six types of involvement. The six categories were (1) parenting, (2) communicating,

(3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision making, and (6) collaborating with the community. The third section of the survey consisted of two open-ended questions.

Based on scores from the parallel surveys, independent t-tests were performed for each question in the study and for each of the six categories of questions. Responses of parents and school administrators were compared in the t-test analysis for each question and each category. Independent-measures research lends itself to evaluation by mean difference between two populations (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2005). Therefore, the t-test for independent samples was selected by the researcher for the method of analysis. The level of significance used in this study was 0.02 significance. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program was used to determine the level of significance for each of the multiple-choice questions in the survey, as well as, for each of the six categories.

The results from the analysis of the parallel surveys were then used to probe further in the interviews. Any areas of high discrepancy between administrator and parent perceptions in the survey results were used to develop questions for discussion. Interviews were held with parents and school administrators from each school involved in this research study.

The researcher and the research assistant separately analyzed and categorized artifacts and interview data. The emergent categories of both researcher and assistant were then compared. Like areas were maintained, areas of difference between research and assistant were re-evaluated by both and any persisting irregularities were eliminated from the research data. The process of having two people code the data individually



and then comparing the results was used to maintain high levels of validity in this research study (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2003).

### **Summary**

Parents are commonly considered to be children's first and most important teachers. Greater collaboration with parents and families is clearly one of the most essential and effective strategies for closing achievement gaps. The design of a mixed-methods approach was used in this study in order to get an in-depth look into parent and school administrator perceptions of parental involvement, including convergent and divergent perceptions, reasons behind such perceived notions, and suggestions for improvements to school-family collaboration. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem a mixed-methods approach was utilized. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered from three public middle schools in the State of Louisiana by using parallel surveys, interviews, and artifact analysis.

Identification of congruent and incongruent perceptions of school-family partnership perceptions of parents and school administrators may help schools and parents understand where they currently stand in the parental involvement situation. Research shows that most parents and school administrators share the common goal of providing an effective education to students. Frequently, by the middle school setting students are striving for independence, parents are unsure of how much involvement is needed, and schools are struggling to accommodate mandates, attain accountability, and meet the needs of all students. By assessing the views of parents and administrators in the middle school setting, the topic of school and family partnerships can be opened up and areas of needed improvement can be identified (Bafumo, 2003; Bloomstran, 2002;

Carter & Wojkiewicz, 2000; Garcia, 2001). Once areas of possible miscommunication or misalignment are discovered, effective plans for improving circumstances can be implemented (Center for Research on the Education of Students at Risk, 1997; Clark & Clark, 1993; Gestwicki, 2004; Lawson, 2003).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to collect, analyze, and compare perceptions of parent and school administrators on school, family, and community partnerships in the middle school setting. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered in order to get a holistic view of the topic. The null hypothesis of the study was that there is no significant difference in the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school, family, and community partnerships as indicated by survey results ( $H_0$ : parent perception = school administrator perception). The alternative hypothesis was there is a significant difference in the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school, family, and community partnerships as indicated by survey results ( $H_1$ : parent perception  $\neq$  school administrator perception).

The following research questions served as parameters in the investigation.

1. What do parents perceive to be the nature and extent of school, family, and community partnerships in their schools?
2. What do school administrators perceive to be the nature and extent of school, family, and community partnerships in their schools?
3. How do the perceptions of parents and school administrators regarding school, family, and community partnerships compare?

4. What actions do administrators and parents suggest would improve school, family, and community partnerships?

An exploratory design that incorporated qualitative and quantitative data was used in this study. Parallel surveys developed from Sanders, Epstein, and Salinas' *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey* were given to parents and school administrators from three public middle schools in the State of Louisiana (Salinas, Epstein, Sanders, Davis, & Albersbaes, 2009). Document analyses and interviews were then used in this study after identifying areas of discrepancy in parent and administrator perceptions.

### **Quantitative Data**

Quantitative data were gathered with parallel surveys given to parents and school administrators from three public middle school settings in the State of Louisiana. When used as parallel surveys, with the same questions posed to both school administrators and parents, the instrument can be used to determine areas of convergent and divergent perceptions regarding family-school relations in particular school settings (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2007).

As noted in Table 3, seven surveys were given out to school administrators which included the principals and assistant principals from each of the three schools. A total of 85.7% of the school administrator surveys were returned. Approximately 59% of the 300 parental surveys distributed were returned.

Table 3

*Survey Return Rate*

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Participants	Surveys Sent Out	Responses	Percent
School Administrators	7	6	85.7
Parents	300	178	59.3

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Three principals and three assistant principals completed the school administrator surveys. The demographics of the respondents were similar to the demographics of the administrators at the selected schools. As noted in Table 4, the school administrator respondents included male and female, as well as, African-American and white administrators. Respondents had administrative experience ranging from four years to over ten years and educational experience ranging from ten to more than 20 years.

Table 4

*School Administrator Demographics*

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	<u>Gender</u>		<u>Ethnicity</u>		<u>Educational Experience</u>		<u>Administrative Experience</u>			
	Male	Female	African American	White	11-15	20+	1-3	4-6	7-9	10+
Percent of Responses	33	67	17	83	17	83	17	50	17	17

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The three schools involved in this study were made up of a diverse population of students. According to parent survey data, an equally diverse population of students

was represented in the survey portion of this study. As noted in Table 5, an average of all three schools revealed 37% the parents participating in the survey had students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, whereas, 63% had students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. In addition, 53.3% of the parents answered the survey questions pertaining to their daughters and 46.7% pertaining to their sons. Although not identical to the ethnic make-up of the schools, the ethnicity of the participants involved in the parental surveys represented a diverse student population.

Table 5

*Student Demographics from Parent Surveys*

	School A	School B	School C	Average
7 <sup>th</sup> grade	49%	33%	29%	37%
8 <sup>th</sup> grade	51%	67%	71%	63%
Male	45%	40%	53%	46.7%
Female	53%	60%	47%	53.3%
African-American	41%	29%	47%	39%
American Indian		2%		<1%
Asian		2%		<1%
Hispanic	1.6%	2%		1.2%
White	57%	61%	53%	57%
Other Ethnicity	0	4%	0	1.3%

The first section of the survey was made up of 52 multiple choice questions which were used to assess participants' perceptions of current school practices regarding school-family partnerships. Section one of the survey requested participants to rate their perceptions of school and family partnership aspects with Likert-scales ranging from 1 to 5. Low levels of agreement were ranked with the number one and high levels of agreement were ranked with the number five. Survey questions from section one were categorized into six groups based on Epstein's (2009) framework of six types of involvement.

Based on scores from the parallel surveys, independent t-tests were performed for each of the six categories in section one and for each individual question in section two. Responses of parents and school administrators were evaluated by conducting t-test analyses to compare mean differences between the two populations. The level of significance used in this study was 0.02. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program was used to determine if there were any statistically reliable differences in the mean responses of parents and school administrators for the categories and questions of the surveys.

The first survey category analyzed was parenting. Questions 1 through 7 on the surveys were classified as parenting questions. Epstein (2009) defines parenting as the process which helps families understand adolescent development and establish home environments that support education. Also included in the definition of parenting is the expectation of schools to have families help them understand cultures, goals, and history of students.

In this study in the category of parenting, as noted in Table 6, equal variances *t*-test results indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean perceptions of school administrators ( $M = 3.571$ ,  $SD = 0.682$ ) and parents ( $M = 2.436$ ,  $SD = 0.892$ ),  $t(182) = 3.085$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\alpha = .02$ . These results show that the null hypothesis can be rejected while findings fail to reject the alternative hypothesis. These results led to the conclusion that school administrators perceived parenting aspects as significantly higher than parents in regard to school, parent, and community partnerships in the middle school settings of this study.

Table 6

*Parenting Component: Survey Questions 1-7*

	Mean	SD	Significance
Administrator	3.571	0.682	
Parent	2.436	0.892	0.002

A closer look into the category of parenting revealed various results for survey questions 1-7, as noted in Table 7. Analysis of question 1 showed there were no significant differences in perceptions of parents and school administrators in all three schools regarding workshops conducted on child or adolescent development. Question 3 had two schools with statistically significant differences in perceptions of parents and school administrators regarding usable information provided for all families. There were no significant differences in parent and school administrator perceptions regarding question 4, which addressed how schools ask families for information about their children's strengths, goals, and talents. Only School C had significant differences in



perceptions of parents and administrators for questions 2, 5 and 6, which dealt with providing usable information to all families who want it, sponsoring home visiting programs or neighborhood meetings, and providing information to support learning conditions at home. All three schools showed statistically significant differences in parent and administrator perceptions for question 7, which addressed how the schools respect different cultures.

Table 7

*Parenting Component: Mean, SD, and Significance*

Survey Questions		<u>Administrators</u>		<u>Parents</u>		Sig
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
1. Conducts workshops or provides info. for parents on child or adolescent dev.	A	1.500	0.707	2.290	0.948	0.248
	B	3.000	0.000	2.185	0.848	0.184
	C	3.000	0.000	2.170	0.950	0.225
2. Provides information to all families who want or need it.	A	3.500	2.121	2.600	0.976	0.218
	B	3.500	0.707	2.296	0.768	0.034
	C	5.000	0.000	2.333	0.986	0.000
3. Produces info. for families that is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school.	A	4.500	0.707	2.810	0.931	0.014
	B	4.000	1.414	2.870	0.933	0.102
4. Asks families for information about children's goals, strengths, and talents.	A	4.000	0.000	2.484	1.112	0.060
	B	3.500	0.707	2.370	0.853	0.071
	C	3.000	0.000	2.328	0.962	0.331
5. Sponsors home visiting programs or neighborhood meetings	A	1.000	0.000	2.307	1.095	0.099
	B	1.500	0.707	2.315	0.722	0.123
	C	4.000	1.414	2.153	0.867	0.005
6. Provides families with info. on developing home conditions that support learning.	A	3.500	2.121	2.581	0.950	0.197
	B	2.500	0.707	2.296	0.944	0.765
	C	5.000	0.000	2.525	0.942	0.000
7. Respects the different cultures represented in our student population.	A	4.500	0.707	2.619	0.991	0.010
	B	4.500	0.707	2.574	0.792	0.001
	C	5.000	0.000	2.328	0.995	0.000

Survey questions 8 through 20 represent topics dealing with the communicating portion of family, school, and community partnerships. In the communication aspect, the focus is on two-way communication conduits between home and school. In the communicating component of this study, equal variances *t*- test results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean perceptions of school administrators ( $M = 4.078$ ,  $SD = 0.598$ ) and parents ( $M = 2.718$ ,  $SD = 1.031$ ),  $t(182) = 3.207$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\alpha = .02$ , as noted in Table 8. The null hypothesis can be rejected, according to these test results. There was a difference in perceptions of parents and school administrators from the schools in this study regarding communication. The findings fail to reject the alternative hypothesis, resulting in the conclusion that there was a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of school administrators and parents regarding the communicating in regard to school, parent, and community partnerships in the middle school settings of this study.

Table 8

*Communicating Component: Survey Questions 8-20*

	Mean	SD	Significance
Administrator	4.078	0.598	
Parent	2.718	1.031	0.002

A closer look into questions 8-20, revealed many questions yielding differences in perceptions of parents and administrators, as noted in Table 9. Even though there was a significant difference in perceptions for the category as a whole, some of the questions did reveal no statistically significant differences in perceptions.

