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The Influence Of Parent And Community Involvement On Local School Councils In Massachusetts

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THE INFLUENCE OF PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ON
LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCILS IN MASSACHUSETTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

LESLIE B. STEIN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

February 2009

Education

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THE INFLUENCE OF PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ON
LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCILS IN MASSACHUSETTS

A Dissertation

By

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ABSTRACT

THE INFLUENCE OF PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ON LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCILS IN MASSACHUSETTS

FEBRUARY 2009

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Education reform efforts in the last fifteen to twenty years at the state and federal levels have provisions for family/community involvement in the schools based on beliefs that partnerships lead to higher student achievement and better outcomes for students, parents and teachers. These requirements have embraced the concept of parent and community involvement in various forms including some aspects of school governance. The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 included this concept of participatory governance with the establishment of local school councils (LSC). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the function and influence of local school councils on school improvement and to provide a better understanding of the role of parent/family and community involvement in those efforts. Data was gathered over a nine month period in three elementary schools in different communities through observation of school council meetings; interviews with various members of the school community, and review of relevant materials. Results of data analysis showed that the function and influence of local school councils on school improvement, and the impact of parent and

community involvement on school council function were related to the overall culture of the school. Parent involvement in the school and parent influence on the work of the school council was strengthened by the relationship with the parent organization and other parent involvement activities in the school. The attitude and commitment to parent involvement present in the school culture, as well as, the efforts to recruit parent and community members with the resulting parity in membership also influenced the work of the school council. The results mirrored previous research that showed inconsistencies in the implementation of school councils across the country, that the evidence of their influence on school improvement has been limited, and that schools with existing parent involvement activities before the initiation of school councils had more positive influence on school improvement. Recommendations for further research in family-school relationships, training and oversight of school councils, training for educators, and the allocation of more state and local resources to support school improvement efforts are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Conventional wisdom embraces the belief that parents are the most important mentors and teachers in a child's life. Research on child development continues to cite the importance of parental involvement from the early childhood years and highlights the influence of parent and community involvement in a child's academic achievement and social adjustment (Comer, 2005; Epstein, 2001; Henderson, 2002; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001, Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Swap, 1993). Parents are responsible for the overall health, development and social adjustment of their children, and there is growing evidence of their impact on the child's academic success when working cooperatively with the schools. The history and philosophy of parental involvement is supported by ecological and developmental systems theories that stress the importance of relationships and the interconnections of environments where children grow and learn (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Epstein, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). The academic literature frames the concept of parent involvement in education as the ideological organizer of the family school relationship and encompasses a broad range of research topics, although it is complicated by various constructs and many definitions of parent involvement.

Parent involvement in the schools is traditionally defined as a provider-receiver model with conventional parent activities like teacher conferences and attendance at school fund raisers. Recent legislation at both the state and federal level sought to change that model to one of partnerships between school personnel, families and community

members with an emphasis on participatory governance at the local school or what is referred to in the educational literature as school-based decision making (SBDM). The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (MERA) included this concept of participatory governance with the establishment of local school councils (LSC). This study used a qualitative approach to explore and describe the partnerships between school staff, parents and community members through the lens of local school councils in Massachusetts.

Topic and Purpose

Education reform efforts in the last fifteen to twenty years at the state and federal levels have provisions for family/community involvement in the schools based on beliefs that partnerships lead to higher student achievement and better outcomes for students, parents and teachers. These requirements have embraced the concept of parent and community involvement in various forms including some aspects of school governance. Recent practices in education have included the concept of site-based decision making (SBDM) where teachers, principals and parents make decisions at the local school level. Much of the literature on SBDM states that the goal is to improve student achievement. School improvement teams or local school councils that include parents and community members who advise the school on issues of policy are required provisions under The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (MERA), and the concept that parents should be involved in school improvement activities was reinforced at the Federal level by The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Education, 2001).

The general purpose of school councils in Massachusetts is stated as, "...a great opportunity for community partners, parents, teachers, and principals to come together both to share ideas and resources, and to shape the direction their schools will take to strengthen teaching and learning" (MA DOE 2001). Massachusetts regulations require school councils to meet regularly to identify the learning needs of the students, review the annual school budget, and develop an annual school improvement plan, which is submitted to the school committee for approval. Improvement plans include assessments of class size, student-teacher ratios and plans for making changes in either of these; issues in professional development; enhancement of parental involvement; school safety and discipline; issues of school climate; extra-curricular activities; concerns about meeting the diverse needs of all learners; and other issues identified by the individual councils.

Although these provisions for participatory decision-making are mandated by state and federal laws, the research on the efficacy of these efforts is meager. The existing literature shows that the implementation of school councils across the country and in Massachusetts has been inconsistent and the research about their impact on school improvement/student achievement and the relationships between school staff, families and community members is limited. Many of the studies on school based decision making or local school councils have been based in survey data, with some studies employing a mixed methods approach that included a qualitative component. The majority of respondents in these studies were school personnel who were members of school councils and research on the function of school councils has primarily involved council members with little inclusion of others members of the school community.

Since the implementation of MERA in 1993 there have only been a few studies of the function or efficacy of the work of the local school councils in Massachusetts. Bryant Robinson (1997) examined the implementation of school councils in Massachusetts and was "...interested in investigating whether site based management represents progress toward the Massachusetts' Reform Act's stated goal 'to improve student performance', or was it just another change—an altering in the outer appearance only" (p. 20). Robinson concluded that not all schools were equally successful in establishing school councils and he described barriers to their effectiveness as lack of cooperation from teachers and administrators, budget constraints, lack of parent participation, lack of training and an overwhelming workload. The first report from the Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission in 2001 showed that school councils were generally not viewed as an effective vehicle for school improvement due to lack of training, financial constraints, lack of parent and community involvement, and confusion over role definition (McDermott et al., 2001). They also reported that many districts had not fully implemented the governance changes and student improvement plans did not address issues of student achievement. The report also noted the lack of resources for oversight and training at the Massachusetts Department of Education. This researcher has not been able to find any other published reviews of the work of school councils in Massachusetts and several telephone and e-mail contacts with staff at the Department of Education have confirmed that there has been little review or oversight at the state level since the passage of MERA in 1993.

The primary purpose of this study is to provide a better understanding of family and community involvement in school governance and to describe the function and

influence of local school councils on school improvement. This qualitative case study describes how the activities of local school councils meet the spirit and intent of the MERA fifteen years after its implementation and explores the impact of the school council on the relationships between school staff, families and community members.

Potential Significance

Since the passage of MERA, it appears that there has been very little oversight of the work of local school councils by the Massachusetts Department of Education and limited research on their function or accomplishments. The existing literature on school councils in Massachusetts and many of the studies about the impact of local school councils in other parts of the country have relied primarily on survey data, and those that included a qualitative component of interviews and document review have been short on their description of data collection and analysis. Previous research on school councils have also focused on their implementation and accomplishments as an entire entity but have not described the impact of family and community membership. This study used a qualitative design that relies on the triangulated methods of observation, interviews and document review and presents a comprehensive description of data collection and analysis. The presence of this researcher in the setting provided a richer description of the work of school councils than can be provided through survey research.

The current climate in public education in Massachusetts is one of limited financial resources and significant pressure for schools to produce adequate yearly progress. Communities and their local school boards struggle to meet the demands of

both state and federal provisions for student achievement. As one of those provisions addresses student achievement through the work of local school councils via school improvement, policy makers at both the state and local level may be interested in the results of this study for assessment of requirements for parental involvement in education and for future planning around school based decision making. School boards, school superintendents and principals in Massachusetts and in other states may use the results of this study to inform their practices and make any changes in the function of local school councils. The study may assist policy makers and practioners with the description of the organization, function and accomplishments of local school councils and identify challenges or barriers to effective policy development and may lead to recommendations for improved practice.

Framework and Research Questions

The framework for this study is rooted in the ecological systems theory first described by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979 and expanded on in several reiterations since then in other publications (1986, 2000). This theory is based on the principle of interconnectedness within settings and the linkages between settings that affect individual development. Bronfenbrenner described these connections as systems that include the child, the most immediate being the *microsystems* which include the family and school. A *mesosystem* refers to interconnections between microsystems that have indirect effects on children's development, such as parents' relationships with the school. *Exosystems* describe institutions or community organizations that impact both the microsystems and

mesosystems and *macrosystems* describe the socio-cultural practices, beliefs and values that affect all systems. Parent and community involvement in the schools is reflected in the exosystem which refers to the community influences on the child either directly or through the family and the macrosystem which refers to the values embedded in the larger social context and the influences that class, ethnic, and cultural differences have on the developing individual. The exosystem is evident in the parent and community activities in the school, including the school council and the macrosystem is reflected in the cultural beliefs about parent involvement that are embedded in our public policy in school reform legislation.

Joyce Epstein (1995) used an ecological perspective to describe her theory of overlapping spheres of influence and the framework she developed for a partnership model with six major types of parental involvement, described in detail in the literature review. In the comprehensive school reform efforts of the last twenty years, relationships between families and schools have changed from a traditional provider-receiver model to one of a partnership or collaboration and shared responsibility between families and schools. This researcher also used Epstein's types of parental involvement as a guide for the research questions and the data analysis.

Using this ecological framework, I asked the following questions in order to describe the function and influence of local school councils on school improvement and on the relationships between school personnel, families and community members.

What types of parent involvement are evident in each school community?

How do the activities of the school council meet the intent and specifics of the MERA?

- identify the learning needs of the students,
- review the annual school budget,
- develop an annual school improvement plan
 - assessments of class size,
 - student-teacher ratios
 - issues in professional development
 - enhancement of parental involvement;
 - school safety and discipline;
 - issues of school climate;
 - extra-curricular activities;
 - concerns about meeting the diverse needs of all learners
 - other issues

What is the understanding of council members and other members of the school community about the function and role of the school council in school improvement efforts?

What is the influence of parent and community membership on the work of the school council?

What is the relationship of the school council to other members of the school community?

How is the work of the school council communicated to various members of the school community?

What is the relationship between the school council and school policies and practices that support parent and community involvement activities?

What are the major challenges and barriers for school councils?

CHAPTER 2.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Parents are interested in helping their children develop and achieve in school. Among the many tenets of the wave of educational reform efforts in the last thirty years is the idea that parental involvement is an essential element in children's academic achievement and social adjustment (Comer, 2005; Epstein, 2001; Henderson, 2002; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001, Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996; Swap, 1993). Hobbs (1978) described an ecosystem where the family as the primary unit of responsibility overlaps with the school's role to coordinate health and social services. Cutler (2000) also referred to the home-school relationship as part of the larger social context in which it exists and discussed the fact that home school relationships get attention in the United States due to a belief that the home environment affects academic achievement. Scott-Jones (1993) refers to a prominent view in current research, "that family involvement is one of several developmental contexts affecting children's achievement in a complex dynamic manner. Understanding the connections among families, schools and other contexts in which children grow and develop is more important than apportioning responsibility for achievement" (p. 246).

In our study of human development we continue to debate the influences of nature or biological factors with the influences of nurture or environmental factors in the growth of the individual. Current educational thought and research views these influences as

interdependent and we strive to inform our practices with the study of the interactions of biological and environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Comer, 1996; Epstein, 2001; Shonkoff, 2000). “Scientists have shifted their focus to take account of the fact that genetic and environmental influences work together in dynamic ways over the course of development” (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 6).

This review focuses on those dynamic influences as we examine the literature about family and community involvement in the development and education of children. Information for this literature review was gathered through a search of the library catalog, as well as, research databases, such as ERIC. Other sources included the internet sites of Universities and Organizations who focus on parent involvement issues and e-mail and telephone contact with researchers in the field. A library search for the term ‘parent involvement’ and ‘parent/community involvement and education’ finds a wide range of topics. The intent of this literature review is to examine parent and community involvement in the schools within the framework of education reform and school improvement efforts, with particular attention to the role that parents and community members play in outcomes for students. I excluded research on community and business initiatives in education that did not include parents. As the focus is on the interactions and activities of parents and community members with school staff, I also excluded research on out of school programs and other research on Family Support programs outside of the school purview.

The first section describes the history of parent involvement in education from the beginnings of formal education in the United States in the 19th century, through the changes in legislation to empower parents in the mid 20th century, to the inclusion of

parents and community members as collaborators and decision makers in the more recent education reform efforts of the present day. The second section reviews some of the theories that guide the concept of parent/family and community involvement in education including those of Lev Vygotsky who wrote about the significance of the child's interactions with others in his environment; Urie Bronfenbrenner whose ecological systems theory has been utilized for decades in the development of educational and social services; and Joyce Epstein who described her theory of overlapping spheres of influence on the developing child representing family, school and community with the child at the center. The third section explores the literature on parent involvement with attention to the various terms and concepts that have emerged in this body of work including parent involvement, community involvement, school-family relationships and partnerships. This includes a discussion of the conventional ideas about parent involvement and describes teacher and parent attitudes and the types of activities that generally define parent involvement in the schools, as well as, how the field has moved the concept of involvement from one of teacher/school directed activities to one of relationships in collaboration and partnership. The fourth section illustrates this concept of working relationships between families and schools by describing the various models from the literature that view family and community members as equal partners in the educational process. Included are developmental models, and specific programs like James Comer's School Development Program and Joyce Epstein's National Network of Partnership Schools. This section includes studies that have looked at family and community involvement in relation to outcomes of student achievement, better attendance and improved behavioral and social interactions; outcomes related to teacher practices; and

outcomes in school improvement related to parent and community participation in school governance. This literature review concludes with a summary and discussion.

The History of Parent Involvement in Education

Before the Industrial Revolution in the United States children traditionally grew up within the context of their family and neighborhood. “The whole structure of social and economic organization had as its’ basic building block the family” (Coleman, 1987, p. 32). “Education remained largely in the hands of the family and church until after the American Revolution when schools became established. By the mid-1800s industrial and urban development further separated families from schools” (Moles, 1993, p. 23). During the 19th century, at about the same time that men began to take work outside the home, the power and responsibility for the cognitive and moral development of children shifted from the home to the school. Coleman (1987) described that shift as a “social investment in a new “constructed institution, the school” (p. 33). Epstein (1995) explained that parents and community members initially controlled the schools in the early 19th century, hiring teachers and determining curriculum but family-school relations shifted in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as, “...the school began to distance from the home by emphasizing the teachers’ special knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy” (p. 24). Families were expected to teach good behavior and take responsibility for family, ethnic and religious values whereas schools focused on teaching a common curriculum to all children, regardless of ethnicity or economic status.

Issues of economics, health, social class and ethnicity were highlighted at the turn of the century with a growing immigrant population. The schools became social welfare institutions between 1905 and 1940 with nurses, vocational counselors and visiting teachers with a focus on educating parents, particularly immigrants and the working poor (Moles, 1993; Cutler, 2000). Compulsory education laws were passed in 1910 and, “By 1925, most middle class Americans at the very least accepted the school as a partner in the home” (Cutler, 2000, p. 9). Home economics was introduced into the curriculum to bridge the relationship between and address family health problems.

In 1885 the Hesperia movement in Michigan led by the Hesperia Teachers and Parents Association spawned the growth of parent-teacher organizations across the country. Many of the social reform movements in education, health, child labor and juvenile justice at the turn of the century led to the growth of various parent groups, such as, the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, which became the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NCPT), a conservative white middle class group, and The National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers which functioned “...only in the District of Columbia and those states where separate schools for the races were maintained so that African-American children might have PTA service...” (PTA, 2005). The NCPT developed standards for Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) in the 1920s and the structure grew as state organizations were established. The PTAs served three functions: social activities, school policy development and as a community service organization.