Table 9

*Communicating Component: Mean, SD, and Significance*

Survey Questions		Administrator		Parent		Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
8. Develops comm. with parents who do not speak English	A	3.000	2.828	2.576	0.969	0.569
	B	3.500	0.707	2.423	0.825	0.075
	C	4.000	1.414	2.418	0.994	0.033
9. Provides written comm. in the parents' language and provides translators	A	3.500	2.121	2.241	1.014	0.099
	B	3.000	1.414	2.453	0.932	0.424
	C	5.000	0.000	2.473	1.034	0.001
10. Has clear two-way channels for comm. between school/home.	A	4.500	0.707	2.660	1.039	0.016
	B	4.500	0.707	2.444	0.904	0.003
	C	5.000	0.000	2.590	1.070	0.002
11. Conducts a formal conference with every parent at least once a year.	A	2.000	1.414	2.823	1.249	0.364
	B	2.500	2.121	2.793	1.026	0.702
	C	4.500	0.707	2.640	1.155	0.028
12. Conducts annual survey to share info. And concerns about student needs	A	2.000	1.414	2.468	1.097	0.557
	B	2.500	0.707	2.463	0.966	0.958
	C	3.500	0.707	2.574	0.865	0.149
13. Conducts an orientation for new parents.	A	4.500	0.707	2.661	1.130	0.026
	B	3.500	2.121	2.574	0.838	0.149
	C	5.000	0.000	2.517	1.066	0.002
14. Sends home student work weekly or monthly for parent review and comment.	A	3.500	2.121	2.921	1.154	0.495
	B	3.500	0.707	2.611	1.054	0.244
	C	3.000	2.828	2.867	1.186	0.881
15. Provides clear info. about curriculum, state tests, school - student results, report card.	A	4.500	0.707	2.905	1.241	0.077
	B	4.500	0.707	2.698	0.912	0.008
	C	5.000	0.000	2.885	1.142	0.012
16. Contacts families of students having academic or behavior problems.	A	5.000	0.000	2.903	1.264	0.023
	B	4.500	0.707	2.556	1.058	0.013
	C	5.000	0.000	3.083	1.078	0.015
17. Uses e-mail and the school website to communicate with parents	A	5.000	0.000	2.871	1.166	0.013
	B	5.000	0.000	2.667	1.046	0.003
	C	5.000	0.000	2.918	1.130	0.012
18. Values family involve. and work on ways to build positive ties between school and home.	A	5.000	0.000	2.726	1.133	0.007
	B	4.000	0.000	2.556	0.861	0.022
	C	5.000	0.000	2.695	1.038	0.003
19. Has policies for teachers to comm. with parents about curr, expectations, how parents can help.	A	5.000	0.000	2.790	1.073	0.005
	B	5.000	0.000	2.667	0.777	0.000
	C	5.000	0.000	2.983	1.137	0.016
20. Produces a regular school newsletter with up-to-date information about the school and parenting tips.	A	3.500	0.707	2.794	1.050	0.350
	B	2.000	1.414	2.528	0.846	0.398
	C	5.000	0.000	2.881	1.099	0.009

Questions 8, 11, and 14 has no significant difference in opinions at any of the schools. Those three questions dealt with developing communication with parents who do not speak English well, conducting formal conferences with every parent at least annually, and sending home student work for parent review. For questions 13 and 20, conducting orientation for new parents and producing regular school newsletters with parenting tips, School C was the only school that had misaligned perceptions.

In addition, analysis of questions 9, 15, 16 and 18, all had statistically significant differences in perceptions with parents rating the questions lower than administrators in only two of the schools. Those questions addressed written communication in the parents' language, providing clear information about curriculum and tests, contacting families of students having academic or behavior problems, values family involvement, and work to build positive ties between home and school. The rest of the questions, numbers 10, 12, 17 and 19, showed that all three schools had administrators who rated the questions significantly lower than parents. The areas addressed in these questions include clear two-way channels of communication; annual surveys to share information and concerns about student needs; using e-mail and the school website to communicate with parents; and policies for teachers to communicate with parents about curriculum and expectations.

The third category of family-school partnerships analyzed in this study was volunteering. Data pertaining to volunteering were collected from survey questions 21 through 28. Volunteering refers to family participation in activities that support the school and students. The school's responsibility in regard to parental volunteering includes recruiting parents, organizing activities, providing support to volunteers, and

assessing volunteering programs (Epstein, 2009). An overall analysis using an equal variance *t*-test of the volunteering component, as noted in Table 10, indicated that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean perceptions of school administrators ( $M = 2.938$ ,  $SD = 0.574$ ) and parents ( $M = 2.427$ ,  $SD = 0.969$ ),  $t(181) = 1.281$ ,  $p = .202$ ,  $\alpha = .02$ . These results show that the tests fail to reject the null hypothesis. These data result in the conclusion that there was no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of school administrators and parents for volunteering.

Table 10

*Volunteering Component: Survey Questions 21-28*

	Mean	SD	Significance
Administrator	2.938	0.574	
Parent	2.427	0.969	0.202

An in depth look into the category of volunteering, as noted in Table 11, revealed that not only did the overall component of volunteering result in no significant differences in perceptions, there were no individual schools that had any significant difference in perceptions at on any of the questions. These outcomes reveal that the perceptions of parents and administrators in each of the three schools regarding volunteering were not significantly different from one another.

Table 11

*Volunteering Component: Mean, SD, and Significance*

Survey Questions		<u>Administrators</u>		<u>Parents</u>		Sig
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
21. Conducts annual surveys to identify interests, talents, and availability of parent volunteers.	A	2.500	0.707	2.307	1.049	0.797
	B	3.000	0.000	2.278	0.811	0.217
	C	3.000	1.414	2.633	1.104	0.648
22. Provides a parent room for volunteers and families to meet and work, and to access resources	A	4.000	1.414	2.450	1.032	0.042
	B	2.000	0.000	2.415	0.908	0.524
	C	2.000	1.414	2.523	1.251	0.562
23. Creates flexible volunteering opportunities and schedules, enabling for employed parents	A	3.500	0.707	2.393	0.988	0.123
	B	3.500	0.707	2.389	0.787	0.055
	C	2.500	0.707	2.155	0.854	0.576
24. Schedules special events at different times of the day and evening	A	4.000	1.414	2.425	1.088	0.050
	B	2.000	1.414	2.407	0.790	0.048
	C	3.500	0.707	2.300	1.030	0.109
25. Reduces barriers to parent participation by providing trans. and child care, and ELA needs	A	1.500	0.707	2.159	0.971	0.354
	B	2.500	0.707	2.296	0.816	0.485
	C	3.000	1.414	2.088	0.987	0.208
26. Trains volunteers so they can use their time productively	A	3.000	1.414	2.583	1.013	0.572
	B	3.000	1.414	2.352	0.781	0.729
	C	2.500	2.121	2.193	0.990	0.677
27. Recognizes volunteers for their time and efforts.	A	3.500	2.121	2.517	1.081	0.221
	B	3.500	0.707	2.404	.0823	0.264
	C	3.000	2.828	2.259	0.947	0.311
28. Encourages families to be involved with the school in various ways	A	2.000	0.000	2.672	0.870	0.283
	B	3.000	0.000	2.327	0.901	0.069
	C	4.000	1.414	2.373	0.963	0.023

Learning at home perceptions were determined with responses from questions 29 through 35 of the survey. Involving parents or families with homework and encouraging schools to design homework policies that enable students to share home learning tasks with families are the activities that make up the learning at home component (Epstein, 2009). In this study, regarding the perceptions of parents and school administrators for school, family, and community partnerships in the category of

learning at home, as noted in Table 12, equal variances *t*-test results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean perceptions of school administrators (M =3.476, SD = 0.884) and parents (M = 2.613, SD = 0.935),  $t(180) = 2.227$ ,  $p = .027$ ,  $\alpha = .02$ . These results indicate that the *t*-tests fail to reject the null hypothesis, leading to the conclusion that there was no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of school administrators and parents regarding the component of learning at home for school, parent, and community partnerships in the three middle school settings of this study.

Table 12

*Learning at Home Component: Survey Questions 29-35*

	Mean	SD	Significance
Administrator	3.476	0.884	
Parent	2.613	0.935	0.027

The component of learning at home was made up of seven questions, numbered 29-35 on the survey, as noted in Table 13. Of those seven questions, four of them had *t*-test results that indicated no statistically significant differences in perceptions of parents and school administrators in any of the schools. However, three of the questions, numbers 30, 31, and 33, had one school with significant differences in perceptions of parents and school administrators. Those questions involved providing information to families on skills for major subjects, providing information to parents on how to assist students with skills that need to improve, and assisting families in helping students set academic goals and selecting courses or programs. Survey questions 36 to

45 collected data on parent and school administrator perceptions of decision making practices as they relate to school, family, and community partnerships. For the shared decision making aspect, the goal is to include parents and students as participants in school governance, decisions, and advocacy through parent organizations, school improvement teams, and committees (Epstein, 2009).

Table 13

*Learning at Home Component: Mean, SD, and Significance*

Survey Questions		<u>Administrators</u>		<u>Parents</u>		Sig
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
29. Provides information to families on how to monitor and discuss school work at home.	A	3.000	1.414	2.525	1.010	0.518
	B	3.500	0.707	2.462	1.038	0.300
	C	4.000	1.414	2.733	0.936	0.067
30. Provides information to families on required skills in major subjects.	A	4.000	0.000	2.833	1.137	0.155
	B	3.000	0.000	2.500	0.804	0.169
	C	4.500	0.707	2.569	1.011	0.010
31. Provides information to parents on how to assist students with skills that need to improve	A	4.000	0.000	2.717	10.27	0.085
	B	3.000	1.414	2.623	0.925	0.388
	C	4.500	0.707	2.610	0.788	0.001
32. Asks parents to focus on reading, listen to children read, or read aloud with their child	A	3.500	2.121	2.790	1.073	0.372
	B	3.500	0.707	2.415	0.929	0.578
	C	3.500	2.121	2.383	0.940	0.115
33. Assists families in helping students set academic goals and select courses and programs.	A	4.500	0.707	2.721	0.951	0.011
	B	2.500	0.707	2.463	1.004	0.109
	C	3.500	2.121	2.633	0.823	0.166
34. Provides information and ideas for families to talk with students about postsecondary plans.	A	4.000	1.414	2.661	1.070	0.089
	B	2.000	0.000	2.623	0.882	0.959
	C	4.000	1.414	2.433	0.909	0.021
35. Schedules regular interactive homework requiring discussion with a family member.	A	2.500	0.707	2.823	.0950	0.637
	B	2.500	0.707	2.531	0.884	0.327
	C	2.000	1.414	2.433	0.909	0.515

Table 14 notes in the category of decision making, the equal variances *t*-test results indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean



perceptions of school administrators ( $M = 3.424$ ,  $SD = 0.802$ ) and parents ( $M = 2.336$ ,  $SD = 0.951$ ),  $t(180) = 2.768$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ,  $\alpha = .02$ . These results show that the null hypothesis can be rejected while findings fail to reject the alternative hypothesis. Resulting in the conclusion, that school administrator perceptions of decision making in terms of school, parent, and community partnerships in the middle school settings of this study were significantly higher than the perceptions of parents as demonstrated by  $t$ -tests.

Table 14

*Decision Making Component: Survey Questions 36-45*

	Mean	SD	Significance
Administrator	3.424	0.802	
Parent	2.336	0.951	0.006

A detailed analysis of each question in the decision making component identified diverse results from survey questions 36 – 45, as noted in Table 15. There were four questions that had no significant differences; questions 36, 42, 43, and 45. Those questions addressed an active PTO, social networks, parents involved in decision making, and contact for less involved parents. Questions 39 and 40 had one school only with significant differences in perceptions, which covered involving parents in planning programs, and reviewing school and district curricula. Questions 37, 41, and 44 had two schools with differences in perceptions, which were including parents on the school's council and committees, recruiting parent leaders from all ethnic groups, and dealing with conflict openly and respectfully. Only one question received  $t$ -test scores

that were significant in all three schools, question 38, in which schools have parents represented on district-level councils and committees.

Table 15

*Decision Making Component: Mean, SD, and Significance*

Survey Questions		Administrators		Parents		Sig
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
36. Has an active PTA, PTO, or other parent organization.	A	1.500	0.707	2.746	1.212	0.156
	B	3.000	0.000	2.203	0.898	0.954
	C	3.500	2.121	2.525	1.056	0.216
37. Includes parent reps on the school's council or other committees.	A	4.500	0.707	2.377	1.083	0.008
	B	4.000	0.000	2.185	0.754	0.219
	C	5.000	0.000	2.085	0.970	0.000
38. Has parents represented on district-level council and comm.	A	4.500	0.707	2.167	1.076	0.004
	B	3.000	0.000	2.170	0.753	0.001
	C	5.000	0.000	2.052	0.963	0.000
39. Involves parent in organized, ongoing ways in planning/improving programs.	A	3.000	0.000	2.180	1.073	0.288
	B	3.000	0.000	2.204	0.877	0.128
	C	4.500	0.707	2.017	0.956	0.001
40. Involves parents in reviewing school and district curricula.	A	4.000	1.414	2.186	1.106	0.027
	B	3.000	1.414	2.204	0.762	0.209
	C	4.500	0.707	2.133	0.947	0.001
41. Recruits parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, and other groups in the school.	A	4.000	1.414	2.397	0.917	0.019
	B	1.500	0.707	2.148	0.833	0.161
	C	4.500	0.707	2.102	1.012	0.002
42. Develops formal social networks to link families with their parent rep.	A	2.500	0.707	2.138	0.963	0.602
	B	2.000	0.000	2.377	0.925	0.284
	C	3.000	2.828	2.086	0.978	0.226
43. Includes students with parents in decision making	A	4.000	1.414	2.279	1.051	0.027
	B	4.500	0.707	2.692	0.961	0.570
	C	4.500	0.707	2.123	0.946	0.001
44. Deals with conflict openly and respectfully	A	4.500	0.707	2.831	1.003	0.023
	B	2.000	10414	2.423	0.871	0.011
	C	4.500	0.707	2.542	1.134	0.019
45. Guides parent representatives to contact less involved parents	A	1.500	0.707	2.439	1.019	0.203
	B	0.000	0.000	2.283	0.818	0.510
	C	3.000	2.828	2.283	1.043	0.367

The final component of the *Six Types of Involvement* framework is collaborating with the community. Community collaboration was assessed using data from questions 46 through 52. Involving community requires coordinating services and resources for parents, students, and the school with community members including businesses, service organizations, and government agencies (Epstein, 2009). In the category of parenting, as noted in Table 16, equal variances *t*-test results indicate that there is a no statistically significant difference between the mean perceptions of school administrators ( $M = 3.139$ ,  $SD = 1.171$ ) and parents ( $M = 2.450$ ,  $SD = 0.928$ ),  $t(180) = 1.774$ ,  $p = .078$ ,  $\alpha = .02$ . These results show that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected; resulting in the conclusion that there was no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of school administrators and parents regarding the aspect of parenting in regard to school, parent, and community partnerships in the middle school settings of this study.

Table 16

*Collaboration Component: Survey Questions 46-52*

	Mean	SD	Significance
Administrator	3.139	1.171	
Parent	2.450	0.928	0.078

A closer look at each individual question in the collaboration component for each of the three schools in this study revealed that most of the responses were consistent, as noted in Table 17. Two of the seven questions, number 46 and 49,

yielded results that showed no significant differences in perceptions from any of the school settings.

Table 17

*Collaboration Component: Mean, SD, and Significance*

Survey Questions	School	<u>Administrators</u>		<u>Parents</u>		Sig
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
46. Develops school plan of family/comm. involve. with input from parents	A	3.000	0.000	2.339	0.976	0.346
	B	2.000	0.000	2.426	0.882	0.224
	C	3.500	2.121	2.170	0.968	0.069
47. Provides a resources directory on community services, and programs.	A	2.500	2.121	2.373	0.945	0.857
	B	2.500	0.707	2.472	0.846	0.501
	C	4.500	0.707	2.190	0.926	0.001
48. Involves families in locating and using community resources	A	3.000	1.414	2.475	1.006	0.474
	B	2.500	0.707	2.278	0.763	0.963
	C	4.500	0.707	2.328	0.906	0.001
49. Works with local businesses, to enhance student skills and learning.	A	2.000	1.414	2.533	1.033	0.478
	B	2.000	1.414	2.389	0.787	0.687
	C	4.000	1.414	2.333	10.84	0.038
50. Provides one-stop shop at the school for family services	A	1.500	0.707	2.300	10.30	0.282
	B	1.500	0.707	2.444	0.718	0.504
	C	4.500	0.707	2.317	0.948	0.002
51. Offers afterschool programs with support from community.	A	1.000	0.000	2.232	1.021	0.074
	B	5.000	0.000	2.604	1.025	0.073
	C	4.500	0.707	2.373	1.049	0.006
52. Views parents as important partners.	A	4.500	0.707	2.733	0.918	0.009
	B	4.000	0.000	2.389	0.787	0.003
	C	4.500	0.707	2.617	1.027	0.013

Only School C had significant difference in questions 47, 48, 50, and 51. Those questions addressed providing resource directories on community services, involving families in locating and using community resources, providing a one-stop shop at

school for family services, and offering afterschool programs with support from community. One question, number 52, in the collaboration component had significant differences in perceptions of parents and school administrators. Question 52 stated that the school views parents as important partners.

### **Qualitative Data**

For the qualitative section of this study, open-ended survey questions, interviews, and documents were used to help clarify and further investigate parental involvement perceptions of parents and school administrators. Five school administrators and 21 parents from the sample of participants surveyed in the quantitative portion of the study were interviewed. In order to select parents for the interview portion of the study, information cards requesting names and phone numbers were given out to all survey participants. From the 39 returned information cards, seven parents were randomly selected from each of the three schools. All school administrators were invited to participate in the interview; however, after several requests, only five chose to participate. Various documents were also analyzed in the qualitative section of this study. The documents were obtained from school administrators, school and district websites, school improvement plans, and school handbooks.

Two open-ended survey questions made up the first aspect of the qualitative study. The questions were included on the parent and school administrator surveys given out to 300 parents and seven administrators. The first question asked, "Do you have any additional comments or concerns pertaining to school, family, and community partnerships at your child's school?" The second question asked, "Do you have any

recommendations for improving school, family, and community partnerships in your child's school?" Responses to these questions from parents and school administrators were evaluated to determine if there were any recurring themes. These results along with the quantitative results were used to help develop interview questions. There were several categories that emerged once the responses were analyzed. School and district documents, including school parental involvement plans, website data, school handbooks, and parish policy manuals, were then analyzed for data pertaining to school, family, and community involvement data.

### **Qualitative Survey Responses**

The data from the documents, along with the analysis of the two open-ended questions, and the results of the quantitative portion of the study were used to develop interview questions for parents and school administrators. The responses to interview questions were then combined with all previously gathered data to determine areas similar and different perceptions of parents and school administrators.

#### **Parenting**

In the category of parenting, several topics were identified when the initial two open-ended survey questions were analyzed. One of the topics detected in the parenting component was the misaligned views of some parents and school administrators regarding the extent of parental involvement needed for middle school students. Some parents tended to believe that middle school students should be independent and parents should take a more passive role in school involvement by the time students reach middle school. One parent stated, "I don't think parents need to be as involved once they reach 7<sup>th</sup> grade. It is time for them to grow up and be more independent." Another

parent stated, “Teenagers want to be on there [*sic*] own. There is not much we can do as parents and schools to make them let us help out. They need to just feel their way through like we all did at their age.” School administrator statements tended to advocate more parental support; as noted in this administrator statement, “Typically at the middle school level, many parents let go thinking that they do not need to be involved as much as they were at the elementary level. It couldn’t be farther from the truth.” Several parents also tended to side with administrator perceptions on this topic, one noting the schools, “Need more parent involvement.”

Even though some parents agreed with school administrator perceptions in terms of the need for parental involvement, it also emerged that parental views of how the schools address cultural differences, special needs of students, and assistance for parents who want to be more active in the education of their middle school children were topics of concern. Some parents felt that the schools were not meeting the needs of their children or supporting them as parents. One parent noted, “Children have special needs but schools don’t do it. My kids got more help before junior high. Junior High don’t care. They throw them kids in with the sharks. Swim or sink you are on your own,” noted one parent. While another stated, “A willingness for the school to listen more to the concerns of parents, be willing to try non-traditional learning experiences, assess each student for their attributes, consider that each student learns differently and try new approaches, never give up on a child or label that child.”

In terms of respect of the different cultures represented in the schools, parents noted, “No respect for different cultures,” and “Not enough resources for my minority child.” One African-American parent volunteer noted, “Our children need role modles

[sic] to help them see other people like them in the school doing something besides cleaning and serving food.” Parents also seemed to be asking for assistance on how to help their children with school. One parent stated, “One suggestion would be to offer some parenting classes/opportunities, especially at different times so all parents have an opportunity to participate.”

### **Communicating**

The next aspect of family, school, and community partnerships explored was communicating. Most of the comments made by parents on the two open-ended survey questions pertained to perceived problems with communication between school and families. One of the themes that surfaced was parents’ perceptions on frequency and tactics of contacts made by the schools to parents, as well as, availability of educators to communicate with parents. Some of the parental comments regarding frequency of communication included, “They could send more letters home and call the parents often,” and “School officials do not communicate pertinent information about students in a timely manner.” In terms of communication tactics, parents stated, “Find ways to communicate with parents better” and “School officials need to improve on notifying parents when grades are dropping.” Parents also indicated that there were issues with availability of school employees for meeting and speaking with parents as noted by this parental comment, “There is a closed door policy at this school and no communication between teachers and parents.”

All of the schools in this study conduct some of their communication with parents over the Internet through Oncourse or Parent Connect. Both systems are designed for schools to use to keep in contact with parents. Teachers and school



administrators use the systems for posting homework assignments, behavior, lesson plans, and student grades. Parents can then access their children's grades, assignments, and behavior via the Internet. One theme that emerged from the survey questions pertains to how the parents and administrators perceived the effectiveness of communication made through the Internet. One school administrator noted, "Having a good website that is interactive helps with communication. That is why I purchased "on course" with staff members' individual web sites to help parents be more informed and provide another means of information and communication between parent and teacher." While the administrator comments tended to rate the technology communication as an asset, some of the parent comments tended to rate it as a liability. One parent noted, "I think the school is doing fine with this. The only problem may be with parents who can't access the internet. I wouldn't even know my daughter's grades if I didn't check them on the internet." Other parents noted, "Often times parents are unaware of what goes on with school functions. It would be beneficial if things were posted on the school's website. The most current information received on the website are student grades," and "Not all homes have computers to use. I cannot see my grandson's grades unless I by [*sic*] a computer and put on the phone line to it. We have no money for that mess. We want to know the grades without all that."

### **Volunteering**

Volunteering was the next component addressed in the review of responses to survey questions. The volunteering themes that emerged in the analysis of the open-ended questions were parent comments that suggested an interest in more active

parental roles in the school and administrator's comments regarding parental motives for and types of volunteering parents are willing to conduct for volunteering.

Many comments were made by parents stating they were interested in more active roles in the school, including one parent's response, "Get the families involved and you will have more of what you need. My children have come here from a private school where there is even less money available and the parents have less time because they have to work more to pay for the schooling . However, because we were all expected and interested in being part of the education of our kids, there was always plenty to go around."

The next area being addressed for the volunteering component is the perceived motives for and types of volunteering parents are willing to conduct. One school administrator stated, "At the middle school level many parents tend to volunteer when it comes to extracurricular activity as opposed to the general day to day support during the school day." An administrator also noted, "When a parent sometimes wants to volunteer in their child's classroom at the middle level, it is not so much as want to help the teacher and their child but wanting to spy on the teacher for wrong doings." However, parents tended to make comments requesting more involvement in all areas of volunteering, as evident in this parental comment, "I suggest involving parents more in decision making, PTO, committees, planning for the kids future and after school activities. We are here, willing and able." In addition, one parent noted, "Now that my son is in jr. highs, its [*sic*] like they don't want the parents at the school. I only go now when there is a conference set up or a open house. I like to run off the papers and see my son in the hall at school. It made me proud and him. I don't know why the school

doesn't want us around. It would seem like the bigger the kid the bigger the trouble and the more help you would want."

### **Learning at Home**

On the topic of learning at home, few comments were made by parents and none by administrators on the open-ended survey questions. Generally, the parental responses addressed the need for more specific expectations and resources from the school. One parent commented, "I recommend that the schools provide more resources for us on the development of our children. How are we supposed to provide a positive at-home learning environment when we don't know exactly what our children are learning and what level they should be at?" While another noted, "More computers are needed and if the kids need them at home then the schools need to send the labtops [*sic*] home. I also want a copy of books at home like we used to have so I can study up while they are at school." Finally, one parent noted, "I think if I could get my child's work before tests that I can help them study and hopefully eventually do better overall."