Cutler (2000) explained that Educators and School Board members directed the PTA away from policy development and toward recreational activities. “A responsible PTA made certain that parents and teachers knew their respective roles” (Cutler, 2000, p.

48). “While expected to make their views known, they (parents) had to avoid challenging or upstaging school authorities” (Cutler, 2000, p. 49). “Expanding the school’s mission challenged the accepted meaning of the idea that the home and the school were separate, if interdependent institutions, leading to role conflict and confusion” (Cutler, 2000, p. 163). The bureaucracy which included men as the administrators and women in the roles of mother and teacher reinforced barriers between families and schools and Cutler contends that the “relationship between the home and school never completely lost its’ adversarial dimension” (Cutler, 2000, p. 7).

Cutler (2000) argued that schools wanted to be all things to all people and thus, have come under great criticism since 1945 for failing to do that. Comer (1996) argued that school reform in the 1930s and 1940s was driven by scientific and technological advances with an emphasis on cognitive and academic achievement. A sense of community involvement in education was weakened by high mobility and mass communication. Hobbs (1978) described the total authority that schools had historically over the child while they were in school, with decisions being made with little parent involvement but noted that in the 1960s the “civil rights movement has promoted a new liaison between families and schools” (Hobbs, 1978, p. 761). The nation’s focus on poverty and concerns about child development and family stability led to the growth of many health and social service initiatives in the 1960s which began our contemporary focus on the importance of early childhood development (Cutler, 2000; Epstein, 1996).

“In the mid-1960s, reformers believed that parent education was not the answer because it did not guarantee parents a meaningful role in school activities, much less power” (Cutler, 2000, p. 176). The Federal Government legitimized parent involvement

in programs by mandating parent advisory councils in 1964 for Head Start. In the 1970s Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) also required parent advisory councils to assist with the development of programs for low income children in response to poverty in the cities and the alienation of poor families in the public schools. Hobbs (1978) makes reference to the Federal legislation known as Public Law 94-142 or the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 which mandated appropriate educational services for students with disabilities and delineated parents' rights in advocating for their children. The process of developing an Individual Education Program (IEP) was designed to bring families and schools together. This was followed by the passage of Part H of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act Amendments in 1986 which established Early Intervention Programs for infants and toddlers, requiring an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) which further emphasized the importance of family involvement in child development.

In 1981 the ESEA was reauthorized and the parent advisory council requirement was abolished. "Professionals had often strongly resisted the councils and community control mechanisms, and these were frequently weak or co-opted by small groups of parents and others" (Moles, 1993, p. 24). A growing concern in the 1980s about family life and child development in the light of a growing divorce rate and large numbers of disadvantaged children brought an ecological perspective to collaboration with the schools. Both Epstein in Booth and Dunn (1996) and Epstein and Schneider in Borman, et al. (1996) wrote about the federal legislation that encouraged and provided concrete actions and responsibilities for families to work in conjunction with schools. In 1988 amendments to the ESEA added new requirements for all Chapter 1 schools in the form

of parent consultation for the development of parent involvement programs rather than advisory councils. It also provided grant monies for parent-school partnerships and for Even Start, a program designed to integrate adult literacy with early childhood education. Epstein made reference to the *Nation at Risk* report from 1983 and said that the report prompted "...an effective schools litany which evolved into lists of requirements for restructured schools" (Epstein, 1996, p. 218). James Comer noted, however, that, "A significant limitation of the effective school movement is the little value attached to parental involvement in their children's schools" (Haynes & Comer, 1993, p. 191).

"During the 1980s and 1990s, family-school relations changed again in response to increased demands from the public for better, more accountable schools" (Epstein, 2001, p. 24). There were elements of family school partnerships in the ESEA reauthorized as the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, the Educate America Act of 1994 known as Goals 2000 and the School to Work Act of 1994 (Epstein, 1996). Schneider and Epstein (Schneider, 1996) highlighted the available funding in each piece of legislation for developing these partnerships with the emphasis on local control and design. "Greater investment in education reform garners strong public support, universal school readiness is ranked first among the nations' education goals, and the demand for higher standards and stricter accountability in the public schools is widely endorsed", p. ; (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 35). Epstein (1995) pointed out that, "...the Goals 2000 legislation sets partnerships as a voluntary national goal for all schools; Title I specifies and mandates programs and practices of partnership in order for schools to qualify for or maintain funding. Many states and districts have developed or are preparing policies to guide schools in creating more systematic connections with families and communities"

(p. 702). Some states and local districts created school choice programs, giving parents greater power in choosing schools for their children and many states, including Massachusetts through the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, mandated that schools involve parents, teachers and community members in site based management efforts (McDermott et al., 2001).

Epstein (1991) reported that the National Association of State Boards of Education published a book in 1989 entitled *Partners in Educational Improvement: Schools, Parents, and Community*. Davies (1991) noted that California developed policies on parent involvement with grants given to local districts for developing programs and Missouri's Department of Education started a family support program for parents of young children known as *Parents As Teachers*. Concerns about minority achievement and urban education prompted the Illinois Board of Education to establish the Urban Education Partnership Grants for districts to address local issues, such as, improving writing skills or homework completion that involved parents and community groups. "School districts nationwide are being encouraged to reexamine their parent involvement policies and programs and to demonstrate innovative approaches in order to obtain Federal education dollars" (Baker & Soden, 1998, p. 1). In their analysis of some of the comprehensive school reform efforts Borman et al (2002) referenced Federal legislation called the Comprehensive School Reform Program (CSRP) which provides

grants to schools to implement proven reforms. The U.S. Department of Education defines Comprehensive School Reform with eleven components one of which includes “...the meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning, implementing, and evaluating school improvement activities” (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2002, p. 3).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Education, 2001) is the reauthorization of the ESEA and the concept of family and community involvement is threaded throughout the legislation. Section 1118 outlines the tenets of parental involvement. Each school must have a written policy about family involvement; parents must participate in improvement committees; there should be coordination with other federally funded programs, such as, Head Start or Even Start; and particular attention should be paid to those who are disadvantaged, minorities, limited English speakers and those who have disabilities. The legislation proposes that parents themselves should make decisions about how the funds are spent to involve other parents. School districts are responsible to communicate information about these activities to all parents. They are also expected to communicate information to parents about curriculum, standards, and testing and should provide notice of these issues in the languages that can be understood by parents. Section 1118 also suggested that schools provide training for teachers in the value of parent involvement.

One of the many elements of education reform efforts in the last two decades has been the decentralization of school management and the establishment of school based management teams in local schools. School based decision making teams (SBDM) or local school councils (LSC) are required provisions in education reform initiatives in

various states and local districts in the United States, Canada and some European countries (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1998). The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (MERA) made some significant changes in the provisions for school governance in schools in the state (Education, 1995, Modified 2005). The school committee is viewed as those who are publicly elected to establish educational goals and policies in the district and the superintendent is considered the educational leader responsible for management and daily operations of the system. Principals are the educational administrators and managers of their schools and their role is considered as most important as, “The school is the focal point for achieving the primary goal of Education Reform: enabling all students to meet the high standards of the Common Core of Learning adopted by the Board of Education in 1994” (Education, 1995, Modified 2005). The school committee approves district wide policies and budget while the principal is responsible for the continuous improvement in teaching and learning in their building.

In order to include all members of the school community in participatory governance, MERA established the requirement that every elementary, secondary, and vocational school in Massachusetts have a school council (Education, 1994, Modified 2005). School councils expand the participation of members of the school community beyond administrators and teachers to parents and other members of the community. The principal co-chairs the school council whose membership includes teachers, parents, community members, and at the secondary level, at least one student. The principal is responsible for the composition and oversight of the council. Membership numbers are left to each individual school but MERA regulations stipulate that there should be parity

between parents and teachers and the membership should be representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school community. The law encourages the local Parent-Teacher organization to be the vehicle for electing parent members to the school council. The school council meets regularly to identify the learning needs of the students, review the annual school budget, and develop an annual school improvement plan, which is submitted to the school committee for approval. Improvement plans include assessments of class size, student-teacher ratios and plans for making changes in either of these; issues in professional development; enhancement of parental involvement; school safety and discipline; issues of school climate; extra-curricular activities; concerns about meeting the diverse needs of all learners; and other issues identified by the individual councils.

In addition to the Federal and State reform efforts to include parents and community members as collaborators and decision makers in the educational process, there are many local parent and community groups across the country and some large organizations working together with schools to improve educational outcomes for children. Two prominent examples are the National Parent Teacher Association and the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education which is a coalition of major education, community, public service, and advocacy organizations working to create meaningful family-school partnerships in every school in the United States.

The Concept of Parent Involvement in Education: Theoretical Foundations

The literature includes the work of many researchers who describe human development and family and school relationships from an environmental or ecological perspective. Lev Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural perspective informs our work in parent and community involvement in education as it highlights the importance of all relationships in learning. The major theme of Vygotsky's theoretical framework of social constructivism is the idea that social interaction plays a significant role in cognition. Although his work was influenced by Jean Piaget (1952), Vygotsky believed that cognitive skills were not primarily a factor of genetics but a product of the individual's social interactions practiced in a cultural context (Vygotsky, 1978). Jean Piaget (1952, 1969) called his own theory of development 'genetic epistemology' as he was primarily interested in how knowledge developed in the individual. He believed that the child had an innate ability or internal motivation to seek out learning on his own. Piaget's concept of cognitive structures is central to this theory, familiar to educators as his four stages of child development: sensorimotor, preoperations, concrete operations and formal operations. Piaget (1969) believed that these cognitive structures changed through adaptation to the environment, specifically through assimilation, or the interpretation of events in terms of existing cognitive structures, and accommodation, or the changing of the cognitive structures in response to the environment. Vygotsky's writing expanded on the role of the environment on child development as a dynamic, not static, entity from the

initial limiting environment of the uterus to the home and gradually widening environment of educational experiences. He stated, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). He believed that the child's relationship to his/her environment changes as the child grows and their experiences are influenced by the interaction of their personal characteristics with the situational characteristics. "At the same time environment should not be regarded as a condition of development which purely objectively determines the development of a child by virtue of the fact that it contains certain qualities or features, but one should always approach environment from the point of view of the relationship which exists between the child and its' environment at a given stage of his development" (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 338).

Vygotsky (1994) also believed that the potential for cognitive development was limited to a particular time frame, an idea he called the *zone of proximal development* or the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with other peers. While Piaget's emphasis was on the development of the individual, Vygotsky stressed the importance of the social other in child development, or the significance of the child's interactions with others in his environment. His writings emphasized the roles of historical, cultural, and social factors in cognition and argued that language was the most important symbolic tool

provided by society. In his study of language development, Vygotsky provided a description of the interrelation between thought and language which he saw as necessary for intellectual development. Vygotsky reminds us that our study of child development should always consider the dynamic aspect of environmental factors. "Together with a dynamic interpretation of environment, we are beginning to understand that the different aspects of development have different relations with the environment. It is for this reason that we have to study the various environmental influences differentially" (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 347).

A comprehensive description of an ecological systems theory of human development was described by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s and reformulated in his many writings in successive years. In his early writing he reviewed the research on the interaction of genetics and environment that began in the 1930s and described a "...theory of environmental interconnections and their impact on the forces directly affecting psychological growth" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 8). "Development is defined as the person's evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his relation to it, as well as the person's growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its' properties" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 9). In contrast to the other theories of development that were based on biological maturation Bronfenbrenner stated, "The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21).

Bronfenbrenner described the principle of interconnectedness within settings and the linkages between these settings. "The definition of developmental ecology is not limited by any single setting; it accords equal importance to relations between settings and to the large contexts in which the settings are embedded" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 284). He described these settings as systems that affect individual development and defined them as *a microsystem, a mesosystem, an exosystem and a macrosystem*. They are represented visually as concentric circles that surround the child. "A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). He used the example of mother-infant dyads and pointed out that change in one member of the dyad affects the development of the other. The family would be considered the basic microsystem for the child with relationships among and between family members affecting the development of that child. The context of familial relationships, physical home, and activities guides the cognitive and social development of the child. The school is also a microsystem for the child with teacher and peer relationships and activities that direct the child's learning and socialization.

"A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). For young children this could be the influences of child care and early school experiences on the family and for the adolescent this may be the interaction between family and peer relationships that impact social behavior. Bronfenbrenner discussed the research that had been conducted to date on the relations

between home and school but pointed out that those investigations "...have focused on techniques of parent involvement rather than on the associated processes taking place within family and classroom and their joint effects on children's learning and development" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 727).

Bronfenbrenner discussed family processes in context and described an exosystem as " ...one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). An example of an exosystem would be the parent's workplace, where parental activities and experiences would indirectly affect the developing child. Bronfenbrenner (1986) explained that there are three exosystems that primarily affect the development of the child: the parents' workplace, the parents' social networks, and the community influences on family processes. He discussed many of the studies conducted in the 1980s that primarily focused on the increase of mothers in the workplace and the stress on two parent working families, particularly those with low income. Research on social supports looked primarily at mothers of young children and often at vulnerable groups, such as, teenage parents and single parents. Bronfenbrenner (1986) reviewed several studies and concluded that the effects of social networks varied dependent on numerous factors and outcomes were viewed within a broader social context. He notes that the child may be affected by community influences either directly or through the family.

"The macrosystem refers to consistencies, in the form and context of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such

consistencies" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). This macrosystem refers to the values embedded in the larger social context and the influences that class, ethnic, and cultural differences have on the developing individual. "The macrosystem operates at the broadest level of influence and is comprised of political systems, social policy culture, economic trends, and so forth" (Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, & Chatman, 2005c, p. xv). It is within this system that we find our values about education and the public policies that guide it.

Within his ecological systems theory Bronfenbrenner (1986) differentiated three research paradigms that were used in studies at that time. A social address model was utilized in studies that compared individual developmental outcomes for those living in different environments, such as, urban versus rural. A process-context model looked at the effects of a particular environment on family processes. A third model, the person-process-context, takes into account the characteristics of the individual members of the family. He also described a chronosystem model or a research approach to studying the impact of familial processes on an individual over time rather than looking at a single event, a model that is most useful in longitudinal studies.

Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) discussed the work of many, "...who are engaged in the formulation and application of a general model for the scientific study of human development" (p. 116) and Bronfenbrenner described his own work over the years with his development of what is now known as the *bioecological model*. As a significant construct in this model the authors describe a proximal process as "... a mechanism for organism-environment interaction" (p. 119) which "...involves a transfer of energy between the developing human being and the persons, objects and symbols in the immediate environment" (p. 118). The authors proposed that proximal processes produce

two types of developmental outcomes, either competence or dysfunction and are affected by dimensions of exposure in duration, frequency, intensity, timing and interruption

Bronfenbrenner has written about the changes in the lives of children over the last four decades which has revealed "a lack both of a common focus and of coordination between social systems at the micro-level of immediate settings (home, school, peer group) and in the dynamic mesosystem relations between these settings (family and school; family and peer group; school and peer group)" (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 120). Bronfenbrenner's numerous publications often delineated areas for further research and he spoke assertively about public policy related to children and families. Bronfenbrenner wrote about the social pressures on families, of mothers in the workforce, two parent working families, single parent families and changes in public policies, such as, welfare regulations that had "...devastating impact on low income families with young children" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b, p. 97). He referred to a government report on the schools from 1975 that said, "... the schools, through no fault of their own were turning into a major breeding ground of alienation, vandalism, and violence in American society. I pointed out how the growing separation between home, school, workplace, and community was creating a situation where children were being deprived of close contact not only with parents, but with adults in general, and I underscored the awesome consequences of this fact for a species like ours" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b, p. 98). He discussed the construct of individualism that is such a part of American culture and the belief that people should take care of themselves. "It is this deficit model that pervades our outlook in social and educational problems" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b, p. 100). His definition of a deficit model included services that were categorical and not coordinated

to address individual issues rather than addressing issues within their context. He proposed that our focus on the individual rather than the circumstances was preventing us from solving problems. Bronfenbrenner suggested a shift in our public policy away from deficits and problems to building interconnections, "...and broaden the focus beyond personal qualities and family dynamics to existing and potential sources of stress and support in the external environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b, p. 103).

In his pursuit of a comprehensive school reform plan in the 1980s, James Comer (Emmons, Comer, & Haynes, 1996) created a theoretical formula based on the elements of several models that address issues of social and organizational change, which included field theory, ecological systems theory, a population adjustment model, and a social action model. Comer's philosophy is that, "Humans are social beings who need community support and involvement to develop adequately" (Emmons et al., 1996, p.29). The authors referred to field theory as one described by Kurt Lewin in 1936 where "...the individual functions in a psychological environment that is composed of feelings about objects, situations, self, and others" (Emmons et al., 1996, p. 31). Comer believed that this theory should help school reformers understand child development within the context of family, school and community. Comer describes a school as an ecological system with the child at the center and he postulates that to change or reform the school, one must change the interaction within the system and those changes in interactions would result in changes in behavior and achievement among the students. "Because school is a system, change in any part will affect the entire school" (Emmons et al., 1996, p. 30). Ecological systems theory described by Urie Bronfenbrenner also instructed

Comer's theoretical formula, as he believes that a child's learning is affected by the ecosystems and that the process of change in schools is based on relationships and community building.

Emmons et al. (1996) explained that a population adjustment model is a primary prevention one in the mental health field that identifies those at risk and intervenes to change the environment to promote positive change. As Comer's interest was in inner city schools with predominantly poor and minority students, he used this theory to support his idea of parent participation at all levels in his school reform framework. Social action theory was also taken from the mental health field as one that stresses collaboration between professionals and community members and suggests that professionals should have significant knowledge about the community in which they are working. Comer used this theory to strengthen his idea that a school is a social system that can change only if the interactions among the individuals change within that system.

Using an ecological systems perspective, Joyce Epstein (2001) described three theories of family and school relations that guide researchers and the practice of educators in the schools. The first is that families and schools have separate responsibilities, with parents caring for their children in the home and teachers maintaining their professional roles with children in school, which Epstein proposes "...stress the inherent incompatibility, competition, and conflict between families and schools" (Epstein, 2001, p. 22). The second theory is that of shared responsibility with coordination and cooperation between the school and family. Shared goals for children's cognitive and social development are assumed. Epstein explains that this perspective is "...based on a model of inter-institutional interactions and ecological designs that

emphasize the natural, nested and necessary connections between individuals and their groups and organizations” (Epstein, 2001, p. 22). The third theory is one of sequential responsibilities for families and schools, where parents play a larger role in the early childhood years with greater responsibility for educational goals shifting to the teacher as children enter formal schooling. Epstein also makes reference to two other theories that help us to understand the development of family-school relations. “*Symbolic interactionism* assumes that self-concept, personality, values, and beliefs are products of our interactions with others” (Epstein, 2001, p. 23). This theory suggests that teachers and parents need to communicate and understand each other’s goals and expectations for their children. The other is reference group theory which also instructs our thinking about family-school relations as it proposes that one group or individual recognizes the importance of the other and wants to consider their attitudes and beliefs before making decisions.

Epstein developed a theory that integrated educational, sociological, and psychological perspectives of how social organizations connect and built a model of the basic components of family, school and community relations. She stated that “our model of family-school relations must be based on a developmental framework to account for *the continuity* of school and family actions and interactions across the school years and the changes in forms and purposes of parent involvement at different student ages and stages of development” (Epstein, 2001, p. 27). During the 1980s Epstein developed her model which is described as overlapping spheres of influence on the developing child representing family, school and community with the child at the center. It assumes that there are some activities that families and schools participate in individually and jointly

that affect a child's development. "The degree of overlap is controlled by three forces: time, experience in families, and experience in schools" (Epstein, 2001, p. 27). (See Figure 1)

The external structure of the model of overlapping spheres may be drawn together or pushed apart depending on the philosophy, practices and activities of the families, schools, and community members. The force of time refers to individual and historical time or the age and grade level of the child and the social conditions at the time. For example, parents and teachers may have more interactions during the early school years than during high school. Teacher and school philosophy about involving parents would also affect the degree of overlap. "When teachers make parents part of their regular teaching practice, they create greater overlap than would typically be expected" (Epstein, 2001, p. 29). Parents may also create greater overlap by increasing their involvement in their child's schooling. Dynamic patterns of overlap are seen as teachers change over the years and parents change their type or amount of involvement. Epstein (2001) states that, "The "maximum" overlap occurs when schools and families operate as true "partners" with frequent cooperative efforts and clear, close communication between parents and teachers in a comprehensive program of many important types of parent involvement" (p. 29).

"The internal model of the interaction of the three spheres of influence shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community" (Epstein, 1995, p. 703). Epstein explains that interactions occur within organizations and between them, and that interactions take place at two levels, a standard organizational communication or

a specific communication between two individuals. Standard organizational communication would include information for all families about school policies, activities, or workshops available to all members of the school community. This type of communication would also involve the activities of a parent-teacher organization, a school council, or a community group. Specific communication would include, for example, conversations or written communication between a parent and a teacher about an individual child. Epstein also noted that, although children are at the center of these overlapping spheres of influence, their interactions and communication among the spheres also influences the outcomes. She proposes that this model may be used to develop research measures to study the effects of parent involvement on student achievement and other child and family outcomes.

In their discussions of the effects of cultural and social capital on parent involvement in the schools, Annette Lareau (1987) and James Coleman (1987) presented different perspectives that compliment Vygotsky's and Bronfenbrenner's theories that emphasize child development within the context of the child's relationships and interactions with their environment. The term *capital* suggests the accumulation of knowledge, influence, and power. Social capital refers to resources based on group membership, relationships, networks of influence and supports, and the norms or standards of behavior. Cultural capital indicates histories, experiences, customs and traditions and often refers to class differences in knowledge and education. Parent involvement or relationships between parents and school staff are potentially impacted by parents' social or cultural capital within the school context.

In her discussion of social class differences that affect family-school relationships Annette Lareau (1987) proposed that the understanding of parent involvement is affected by the concept of cultural capital as schools rely on certain social structures and authority patterns in their relationships with families. “The standards of schools are not neutral; their requests for parental involvement may be laden with the social and cultural experiences of intellectual and economic elites” (Lareau, 1987, p. 74). In her qualitative study Lareau used observation and interviews to gather data on family-school relationships in two schools, one in a predominantly working class community and one in an upper-middle class community. Lareau observed once or twice a week in a first grade classroom in each school for a six month period. She then chose six children in each class for further study, describing her selection process and noting that she chose only white children in order to exclude the confounding variable of race. She interviewed the mothers twice at the end of first and second grades, and interviewed most of the fathers, teachers and administrators in each school. Although Lareau noted that the interviews were tape recorded there was little information about data analysis except numerical data on numbers of participants. Lareau found that teachers at both schools encouraged parental involvement in a lot of ways, and although they spoke of being partners with parents, “... they desired parents to defer to their professional expertise” (Lareau, 1987, p. 76). The level of attendance at school functions was much higher at the upper-middle class school. Parents at the working class school were more reluctant to interact with school staff, often communicating about non-academic issues like bus schedules and playground activities. Lareau stated that both sets of parents valued educational opportunity for their children but viewed the process differently. Working class parents

saw the teacher as responsible for their child's education whereas upper-middle class parents saw education as a partnership with the schools. Lareau proposed that differences in social, cultural and economic resources helped to shape those value systems. Since school staff shared the same perspective with upper-middle class parents about family school relationships, Lareau concluded that "These results suggest that social class position and class culture become a form of cultural capital in the school setting" (Lareau, 1987, p. 82).

James Coleman (1987) discussed the history of relations between families and schools and described the changing environment within the family and society that is affecting public policy and educational opportunity for all children. He described his concept of social capital as "...the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up. Social capital exists within the family, but also outside the family, in the community" (Coleman, 1987, p. 36). He explained that social capital means that members of the family and community take interest in the development of individual children, reinforcing social rules and expectations. "As the Equality of Educational Opportunity report of 21 years ago first made clear, variations among family backgrounds make more difference in achievement than do variations among schools" (Coleman, 1987, p. 35). "Children acquire 'social capital' that has the apparent benefit of strengthening ties between families and schools in a way that influences student achievement despite social background" (Bauch, 1993, p. 128). Coleman (1987) made reference to some of his research in the early 1980s on the achievement of students in private schools. He postulated that students had higher achievement and lower drop out rates in schools where the relations with families were

strong. In one study of Catholic schools they concluded that the social networks and norms created in this church-school community served as social capital that helped family and school in the education of the their children. Although Coleman and his colleagues also found public schools settings where the social capital in the community surrounding the schools was high, he refers to what he calls ‘...an extensive erosion of social capital available to children and youth both within the family and outside of it’ (Coleman, 1987, p. 37). He was concerned that in our individualistic society we are not attending to the needs of our children and are expecting the public schools to provide the needed social capital for them.

The literature highlights the importance of child development within the context of the child’s relationships and interactions with their environment. Vygotsky believed that cognitive skills are a product of the individual’s social interactions practiced in a cultural context and Bronfenbrenner described an ecological theory of the connections between settings that impact the developing child. Scholars, such as James Comer and Joyce Epstein, used an ecological approach to develop models that integrated educational, sociological, and psychological perspectives of how social organizations connect and they built educational models of the basic components of family, school and community relations.

Terms and Concepts of Parent Involvement

The literature on family school relationships illuminates numerous perspectives in the definitions of parent involvement in education. The conventional idea of parent involvement brings up images of parents helping out in classrooms, managing bake sales and participating in PTA meetings. Much of the writing in previous years talked about how to get parents involved in the schools but the current literature includes more discussion of shared responsibilities with linkages and collaborations between home and school (Epstein, 1996; Comer, 1999; Swap, 1993; Henderson, 2002). Some of the literature discusses traditional roles for parents and teachers with schools usually defining involvement for parents by assigning them to activities rather than parents initiating activities. Parent involvement is often defined as what parents can do for teachers rather than exploring elements of the relationship.

Much of the current literature views parent involvement within the context of relationships rather than activities (Comer, 1999; Epstein, 2001; Henderson, 2002; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). There are numerous viewpoints on the development and dynamics of these relationships from a traditional *teacher dominant/parent volunteer* to a mesosystems approach which views each relationship within its own context. There is a focus on collaboration, or building trusting relationships between families, teachers, and community members (Comer, 1996; Epstein, 2001; Henderson, 2002). The changing venue of schools which had been viewed by most parents as a formal social system with

authority and certainty can now be described as a place where formal and informal means can be utilized to involve parents and, therefore improve student outcomes (Comer, 1991; Epstein, 2001; Henderson; 2002; Swap, 1993).

In the previous discussion of the history of parent involvement in education, we reviewed the changes in family-school relationships over the years, from what Epstein (2001) calls an inter-institutional separation in the 1930s and 1940s to cooperation and communication between families and schools since the 1970s. Through legislation there has been a call for parent empowerment and schools have been encouraged to develop programs and roles for parents. The term or concept of *parent involvement in education* encompasses a wide range of philosophies, ideas, goals, and activities. “*Parent Involvement* is a broad term that may take a variety of forms both in and out of school” (Moles, 1993, p. 22). “One complicating element in parent involvement research is the use of different definitions of parent involvement by different researchers. There are numerous definitions of parent involvement, yet most such definitions fall into five categories: parent expectations; a home structure for learning; educational communication between parents, schools, and students; parent participation in school activities; and parent participation in school decision making” (Keith et al., 1998).

The term parent involvement has evolved to *family and community involvement* with the recognition of the multiplicity of family types, that a child’s caregiver is not necessarily a parent, and that the responsibility for a child’s development is shared within and across contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Comer, 1991, Epstein, 2001; Henderson, 2002). It is widely acknowledged that many others in the family and community assist the primary caregiver with raising the child. The definition of family involvement now

encompasses activities in the home and neighborhood, as well as, those in the school.

Family involvement has moved beyond those parents who are easy to reach to include all members of the school community and focus has changed from a deficit approach to one of recognizing the strengths of families (Comer, 1999; Swap, 1993).

The parent involvement agenda has moved beyond that of teachers and administrators to the priorities of families and community members, and the focus is wider than academics. Henderson and Mapp (2002) use the terms *involvement* and *connection* interchangeably in their review. Epstein (2001) explains that involvement implies that parents are responsible for connecting with the school but the term *partnership* is a broader concept that everyone involved, schools, families and community members have responsibilities to share their ideas, knowledge and services with each other about the schools and children's education. Henderson and Mapp (2002) define *community* as "the neighborhood or the places around the school; local residents who live in the area and may or may not have children in the school, but have an interest in the school; and local groups that are based in the neighborhood" (p.10).

In their study of the attitudes of low income minority parents about education Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel (2001) concluded that "...it seemed clear that patterns of family-school interactions were controlled by highly defined, socially constructed scripts that institutionalize the relationships among parents, teachers, and school administrators" (p. 75). These authors discussed parent involvement as "... a broad framework of experiences and activities located in both the home and school" (p. 76) and point out that the literature in parent involvement represents a broad range of definitions. In this qualitative study a random sample of families who were representative of the school

population was interviewed about their educational experiences and their ideas about their role in their child's schooling. The data were coded and summarized according to descriptive categories. Although the researchers noted attitudes of school staff were that low income minority parents had little interest in parental involvement in the school, 90% of the families contacted willingly participated in the study. They found relationships between the school and community to be cordial and families described a broad range of experiences with their children's academic success. Parents' own experiences in schooling were reflected in their attitudes and expectations for their children. The authors described their findings about the perceived roles of parents as "stunning" as this diverse group of parents consistently described attendance at meetings and help with homework as their role in the school. Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel labeled this a *provider-receiver model of family-school relations* which limits communication to a formal process and suggests a social order that school personnel have specific expertise and knowledge. They suggested that this was an institutionalized, learned response and concluded that how parents perceive their role in their child's education may have something to do with the way the school treats them, and that family makeup and social class may affect the quality of family-school relationships. The authors suggested that further research should look more specifically at factors of class and family-school relationships.

Amy Baker (1997) pointed to the mandates for more parent involvement in education at the federal level but also stated "...that there is little consensus about what constitutes effective parent involvement" (p. 27). In order to explore the concept of parent involvement and the author's view that parents and teachers have had little opportunity to express their ideas on this subject, focus groups with teachers were

conducted by twelve sections of the National Council of Jewish Women. The study mentions that the sample was diverse in size and geography but gives no more detail on demographics of age, gender, years of experience, ethnicity or education. The year of the study was not stated. The most specific information about the teacher respondents was that there were eighty-seven participants with 73% from elementary schools, 8% from middle schools, and 7% from high schools. Fourteen focus groups were conducted for each section and each session was audiotaped following a similar format. Information gathered included types of contacts with parents, beliefs about parent involvement and perceptions of the school's interest in and attitudes about that involvement. The audiotapes were transcribed and submitted to a content analysis which resulted in six categories with some subcategories.