### **Decision Making**

In the decision making component, several topics emerged during the evaluation of the open-ended survey questions. The most prevalent decision making category to emerge came from the comments regarding parent teacher organizations (PTO) or parent teacher associations (PTA). School administrators and parents made comments noting the need for active PTO groups. "Would like PTA to be established and maintained," stated one administrator. Parent comments included, "We need a PTO that allows all parents to help," and, "The PTO should be for all parents and teachers

and not just for those off of work with expensive cars and houses and name-brand clothes.”

Parent responses also noted perceptions regarding a lack of shared decision making and an interest in taking on more active decision making roles. One parent commented, “I would like to truly see a partnership with school and home. I don’t see it. They make all the decisions and force them on us, like it or not.” One parent also noted, “Families are being pushed further and further away. I want to be part of the decision process for the school and the state to get my say so about my children’s education.” Additional one parent stated, “We have no voice or representation in this school. In our old school, we were part of the process of education. Here nothing.” Another parent stated, “We need to have more parent leaders take part in committee and school decision making. Include families in deciding matters such as uniforms, attendance, tardies.”

### **Collaboration**

In the collaboration aspect, many of the parents made comments noting the perceived need to include the community in school partnerships. One parent noted, “We have very little partnership here. The military bases, Wal-Mart, etc. girl scouts could help out – why don’t we ask for it?” While another indicated the possible benefits for getting more parents involved through community incentives. “Offer incentives from community partnerships, I know not many parents would be involved, but the few that are reached make a difference. Also, utilize military volunteers for support. They do a great job helping out the schools.” School administrators had no comments regarding community involvement on their surveys. The themes uncovered

in the analyses of the responses to the open-ended survey questions and the documents were then used to develop interview questions for parents and school administrators.

### **Themes**

The final aspects of the qualitative portion of this study were the document evaluation and interviews. Document evaluation was conducted throughout the study. The researcher collected school parental involvement plans, website data, school handbooks, and district policy manuals from the school administrators, district parental involvement coordinators, and school websites. From the document review, survey discussion question responses, and quantitative responses several probing interview questions were developed for parents and administrators. Interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2010. The questions presented to both groups of participants were similar in nature. As noted in Table 18, thirteen probing questions were asked in each interview. Additional questions were asked after many of the probing questions to clarify answers or get more in depth responses. The additional questions were unique for each interview.

Analysis of the interview responses, documents, and open-ended survey responses by the two independent researchers revealed the emergence of several themes. The first theme noted by the researchers was misaligned perceptions of parents and administrators regarding levels of needed middle school parental involvement. Basically, many parents tended to feel that their middle school children needed or wanted little parental involvement. When asked about taking on a more active role in their child's education, one parent stated, "I think the part I play now is sufficient because my child is at the age where they don't want me to be there at the school."

Table 18

*Probing Interview Questions*

Parent Questions	School Administrator Questions
<p>1. Could you describe what kind of communication you have had with this school over the past year?</p> <p>2. Have you gone to PTA or other types of school meetings over the past year? Could you describe the meetings and frequency?</p> <p>3. How does the school contact you when they have academic or behavioral concerns about your child? Who contacts you?</p> <p>4. Do you use the school website to get information regarding the school? How effective is the school website?</p> <p>5. How would you describe the relationship you have with the school? Are you comfortable going into the school?</p> <p>6. Are the school's or teachers' expectations communicated to you? How is this done?</p> <p>7. How does this school respect the different cultures and special needs represented in the student population?</p> <p>8. Have you been asked to participate in decision making? How do you feel about being part of the decision making process?</p> <p>9. Do you feel as a parent you are viewed as an important partner? Why or why not? Would you like to have a more active role?</p> <p>10. How does the school deal with conflict?</p> <p>11. What school practice to involve parents has helped you the most? What is one thing your family could do to help school?</p> <p>12. What is the best thing this school could do next year to help increase parental involvement?</p> <p>13. Do you have any other comments, ideas or suggestions?</p>	<p>1. Could you please give insight as to how the school communicates with parents on a regular basis?</p> <p>2. Parents noted that the school had no active PTO. If this practice was altered, how would it affect current practices?</p> <p>3. In regard to academics and behavior, how does the school contact parents? Who contacts?</p> <p>4. How frequently do you contact parents with email or through websites? How do teachers contact parents with technology?</p> <p>5. Are there any specific activities initiated by the school in order to build positive ties between school and home?</p> <p>6. Are there any policies that encourage all teachers to communicate with parents regarding expectations?</p> <p>7. How does this school respect the different cultures and special needs represented in the student population?</p> <p>8. How are parents represented on district-level advisory council or committees?</p> <p>9. In what ways could a middle school let parents know that they are viewed important partners?</p> <p>10. Could you describe how conflict involving students and/or teachers and /or parents is typically resolved?</p> <p>11. Parents noted they would like to be more involved with encouragement and training. What is your view?</p> <p>12. How could middle school administrators help to increase parental involvement needs?</p> <p>13. Do you have any other comments, ideas or suggestions?</p>

Schools generally maintain the importance of strong parental involvement ties in the middle school years. When asked about the need for parental involvement, school administrators frequently stressed the need for strong parental involvement as noted in their school or district parental family involvement policies. All three schools had policies at the school and/or district level detailing parental involvement policies and procedures. All parental involvement policies reviewed noted tactics to increase parental involvement in the middle school setting.

The next emergent theme discovered related to reasons why there is less parental volunteering taking place in the schools than desired. Both groups of participants, parents and administrators, made comments noting a desire for more family volunteering. However, the parents tended to explain their lack of involvement based on decisions made by the school, while administrators tended to reason the lack of involvement based on decisions made by parents. Many parents felt that the school did not have policies in place to welcome parent volunteers to take part in the workings of the school. One parent noted, "I have been to the school but you can't make it past the office. I couldn't get to any of my son's teachers or anything due to the closed door policy." School administrators noted that requests were made to have parents volunteer, but frequently parents signed up to volunteer and then did not show up. Administrators also tended to perceive their schools as a place where parents are "Greeted warmly and respectfully." Another obstacle cited as to why there tends to be a perception of limited parental volunteering was the lack of flexibility. School administrators tended to cite evening opportunities for parent conferences and orientation events as flexible parental involvement activities; whereas parents tended to request more opportunities to assist

with school activities in the evenings and on weekends. One parent noted that working parents needed to have flexible volunteering options, "Give them the opportunities to volunteer... it would make all of the schools better and make the child's attitude better."

The next two themes discovered related to communication components. The first theme revealed a disconnect between communication methods deemed effective by schools and used consistently by parents. Many parents reported using technology components to communicate with schools sparingly, while administrators reported technology components as one of the primary means of communication with parents. While schools seemed to view websites and email as an effective way to communicate with large numbers of families, some families lacked the necessary technology components to access student grades, behavior, homework assignments, and communication with schools. Some of the parents were not educated on how to use the existing programs. When one parent was asked if she uses school provided technology, she responded, "No ma'am, but my girls do. They use it so they can check their grades." Several other parents noted having no computers or Internet access at home to check the website. Both the interview responses and school documents noted the online availability of school policies and procedures, homework assignments, grades, upcoming events, standardized testing data, and communication links for faculty that were all provided by the schools. Even though accessed by many of the parents, there was a gap noted in the use of technology resources and communication by several families.

The next emergent theme in the category of communication was the feeling by parents that there was a lack of personal communication with educators. Parental



perceptions regarding this aspect include educators initiating personal communication only when there is a problem, failure of educators to return communication requests, defensive responses by educators, and overuse of automated systems. Both administrators and parents stated that personal communication between school and family tended to occur primarily when there were problems concerning student behavior and occasionally with there were student academic concerns. One parent stated, "The only time I communicate with the school is when my child has a problem at school." School handbooks and online policy manuals outlined procedures for contacting parents when students have behavioral issues; however, there were no noted policies for personal communication with families otherwise, besides progress reports and report cards.

Even though all administrators noted a policy of encouraging or requiring educators to communicate with parents on a regular basis, parents perceived a lack of personal communication initiated by teachers and administrators, as well as, a failure to get replies to their communication requests. One parent stated, "So as far as a teacher calling, I never got a personal call from a teacher for any reason." Parents tended to feel there was a lack of interest by educators to return phone calls and emails as noted by this parent, "I did go one time for an open house and the two teachers that I specifically went to talk to at time, both teachers were not present. So I left messages to get them to call me back and I actually got one to call me back. The other one I never heard from." Some parents did report positive personal communication interactions with teachers; however, some of those parents reported having little success with communicating with administrators. "I had a few of the teachers there that I had open

communication with through email, but as far as the administration, I guess they were so wrapped up in bad kids they really did not have the time for what was going on with good kids,” explained a parent. On the other hand, administrators reported adequate parental communication. One administrator stated, “Most of our teachers are active and reach out to the needs of all families, because they know our students are more likely to experience success in school when teachers work to involve parents.”

Several parents perceived the lack of personal communication as a defensive act by school administrators. One parent stated that schools should, “Be more open and it seems like when you talk to them they have a tendency to feel that you are attacking them when you are really just trying to find out information. They always seem like they are protecting themselves from something.” Discussions on this topic with school administrators revealed their perceptions that parents may have questionable motives behind parental involvement and a failure of parents to stay informed regarding current educational trends. One administrator stated some parents want to, “Have information to gossip.” While another stated, “Parents are not knowledgeable about subject matter.”

Many parents also commented that over the past school year the only verbal communication they had with the school was through an automated system. Administrators tended to rate the automated system as a positive aspect used to communicate with parents when students were absent, when work was missing, or when low grades were achieved. Many of the parents also viewed the automated system as a positive component to effective communication; however, some of the parents felt as though the automated system replaced any personal communication with the schools. One parent stated, “The only communication you have with the schools is the parent

command center that you log on yourself and check. They don't call you or email you or send anything home. He had to take it upon himself to tell me but there was no contact from the school.”

Another theme that emerged during the analysis of the interview responses was the practice of communicating with parents through their children. Many of the parental perceptions noted that they get most of the information concerning curriculum, expectations, instruction, discipline, assessment, and school culture from their children instead of from educators. When asked if the school's or teachers' expectations were communicated clearly, one parent noted, “They don't let me know. My child tells me what she has to do.” Administrators tended to agree with parents regarding this aspect. One school principal stated, “It is really hard as they get older to be sure that information is getting home to the parents. That the child is getting it home, but there usually is no other way to do it.” However, some parents reported obtaining pertinent information from school provided documents, including the school handbook and website. When asked about how well the school communicates expectations, one parent stated, “I would say it is communicated well, but at the beginning of the school year they gave out a handbook and it is up to the parents to read it. I guess I know because I read the handbook.” One parent is quoted as saying, “If it was on the command center I would know but otherwise if my child decided not to tell me, I wouldn't have a clue.”

A disconnect between how much decision making involvement parents should have and how much they currently get was the next emergent theme. A few parents stated they had been asked to participate in school based decision making committees.

However, the majority of parents interviewed noted not having any invitation to participate. All administrators stated that their schools have parents on school and district decision making committees. According to school administrators, some of the parents are selected for those committees by administrators and some of the parents are volunteers. However, most of the parents reported not being active in the decision making processes of the school. One parent is quoted as saying, “We don’t decide if this is not right or their authority. We have no say so. Whatever the school decides that is what we have to abide by.” Parents stated in various ways that they want to be more involved in the educational decisions that affect their children. When asked what types of things they would like to have more input about, responses included all aspects of the school including curriculum, policies and procedures, assessment, and instruction. When asked what kind of decision making she would like to be more involved in, one parent noted, “All of it to be honest with you. To be more involved with the school. You know I was always involved until we went to Louisiana then I kind of felt that block. Just overall involvement, with the homework, to know what is going on in the classroom, everything.”

Overall, the themes noted several issues with communication, a lack of consensus between parents and administrators regarding student autonomy, and misaligned perceptions about parental volunteering and shared decision making.

### **Summary**

The focus of this study was to compare parent and school administrator perceptions of school, family, and community partnerships for middle school students. Data were gathered from parallel surveys, interviews, and documents. A

comprehensive analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data revealed varied results. The quantitative analysis revealed statistically significant differences in perceptions for three of the six major components of parent, school, and community partnerships in the three schools. Overall, t-test comparisons of parent and administrator perceptions for the components of parenting, communicating, and decision making were all statistically significant ( $\alpha = .02$ ); while the components of volunteering, learning at home, and collaboration components were not.