The analysis found that teachers wanted to feel supported by parents, elaborated on the importance of homework, and wanted parents to teach children proper values and social skills. The importance of communication between teachers and parents was outlined in six different types: parent conferences, informal meetings, phone calls, home visits, information sent home from the school, i.e., report cards, and documents like school policies. Teachers reported the benefits of parent involvement as help at home with learning activities, presence in the classroom or building, and communication with the teacher about the child. Teachers recognized the barriers to parent involvement like transportation and work schedules that prevented parents from being present in the school. They expressed frustration about families who do not have telephones and those families who move frequently. Teachers in this study held a similar view found in other articles that parents of older children are less involved than parents of younger children

(Baker, 1999; Cutler, 2000; Epstein, 1996; Izzo, et al, 1999; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996).

Some believed that schools are not always welcoming to parents and that some teachers are afraid of parents. Ideas for encouraging parent involvement included providing opportunities/projects in the school; consistent, frequent communication; developing positive relationships with parents; and engaging in joint problem solving. The article concluded with these recommendations: 1) create time and support for teachers to involve parents; 2) provide training for teachers in working with parents; 3) review policies that present barriers to involvement; and 4) create opportunities for teachers to communicate with parents.

Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris (1997) described three types of parent involvement in children's schooling: behavior, cognitive-intellectual, and personal. Behavior refers to parents' activities at school like parent-teacher conferences and participation in school wide events, as well as, helping with homework and communicating with their child about their experiences at school. Cognitive-intellectual involvement refers to providing intellectually stimulating experiences for their child outside the school building, such as talking with them about current events or taking them to museums. Personal involvement is defined as the ability of the parent to keep up with their child's activities at school. The purpose of their study was to examine the multiple factors that influence these various aspects of parent involvement. The authors took an ecological perspective and postulated a hierarchical model with three levels of factors, individual, contextual and institutional that might predict parent involvement in education. At the individual level they looked at child and parent characteristics that might influence involvement. They defined the contextual factors as the specifics of the

family setting that effect parental involvement, such as, stressful life events and social supports. Institutional factors referred to attitudes and practices of school personnel. The researchers also took into account the moderating effects of family constellation and child gender. Participants included 209 mothers of third and fifth graders, 111 girls and 89 boys, in four urban schools and their 28 teachers. Data were collected about ethnicity, socio-economic status, parental education and single and two parent households. They gathered information from individual parent interviews, questionnaires completed by parents, children and teachers that rated types and frequencies of involvement and perceptions of involvement, and from rating scales that measured moderating variables, such as, family constellations and social supports. Multiple regression analyses looked at correlations among variables and the data were displayed in tables with significance levels.

Grolnick, et al. (1997) concluded that multiple factors at several levels influenced parent involvement and that the factors varied for different types of involvement. Controlling for SES, parent attitudes were associated with all three types of involvement and the higher the SES, the more the mothers were involved. Mothers who believed in the effectiveness of parent involvement tended to be more involved. Those from two parent families tended to be more involved and those who rated their children as more difficult were less involved personally and in cognitive activities. Grolnick et al. reported one effect for context variables, that mothers who described a difficult context were less involved personally but those who reported more social supports were more involved cognitively with their children. Child and individual characteristics had a strong relationship with cognitive involvement. Positive teacher attitudes toward involvement

were associated with active parent attitudes, less difficult contexts, and more social support. Teacher effects were moderated by gender, as the effect was more significant for mothers of girls than boys. From this study the authors hypothesized that involvement for single parent mothers may be more difficult and that other types of involvement should be considered other than day time activities. They stated that “interventions beyond traditional classroom activities are necessary to reach all families” (p. 546) and schools should consider social realities and cultural differences when designing parent involvement programs. Although they looked at SES variables they did not report any data on effects of ethnicity, and the study may have been limited by the exclusion of fathers from interviews.

Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George (2004) discussed their efforts to study parent involvement in high poverty urban communities as part of education reform and how it became apparent to them that participants in their studies did not share a common understanding of parent involvement. The authors identified a *deficit model of parent involvement* in urban schools where parents were viewed as subjects to be manipulated and had no power or position in the school community. Parents were expected to participate in school sanctioned ways and their perspectives and resources were not considered. Barton, et al. posited that race and culture in urban areas also affects the perceptions and the power dynamic in family-school relationships. In this short paper, they explained that after some research, they proposed an ecological perspective in family school relationships and named their model the Ecologies of Parental Engagement as a way to understand what parents engage in and how they manage to do so. In their framework of engagement the authors propose that parental engagement is the mediation

between space and capital by parents in relation to others in the school setting. They describe space as having underlying structures and resources and are "...shaped by the rules and expectations for participating together in that space..." (p. 5). They identified spaces as academic, or those that reflect curriculum and instruction; school based non-academic, or those that reflect social or organizational qualities of schooling; and home/community spaces where parents interact with others around their concerns about school. Capital is defined as having the human, social, and material resources to access and act on the desired outcomes. "Furthermore, how parents are positioned or position themselves changes with changing spaces and changing access to resources" (p. 9). The authors concluded that parental engagement is not a set of activities or outcomes but a framework for relationships and actions within the school context.

In their longitudinal work at the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins, Joyce Epstein and her colleagues have moved the discussion of family-school relationships from one of involvement to one of *partnership*. Epstein (2001) explains that involvement implies the expectation of the school for all parents to participate with the result that those who do participate are considered good parents and those who do not are seen as bad parents. "In partnership, educators, families and community members work together to share information, guide students, solve problems, and celebrate successes" (Epstein, 2001, p. 4). Members of all three groups, families, schools and communities are active participants rather than observers or recipients. Partnerships imply equal power or what Epstein calls 'sharing the role of the expert'.

In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more family-like schools. A family-like school recognizes each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach. In a partnership, parents create more school-like families. A school-like family recognizes that each child is also a student. Families reinforce the importance of school, homework, and activities that build student skills and feelings of success. Communities, including groups of parents working together, create school-like opportunities, events, and programs that reinforce, recognize, and reward students for good progress, creativity, contributions, and excellence. Communities also create family-like settings, services, and events to enable families to better support their children. Community-minded families and students help their neighborhoods and other families. The concept of a community school is reemerging. It refers to a place where programs and services for students, parents, and others are offered before, during, and after the regular school day. (Epstein, 1995, p. 704)

Swap (1993) cautioned that the term partnership in the parent involvement literature is utilized in various models. She proposed that the important elements of a partnership model are two way communications, enhancement of learning at home, mutual support, and joint decision making. Swap argues that some partnerships are limited as they only focus on child learning, such as, reading programs or workshops. Others are more comprehensive, such as, the 21st Century Schools (Finn-Stevenson & Zigler, 1999), as they provide networks of mutual support and multiple program options. Some models provide all the elements by restructuring schools for partnership and student achievement, such as, the CoZi Model (Stern & Finn-Stevenson, 1999).

Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, Chatman, (2005c) discussed the "...concept of complementary learning as a framework of thinking about the importance of, and linkages among, the many contexts, activities, and actions-both school and non-school-where children learn" (p.2). They define *complementary learning supports* as good early childhood education, family support, parent involvement at home and school, and after school programs. They suggest that non-school supports should be provided for all

children and all services should be linked or complementary to each other. The authors describe various programs that have integrated service systems or continuums for family, school, and community services. “The concept of community can be defined in multiple ways-as a network of social connections, a target for resource allocation, or simply a physical space” (Shonkoff & Phillips, p. 355). The term *community involvement* in education is variously conceptualized as parent involvement, parent education, community school programs, community organizing for education reform, and partnerships with community organizations (Epstein, 2001; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Sanders 2001). Some authors use it to extend the concept of involvement from parents to all family members and to others in the neighborhood and others view the school as the community that includes all members, children, staff, families and agencies, businesses or organizations that partner with the school (Comer, 1996; Epstein, 2001). Parent education often refers to workshops for parents at the school, adult education classes, such as, GED, and connections for parents to community agencies. Henderson and Mapp (2002) explain that *community school* is a term that is used to refer to school-community initiatives in school reform which typically offer academic assistance, such as, tutoring, after school programs and learning clinics. These programs are designed with the input of families and local residents and may have a family support center. Community organizing efforts refer to groups of parents and neighborhood residents who engage in collective action to make changes in their local public schools. “School-community partnerships, then, can be defined as the connections between schools and community individuals, organizations and businesses that are forged to promote students’ social, emotional, physical and intellectual development” (Sanders, 2001, p. 20). Sanders

described the most common partnerships as those with businesses, primary community organizations, such as churches and libraries, and other community services, such as, health centers and recreational centers. Activities include mentoring, academic tutoring, job shadowing and provision of supplies and equipment to the students and the schools. Partnerships also include community members in the efforts of school reform, typically through decision making teams in the school.

The diverse definitions, experiences and expectations of school staff and families in respect to parent involvement in education are reflected in the studies reviewed. Within the context of the history and legislation that has encouraged more parent empowerment in education, the definition and concept of parent involvement has changed from a traditional separation to more connections between families and schools. The home-school relationship has changed from one of parents receiving education for their children to one of working collaboratively with school staff toward shared goals. Researchers reported that expectations in family-school relationships encompass parent's attitudes and supporting activities at home, communication with school staff, parental participation in school activities, and family and community involvement in educational decision making. Some of the studies discussed parent involvement in respect to the various individual, institutional and contextual factors that influence it and made reference to parent involvement perspectives in school districts with varying socio-economic levels. Terms of involvement have broadened from parent to family and community as the education of children is viewed from a more ecological perspective as the responsibility of the family, school, and neighborhood. And involvement which implies what parents are expected to

do for the school has evolved to partnership which emphasizes communication, support and joint decision making.

Parent and Community Involvement in Education

In this chapter we have reviewed the history of parent-school relationships and discussed the changes over the years in the understanding and expectations of parent involvement to the current situation where parents are playing a greater role in their children's education. The current view of parent involvement has moved from one of a provider-receiver model to one of collaboration between families, schools and community (Epstein, 2001; Lareau, 1996; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Swap, 1993). "For both parents and teachers, collaboration reduces the characteristic isolation of their roles" (Swap, 1993, p. 11). We also examined theories in ecological and developmental systems that support the concept of family and community involvement in children's education, and we reviewed the terms used in the literature about involvement practices.

The literature in family involvement in education encompasses a wide range of interest areas, models and programs from involvement in early childhood development, academic achievement, after school initiatives, family support, professional development, parent leadership in the schools, and community organizing for education reform. As reported by Weiss, et al. (2005d) there are many research efforts, professional groups with standards, and community organizations who focus on family involvement in education. They described various programs that have a family focus, such as, Even Start

and Head Start and home visitation programs, such as, Healthy Families America, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), Parent-Child Home Program, and Early Intervention. They list efforts in Family Involvement to support academic achievement, such as, MAPPS (Math and Parent Partnerships); Family Involvement to support social-emotional development, such as, Families and Schools Together (FAST); Home-School Partnerships, such as, parent information and research centers, i.e., the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE); and Parent Leadership, such as, the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership. Their resource guide also calls attention to school focused programs, such as, the School Development Program and the National Network of Partnership Schools, and community focused programs, such as, ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) and Schools of the 21st Century (Weiss et al., 2005d).

This section focuses primarily on early childhood and school based models, programs and governance efforts that include families and community members as partners in the school setting. Included are studies that have looked at family and community involvement in relation to outcomes of student achievement, better attendance and improved behavioral and social interactions; outcomes related to teacher practices; and outcomes in school improvement related to parent and community participation in school governance. "As a result, educators and community leaders concerned about the achievement gap and the need for meaningful civic engagement in education are beginning to create models, processes, and projects that move away from a school-centered view of family involvement to one focused on the families and communities in which children live" (Weiss, Coffman, Post, Bouffard, & Little, 2005, p.

4). The literature has illuminated several models that encourage and include parents, families and community members in the educational process. “Models may be formal or informal, explicit or implicit, recognized or unrecognized, but they provide a consistent pattern of assumptions, goals, attitudes, behaviors, and strategies that help us to understand parent-educator relationships in that school” (Swap, 1993, p.27).

Educational Models That Include Parent Involvement

The Transactional model of development was introduced by Arnold Sameroff and Michael Chandler in their writings in the 1970s, which contradicted the notion of development as a product of nature or nurture and proposed that child outcomes are a product of a combination of an individual and her experience (Sameroff & MacKenzie, 2003). “The transactional model views the development of the child as a product of the continuous dynamic interactions between the child and the experience provided by his or her family and social context” (Sameroff & MacKenzie, 2003, p. 16). Weiss, et al. (2005c) characterize a developmental systems model as based in the framework of an ecological systems theory, as the routines and activities in a child’s daily life can have substantial influence on their development. “Developmental systems model is organized to address stressors generated by either child or family characteristics, as well as, the effects of stressors resulting from their joint occurrence” (Guralnick, 2001, p. 4). The principles of this model are that it is organized within a developmental framework, has a family centered, community approach, and child and family services are integrated and coordinated. Both a transactional model and a developmental systems model have been

used to design service systems for young children at risk and for those with developmental disabilities (Weiss, et al. 2005c). Center based models like Head Start and Parent Child Development Centers are based on the premise that supportive and nurturing homes help to maintain skills learned at the center. Head Start serves low income families and includes parenting education and support services, as well as, health and developmental services. Home based services such as, the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) and Early Head Start are based on the belief in parent involvement for children's school success (Baker, 1998b; Weiss, et al. 2005c). "Early interventions are premised on a belief in the power of environmental influences on early development" (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p.219). Early Intervention Programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities are also based in a developmental systems model as they work in a partnership model with families, providing direct services and information and social supports. Davies (1991) described a parent center funded through Chapter 1 that was developed at the Ellis School in Boston in the 1980s. The center expanded with breakfasts for parents and teachers, ESL and GED classes, escort and referral services for social services and coordination of classroom volunteers. Another example is that of the California Healthy Start School-Linked Services Initiative, a service integration model which has a family centered perspective and emphasized collaboration between schools and human service agencies.

Eccles and Harold (1996) presented a theoretical framework of parent involvement that they describe as both an outcome of parent, teacher, and child influences as well as a predictor of child outcomes. Their graphic model depicts various influences on parent involvement, including what they call *exogenous* variables or those

that have more indirect influence, such as, family and child characteristics, neighborhood factors, and teacher/school characteristics. The second column in the model shows teacher and parent beliefs and attitudes that affect each other and their respective practices which lead directly to child outcomes. (see Figure 2)

These authors reported on two studies that they used to investigate their model. The Michigan Childhood and Beyond Study was longitudinal and was conducted in four, white, lower-middle to middle class urban/suburban districts in the Midwest. They initially looked at groups of kindergarteners, first and third graders, and then followed them for four consecutive years with the last data set when they were then third, fourth and sixth graders. The sample size in each grade was approximately 250 to 500 students and included fifth graders in elementary and middle school settings. Data were gathered on child achievement, as well as, parent and teacher attitudes and beliefs about parent involvement in their children's education. Questionnaire data were gathered from children, parents and teachers. Data were presented in tables with information on scales that were used, statistics on information gathered, and correlational data on significant effects of certain variables. Parents were asked about their responses to teacher requests, their volunteer activities in the school and their involvement with monitoring their child's daily activities. Data on teacher practices included ideas that teachers sent home to parents, sharing of classroom goals with parents, and requests that teachers made of parents to monitor their children's work.

Parents of older children did significantly less monitoring than those of younger children and parents of younger children also did more volunteering. The amount of parent involvement did not differ by grade. There was no significant difference among

grade levels on the type or extent of communication with parents. The authors found that the low levels of communication were 'striking', in that teachers, on average, provided ideas for parents less than once a month and 50% to 70% of teachers provided no other feedback about children's progress other than conferences and report cards. Parents of students in the middle school tended to contact the school more for ideas on helping their children and teachers in the middle school encouraged less involvement and contacted parents less often. Data showed significant sex of parent effects in that mothers were more involved with their children's intellectual and school-related development and fathers were more involved in the children's athletic development. Parent monitoring of their child's work decreased with grade level but the frequency of their help with tests and learning general knowledge increased with grade level. Two parent characteristics of intellectual confidence and achievement motivation were significantly correlated with parent involvement in reading and math education. Mother's education or income levels were not related to involvement in the child's education but the authors noted that that finding might be related to a large sample of middle class families. Both mother's and father's education were positively associated with request for information on their child's progress but was negatively related to the extent parents monitored their child's activities. There was a positive but weak correlation, however, between teacher's requests for monitoring and parents' activity in monitoring their children's school work. This study was limited by its' demographics of mostly white, middle class families and the data presented did not discuss the effects on child outcomes.

Eccles and Harold (1996) described a second study they conducted in Maryland with 1400 African-American and European-American early adolescents in middle school.

The study looked at parent involvement both in school and at home and the sample included families from a range of socio-economic levels. Data were gathered through interview and questionnaire with both the adolescents and their parents. Parents reported attending three to four events and two to three parent conferences a year in the school. Although 61% belonged to the Parent-Teacher Association, only 5-6% reported any leadership activities. Parents stated that work commitments kept them from being more involved in the school and parents and children reported that teachers' communication with parents was primarily around homework completion. At home, parents reported more involvement with their children's education, helping them with their homework one to three times per week, more than any other activity. The authors reported that their analyses of predictors of parent involvement based on their model were significant in a positive direction but the effects were weak as their data represented only one point in time. Differences between the two groups of African-American and European-American families were slight with African-American parents slightly more involved at home and European-American parents slightly more involved at school. As expected, other family and work responsibilities were negatively correlated with parent involvement both at school and home. Parents with higher educational expectations for their child were more involved both at home and in school. The article did not illustrate any statistics in tables or graphs and the results were limited as the data reported was from the first year and the authors indicated that the study would continue. This study did not look at school or teacher characteristics depicted in their model.

Haynes and Ben-Avie (1996) believe that Harold and Eccles' model should be expanded to consider teacher, parent, school and community outcomes as well as child

outcomes. They refer to Harold and Eccles' discussion of the organizational structure of schools as part of their model in teacher and school characteristics and refer to James Comer's analysis that there is often a cultural dissonance between families and schools, and schools need to work with parents to help them understand the importance of their participation. Haynes and Ben-Avie describe Comer's School Development Program (SDP) as a model that includes three tiers of parental involvement: general participation, helping out in the classroom, and parent participation on a school decision making team. "Parents are involved in both instructional and non-instructional activities. Parents work directly in the classrooms; parents have meaningful roles in the schools that are directly related to educational activities and the curriculum; parents are involved in changing the climate of the school so that authentic learning and teaching can occur; and parents are an integral part of the schools' governance and management teams" (Haynes & Ben-Avie, 1996, p. 53). The authors argue that parents have a sense of ownership, efficacy and increased self-confidence.

James Comer (1991, 1996, 1999) started the School Development Program (SDP) at the Yale University School of Medicine Child Development Center in 1968. It is the organization responsible for implementing what is now known as the Comer Process or Comer Model which has been implemented in numerous school districts across the country. Comer believed there was a "...need for an organizational and management system based on knowledge of child development and relationship issues" (Comer, Haynes, Joyner, &, 1996b, p. 8). The goal of the SDP is to improve the educational experience of poor, ethnic minority students by building relationships between families, schools, and communities.

Comer and his colleagues (1996, 1999) conducted their initial research in two schools in New Haven, Connecticut which had low standardized test scores and high student and teacher absenteeism. The schools' population was 100% African-American and 80% of the children were eligible for the free or reduced price lunch program. They developed a process to reconnect schools to their communities and redistribute power in decision making between parents and school staff with the goal of improving student achievement. The process was field tested between 1978 and 1987 in New Haven and three school districts in other states (Comer 1999; Haynes et al, 1996c). Partnerships were developed between teacher training programs and local school districts and Regional Professional Development Centers were established. In 1995 there were 563 schools participating in the SDP, including 85 middle schools and 45 high schools (Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes, & Joyner, 1999). "The School Development Program has now worked in more than 1,000 schools. More than two-thirds have been high-minority, low-income elementary schools. In general, these sites were characterized by a dysfunctional culture in which parent participation was either minimal or negative" (Comer, 2005, p. 39).

Comer (1996, 1999) believes that healthy child development along physical, cognitive, psychological, language, social, and ethical developmental pathways is the base for academic achievement and social success. In the SDP these developmental pathways are considered interdependent and are used as a framework for making decisions in the schools about what is best for children. Comer stresses the importance of school climate and relationships between families and schools in supporting a child's development, and parent involvement is a key element in his model. Each school

develops its' own academic and social goals. The SDP Model has nine elements in its' design: three teams, the School Planning and Management Team (SPMT), the Student and Staff Support Team (SSST) and the Parents' Team (PT); three operations, the Comprehensive School Plan, staff development, and monitoring and assessment; and three guiding principles of consensus, collaboration, and no-fault problem solving.

The School Planning and Management Team (SPMT) (School Development Program, 2001) develops a Comprehensive School Plan each year that identifies curriculum priorities and provides a way to assess academic and social accomplishments of the school and students. The plan includes a structured set of activities in academics, social climate and staff development. The SPMT is responsible for setting the school calendar, developing policies about programs, directing the work of sub-committees and managing the effective use of resources. Membership usually numbers twelve to fifteen, with four to six parent members elected by the various parent groups in the school; four to six teacher members representing different grade and subject areas; one member from the Student and Staff Support Team; one member from the support staff in the school; two students at the middle and high school level; and one to two administrators, including the Principal who leads the work of the team. Sub-committee work focuses on curriculum and instruction, social climate, staff and parent training, and public relations.

The Student and Staff Support Team (SSST) has two functions, one as a body in the school that reviews and modifies conditions that support general teaching and learning and another as the team that provides assessment and intervention for individual students. Members include an administrator, the school psychologist, the social worker, special education teachers, the school nurse and other support staff. Parents are included

in problem solving around their own child and the Team functions as a planning and placement team for students with special needs. The SSST works with the SPMT to develop programs for the general school population.

Comer (1991, 1999) believes that educators need to be aware of the diversity of families and the barriers they face in their relationships with the schools. Some parents have memories of negative experiences with school and others' attention is on basic survival. Rules and expectations at home may be different from school. The Parents' Team (PT) in the SDP is intended to include parents in all levels of school life with parent participation in general school activities, as volunteers or paid part-time staff, and as decision makers as members of the SPMT and its' subcommittees. "The Parent Team also works with teachers to plan the usual back-to-school, Thanksgiving, and other holiday events as purposeful parts of the comprehensive school plan that support students' developmental needs. This differs from other schools, where social activities often have no clear purpose beyond entertainment and therefore are vulnerable to being eliminated in response to pressures for more academics" (Comer, 2005, p. 39). The Principal meets with the school PTO/PTA regularly and a staff person functions as a parent liaison for ongoing communication.

Haynes, et al. (1996c) explained the research process and described the purpose of the research on the SDP to be "threefold: 1) to provide formative process data to improve and strengthen program implementation, 2) to provide measures of program impact on salient outcome variables, including those identified in Comprehensive School Plan goal statements, 3) to contribute to the theory on how schools change and how students succeed" (Haynes, Emmons, Gebreyesus, & Ben-Avie, 1996c, p. 123). The research

design involved quantitative and qualitative methods and included data gathered from all members of the community including parents, teachers, janitors, community members, etc. The authors noted that the focus of SDP research moved from individual schools to a systemic level to include central administration and the school board. This chapter summarized results of several studies over the years and explained the implementation process over four to five years for planning, training, transition, and institutionalizing the SDP model in school districts.

Haynes, Emmons and Woodruff (1998) reported that research on the effects of the Comer School Development Program on school and student outcomes began with short-term, cross-sectional and comparative studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The authors described some of the studies, such as, one quasi-experimental control study in Michigan that compared outcomes for 144 SDP students and 144 non-SDP students on attendance, behavior, classroom climate and achievement where they found significant gains in reading and math over a four year period for the SDP students compared to the district. Comer and his colleagues refined their assessment process and developed the School Implementation Questionnaire-Revised (SIQ-R) in order to measure the relationship between the quality of implementation of the SDP, school climate and student outcomes. They began collecting longitudinal data in the 1994-95 school year from 14 elementary schools in New York, 27 elementary schools in Washington, D.C., and 8 schools in New Haven, which the authors noted were involved in a renewal process of the SDP. School staff, various team members and some parents were surveyed on the elements of the implementation of the SDP. Haynes, et al. (1998) used an effectiveness variable from the SIQ-R and reported that the level of implementation varied among

schools within districts and across districts. They defined the effectiveness variable as, the "...average of the school score on SPMT effectiveness, SSST effectiveness, PT effectiveness and Comprehensive School Plan effectiveness" (Haynes, Emmons, & Woodruff, 1998, p. 75). The researchers correlated the effectiveness variable with student scores on reading and math achievement tests and found a significant correlation in all the districts, for example, in New York the correlation in math performance was ($r = .68$, $p = .007$) and in reading performance was ($r = .72$, $p = .004$). They also described the criteria they used to rate the schools as low, moderate or high in implementation and then correlated that with student achievement, reporting that across each group of schools the student achievement was at or above the average. Student achievement was higher in higher implementing schools. Data were presented in the narrative with correlation coefficients, levels of significance, and achievement percentiles, and displayed in scatter plots, tables and bar graphs. The authors noted a significant positive correlation in the schools in New Haven that implemented the SDP for two years and they reported improved achievement data from 1995 to 1997 in those schools. They concluded that effective implementation of the School Development Program is positively correlated with student outcomes but cautioned that more in depth qualitative and quantitative analysis was needed. There was no discussion of the limitations of this initial study or any description of the plan for the longitudinal study they referred to in the narrative.

Emmons, et al., (1999) reported on the changes made through the Comer Process at the Isadore Wexler School in a low income neighborhood in New Haven, Connecticut. The school had 440 students in preschool through fifth grade with a population of 87% African American, 11% Hispanic, 2% White and 0.5% Asian-American. In 1992 a new

Principal began by addressing physical plant issues through repairs and painting, inviting more parents into the building by starting a Family Resource Center, and providing training for the staff at the SDP at Yale. In 1997 data were gathered through interviews and focus groups with members of the SPMT, SSST, staff, parents and volunteers. The SPMT included members of the Parent Team and the SSST, and handled issues through a variety of subcommittees. Members reported a sense of team work, collaboration and shared responsibility with the Principal. SPMT membership gave them access to more community resources, which they used to help pay for science equipment and a program to prepare children for the Connecticut Mastery Test, with improved scores. Parents who were paid for their time were in the classrooms helping with instruction. The SSST looked at global concerns, such as, discipline issues and individual student and staff concerns. Staff commented that this process provided a more comprehensive approach to problem solving around individual children instead of just referring them to Special Education which had been past practice. One teacher described Special Education as no longer stuck in the closet with general education and special education teachers working collaboratively. Parents felt more welcome in the building and there was more outreach to parents for various activities, including attendance at PTO meetings. This chapter included excerpts from the interviews and focus groups separated by categories, such as, the role of the SPMT and Parent Involvement Changing the Culture, but there was no description of the data analysis.

The Schools of the 21st Century (21C) model developed by Edward F. Zigler was combined with James Comer's SDP in the early 1990s to develop schools that are now known as CoZi schools operating in several states (Stern & Finn-Stevenson, 1999; Finn-

Stevenson & Zigler, 1999b). 21C schools bring child care and family support services under one roof in the neighborhood school. Child care is provided for preschool children year-round as well as before and after school and vacation care for school age children. Support services include home visits to expectant parents, training for family child care providers and information and referral. Individual sites may add other services, such as, adult education and job training. Guiding principles of the model are accessible, high quality child care, partnerships between parents and schools and programs that are not compulsory for parents (Finn-Stevenson & Zigler, 1999). SDP's goal of improving academic and social achievement is enhanced in the CoZi model with access to young children and their families through the 21C. The SDP process provides the structure for planning and evaluating the program and SDP teams include representatives from the various 21C services.

The Bowling Park School in Norfolk, Virginia was the first school chosen for the CoZi model (Stern & Finn-Stevenson, 1999). Located in a public housing community, it had 500 African-American students, 75% of whom qualified for the free lunch program. Between 1992 and 1995 the school opened child care programs, initiated a home visitation program for infants and toddlers, a health clinic and adult education classes. Funding came from a variety of government sources, private foundations and a sliding scale of parent fees. The school became a community center and attendance improved. Teachers observed that Kindergarten students were better prepared for learning and they reported greater job satisfaction as they saw more of their student's needs being met. Scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills improved from a grade 4 math at the 46th percentile in 1995 to the 88th percentile in 1996; and grade 4 reading from the 44th

percentile in 1995 to the 87th percentile in 1996. Many parents used the opportunity to look for employment or pursue their own education and they described the school as an open, welcoming place that valued their participation. This chapter described the model and reported results but there was no description of data collection or analysis.

In their introduction Cook, Habib, Phillips, Settersten, Shagle, Degirmencioglu, (1999) stated that “...evidence is not conclusive about the effectiveness of the School Development Program” (p. 546). The authors noted that much of Comer’s empirical work had been conducted in elementary schools and they commented that many of those studies were carried out by collaborators. They conducted the first independent experimental study of Comer’s School Development Program (SDP) in Prince George’s County in Maryland. Cook, et al. described Comer’s theory as a mediational one, with a causal linear relationship between school climate and academic outcomes. The purpose of the study was to measure implementation variables of the SDP, the effects on school climate and student attitudes, and the effects on academic achievement. Measurements were first tested in two pilot schools that were included in the study. Participants were divided into three cohorts in SDP and control schools, which were matched by racial composition and achievement scores. They were primarily African-American, 66%, White 24%, Asian-American 4% and other 6%, 21% were eligible for a free lunch and 47% of the sample were boys. The researchers gathered data through questionnaires of over 12,000 students, 2000 staff, and telephone interviews of over 100 parents in 23 middle schools over a four year period between 1991 and 1994. They also reviewed student records and gathered some qualitative data.

Many constructs were measured in program implementation, school climate, and student outcomes with moderator and outcomes variables including race, gender, SES, GPA, family composition, attendance, and scores on the Maryland Math Test and the California Achievement Test given at the beginning of seventh grade and again at the end of eighth grade. A multivariate analysis was conducted and results were described in narrative and graphic display with specifics about individual constructs measured and presented as means and standard deviations and correlational data. The written description was lengthy and detailed about the process and they described other variables that were not measured but may have influenced the results.

Cook, et al. (1999) reported only a small differential between the SDP and control schools. SDP schools had the presence of a facilitator and the SPMT functioned better in those schools. The model appeared to stimulate parent involvement as there was a greater perceived sense of parent and community involvement and parents rated parent involvement higher in SDP schools. There were no differences in the sense of shared governance or in the effects on school climate. Researchers found that the model was only partially implemented in SDP schools and the Student and Staff Support Team (SSST) did not function as intended in those schools. Implementation was also less successful in schools with more minority students and a larger percentage of newer staff. They commented that the mixed quality of implementation may have affected the results and they found that the Comer procedures may have contributed to positive changes in social, behavioral and psychological adjustment among students. The authors concluded that there were no systematic effects on climate or outcomes for being a SDP school and there was "...no evidence that a better academic and social climate qualitatively

transforms a school” (Cook et al., 1999, p. 577). Another noteworthy finding was that the effects of the SDP did not improve math scores and may have lowered them. Limitations included a site that was not as poor as intended for the Comer model, previous implementation of the Effective Schools Model in some of the schools and brief length of only four years for a longitudinal study. Cook et al. (1999) commented that the staff of the School Development Program at Yale has become more focused on instructional practices and inservice training in recent years and since its’ inception thirty years ago, the SDP now overlaps with other reform models that emphasize relationships and shared governance, and higher standards for better child outcomes.