The qualitative analysis, which was comprised of open-ended survey questions, interview responses and document analysis, resulted in several overall emergent themes. The first theme discovered noted the misaligned perceptions of school administrators and parents concerning levels of needed middle student autonomy. A desire by school administrators and parents for more parental volunteering was the second theme to emerge in this study. One of the themes discovered in the component of communication, addressed a disconnect between communication methods deemed effective by schools and used effectively by parents. Also, there was a theme that noted parents perceived a lack of personal communication with educators. The next theme was the perceived inadequacy of the practice of schools sending correspondence to parents through their children. The final theme discovered in this study was a disconnect between how much decision making parents should have and how much they currently get.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to collect, analyze, and compare perceptions of parent and school administrators on school, family, and community partnerships in the middle school setting. Data were gathered from parents and school administrators from three public middle schools in the State of Louisiana through analysis of parallel surveys, interviews, and relevant documents. For the quantitative portion of the study, school administrators and parents completed parallel surveys. The null hypothesis of this section of the study was that there would be no significant difference in the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school, family, and community partnerships as indicated by survey results ( $H_o$ : parent perception = school administrator perception). The alternative hypothesis was there would be a significant difference in the perceptions of parents and school administrators in regard to school, family, and community partnerships as indicated by survey results ( $H_1$ : parent perception  $\neq$  school administrator perception). For the qualitative portion of the study the open-ended survey questions, interview responses, and documents were analyzed. Qualitative and quantitative components were incorporated in this study in order to get an in-depth look at parent and school administrator perceptions of school and family partnerships in middle school setting and analyze any areas of discrepancy of perception that may need further attention.

This study was based on prior studies conducted by researchers at John Hopkins University and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997). The primary basis for this study is based on the Epstein's *Theory of Overlapping Spheres* (1995) developed by a team of researchers from Johns Hopkins led by Epstein. Basically, Epstein and associates conceptualized school, home, and community as intertwined areas in which a child learns. The second of Epstein's theories is the *Six Types of Involvement* framework which cites six specific areas of parental-school-community partnerships and explains how each component affects the educational process of students (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, et al., 2009). The third framework primarily used in this study is Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's *Parent Role Construction Theory*, which states generally that the behavior of parents are based on their own belief system and expectations made by those around them, including peers and educators.

The following research questions served as parameters in the investigation of the problem stated.

1. What do parents perceive to be the nature and extent of school, family, and community partnerships in their schools?
2. What do school administrators perceive to be the nature and extent of school, family, and community partnerships in their schools?
3. How do the perceptions of parents and school administrators regarding school, family, and community partnerships compare?
4. What actions do administrators and parents suggest would improve school, family, and community partnerships?

In this study, statistically significant differences in perceptions of parents and school administrators were detected in three of the six components analyzed in the quantitative analysis; the differences were noted in parenting, communicating, and decision making. In addition, statistically significant differences were also noted in several of the questions in each component. The qualitative analysis resulted in several overall emergent themes. Misaligned perceptions of school administrators and parents concerning levels of middle student autonomy, a desire by school administrators and parents for more parental volunteering, a disconnect between communication methods deemed effective by schools and used effectively by parents, a perception that there is a lack of personal communication with educators, and perceived inadequacy of the practice of schools sending correspondence to parents through their children, and requests for more shared decision making by parents were all themes discovered through analysis of the interview responses, open-ended survey answers, and documents.

### **Research Findings**

The findings of this study are discussed following the parameters established with the research questions: The first research question asked what parents perceive to be the nature and extent of school, family, and community partnerships in their children's schools. The parents who participated in this research study seemed to have a positive interest in their children's education. Over 90% of parents who completed the surveys agreed that parental involvement is important for a good school and for student success in school. However, many parents were unsure about how much involvement they should contribute for their middle school age children; there was a dilemma



regarding balance between parental involvement and children's autonomy. Also, parents reported that they wanted more opportunities to volunteer and increased shared decision making in their children's education. Parents stated that they felt as though they are generally passive participants in the decision making processes and are required only to follow the policies and procedures established by schools. Parents also noted that unless student behavioral problems occur, communication was limited to online resources and automated phone calls delivered through the school's technology based grading system. About half of the parents interviewed stated they were comfortable with their relationship with the school and about half were uncomfortable. Many parents were interested in opening more communication channels between home and school; some parents claimed to have experienced unreturned phone calls and email by teachers. Parents also felt there was some favoritism based on family or cultural association in the school setting.

The second research question asked, "What do school administrators perceive to be the nature and extent of school, family, and community partnerships in their schools?" The school administrators who participated in this study tended to feel that parental involvement was very important for middle schools; when surveyed over 90% agreed that parental involvement is important for a good school and for student success in school. However, administrators tended to believe that parents were not interested in more partnership with the schools. When administrators were asked on the survey to give their opinion about the statement "parents of children at this school want to be involved more than they are now," over 75% of administrators disagreed. School administrators did note that many parents typically are less involved in the middle

school then they were in the lower grades. Administrators seemed to feel that their role in the communication process with parents was to contact parents when problems arise with students, to send out newsletters, and to respond to parental requests for communication. However, they tended to leave the personal communication, including email correspondence, to the teachers. Administrators felt the amount of decision making shared with parents was sufficient. They reported selecting some parents and allowing some to volunteer to serve on school and district committees.

The third research question asked, “How do the perceptions of parents and school administrators regarding school, family, and community partnerships compare?” Of the six parent/school components outlined in this study, t-tests results noted statistically significant differences in three areas of parenting, communicating, and shared decision making. Overall, the three areas of volunteering, learning at home, and community involvement showed no statistically significant difference in parent and school administrator perceptions. However, when specific questions from each component were analyzed there were some areas of significance in some of those areas as well.

One parenting area of significant difference in opinion discovered in this study deals with producing information for families that is clear, usable, and linked to children’s success in schools. Even though all of the school administrators responded in the interviews that they do provide parent newsletters and most provide parental information online, parents disagreed with that declaration. During this study school, teacher, and district websites from each of the schools were reviewed. All three schools provide detailed information on their websites including school calendars, standardized

testing information, school report cards, online grading and attendance systems, homework assignments, links to educational materials, and school manuals containing policies and procedures. When questioned in-depth about that disconnect in perceptions, some parents either did not have access to the Internet or did not know how to use the websites.

Showing respect for different cultures in the school was another area that had significant differences in parent and administrator perceptions in the parenting category. Administrators tended to rate the school's level much higher than parents did on this topic. However, when questioned, most parents stated that they thought the school was doing just fine with this issue or that they did not know how the school handled different cultures in the school setting. Some parents did note favoritism for students from certain ethnic backgrounds or from particular families of higher socioeconomic status in the school.

In the category of communication, there were several themes that emerged, as well as, several areas of statistically significant differences in perceptions that were detected. The themes discovered in the portion of the study were a disconnect between communication methods deemed effective by schools and used consistently by parents, information being conveyed to parents primarily through students, and parental perceptions that there is a lack of personal communication with educators. The survey questions that were rated higher by administrators than parents were clear two-way channels of communication between families and schools, e-mail and the school website to communicate with parents, and policies for teachers to communicate with parents about curriculum, expectations, and how parents can help. Although using the

automated systems and technology components to communicate with parents is one available resource, schools must not get into the mindset that it is the only resource necessary. Obviously, from the parental responses in this study, parents are requesting more personal and consistent contact. The U.S. Department of Education's *Reaching All Families* (1996) guidebook suggests that implementation of a positive telephone communication school wide system is an effective tool to add to the arsenal. It is a way in which to speak with parents on a personal level. To be most effective, parents need to receive at least two or three positive phone calls over the course of the school year. A generally easy concept, a positive phone call program does require time on the part of the teachers and administrators. To ensure continued support from parents, schools need to return phone calls and reply to emails. It is important that parents not only receive appropriate information and that they get it frequently and in a timely manner (Gestwicki, 2004).

The next areas to be discussed in the communicating component were misaligned perceptions of the manner in which the school values family involvement and works on ways to build positive ties between school and home, as well as, how the schools provides clear information about curriculum, state tests, school and student results, and school report cards. Many parents responded in this process that they were unhappy with the focus on standardized tests and unsure about expectations. However, standardized testing requirements are not determined by the schools. Mandates are handed down to school administrators from the school districts who get their mandates handed down from the State of Louisiana Department of Education who base their decisions regarding standardized testing on federal requirements, including No Child

Left Behind mandates (NCLB, 2001). Many parents tended to feel as though it was the schools against the families and students in terms of standardized testing. However, the findings suggest with more open lines of communication and positive ties, those misconceptions may be minimized. In order to find a system which meets the needs of the parents, which would be active involvement in their children's education, and the needs of the administrators, which includes open and positive communication lines with parents, clear messages need to be sent out by the schools informing parents of the need for partnerships between all stakeholders (Gestwicki, 2004). Parents need to know that their parental support for the school's policies and educational philosophy are needed. The school and family need to work together to clearly define parental involvement and to develop partnership activities that complement one another. The school responsibilities for helping parents to understand they are a welcome and necessary component to the educational process is to include clearly communicating policies and objectives, take parental concerns seriously, keep parents informed consistently and promptly, and include parents as active and equal partners. The parental responsibilities that will help clearly define parents as integral parts of the educational process include sharing time and knowledge with the school, working cooperatively in the decision making process, communicating appropriately and promptly, and staying informed about the criteria involved with the educational system (Jackson, Andrews, Holland, & Pardini, 2004).

Shared decision making was an area of concern that came up in the qualitative and quantitative portion of the study. There was an emergent theme noting a disconnect between how much decision making parents should have and how much they currently

get in the three schools. Parents tended to want a more active role at the school and district level, while administrators tended to believe parents had sufficient roles. This misalignment can be due in part to how school and district volunteers are selected. Schools tended to select parent representatives in many cases; while many of the parents were unsure if there were any representatives and only two parents in this study noted ever having been asked to participate in any decision making for the school or district. Also, over the past century in the American public school setting schools have labeled themselves as the authority on education and have nearly pushed parents out of the equation. The parents' role has primarily been to assist with homework and get their children to school ready to learn. All major decisions tend to be made by school or district administrators, leaving parents out of the loop. Such practices may lead to varied expectations of shared decision making by parents and administrators (Belfield & Levin, 2001). Recruiting parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, and other groups in the school was also an area of misalignment noted in this study. Research suggests having volunteers of varied cultural backgrounds in order to expose students to adults that look different than the majority. Emphasis should be placed on getting volunteers from all backgrounds represented in the student population. Just as students are living and learning in a country where all cultures coexist, having adults present in the school from all cultural backgrounds, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, or disability helps to eliminate barriers, immerse students into a diverse environment, and provide role models to which all students can relate (*Diversity Activities for Middle School*, 2009).

Two major themes that emerged during the qualitative portion of this study revealed that parents and school administrators noted less parental volunteering taking place than desired and incongruent perceptions as to the levels of needed parental involvement for middle school students. Many parents felt justified in pulling away from school partnerships for adolescents because they noted the need for more independence by their children. Even though volunteering tends to decrease as students enter middle school, the U.S. Department of Education claims that more parents would volunteer if more opportunities to stay involved were offered to parents of adolescents (Alt & Choy, 2000). Some of the school administrators noted concerns about the reasons behind offers to volunteer by parents, stating some parents wanted to spy on teachers to catch them messing up or to find out what is happening in the social setting of the students. However experts agree that effectively planned and implemented volunteering programs can be a rich asset for schools. Epstein defines effective parental involvement as a way to incorporate parental assets while connecting them in meaningful partnerships in learning, school governance and community unity (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein, et al, 2009; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

Finally, the last research question asked, “What actions do administrators and parents suggest would improve school, family, and community partnerships?” Parents who took part in the study suggested an open door policy that would allow parents to communicate with teachers and administrators. Parents also recommended sending folders home on a weekly basis with graded papers, assignments, and communication from the schools. One parent summarized statements made by many when she said, “Allow all families and kids to be involved in activities, not just certain ones.” In all

three schools, parents and school administrators recommended establishing and maintaining an active parent teacher organization (PTO). Two of the schools did not have active PTOs and one school did not have one at all. Administrators also recommended sending positive messages to parents in the form of mail-outs or phone calls. In addition, they suggested conducting surveys similar to the one used in this study at the beginning of each school year asking for parental input.