Thomas Cook reported on a second evaluation of the School Development Program in Chicago (Cook, Murphy, & Hunt, 2000). The study was a five year, randomized experiment with matched pairs. Participants included over 10,000 students in the 5th to the 8th grade in 10 SDP schools and 9 control schools who were mostly African American living in public housing. Similar to the study conducted in Maryland, the purpose of this study was to measure implementation variables of the SDP, the effects on school climate and student attitudes, and the effects on academic achievement. Survey measures were used again and the authors noted that this study had a larger ethnographic component. Academic achievement was measured using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Multivariant analysis was utilized and data were presented in narrative and graphic form, showing statistical differences between the schools and describing demographics and achievement scores. The results showed steady improvement in both SDP and control schools in implementation variables. The data suggested that SDP schools caused positive changes in socially important sets of outcomes, such as, beliefs, feelings and

behavior related to disruptive behavior and in standardized test scores. Most of the effects were more significant in the last two years of the study. Cook et al. (2000) noted that the results may have been influenced by the fact that reform efforts had begun in Chicago prior to this study which had already established local school councils. They concluded that more longitudinal research was needed and they wondered whether the effects would last as the students moved on to other schools.

Joyce Epstein (1995, 1996, 2001) has based her partnership practices on a model of collaboration and shared responsibility between families and schools. “There are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. They can improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership, connect families with others in the school and in the community, and help teachers with their work. However, the main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work” (Epstein, 1995, p. 702). Epstein (1995) discussed the properties of successful partnerships programs. She emphasizes that the development of a partnership is a process, not a single event. Progress is incremental, should be reviewed regularly, and should be continuously improved. Partnership programs should be focused on helping more children achieve through curriculum and instructional reforms. Epstein believes professional development is an essential property, as pre-service and in-service training should help educators define their professional work in terms of partnerships.

Joyce Epstein and her colleagues used her theory of overlapping spheres of influence to conduct studies that identified a framework of six major types of parental involvement, or ways that schools can work with families to involve them in their children's education:

- 1) *Parenting*: Assist families with understanding child development and with setting the home environment to support learning. Activities may include workshops, family support programs, home visiting, or use of an annual questionnaire for families to share goals for their children
- 2) *Communicating*: Communicating with parents about school programs and student progress, which may include report cards, parent-teacher conferences, notices, newsletters, policy handbooks, student work sent home and annual surveys to families.
- 3) *Volunteering*: Develop volunteer programs and recruit family and community members to support individual learning and school programs. Activities may include organizing volunteers for classroom and school events, a parent/family center, room parent, or parent patrols for school safety.
- 4) *Learning at Home*: Involving families in learning activities at home Including homework information on content and how to assist with work, calendars with information about curriculum, and packets for summer work.
- 5) *Decision Making*: Include families in school governance, committees and other parent organizations, including PTO/PTA, school action teams, district advisory councils, parent networks and advocacy groups for school reform.
- 6) *Collaborating with the Community*: Coordinate the resources of universities, businesses and other community organizations to support learning in the schools. Activities may include partnerships with local businesses, access to health, cultural, community and social services (Epstein, 1995, 2001; NNPS, 2005).

In 1996 Epstein developed the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) in order to facilitate the connections between research, policy and practice for school improvement (Sanders, 1999). Membership is open to schools, districts, and state

departments of education. Schools may join the NNPS independently or with their district and of the 202 schools that joined during the first year of 1996-1997, 95% were public schools and 84% joined with their district. During the 1998-1999 school year the number of member schools had grown to 800. Members are provided with a copy of *School, Family and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action* (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997), newsletters, technical assistance, opportunities to participate in research studies, and semiannual trainings. Membership requirements include the development of an Action Team to plan, implement, and evaluate their partnership program through the development of a three year outline and a one year detailed plan. “The Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships can be the ‘action arm’ of a school council, if one exists” (Epstein, 1995). Action Teams consist of six to twelve people including family members, teachers, administrators, other staff, community members and students in the upper grades. Schools use Joyce Epstein’s six types of involvement as a framework for developing their partnership program and, although there are no fees for membership; schools agree to allocate some of their annual budget for implementation. The Action Team Chairperson maintains communication with the NNPS staff and each school completes a survey at the end of each year.

“Excellent programs of partnership are not only well implemented but they also are linked to school improvement goals, reach all families, meet challenges for the six types of involvement, and meet other specified criteria” (Sanders, 1999). This author reported on the results of the 1997 year end survey called UPDATE completed by 63%, or 128 of the 202 member schools. The majority of respondents (87%) reported that they were taking advantage of member benefits. Most schools (85%) reported that they had

Action Teams and of those, 56% met regularly and planned activities that included the six types of involvement. Over half of the schools reported sharing information about their partnership activities with parents (52%) and with teachers (60%). Schools reported a range of sources and amounts of available funding with the average school budget for partnership programs at \$4065. Nearly one third (31%) of the schools/districts reported that they wrote grants for partnership programs. Sanders discussed the challenges faced by the member schools in addressing the six types of involvement, such as providing information from workshops to parents who could not attend and finding ways to improve two way communications. The primary challenge reported by schools was a lack of time for planning and implementing partnership practices (50%), as well as, lack of funds, inadequate training, and poor administrative support.

Sanders (1999) used a multiple regression analysis to examine the factors that influenced the four steps in the implementation of partnership practices. She described how the dependent variables were measured in the narrative and presented variation data in three tables. Results showed that the variables of Action Team support ($\beta = .36$; $p < .01$) and adequate funding ($\beta = .25$; $p < .05$) were the most important for program implementation, as well as, time, guidance and leadership. Sanders acknowledged that other variables, such as, school organization, school climate, or student mobility may affect implementation but were not accounted for in their data. The author acknowledged that this was the first attempt to gather data from member schools which would assist NNPS in their program development.

Sheldon (2003) examined partnership programs using Epstein's framework of six types of involvement. The study combined data collected by NNPS from the end of the

year survey on program quality in 1998-1999 with academic achievement data from 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 on the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP). The sample included third and fifth grade students in 82 schools in a large urban area. These schools had an average of 500 students, with 80% eligible for free or reduced price lunch and 41% who either entered or left the school during the year. Achievement scores on the MSPAP in these schools had historically been poor with only 25% or fewer students scoring in the satisfactory or above range. Sheldon described the achievement scores as the dependent variable and demographic information, program quality, program outreach, and program organization as the independent variables. Multiple regression analyses were conducted and results were discussed in the narrative and depicted in tables that showed means and standard deviations, and the correlational relationships between school characteristics, partnership program characteristics and academic achievement. Reports on program quality were positively related to program organization and program outreach, although the relationship between outreach and organization was low. School characteristics were related to academic achievement, i.e., schools with high rates of mobility had low achievement scores and schools with large percentages of students with free or reduced price lunch were negatively correlated with academic achievement. After controlling for school characteristics, the analyses found few and inconsistent relationships between partnership program quality and achievement. The author reported that limitations of the study were the use of cross sectional data and the high correlation between the two years of achievement data. Sheldon concluded that the results show a link between schools efforts to improve family and community

involvement and student performance and acknowledged that this study was only one phase of a longitudinal examination of the affects of the NNPS model.

Epstein and Sheldon (2002) referred to the research on attendance and drop out rates and explained that chronic absenteeism predicts poor achievement as well as having other negative effects for students and schools. “Reducing the rates of student truancy and chronic absenteeism has been and continues to be a goal of many schools and school systems” (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, p. 308). The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) conducted a study of the effects of family and community partnership activities on improving student success, including attendance. In 1997 eighteen schools, including twelve elementary and six secondary schools completed baseline surveys about their goals for attendance, history of attendance issues, and involvement practices used to improve attendance. Surveys were completed again at midyear and at the end of the year on effectiveness of the practices and changes in attendance. Due to the low number of secondary schools, Epstein and Sheldon only analyzed the data from the five rural and seven urban elementary schools. Information gathered included background variables of location, racial composition, income status, size of school, percentage of second language learners, transportation issues, and homeless students; attendance variables including change in attendance rates for three consecutive school years (1994-1997) and data on students who were chronically absent; use of and helpfulness of involvement practices; and success in communication with families.

Although Epstein and Sheldon (2002) did not specifically explain their process for data analysis, their description was rich with statistics in the narrative and they were displayed in tables. Statistics included percentile data on school demographics, and

means and standard deviations derived from scales completed by respondents on attendance rates and changes, and helpful practices. Correlations were reported between changes in daily attendance with background variables and with the seven identified involvement practices. Results showed improved daily attendance and reduced chronic absenteeism was positively correlated with awards to students, communication with families specifically when there was a contact person, workshops for parents on attendance issues, and the presence of after school programs. The authors described their study as exploratory and reported their findings must be interpreted cautiously.

“Although the schools varied in levels of poverty, racial diversity, and languages spoken at home, we cannot be sure that the specific involvement activities will be effective in all elementary schools” (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, p. 314). They noted the small sample limited the capacity for analyses and the study could not control for other possible variables in these school settings. In addition to a larger sample, the authors suggested that further study should include rural, urban and suburban settings. It would also be revealing to use this study design in a comparative way, as this one only included schools that were participating in NNPS.

Steven Sheldon and Joyce Epstein (2005) conducted another exploratory study that looked at the efforts of schools to involve parents and their impact on mathematics achievement. They intended to answer three research questions: 1) the level of mathematics achievement in the sample schools, 2) the perceived effectiveness of partnership practices, and 3) the relationship between those practices and mathematics achievement. In the beginning of the 1997-1998 school year they asked NNPS member schools to complete baseline surveys on school characteristics, partnership practices and

mathematics achievement data from 1997 for a selected grade level. Follow-up surveys were completed at the end of the school year. Schools from seven states responded including ten elementary, and eight middle and high schools from a diverse population in urban, suburban and rural areas. They asked schools to provide mathematics achievement data for two consecutive school years and report card data for that same grade level. Surveys included fourteen partnership practices related to mathematics and the researchers analyzed the responses in relation to Epstein's typology of six types of involvement.

Sheldon and Epstein (2005) described their findings in the narrative and displayed the statistics in tables with means and standard deviations, and correlations between school characteristics and mathematics achievement, and between partnership practices and mathematics achievement. Results indicated that over 51% of students scored in the satisfactory or proficient range on standardized mathematics test in 1997 with an average increase of 6% in 1998. Grades on report cards declined slightly with variation among schools. Larger, high poverty schools reported lower rates of mathematics achievement than smaller, more affluent schools. District patterns showed better mathematics outcomes at the elementary level. All schools reported giving parents information on how to contact mathematics teachers, scheduled conferences with parents about mathematics achievement, and reported progress and problems in mathematics on report cards. The relationship between schools that encouraged parents to engage in home learning activities was positive and strong with an increase in mathematics achievement. Sheldon and Epstein acknowledged that the results were not statistically significant given the small sample and suggested more longitudinal research with larger samples. The

descriptive statistics were very general, i.e., the average size of districts was 10,000 and the tables indicated data from fifteen schools rather than eighteen, and there was no information on the number of students in the sample.

Sanders (2001) reported on a research study completed by NNPS on the implementation of community involvement in member schools. They attempted to identify and categorize the types of community organizations, determine the focus of the partnership activities, examine any obstacle to developing those partnerships, and identify factors that influenced schools' satisfaction with their community partners. There were 443 schools in the sample, with 34% from large cities, 27% from suburban areas, 20% from small cities, and 19% from rural areas. Schools included primarily elementary, 70%, with 19% from middle schools, 7% from high schools, and 9% from schools that ranged in grade level. The author stated that schools were diverse in ethnicity and economic level but gave no statistics. A section on community involvement practices was included as part of the year end survey called UPDATE completed by members in 1998. Of the 443 schools, 312 reported having at least one school-community partner which fell into ten categories spanning businesses, churches, universities, etc. The greatest proportion or 45% included one or more business partners. Other schools and universities represented 9%, local service organizations 10%, government and military agencies 8%, and health care organizations 8%. These categories were described in the narrative and displayed in a table that also showed the focus of the activities as student, school, family or community centered, with the largest number being student centered or 61%, and the least number being community centered or 7%. Obstacles to community involvement were lack of participation (30%), defined as schools having difficulty developing

relationships between school and community members; lack of time to meet, identify and contact community members (24%); lack of availability of community partners in some locations (12%); and lack of leadership, funding and poor communication.

Sanders described the members' satisfaction with the quality and quantity of their community partnerships and presented correlations between school context variables, such as, location, size, and grade level with the satisfaction of their community activities. Over half or 54% reported satisfaction with the quantity of their community partnerships and 80% were satisfied with the quality. Those schools that had more active community members reported that they were more satisfied. There was a significant negative correlation between schools that were located in large urban areas and their satisfaction with their community partnerships, as well as, a significant negative correlation between the number of obstacles and satisfaction levels. There was also a significant, positive correlation between schools' general support for partnerships and the number of active community members identified ($r = -.25, p < .001$). Sander's conclusion was that the study suggested that certain school and district supports for partnerships may influence various obstacles and satisfaction that schools have with community partnership activities. She also proposed that there needs to be more quantitative research and in depth case studies on the factors that influence or hinder community partnerships.

As the NNPS only began its' activities in 1996 and many of the studies discussed above were based on 1997-98 data, it appears that any significant effects on student outcomes or school improvement would be more demonstrable after a more longitudinal period of time. It is also noteworthy that these studies were primarily conducted by Epstein's collaborators and should be considered with caution.

In her discussion of developing home-school partnerships, Susan Swap (1993) described three models of working with families that avoid a partnership approach. Schools often use a *Protective Model* with parents where parents delegate to the school and hold the school accountable for the child's education. Parent involvement is viewed as inappropriate as it interferes with the work of educators. Although the goal of this model is to reduce conflict, it often exacerbates conflict between home and school as there is little opportunity for communication or problem solving. The goal of the *Curriculum Enrichment Model* is to expand the school curriculum by incorporating it into the contributions of families. Both teachers and parents are seen as experts, and although teachers are generally protective of their turf in curriculum, this model allows parents to play a role. This model draws on the expertise of families and provides opportunities to include those who are not in the mainstream culture, such as, immigrant parents who can incorporate their culture into the curriculum.

Swap described the *School to Home Transmission Model* as the most common approach, where parents are asked to support the goals of the school which are set by the educators. Although it assumes continuity between home and school values, schools choose the values outside of school that support school success or transmit the attitudes of what James Comer calls the 'social mainstream'. In her review of the literature she refers to the Comer Model as one that aims to reduce barriers for low income families outside of the mainstream. "These barriers have been overcome most convincingly when parent involvement programs are integrated with a comprehensive plan for school improvement" (Swap, 1993, p. 9). In the Transmission Model communication is primarily one way and, if parents sit on any decision making committees, they are

expected to play a subordinate role. Swap believes that schools reflect and perpetuate the dominant values of the mainstream culture and she points out that parents who do not follow through as expected by the school are seen as deficient in parenting, particularly in poor urban areas. Swap proposes that the School to Home Transmission Model “may provide a framework for the transition between a protective stance with parents and a more collaborative one” (Swap, 1993, p.37).

Swap (1993) describes a new model of home-school relationships in the *Partnership Model*. “The primary purpose of a partnership between home and school is to support and enhance children’s learning” (Swap, 1993, p. 101). She explains that a Partnership Model assumes a revisioning of the school environment to one of collaboration, where parents and schools work together for all children to achieve. This model differs from the transmission model as it assumes two way communication and places emphasis on the strengths of parents. It also differs from the enrichment model as it has a unifying mission of all cultures and aspects of school. Swap refers to James Comer’s School Development Program as a partnership model that has comprehensive parent involvement intricately linked to the mission of the school.

Swap (1993) outlined the important elements of a partnership model, the first being two-way communication. Communication to parents is accomplished through social gatherings, conferences with teachers, parent information centers, newsletters and policy handbooks. Examples of communication from parents are information forms, needs assessments, school improvement planning, volunteering, participation on hiring committees, and attending workshops with school personnel. Schools support parents by enhancing their parenting skills through activities and workshops, by providing

opportunities in the school for adult education and by attending workshops with teachers. The second element is the enhancement of learning at home and at school, as parents understand and provide opportunities that support school work and teachers work with and develop curriculum with parent input. Mutual support is the third element as educators are responsive to parent's needs, parents provide support by volunteering in the school and parents and teachers celebrate accomplishments as a community.

The fourth element of a partnership model described by Swap (1993) is solving problems together through joint decision making on committees, planning and management teams, or school councils. Joint decision making is guided by policies at the federal, state and local levels. Efforts in education reform in the last couple of decades have favored the concept of school based management (SBM) which shifts the locus of control from a central administration to the local school level. Swap points out that not all SBM teams include parents. "Partnership in decision making does not assume that parents or educators have expertise in the same areas. Partnership entails recognizing each other's legitimate authority" (Swap, 1993, p. 147). Swap discussed barriers to joint decision making, such as, resistance from the Principal, lack of a shared vision, advocacy of individual issues, influence of religious or political beliefs, or non-representation of all parent subgroups.

Swap (1993) refers to various programs that have some or all of these elements. She stated that some partnerships are limited as they only focus on child learning, such as, reading programs or workshops. Others are more comprehensive, such as, the 21st Century Schools, as they provide networks of mutual support and multiple program options. Some models provide all the elements by restructuring schools for partnership

and student achievement, such as, the CoZi Model. Those that have all the elements include joint planning and decision making, lay out a framework for action, build readiness in the faculty and commit to a three to five year process. These partnerships are also strengthened by securing district support and using consultation from outside experts.

Additional Studies That Include Parent Involvement

There have been many programs designed to increase home-school cooperation. Few programs, however, have been systematically evaluated for their effects on students' performance (Borman, 2002; Epstein 2001). In her many publications Joyce Epstein writes about the complexity of research design and implementation in the area of family involvement. She stresses that various types of involvement should be studied longitudinally and whether and how results of particular types can be generalized over time. "One of the most persistent misperceptions of many researchers, policy leaders and educators is that any family involvement leads to all good things for students, parents, teachers and schools" (Epstein, 1996, p. 223). Epstein stated that, "The positive or negative results of different involvement activities depend on the effectiveness of the design, implementation, measures, and improvements that are made over time" (Epstein, 2001, p. 52). Epstein (2001) also discussed the topic areas that should guide our research about family and community involvement in education: understanding child outcomes across the grades, as well as, the impact of programs and practices that involve families; study the connections between families, schools and community resources and

organizations; and explore the roles that students play in family, schools and community partnerships.

Haynes, et al (1996b) and Haynes and Ben-Avie (1996) discuss outcomes of parental involvement beyond academic achievement that benefit all members of a school community including children, families, school staff and community members.

“Through increased parental involvement in the schools, school staff increase their knowledge base of the sociocultural context of the communities served by the school” (Haynes & Ben-Avie, 1996, p. 45). For parents, involvement in the school leads to learning ways to help children with their school work and often motivates parents to further their own education. Sustained parent involvement empowers parents to be advocates for their children, leads to positive outcomes for school improvement and can foster positive outcomes for the community that is served by the school. Haynes and Ben-Avie propose that when families and schools work together, they become “...a potent force in the community, in promoting healthy, holistic development among all children” (Haynes & Ben-Avie, 1996, p. 46).

Henderson and Mapp (2002) described their review and synthesis of 51 studies that were published between 1993 and 2002 that focused on the influence of family and community involvement on student academic achievement and other outcomes. They chose studies that represented all regions of the country, included diverse populations and looked at community as well as parent and family involvement. The authors reviewed quantitative studies with an experimental, quasi-experimental or correlational design with statistical controls or qualitative studies with sound theory, objective observation, and thorough design, and those studies whose findings matched the data collected and

conclusions that were consistent with the findings. Studies covered a variety of topic areas, such as, programs and interventions, home-school interactions, literature reviews, culture and class, and community organizing; and spanned age and grade levels from early childhood to high school. Achievement was measured in several different ways. Teacher rating scales around school adjustment, reading and language, social and motor skills were used with young children. Report cards, standardized test scores, grade point averages and enrollment in advanced classes were used with school aged children. Other outcome measures included attendance, staying in school, promotion to the next grade and improved behavior. The authors concluded that although they felt "...confident in making a strong statement about the benefits of school, family, and community connections", they also stated that, "...the research in this field shares many of the limitations found in other areas of educational research", in that there were "...not enough quasi-experimental or experimental studies" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p.18). The authors also noted that this type of long term research has been limited by the availability of funding.

The studies fell into three broad categories: those that looked at the impact on family involvement on student achievement; some that examined effective strategies for connecting families, schools and communities; and others that looked at community organizing efforts to improve schools. Among the studies on the impact on achievement, benefits included better grade point averages, standardized test scores, improved attendance, more classes passed, and improved behavior and social skills. The authors noted that, "...while the effect sizes in many of these studies are statistically significant, they are small to moderate" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 24). Some studies found that

parent communication and involvement with the schools had little effect on student achievement and a few found that parent involvement with homework and contact with the school were negatively related to grades and test scores. Early childhood and kindergarten programs that trained parents to work with their children at home had significant positive effects. Studies that compared levels of involvement found that achievement increased with the degree of parental engagement. The authors reported from their synthesis that families from all cultural, social and educational backgrounds encourage and assist their children with academic work. “Children from all family backgrounds and income levels made gains” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 29). The authors identified a protective effect, or those students who feel supported both at home and at school, do better at school. The studies showed that families from all income and social levels are involved at home, but families from higher income and social class tend to be more involved in school. One of Henderson and Mapp’s key findings was, “Parents and Community Involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement” (p. 38).

The sixteen studies that examined effective strategies for connecting families, schools, and communities were primarily case studies with small sample sizes. They looked at why and how parents get involved, what factors influence that involvement and their connection to school staff. The authors noted that many of the studies were done in sites that were making steady gains in student achievement. “What these studies tell us is that *relationships matter*. ... Programs that successfully connect with families and community invite involvement, are welcoming, and address specific parent and community needs” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 43). Parent involvement was influenced

by many factors including educational level, personal experiences in school, attitudes of school staff, cultural influences, and family issues. Programs that were effective in engaging diverse families acknowledged and addressed cultural and class differences. Another key finding in this synthesis was that programs that attempted to engage families were based in a philosophy of partnership and were integrated into a comprehensive approach to improve student achievement.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) defined community organizing efforts as those that are conducted outside schools and designed and led by parents and community members as a way of giving parents more power over the schools and distribution of resources. Most of these efforts are in low income urban areas and in the rural south. The goal is to address the conditions that are at the root of poor student performance and to hold school districts accountable. There were only five studies reviewed, which were all descriptive. The main methods were surveys, interviews, and case studies and they did not attempt to measure any effects on student achievement. The authors concluded that there is a growing body of evidence of effective practices of family and community involvement in the schools and that the research suggests that high quality programs and school reform efforts will be more successful if they engage parents.

In 2007 Henderson, Mapp, Johnson and Davies published a how to book for schools on developing partnerships, *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family School Partnerships* where they describes four types of schools: partnership, open-door, come if we call and fortress. They created a rubric in five different areas of building relationships, linking to learning, addressing differences, supporting advocacy and sharing power.

Baker, Plotrkowski, and Brooks-Gunn (1998b) reported on the effectiveness of the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) from a longitudinal two cohort, randomized experimental study in a large city in New York State. HIPPY is a free, home-based program whose goal is to provide educational enrichment to poor and immigrant families and was a part of this school district's Early Childhood Center. During biweekly home visits, mothers were given books and activity packets organized like lesson plans that were designed to develop skills in language, sensory and perceptual discrimination, and problem solving for four and five year old children. Trained paraprofessionals who were recruited from backgrounds similar to the family modeled the use of the materials during home visits. "These programs aim to foster literacy skills, encourage mothers to engage in developmentally appropriate activities with their children and model reading techniques which will in turn enhance the child's school related skills and behaviors" (Baker, Plotrkowski, & Brooks-Gunn, 1998b, p. 573). The sample included 182 HIPPY program and control group children in two cohorts during a two year period with participants enrolled in a preschool program during the first year and Kindergarten during the second year. Two thirds of the families were ethnic minorities from primarily African-American and Latino backgrounds. The study used a pre and post test design with data from the Cooperative Preschool Inventory (CPI) and scores from the Metropolitan Readiness Test and Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT). Regression analysis was conducted to determine group differences within cohorts.

At the end of the program, results showed that the HIPPY children in Cohort 1 scored significantly higher on the CPI than the control group, but this finding was not true in Cohort 2. In Kindergarten there was no statistically significant difference between

HIPPY and control children on achievement tests. In first grade HIPPY children scored significantly higher on the reading scale of the MAT but again this was not replicated in Cohort 2. Further analysis was conducted to determine if there were differences between the two cohorts but the results did not explain the disparity. Although the researchers were encouraged by the positive results from Cohort 1, their findings were mixed and they recommended further research on the effectiveness of the HIPPY program, with attention to the mediating factors of parent participation and the intensity of treatment.

Jordan, et al (2000) discussed the skills children need for early literacy, such as, letter identification, phonological awareness, and recognition of environmental print and they pointed out that linguistically rich homes usually contribute to the development of these abilities. The authors also described literacy attainment as a constellation of abilities encompassing both print and language skills. They reported on Project EASE (Early Access to Success in Education), designed to provide parents both with a theoretical understanding of how to help their children and with scaffolded interactive practices to facilitate their children's early literacy development. The purpose of their quasi-experimental study was to determine whether the intervention was related to parent efficacy and what effects it had on children's language and literacy skills. The sample included 248 Kindergarten students in four schools in a community in Minnesota, which were Title 1 eligible and had only a 5% minority population. One hundred seventy-seven students in eight classes received the intervention, and 71 in three classes constituted the control group. There were approximately 25 students in each class and the teachers used a consistent district wide curriculum, although the specifics were not described. Methods included pre and post testing of all children, explanatory letters to all parents in

September and five training sessions once a month for parents in the experimental group. Training was immediately followed by structured parent-child reading activities and parents returned home with scripted activities for the next three weeks. Parents in the comparison group were informed of the program and agreed to have their children tested. Parents completed surveys about home literacy practices before the intervention. Child outcomes were measured pre and post intervention using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R) to measure receptive vocabulary and the Comprehensive Assessment Program (CAP) to look at three literacy dimensions of language, print and sound. The authors used sophisticated statistical analyses including repeated measures of analysis of variation for the literacy tests individually, and specifically for the three dimensions, controlling for the home intervention variables. They also used regression analysis to examine the extent to which attendance at trainings and home activities were related to outcomes for the experimental group.

The two groups had similar scores on the PPVT-R and some subtests of the CAP but the authors found that Project EASE participants made statistically significant greater gains than the control group on the CAP subtests in Vocabulary, Story Comprehension, Story Sequence, Sound Awareness and Concept of Print. Gains in language skills showed the largest effect, as well as, the amount of participation as indexed by completing book-related activities at home related to size of the effect observed. Results also showed that receiving this intervention had a particularly powerful impact on the children who scored low at the pretest. Jordan et al (2000) concluded that parental involvement in improving school performance is significant, particularly given that many of the parents were not limited in their literacy support and the schools had good achievement results. The

authors suggested that replicating this project with high risk populations might be more challenging. Limitations of the study noted by the researchers were not knowing whether participation in Project EASE improved middle-grade reading outcomes, and in the absence of actual observations of the parents engaged in the activities with their children, it was difficult to determine precisely what the key aspects of those interactions were that generated gains. Although they used multiple measures and controlled for many variables in their analysis, the authors did not discuss any potential variables in teacher effect. They did survey parents afterward about their satisfaction with the project but did not gather any information from teachers.

Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) used data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), published by the National Center for Education Statistics in 1989 to measure aspects of parental involvement on student outcomes. NELS was based on a sample of over 24,000 eighth grade students, their parents and teachers in over 1000 private and public schools in the United States. The authors chose to use this sample as they noted that it was particularly strong in its coverage of items pertaining to parent involvement. The purpose of the study was fourfold: to clarify the concept of parent involvement; to examine how dimensions of involvement vary among schools; to understand the relationship between parent involvement and family background; and to look at school achievement related to parent involvement. They identified four constructs of parental involvement, two types at home of discussing school activities and monitoring school work and two types at school as communication between parents and school personnel and attendance at school meetings. From those constructs they chose twelve items to measure. The researchers used a multilevel regression analysis within a

hierarchical model so they could partition the variation in a variable into within and among group components and to examine the relationship among variables both within and among groups. Results were reported in narrative and graphic form with percentile variations and correlational data. They found that levels of home discussion and monitoring, and communication with the school were the same across schools. Discussion of school activities had the highest correlation with academic achievement. Schools did differ significantly in levels of school involvement with only a modest effect on reading achievement and no effect on math achievement. The authors reported that "...family SES had virtually no relationship to the level of home supervision and was only moderately related to the other three dimensions of involvement" (Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996, p. 137). They did note, however, in their discussion that reading and math scores were higher for children who attended a higher SES school, despite family background, as well as, parents in higher SES schools were more likely to volunteer in the school. Parent involvement was associated with gender as girls reported more discussions at home and males reported more communication with the school but there were no differences between the sexes in school participation. They noted that data from NELS did not give information about school policies or practices that encourage parent involvement which limited their results.

Zellman, Stecher, Klein, and McCaffrey (1998) reported the evaluation results of a parent involvement program supported by the Weingart Foundation and the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). The authors point out that there are many small, local programs that encourage parent involvement in the schools but few have the funds to evaluate their efforts and most evaluations that are completed focus on parental

attitudes pre and post interventions. PIQE focused their training on the parents of minority, inner city youth through an eight week session of one class per week for parents. The sessions included ideas to improve child self-esteem, discipline and communication at home, parent as teacher at home, information about the school that encouraged visits, drug use, and discussion of higher education and career options. The training focused on child outcomes of improved child attendance and retention, improved academic performance, improved child-parent relationships, and increased motivation for post secondary education.

They looked at the results of this training in two elementary schools from large districts in California. In the first school they interviewed teachers on the changes in child behaviors and were able to compare data between 65 with PIQE training and 60 without training. Only 25% of parents who participated in the training responded to interview requests and reported on the changes in their and their child's behavior. In the second school they looked only at school records of attendance, tardiness and grades but were able to compare a large sample of 205 PIQE participants to 252 non-participants. Although there were some positive effects reported by parents, such as, increased knowledge, better attitudes and some change in their behavior, there were no significant effects on child behavior. Teacher report and school data also found no effects. The authors made suggestions for changes in the PIQE model, such as, providing training for teachers in addition to parents. They also suggested that PIQE differentiate between contact with the school or the teacher. The authors provided a critical review of their evaluation design.