### **Recommendations for Action**

There is little purpose in determining areas of shortage unless plans are developed and implemented to correct them. Recommendations for this study are discussed based on the six components of parental involvement used throughout the study. In terms of parent-school relations, parenting, communicating, and decision making were the major areas of misaligned perceptions discovered in this study.

### **Recommendations for Sharing Information with Parents**

In the parenting component, one area of significant difference in opinion deals with producing information for families that is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in schools. Even though all of the school administrators responded that they do provide parent newsletters and parental information online, parents in two of the three schools disagreed significantly with that statement. Many schools rely on the school website to convey information to parents. The analysis of the school documents included reviewing the school and district websites. All three of the schools had information for families that were linked to student success, including policies and procedures, teacher web pages, standardized testing requirements, and online grade reporting systems. Even though many of the parents reported using the websites, in this



study there were several parents who did not have access to the school website or who did not know how to use the websites. One recommendation would be to mail informational letters home to parents or to publish information in school or local newspapers so that parents can access it easily. Schools could also set up technology training to facilitate parents. Parents can also look in the community for help with technology components. Many public libraries provide free Internet access and technology training classes.

### **Recommendations for Improving Cultural Awareness**

In the category of parenting there was also a misalignment in perceptions dealing with how the school shows respect for different cultures. One recommendation to increase parental perceptions regarding respect for different cultures would be to set up zero tolerance policies and practices in schools regarding negative culture related behaviors by students, educators, and visitors. Also, school administrators can work to maintain varied cultural representation on school committees and volunteer groups. According to the Diversity Council of Rochester, Maryland (2009), schools can also set up activities for students and families to promote cultural acceptance and understanding, including multicultural fairs, research projects on different cultures, intolerance projects, and guest speaker events.

### **Recommendations for Improving Two-Way Communication**

The communication component in this study revealed the greatest areas of misaligned perceptions. Parents rated the schools significantly lower than administrators in the areas of clear two-way channels of communication between families and schools, using e-mail and the school website to communicate with parents, and policies for

teachers to communicate with parents about curriculum, expectations, and how parents can help. These areas also correlate with qualitative results from this study that noted a disconnect between communication methods deemed effective by schools and used consistently by parents, information being conveyed to parents primarily through students, and parental perceptions that there is a lack of personal communication with educators. Recommendations to correct these areas are to increase communication efforts, especially one-on-one communication, with parents. Mass emails to parents by school administrators and teachers, updating school websites regularly, and making contacts with parents through phone calls and notes regularly are all methods that can be incorporated. Parents and administrators all noted personal contact with parents generally occurs only when there are academic or behavioral concerns. Some parents had not personally spoken to any educators in their children's school or visited the school at all throughout the previous school year; many of those parents communicated no problem with that situation because they perceived their children as well-behaved and therefore not in need of communication. School administrators expressed the same perceptions, stating they primarily contacted parents personally when there were concerns. Schools can help to dispel that perception by increasing positive contacts with parents, including personal phone and notes to parents instead of only communicating when there is a problem. Families and schools can work toward more personal connections by making contacts early on, sending notes of gratitude, and praising positive efforts and behavior of students frequently.

### **Recommendations for Improving Communication Techniques**

One reason behind these disagreements in perception may be the manner in which the information is sent to parents, which ties into one of the qualitative themes also discovered in this study, where parent views were that they receive most of the information regarding school expectations, culture, and activities from their children. One recommendation is to change the manner in which the information is sent between home and school. Schools tend to send letters and other pertinent information home with students. Unfortunately, much of that information may not make it to parents. In lower grades, teachers frequently use a folder system for sending information home to parents with their children, where parents get accustomed to checking folders daily. However, that system is not normally used in the middle school setting. Adolescents tend to be viewed as more autonomous therefore resulting in educators' dependence on them to deliver documents to their parents and often times to return them to school. One recommendation would be to continue the folder system into middle school. A way to accommodate the need for adolescents' maturity may be to use school planners instead of folders. Middle schools students can then record important information in the planners, while documents can be put into pockets in the planner. School policies can be developed that require parent and teacher signatures on the planners to denote that information has been delivered appropriately.

### **Recommendations for Sharing Expectations**

When asked in the survey to rate their perceptions of how effectively the schools provide information about curriculum, state tests, school and student results, and school report cards, many parents responded that they were unhappy with the focus on

standardized tests and unsure about expectations. The disconnect in perceptions may be narrowed by communicating the high-stakes standards required of schools, explaining grading procedures, and clueing parents in as to how those two factors affect student success. The schools can help to bridge the gap by sharing the knowledge, either through seminars, letters, technology correspondence, phone calls, or meetings with parents. Schools may consider providing workshops or parent testing nights where information can be shared. The schools, school districts, and the Louisiana Department of Education are providing curriculum, testing, and school report card information online; however, parents need to be aware of this information, how to find it, interpret it, and use it. By opening other channels of communication, as noted previously in this study, schools can provide this information to parents.

### **Recommendations for Building Positive Ties**

The last area to be discussed in the communicating component is how parents and administrators perceive the value placed on family involvement and how the school works on ways to build positive ties between school and home. Olmsted (1991) recommends discussing attitudes about parental involvement with educators, setting expectations and requirements for teachers establishing goals that meet the needs of the school and families, and including several types of parental involvement activities. Another recommendation is to assess board and school policies to be sure they are set up in a manner that encourages parental involvement and approve budgets for support. Trust-building, flexibility, responsive listening, individual attention to students and families, nurturance, mutual respect, problem solving processes, and consistency are

also imperative ingredients in building positive ties between families, schools, and community (Swick, 2003).

### **Recommendations for Increasing Shared Decision Making**

The decision making component was also an area of misaligned perceptions detected in this study. Specifically, one theme in this study noted that parents tended to perceive less than adequate amounts of shared decision making; while school administrators tended to rate the shared decision making as adequate. Also, an item on the survey noted misaligned perceptions on the topic of including parent representatives on school and district level committees and councils. Olmsted (1991) recommends including equal numbers of parents and school personnel in the governing of schools ensuring all parties are active participants and helping to develop a sense of ownership for all. Recruiting parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, and other groups in the school is also an area that can increase shared decision making perceptions by parents. Socioeconomic or cultural differences can cause fear, uncertainty, or uneasiness in potential parental leaders. Opening lines of communication, embracing cultural differences, providing translators when needed, and having an open-door policy for visitors can help minimize these issues (Barbour, Barbour, & Scully, 2005). In order to foster district level parent leaders, many researchers recommend clearly defining roles, developing leadership checklists, action plans for partnerships, and adjustment of roles and responsibilities when necessary. Another recommendation would be to develop a school climate of respect for differences and strengths in others (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Totto et al., 2001; Lezotte & Mckee, 2002).

### **Recommendations for Increasing Parental Volunteering**

The quantitative analysis revealed that some areas of the parental involvement strategies and practices being used in all three of the schools seem to be overall successful. Those areas were volunteering, home learning, and community involvement. However, the qualitative analysis revealed that parents and school administrators noted less parental volunteering taking place than desired.

Recommendations include creating a school spirit of collaboration, encouragement, and gratitude by inviting parent and community volunteers to participate in more aspects of the educational process, providing assistance when needed, and celebrating successful partnerships (Brooks, 2001; Olsten & Fuller, 2003). The Parents as Teachers (PAT) organization also suggests creating school-based community involvement centers to recruit and train volunteers, offer parent involvement workshops, and possibly paying a parent volunteer coordinator. Schools can make volunteers feel more welcomed by setting up parent lounges, offering drinks, and student escorts when appropriate. Also, making flexible volunteering opportunities would be helpful for working parents in accommodating their schedules. Parents can help to improve the volunteering aspects by notifying schools about their strengths and talents that can be advantageous to the learning environment, notifying other parents of school volunteering opportunities and activities and volunteering to work on projects that can be done at home to support educators and students (Parents as Teachers, 2009).

### **Recommendations for Aligning Perceptions**

There was also a theme discovered in this study noting misaligned perceptions of parents and school administrators in terms to levels of needed parental involvement

for middle school. Many parents felt justified in pulling away from school partnerships for adolescents because they noted the need for more independence by their children by that age. However, school administrators noted just the opposite. Adolescents still need to know that significant adults, including parents and teachers, are interested in their lives (Clark & Clark, 1993). Studies have shown that parents' partnership levels were dependent on their perceptions of how much involvement the schools and their children requested. Therefore, recommendations for balancing out these perceptions are to increase opportunities for parental involvement and to encourage students to take part in developing and implementing parental involvement activities. Also, it is recommended for schools to share information on research based developmental needs of adolescents and for parents to seek out such information. This knowledge will empower parents to understand more accurately how much parental involvement is needed by adolescents.

### **Recommendations for Evaluating Parental Involvement Plans**

Overall, recommendations for the three schools involved in this study would be to consider the parent-school partnership evaluation process as ongoing. Inventory of parent, school, and community partnerships should be conducted on an annual basis to create awareness for all stakeholders. Short-term plans should be developed and implemented along with long term goals. Once plans are developed and implemented, ongoing effective communication with all stakeholders, the celebration of accomplishments or milestones, and the evaluation of outcomes should also be conducted (Sanders, 2001).

### **Significance of the Study**

The term “school, family, and community partnerships” is viewed differently by many of the key players in the educational process. The goal of this study was to gain an in-depth look into the similarities and differences in the perceptions of parents and school administrators in the middle school setting of three schools in Louisiana and to gain an understanding of successful practices and possible remedies to any obstacles that may be uncovered in the research process. The research findings of this study are noteworthy because school administrators rated their school’s efforts to partner with parents in the categories of parenting, communicating, and decision making significantly higher than parents. These results led to the conclusion that in those three schools, the efforts and attempts of educators to include parents as partners are not as effective as they could be. Sometimes in the educational process, policies and procedures are put into place without follow-up to determine if they are as effective. Even though each school had a parental involvement plan, the research results indicate that school-family partnership plans should possibly be considered as formative and not cumulative. There should be an ongoing policy of evaluation to determine which areas of the parental involvement plans are effective and where changes should occur. The research results from this study can be used by school administrators as a springboard for taking notice of differences in perceptions and implementing necessary change in their parental involvement plans.

In addition, this research study is significant because it adds to the existing body of knowledge by analyzing and comparing perceptions of middle school parents and administrators on the topic of school, family, and community partnerships. It allowed



for a probing look into the aspects of parent opinion while at the same time included a frequently overlooked stakeholder, the school administrator in the process. Since school administrators are key school leaders and policy makers, they play an active role in school-family partnerships (Hoerr, 2008). With the knowledge discovered in this research study, administrators can set up new approaches to school, family, and community collaboration by increasing communication, shared-decision making, and parental assistance. Parents can gain empowerment by having their opinion voiced. The research results allow for bridges to be built by both groups of stakeholders in order to facilitate more successful collaboration for the benefit of the students.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

This study collected, analyzed, and compared perceptions of parent and school administrators on school, family, and community partnerships in three middle schools in the State of Louisiana. In order to get a detailed look into the perceptions of stakeholders along with reasons behind and suggestions for such perceptions, only three schools were included in this study. Since there were only two or three administrators in each school, the population size of school administrators was low. The relatively small sample size of school administrators limits the generalizability of the findings of this study to the three schools that took part. Since specific areas of parent, school, and community involvement have been identified in this study, future in-depth research focusing in one specific aspect with larger population would contribute to the current body of knowledge. The perceptions of school administrators regarding school-family partnerships is an area that is not frequently addressed in research. Therefore, this study focused on parent and school administrator perceptions only. However, in order to

attain a more holistic picture, it would be beneficial to include additional stakeholders in future research projects, including teachers, students, district administrators, local business owners, and community service representatives. Additional perspectives would likely reveal more varied information regarding aligned and misaligned perceptions of school, family, and community partnerships and how those perceptions affect the educational process.

Demographic data were collected in this study to ensure the sample was similar to the population of students and administrators in each school. However, a more detailed analysis comparing parental involvement aspects to specific demographic factors for students, parents, and administrators could reveal patterns of perceptions laid out along demographic attributes. In order to address reasons behind misaligned perceptions, specifically looking at parental involvement perceptions compared to grade point average of students, marital status of parents, number of years in school administration, and other demographics along those lines may provide pertinent data and suggestions for improving such relations.

Another area of possible future research may include longitudinal studies that follow a particular school or family over several decades. Investigating how much parental involvement has taken place in a specific school setting over several decades may uncover themes how parental involvement relates to specific actions in each school; examples may include themes noting tradition or cultural values in the school setting or manners in which new policies are incorporated or communicated. Also, since Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's *Parent Role Construction Theory* (1997) contends that one of the major predictors to parental involvement is the prior experience

of the parents and peer involvement of other adults relevant to the parents, that area may also offer up a substantial amount of data with longitudinal studies. *The Parent Role Construction Theory* states that parents tend to practice what they have experienced, thus leading to generation after generation of consistent behavior. It would be interesting to research how much relevance parent's experience with their own parents' involvement in the educational process affects how they view parental involvement partnerships.

One additional recommendation for future research would be to conduct somewhat of a pre-test, intervention, then post-test situation in the three schools that participated in this study. This study would then be considered as somewhat of the pre-test component. Then the schools and parents would incorporate strategies to address the noted misaligned areas of partnership discovered in this study for a one to two year period; which would be the intervention. Next, another similar study to this one would be conducted as the post-test. The results from this study and the post-test could be evaluated to determine how much, if any, change occurred after the intervention.

### **Summary**

School, family, and community interactions are frequently described as circles overlapping in specific areas with one another. This researcher has found the symbolism of plant nourishment to also be a representation of how adults' school, family, and community partnerships affect the development of a child. Most plants require soil, water, and sunlight to grow, just as school, family, and community are integral parts of a child's nourishment. The amount and quality of each element affect the growth of the plant, just as the amount and quality of the home, school, and

community affect the growth of the child. However, at times a deficiency in one element can be overcome by an abundance in another. If there is too much sunshine, extra watering may be just what the plant needs. Some plants can even grow without soil, with very limited water, and with small amounts of sunshine even when not intended to do so. The key to how well the plant will survive depends on adjustments made to the growing conditions to make up for deficits. When shifting to the nurturing of a child, the same types of adjustments can be made. When there is a deficit in the school setting for certain children, adjustments can be made in the home or community to help meet the child's needs. The same goes for deficits in the home setting. However, in order to make such adjustments, alliances are necessary. Only through holistic collaboration can the needs of the child be discovered and the adjustments made. Through open communication channels, information sharing parent-school partnerships, and shared decision making, parents, schools, and community members can find their way toward true collaboration designed to reach each and every student and help all children achieve their highest goals.

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**APPENDIX A**

**ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY**

Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships:  
School Administrator Survey

**This survey should be answered by a school administrator (i.e., principal or assistant principal).**

**Section I: This section asks you to rate your school. Circle one response for each question based on your views and experiences with this school.**

**Rating Explanation:**

- 1 - Never: Strategy does not happen at our school.
- 2 - Rarely: Conducted in one or two classes or with a few families. Strategy not emphasized.
- 3 - Sometimes: Conducted in a few classes or with some families. Minimal emphasis is given. Quality of implementation needs to improve.
- 4 - Often: Conducted in many classes, but not all or with many families, but not all. High quality of emphasis is given. Only minor changes needed.
- 5 - Frequently: Conducted in most or all classes with most or all families. Quality of emphasis is excellent.

Our school	Rating				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
1. Conducts workshops or provides information for parents on child or adolescent development.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Provides information to all families who want or need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Produces information for families that is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Asks families for information about children's goals, strengths, and talents.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Sponsors home visiting programs or neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Provides families with age-appropriate information on developing home conditions or environments that support learning.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Respects the different cultures represented in our student population	1	2	3	4	5
8. Develops communication with parents who do not speak or read English well, or need large print.	1	2	3	4	5



Our School	Rating				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
9. Provides written communication in the language of the parents and provides translators as needed.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Has clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Conducts a formal conference with every parent at least once a year.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Conducts an annual survey for families to share information and concerns about student needs, reactions to school programs, and satisfaction with their involvement in school and at home.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Conducts an orientation for new parents.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Sends home student work weekly or monthly for parent review and comment.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Provides clear information about the curriculum, state tests, school and student results, and report card.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Contacts families of students having academic or behavior problems.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Uses e-mail and the school website to communicate with parents	1	2	3	4	5
18. Values family involvement and work on ways to build positive ties between school and home.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Has policies that encourage all teachers to communicate frequently with parents about the curriculum, expectations for homework, and how parents can help.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Produces a regular school newsletter with up-to-date information about the school, special events, organizations, meetings, and parenting tips.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Conducts annual surveys to identify interests, talents, and availability of parent volunteers to match their skills and talents with school and classroom needs.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Provides a parent or family room for volunteers and family members to meet and work, and to access resources about parenting, tutoring, and related topics.	1	2	3	4	5

Our School	Rating				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
	23. Creates flexible volunteering opportunities and schedules, enabling employed parents to participate.	1	2	3	4
24. Schedules special events at different times of the day and evening so that all families can attend as audiences.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Reduces barriers to parent participation by providing transportation and child care, and addressing the needs of English language learners.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Trains volunteers so they can use their time productively.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Recognizes volunteers for their time and efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Encourages families and the community to be involved with the school in various ways (e.g., assist in classrooms, monitor halls, lead activities)	1	2	3	4	5
29. Provides information to families on how to monitor and discuss school work at home.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Provides information to families on required skills in major subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Provides specific information to parents on how to assist students with skills that they need to improve.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Asks parents to focus on reading, listen to children read, or read aloud with their child.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Assists families in helping students set academic goals and select courses and programs.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Provides information and ideas for families to talk with students about college, careers, and postsecondary plans.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Schedules regular interactive homework that requires students to demonstrate and discuss what they are learning with a family member.	1	2	3	4	5
36. Has an active PTA, PTO, or other parent organization.	1	2	3	4	5

Our School	Rating				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
37. Includes parent representatives on the school's council, school improvement teams, or other committees.	1	2	3	4	5
38. Has parents represented on district-level advisory council and committees.	1	2	3	4	5
39. Involves parent in organized, ongoing, and timely ways in planning and improving school programs.	1	2	3	4	5
40. Involves parents in reviewing school and district curricula.	1	2	3	4	5
41. Recruits parent leaders for committees from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school.	1	2	3	4	5
42. Develops formal social networks to link all families with their parent representatives.	1	2	3	4	5
43. Includes students with parents in decision making groups.	1	2	3	4	5
44. Deals with conflict openly and respectfully	1	2	3	4	5
45. Guides parent representatives to contact less involved parents for their ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
46. Develops the school's plan and program of family and community involvement with input from educators, parents, and others.	1	2	3	4	5
47. Provides a resources directory for parents and students on community agencies, services, and programs.	1	2	3	4	5
48. Involves families in locating and using community resources	1	2	3	4	5
49. Works with local businesses, industries, libraries, parks, museums, and other organizations on programs to enhance student skills and learning.	1	2	3	4	5
50. Provides one-stop shop at the school for family services through partnerships of school, counseling, health, recreation, job training, and other agencies.	1	2	3	4	5
51. Offers afterschool programs for students with support from community businesses, agencies, and volunteers.	1	2	3	4	5
52. Views parents as important partners.	1	2	3	4	5

**Section II:** This section asks about your personal views on parental involvement in the school setting.

Please circle the one choice for each item that best represents your experiences.

1. Parental involvement is important for a good school.	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2. Every family has strengths that could be tapped to increase student success in school.	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
3. All parents could learn ways to assist their children on schoolwork at home.	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
4. Parental involvement can help teachers be more effective with more students.	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
5. Parents of children at this school want to be involved more than they are now.	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
6. Parental involvement is important for student success in school	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4

**Section III:** Please circle one answer for each question below.

(a) How many years experience do you have as a school administrator (i.e. principal and/or assistant principal)?

1-3 years      4-6 years      7-9 years      10 or more years

(b) How many years experience do you have as an educator in total (as a teacher, administrator, etc.)?

1-5 years      5-10 years      11-15 years      16-20 years      more than 20 years

(c) What is your ethnicity?

African-American      American Indian      Asian      Hispanic      White      Other \_\_\_\_\_

(d) What is your gender?

Male      Female

(d) What is the highest degree you have earned?

Master's      Master's Plus 30      Specialist      Doctorate      other \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX B**

**PARENT SURVEY**

Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships:  
Parent Survey

**This survey should be answered by the parent or guardian who has the most contact with this school about your child based.**

**Section I: This section asks you to rate your school. Circle one response for each question based on your views and experiences with this school.**

**Rating Explanation:**

- 1 - Never: Strategy does not happen at our school.
- 2 - Rarely: Conducted in one or two classes or with a few families. Strategy not emphasized.
- 3 - Sometimes: Conducted in a few classes or with some families. Minimal emphasis is given. Quality of implementation needs to improve.
- 4 - Often: Conducted in many classes, but not all or with many families, but not all. High quality of emphasis is given. Only minor changes needed.
- 5 - Frequently: Conducted in most or all classes with most or all families. Quality of emphasis is excellent.

Our school	Rating				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
1. Conducts workshops or provides information for parents on child or adolescent development.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Provides information to all families who want or need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Produces information for families that is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Asks families for information about children's goals, strengths, and talents.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Sponsors home visiting programs or neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Provides families with age-appropriate information on developing home conditions or environments that support learning.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Respects the different cultures represented in our student population	1	2	3	4	5
8. Develops communication with parents who do not speak or read English well, or need large print.	1	2	3	4	5

Our School	Rating				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
9. Provides written communication in the language of the parents and provides translators as needed.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Has clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Conducts a formal conference with every parent at least once a year.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Conducts an annual survey for families to share information and concerns about student needs, reactions to school programs, and satisfaction with their involvement in school and at home.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Conducts an orientation for new parents.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Sends home student work weekly or monthly for parent review and comment.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Provides clear information about the curriculum, state tests, school and student results, and report card.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Contacts families of students having academic or behavior problems.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Uses e-mail and the school website to communicate with parents	1	2	3	4	5
18. Values family involvement and work on ways to build positive ties between school and home.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Has policies that encourage all teachers to communicate frequently with parents about the curriculum, expectations for homework, and how parents can help.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Produces a regular school newsletter with up-to-date information about the school, special events, organizations, meetings, and parenting tips.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Conducts annual surveys to identify interests, talents, and availability of parent volunteers to match their skills and talents with school and classroom needs.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Provides a parent or family room for volunteers and family members to meet and work, and to access resources about parenting, tutoring, and related topics.	1	2	3	4	5



Our School	Rating				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
23. Creates flexible volunteering opportunities and schedules, enabling employed parents to participate.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Schedules special events at different times of the day and evening so that all families can attend as audiences.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Reduces barriers to parent participation by providing transportation and child care, and addressing the needs of English language learners.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Trains volunteers so they can use their time productively.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Recognizes volunteers for their time and efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Encourages families and the community to be involved with the school in various ways (e.g., assist in classrooms, monitor halls, lead activities)	1	2	3	4	5
29. Provides information to families on how to monitor and discuss school work at home.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Provides information to families on required skills in major subjects.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Provides specific information to parents on how to assist students with skills that they need to improve.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Asks parents to focus on reading, listen to children read, or read aloud with their child.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Assists families in helping students set academic goals and select courses and programs.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Provides information and ideas for families to talk with students about college, careers, and postsecondary plans.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Schedules regular interactive homework that requires students to demonstrate and discuss what they are learning with a family member.	1	2	3	4	5
36. Has an active PTA, PTO, or other parent organization.	1	2	3	4	5

Our School	Rating				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
37. Includes parent representatives on the school's council, school improvement teams, or other committees.	1	2	3	4	5
38. Has parents represented on district-level advisory council and committees.	1	2	3	4	5
39. Involves parent in organized, ongoing, and timely ways in planning and improving school programs.	1	2	3	4	5
40. Involves parents in reviewing school and district curricula.	1	2	3	4	5
41. Recruits parent leaders for committees from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school.	1	2	3	4	5
42. Develops formal social networks to link all families with their parent representatives.	1	2	3	4	5
43. Includes students with parents in decision making groups.	1	2	3	4	5
44. Deals with conflict openly and respectfully	1	2	3	4	5
45. Guides parent representatives to contact less involved parents for their ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
46. Develops the school's plan and program of family and community involvement with input from educators, parents, and others.	1	2	3	4	5
47. Provides a resources directory for parents and students on community agencies, services, and programs.	1	2	3	4	5
48. Involves families in locating and using community resources	1	2	3	4	5
49. Works with local businesses, industries, libraries, parks, museums, and other organizations on programs to enhance student skills and learning.	1	2	3	4	5
50. Provides one-stop shop at the school for family services through partnerships of school, counseling, health, recreation, job training, and other agencies.	1	2	3	4	5
51. Offers afterschool programs for students with support from community businesses, agencies, and volunteers.	1	2	3	4	5
52. Views parents as important partners.	1	2	3	4	5

**Section II:** This section asks about your personal views on parental involvement in the school setting. Please circle the one choice for each item that best represents your experiences.

1. Parental involvement is important for a good school.	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
2. Every family has strengths that could be tapped to increase student success in school.	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
3. All parents could learn ways to assist their children on schoolwork at home.	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
4. Parental involvement can help teachers be more effective with more students.	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
5. Parents of children at this school want to be involved more than they are now.	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4
6. Parental involvement is important for student success in school	Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Agree 3	Strongly Agree 4

**Section III:** Please fill in the following information based on the oldest child that you have who currently attends this school. Circle one answer for each question.

(a) What is the grade-level of your child?

7<sup>th</sup> grade      8<sup>th</sup> grade

(b) What is the ethnicity of your child?

African-American      American Indian      Asian      Hispanic      White      Other \_\_\_\_\_

(c) Gender of your child?

Male      Female

(d) Your child's current grade point average?

4.0-3.5      3.4-2.5      2.4-1.5      1.5-0.5      below 0.5

(e) What is the annual income for your family?

Below \$25,000      \$25,000-\$49,000      \$50,000-\$74,000      \$75,000-\$99,000      \$100,000 or over



**APPENDIX C**

**SURVEY PERMISSION**



March 23, 2010

To: Jackie LeBlanc  
 From: Joyce L. Epstein, Lori J. Connors, Karen Clark Salinas, & Steven B. Sheldon  
 Re: Permission to use:

- Parent and Student Surveys on Family and Community Involvement in the Elementary and Middle Grades. (2007) S. B. Sheldon & J. L. Epstein
- Surveys and Summaries: Questionnaires for Teachers and Parents in the Elementary and Middle Grades. (1993) J. L. Epstein & K. C. Salinas
- High School and Family Partnerships: Surveys for Teachers, Parents, and Students in High School. (1993) J. L. Epstein, L. Connors-Tadros, & K. C. Salinas

This letter grants you permission to use, adapt, or reprint the surveys noted above in your study.

We ask only that you include appropriate references to the survey and authors in the text and bibliography of your reports and publications.

Best of luck with your work.

**APPENDIX D**

**LETTER OF CONSENT FROM SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

May 11, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

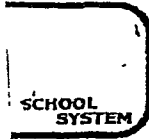
Under the direction of Louisiana Tech University, Jackie LeBlanc has approval to collect and use data from \_\_\_\_\_ Jr. High School's consenting parents and administrators using the survey instrument created by Johns Hopkins University titled *The Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey* and to conduct telephone interviews with parent and administrator volunteers. We have been assured that the school, school district, and participants in the study will remain anonymous.

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Schools  
Parish School Board



May 2010 10:31AM Superintendent's Office



PARISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

ROAD #      LOUISIANA  
TELEPHONE #      # FAX #

Superintendent

May 13, 2010

President of the Board

To Whom It May Concern:

Under the direction of Louisiana Tech University, Jackie LeBlanc has approval to collect and use data from Middle School's consenting parents and administrators using the survey instrument created by Johns Hopkins University title The Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey and to conduct telephone interviews with parent and administrator volunteers. We have been assured that the school, school district and participants in the study will remain anonymous.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Superintendent

May 11, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

Under the direction of Louisiana Tech University, Jackie LeBlanc has approval to collect and use data from                   Jr. High School's consenting parents and administrators using the survey instrument created by Johns Hopkins University titled *The Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey* and to conduct telephone interviews with parent and administrator volunteers. We have been assured that the school, school district, and participants in the study will remain anonymous.

Sincerely,

Superintendent  
Parish School Board

**APPENDIX E**

**SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR CONSENT FORMS**

## Human Subjects School Administrator Consent Form

**The following is a brief summary of the project in which you are asked to participate. Please read this information before signing the statement below.**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** School Administrator and Parent Perceptions of School, Family, and Community Partnerships in Middle School

**PURPOSE OF STUDY:** The purpose of this study is to identify, analyze, and compare middle school parent and school administrator perceptions of school, family, and community partnerships.

**PROCEDURE:** Approximately nine school administrators and 300 parents from three public middle schools in the State of Louisiana will voluntarily complete parental involvement surveys. Multiple choice responses from the surveys will then be analyzed. Approximately 30 parents and 9 school administrators from the survey participants will then be randomly selected to participate in telephone interviews. The interviews will be used to probe deeper into the research topic and to gather data in qualitative form. Various artifacts and documents, including school websites, parent-teacher association minutes, and school policy manuals, will also be analyzed by the researcher in order to gather more in-depth data.

**INSTRUMENTS:** The Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey developed by Epstein, Salinas, Sanders, Davis and Albersbaes at Johns Hopkins University will be the instrument used in this research study.

**RISKS/ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS:** There are no risks associated with participation in this study. It requires completion of a survey composed of the aforementioned instrument and a question and answer telephone interview. There are no alternative treatments. Participation is voluntary. Neither any employees of the school or the parish school system will be informed of my participation or non-participation or my answers. My school will not be identified by name.

The following disclosure applies to all participants using online survey tools: This server may collect information and your IP address indirectly and automatically via "cookies".

**BENEFITS/COMPENSATION:** There will be no compensation provided to research subjects. Research results will be provided to subjects upon completion of study. The results from the study will benefit the participants involved in the study by providing qualitative and quantitative research findings regarding the perceptions of parents and school administrators in the middle school setting of school-parent partnerships. The research findings can be used by schools and parents to evaluate current parental involvement policies and plan strategies for parent-school partnership growth.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, attest with my signature that I have read and understood the description of the study, "School Administrator and Parent Perceptions of School, Family, and Community Partnerships in Middle School", and its purposes and methods. I understand that my participation in this research is strictly voluntary. Further, I understand that I may withdraw anytime or refuse to answer any questions without penalty. Upon completion of the study, I understand that the results will be freely available to me upon request. I understand that the results of my survey will be confidential, accessible only to the researcher, dissertation committee, myself, or a legally appointed representative. I have not been requested to waive nor do I waive any of my rights related to participating in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX F**

**PARENT CONSENT FORM**

## Human Subjects Parent Consent Form

The following is a brief summary of the project in which you are asked to participate. Please read this information before signing the statement below.

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** School Administrator and Parent Perceptions of School, Family, and Community Partnerships in Middle School

**PURPOSE OF STUDY:** The purpose of this study is to identify, analyze, and compare middle school parent and school administrator perceptions of school, family, and community partnerships.

**PROCEDURE:** Approximately nine school administrators and 300 parents from three public middle schools in the State of Louisiana will voluntarily complete parental involvement surveys. Multiple choice responses from the surveys will then be analyzed. Approximately 30 parents and 9 school administrators from the survey participants will then be randomly selected to participate in telephone interviews. The interviews will be used to probe deeper into the research topic and to gather data in qualitative form. Various artifacts and documents, including school websites, parent-teacher association minutes, and school policy manuals, will also be analyzed by the researcher in order to gather more in-depth data.

**INSTRUMENTS:** The Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnerships Survey developed by Epstein, Salinas, Sanders, Davis and Albersbaes at Johns Hopkins University will be used in this study.

**RISKS/ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS:** There are no risks associated with participation in this study. It requires completion of a survey composed of the aforementioned instrument and a question and answer telephone interview. There are no alternative treatments. Participation is voluntary. The participant understands that Louisiana Tech is not able to offer financial compensation nor to absorb the costs of medical treatment should you be injured as a result of participating in this research. The following disclosure applies to all participants using online survey tools: This server may collect information and your IP address indirectly and automatically via "cookies".

No one at the school will be informed of my participation or non-participation.

**BENEFITS/COMPENSATION:** There will be no compensation provided to research subjects. Research results will be provided to subjects upon completion of study. The results from the study will benefit the participants involved in the study by providing qualitative and quantitative research findings regarding the perceptions of parents and school administrators in the middle school setting of school-parent partnerships. The research findings can be used by schools and parents to evaluate current parental involvement policies and plan strategies for parent-school partnership growth.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, attest with my signature that I have read and understood the description of the study, "School Administrator and Parent Perceptions of School, Family, and Community Partnerships in Middle School", and its purposes and methods. I understand that my participation in this research is strictly voluntary and my participation or refusal to participate in this study will not affect my relationship with my child's school or affect my child's grades in any way. Further, I understand that I may withdraw anytime or refuse to answer any questions without penalty. Upon completion of the study, I understand that the results will be freely available to me upon request. I understand that the results of my survey will be confidential, accessible only to the researcher, dissertation committee, myself, or a legally appointed representative. I have not been requested to waive nor do I waive any of my rights related to participating in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX G**

**ADMINISTRATOR LETTER OF EXPLANATION**

Dear School Administrator:

I am conducting a research study on the behalf of Louisiana Tech University on Parent and School Administrator Perceptions of School, Family, and Community Partnerships in Middle School. I would greatly appreciate your participation. For the first part of this study, simply fill out the attached survey, and return it in the self-addressed stamped envelope to me within the next two weeks. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey.

Please answer as honestly as possible and remember that all participants will remain anonymous. **If you are unsure of any of the answers to any of the questions, please feel free to skip those questions.** A blank response to any question will be coded as “Do Not Know”. If there are any clarifications needed for the study, I will follow up with a quick telephone call. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Thank you,

Jackie LeBlanc, Ed.S

[jleblanc@jpsb.us](mailto:jleblanc@jpsb.us)

318-533-0193



**APPENDIX H**

**PARENT LETTER OF EXPLANATION**

Dear Parents or Guardians:

I am conducting a research study on the behalf of Louisiana Tech University on Parent and School Administrator Perceptions of School, Family, and Community Partnerships in Middle School. I would greatly appreciate your participation. For the first part of this study, simply fill out the attached survey, and return it in the self-addressed stamped envelope to me within the next two weeks. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. If you would prefer to fill this survey online, please go to [www](http://www). within the next two weeks.

A telephone interview will be conducted with randomly selected participants. If you are interested in participating in the interview, please also fill out the attached card and return it separately. If you would prefer, you may email or call me to request participation in the interview process, instead of returning the card. Interview participants will also remain anonymous.

Please answer as honestly as possible and remember that all participants will remain anonymous. **If you are unsure of any of the answers to any of the questions, please feel free to skip those questions. A blank response to any questions will be coded as "Do Not Know."** If there are any clarifications needed for the study, next month, I will follow up with a quick telephone call. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Thank you,

Jackie LeBlanc, Ed.S

[jleblanc@jpsb.us](mailto:jleblanc@jpsb.us)

318-533-0193

**APPENDIX I**

**TEACHER LETTER OF EXPLANATION**

Dear Teacher:

I am conducting a research study on the behalf of Louisiana Tech University on Parent and School Administrator Perceptions of School, Family, and Community Partnerships in Middle School. Your school district and school administrator have given permission for your class to participate in this study; please see attached consent letters and forms. I would greatly appreciate your participation. Simply hand out these surveys to your homeroom students to take home to their parents. I would appreciate it if you would let them know that this research study is of great importance and their participation is greatly needed. You have been provided with 25 surveys, please hand out only these 25 surveys randomly down each row, until you run out. If you have more than 25 students, please let the students know that only the first 25 can participate. If you have less than 25 students in your homeroom, please continue to hand these out to the same grade-level students in your next classes by passing them out down the row. Students should not be selected for this study, hand out the surveys randomly.

Thank you,

Jackie LeBlanc, Ed.S

[jleblanc@jpsb.us](mailto:jleblanc@jpsb.us)

318-533-0193