Redding (1997) examined the results of surveys administered to parents and teachers in nine elementary schools (K-5) in Pennsylvania. The sample included 213 teacher surveys and 1111 parent surveys. The article discussed the importance of school and family as part of the same system and described an interest in the quality of communication, the practices that enhance school learning and the perceptions and expectations of parents and teachers. They also were interested in the relationship of these variables with the level of poverty. They used a self-administered questionnaire, the “School Community Survey” with all teachers and families in the schools. Teachers responded to a set of 65 Likert scale items relative to their perceptions of the school and parents responded to a corresponding set of items and also responded to 12 SES and descriptive items. Other data used in this study were achievement scores from the Pennsylvania reading and Math tests, average daily attendance, poverty level (% of students receiving free lunch), and school enrollment.

Redding analyzed the data to determine correlation between the survey items and measures of student performance and the relationship of these measures to the level of family poverty in the school. They also noted that the analysis helped to sort out general themes or patterns. The data were described in the narrative and the correlation coefficients and significance levels were displayed in tables. There was a high correlation between academic performance (reading and math scores) and parental attendance at conferences and open houses and those volunteering in the school. Examples of other behaviors reported by parents that correlated significantly with academic performance were reading at home, completion of homework, talking with children about school and taking children to museums, libraries, etc. Examples of teacher perceptions on the

surveys that correlated significantly with academic performance were consistent assignment of homework, a well stocked library, knowing parents and communicating with them through notes and telephone calls, and positive feedback from parents on their teaching. Redding concluded that while the relative poverty of the school population corresponded inversely with attendance and academic performance, the perceptions measured by the surveys tend to be mediating factors between poverty and achievement. They cited the example that family income does not determine whether teachers assign homework nor does it compromise parent's ability to talk with their children about school. The author saw average daily attendance as a pivotal connection to academic performance but viewed it as a family variable, similar to poverty and not a measure of the school process or expectations. Limitations of the use of survey data were noted but Redding also pointed to the value of this information for better understanding of human relationships.

Joyce Epstein (2001) noted that surveys of teacher practices showed that parent-child reading is the most used parent involvement technique. She reported on a study of 293 third and fifth grade students in Baltimore in the school year 1980-81. The children were from 14 classrooms with varied practices in parent involvement, from teachers who reported frequent use of parent involvement activities to those who were nonusers of those activities. Students took the California Achievement Test in the fall and spring. Parents were surveyed about teacher practices and Principals rated the overall quality of teachers, including instruction and management skills. Multiple regression analysis was used to control for the independent variables that could influence achievement, such as, family background, teachers' characteristics, parent reactions, and student efforts. Parents

who positively influenced change in the reading achievement of their children were those with more education and those who reported learning more than they had previously about their child's instruction. Children who were rated by teachers as completing their homework well gained more in reading achievement than others. Teachers' leadership in parent involvement in learning activities at home contributed independently to the gains in reading achievement. In contrast, overall teacher quality and teachers' leadership in home activities were not correlated with achievement scores in math. Some of the data collected showed that teachers report that reading activities are the most satisfying parent involvement activity and that Principals encourage teachers to engage parents in reading activities. Some parents reported feeling inadequate to help their children with reading and math, particularly in the fifth grade. The authors also reported that sex and race were not explanatory variables for student growth over the school year. Limitations of this study included lack of specificity of teacher practices and a sample that only included urban schools and families. The study also did not account for the prior differences in the involvement of families in the study or the practices of earlier teachers who interacted with those families.

The literature often refers to the decline in parent involvement as children get older (Baker, 1999; Cutler, 2000; Epstein, 1996; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich (1999) conducted a study that looked at the effects of parent involvement over time on children's social and academic functioning in school. The authors indicated that many of the studies on parent involvement have been cross-sectional ones that rely on teacher reports at one point in time which may bias the results based on the teacher's beliefs about children and their parents. This study employed a

longitudinal design that gathered data from different sources over a three year period. The random sample included 1205 students from Kindergarten through third grade in 27 schools in a small southern New England city. The sample was demographically similar to the rest of the city with 63% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 17% White, and 51% were female and 49% were male. Teachers reported that 48% of the children were eligible for a free lunch. For three consecutive years, 1991-1993, teachers completed two surveys on the same cohort of children, one rating the child's strengths and problems in school and the other rating the quantity and quality of parent involvement. They examined the relationships among measures of parent involvement (frequency of school contacts, quality of interactions, participation in school activities, and educational activities at home) and measures of students' school performance (engagement and social-emotional adjustment). The researchers also collected socio-demographic data, absentee records, and standardized test scores from the school database.

Repeated measures of analysis of variance were used and results were reported as descriptive statistics of frequencies, means and standard deviations of parent involvement variables for the three years with summaries of the significant main effects. Multiple correlations were conducted between the variables of parent involvement and student performance. Izzo, et al reported a slight decline in parent involvement over the years in the quality of parent-teachers relations, the frequency of contact and the parental attendance at school activities, however, no grade level correlated significantly with any parent involvement variable. Three of the four parent involvement variables correlated positively with school performance, with participation in educational activities at home as the strongest positive predictor of math and reading achievement. The number of parent-

teacher contacts had a negative correlation with school adjustment, leading the authors to hypothesize that frequent contacts may be an indicator that certain children are not doing well in school. Reliance only on teacher report without input from parents and children was noted as a limitation in this study, as well as, the absence of other parent involvement variables that may have been included. Izzo, et al also acknowledged that significant attrition in their sample limited their results and that the results did not show any causal relationships between parent involvement and student performance.

Sanders (1998) noted that Educators are concerned about the school attitudes and academic achievement of African American youth, particularly in urban school districts. The purpose of this study was to determine the influences of school, family and the church on the academic achievement of these adolescents. The study was conducted in a southeastern city whose schools had a predominantly minority population which was 90% African American and 25% of their families were living below the poverty level. The sample of 827 eighth grade students was selected from 8 of 19 geographically diverse middle schools in the city. Methods included a five point Likert type questionnaire completed by all participants and in-depth interviews with 40 students. The questionnaire gathered information about background, such as, gender, poverty, and family structure, and the variables that were measured included students' perceptions of support from parents and teachers, levels of participation in church and related activities, achievement ideology and academic self-concept, and school behavior and academic achievement. The interviews were conducted to supplement and enrich the survey data. Academic achievement was calculated as a grade point average by subject grades reported by the student.

Multiple regression analysis was utilized to look at the effects of the variables with descriptive and correlational data presented in tables and discussed in the narrative. The author presented excerpts from the interviews but the analysis of the qualitative data was not described. Attitudinal variables of school behavior, academic self-concept and achievement ideology were positively and significantly correlated with each of the support variables of school, family and church and with academic achievement. Being female was also positively and significantly correlated with the attitudinal variables while age, poverty, and single parent household were negatively correlated with the attitudinal variables. Teacher and parent support were positively and significantly correlated with school behavior and achievement ideology. Parental support and church involvement had moderate and positive effects on academic self-concept but teacher support did not have a significant effect on self-concept. Sanders reported that although all of the support variables were positively associated with student grades, only church and teacher support were significantly correlated with academic achievement. The regression model showed that academic self-concept had the greatest effect on student grade point average. The article concluded that certain attitudes effect academic achievement, as well as, support from teachers, parents, and community partners. There was no discussion of the study limitations but suggestions for further research with reference to using Epstein's six types of involvement. Although this study might provide some direction for further research about parental and community support and academic achievement, the results are limited due to reliance on survey data provided only by students, with academic achievement data based only on student report.

Epstein (2001) and her colleagues began to study the various aspects of partnerships in field studies with the Baltimore City Public Schools in Maryland in the 1980s. The authors mentioned that this was the first phase of a large study on the effects of parental involvement. In an early article (Becker & Epstein, 1982) they cited the differing opinions among educators of the effectiveness of teacher efforts to involve parents in their children's education. In order to measure teacher's opinions on parent involvement they conducted a survey of first, third and fifth grade teachers in most of the schools in Maryland in 1980, which included 3700 teachers from 600 urban and rural schools in addition to 600 principals. Ninety percent of the teachers were female and twenty percent were black. They ranged in age from twenty to seventy with the largest group (38%) in their thirties. Fifty percent of the teachers had taught for more than ten years.

The survey focused on the teacher's perception of 14 specific techniques that teachers might use to encourage parent participation in learning activities. The techniques were grouped into five categories: 1) those involving reading, 2) those that encourage discussion between parent and child, 3) informal activities at home, 4) contracts between teacher and parent, and 5) those that develop parents teaching skills. The article included a table describing the characteristics of the teachers and bar graphs that show teacher agreement with statements from the survey. Although the authors did not describe their methods or data analysis, the description implied correlation. "Support for each one of the 14 parent involvement techniques was positively correlated with the proportion of parents who were active at school and the frequency with which the teacher made use of parent volunteers in the classroom" (Epstein, 2001, p. 118).

The authors reported that parent child reading was the most widely used technique and it was a more prevalent practice among teachers of younger children. Discussion of television programs with children was one of the least frequently used techniques and teachers infrequently assigned parent interviews to students. Although forty percent of teachers supported the use of informal activities at home, they used these techniques infrequently, citing lack of cooperation or inability of parents to conduct them. Very few teachers were supportive of contracts between teachers and parents but the small percentage that did use them felt they were the most useful technique. Teachers were more inclined to use contracts with better-educated parents. Teachers of young children encouraged classroom observation and teaching parents to teach, and more experienced teachers and those working in urban schools used this technique more frequently

Teachers reported having the most contact with parents of children with learning and discipline problems and with parents who are already active in the school. The authors noted that the emphasis in family involvement in early childhood education was evident in the practices of teachers in the younger grades. Teachers who made home visits were more likely to be favorable of parent involvement. The authors also correlated their data on teacher perceptions by the level of education of parents. Although some teachers talked about pushy upper class parents and incapable lower class parents, those who used the techniques found little difference in responses of parents from different SES (socio-economic status) groups.

In a follow-up article in the same issue (Epstein & Becker, 1982) they discussed the teachers' comments during the interviews and their qualitative analysis of that information. Management of time for both teachers and parents was a salient issue with

various opinions about how it should be utilized. Commitment and expectations of parent involvement also produced diverse ideas. Teachers talked about the difficulty of managing volunteers and some admitted a fear of parents that inhibits their attempts to include them. Teachers commented on their use of common practices such as asking parents to read to children, sign papers, etc. One teacher spoke about her practice of making a home visit to each child's family in the summer and commented that it forms the basis for continuing parent contact throughout the year. The authors concluded that an absence of research about teacher practices still existed and they identified several questions for further research that covered ideas of attitudes, roles, supervision of learning activities at home, teacher as parent manager, training parents in learning activities, and acceptance of formal and informal parent involvement.

School Governance and Parent Involvement

In the last fifteen to twenty years many education reform efforts in the United States and in other countries have included provisions for decentralized administrative control with an emphasis on school governance at the local level that includes all stakeholders. Kijai and Norman (1990) reported that California, Florida and South Carolina had legislation by 1980 that established school based improvement councils. This concept is often referred to in the literature as site based or school based decision making (SBDM) or local school councils (LSC). SBDM assumes that the Principal provides educational leadership and works collaboratively with parents, teachers and members of the community to establish a decision making process around school

policies, budget, and school improvement. “SBDM is also intended to change the culture within each school, because teachers, parents who create these programs should have far greater enthusiasm for making them work” (Din, 1997, p. 4). Much of the literature on SBDM states that the goal is to improve student achievement.

In the literature about education reform in the United States the changes in the Chicago Public Schools in 1988 are frequently referenced as one of the most radical efforts to restructure an urban system in the last two decades (Epstein, 2001; Moore, 1998, 2002; Smylie 2003). One of the main ideas behind this reform effort was that strong democratic participation in governance would substantially improve student achievement (Moore, 2002). That effort included a substantial shift from centralized governance to management by local school councils that included eleven to twelve members, six parents, two teachers, two community members, the principal, and a student at the secondary level. Responsibilities of the local school councils were selecting and evaluating the principal, developing an annual school improvement plan, and developing and approving a budget that included about \$500,000 in flexible funds (Moore, 1998).

Moore (1998) reported on a study that looked at the relationship between school level practices and the trends in student reading achievement in Chicago elementary schools between 1990 and 1997. In 1990, 83% of elementary schools had low reading achievement scores defined as less than 40% of the students reading at or above the national norm on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (IOWA). In these low achieving schools the percentage of students achieving at or above the national norm moved from 23% in 1990 to 37% in 1997. The researchers at the Consortium on Chicago School Research

developed a procedure for analyzing the trends or patterns in IOWA reading achievement test scores and used regression analysis to classify schools into five categories based on the trends in their improvement over the seven year period. The description of the analysis was detailed and explained specifically how they used scores to determine trends in improvement. Narrative statistics as well as charts depicted the schools in each of the five categories. The study sample included 420 elementary schools and compared the practices of 111 of those in the top category that made a substantial upward trend in reading achievement, defined as a gain of more than 10% of students achieving at or above the national norm over the seven year period, with 224 of those in the middle category who had no significant improvement trend, defined as gains or losses of less than 7% over the seven year period. Eighty-seven of the 111 and 189 of the 224 schools, were low achieving schools in 1990. The focus of analysis of school practices was on the 83% of schools who were low achieving in 1990. The schools with substantial improvement were located geographically throughout the city and served approximately 65,000 students with a large percentage of those who were low-income (78%). They also had a smaller percentage of African American students but a higher percentage of Latino students than schools with no trend in improvement.

The Consortium on Chicago School Research collected data on school practices from elementary teachers and sixth and eighth grade students through a survey from a stratified random sample of 80 elementary and 31 high schools in 1994. Responses were combined to create 26 indicators of school practices that were organized around what Chicago referred to as the Five Essential Supports for Student Learning: School Leadership, Family-Community Partnership, School Environment/Culture, Staff

Development, and Instructional Program. They combined the scores from teachers and students to develop an average score for each indicator for each school. Moore (1998) reported that they controlled for student background variables, such as SES, race, and school mobility and used a multivariant analysis of covariance in their comparisons. The narrative included a lot of descriptive statistics about school populations, and extensive discussion of the reasons for using the IOWA test and the possible limitations of that measure. Quantitative data were displayed in numerous charts, bar graphs and scatter plots. The researchers added a qualitative piece to the study through observations, interviews and document reviews at seven of the schools with substantial improvement. They noted that these schools were not a random sample but were chosen to illustrate what schools with substantial trends in their improvement could accomplish. Although information from those site visits was discussed in the narrative, there was very little description of the qualitative methods and process of data collection and no description of the qualitative data analysis.

Moore (1998) reported that 14 of the 26 indicators showed a statistically significant difference at or below the .05 level between the schools with a trend of substantial improvement and with those with no trend of improvement. Under School Leadership indicators with significance included local school council contributions, principal as instructional leader, principal supervision, and teachers' influence on decision making. Examples of contributions of local school councils were cited as improving school safety, improving family involvement, advocating for improvement in physical facilities, developing collaborations with neighborhood organizations, helping to implement educational plans, and volunteering in a variety of ways. These schools also

used their discretionary funds to meet their school improvement plans. “However, no statistically significant difference was found for School Improvement Plan Implementation, either before or after student background controls were introduced” (Moore, 1998, p. 65).

The only significant indicator in Family Community Partnerships was teachers who reach out to communicate with and involve parents. Other indicators of parent involvement were not statistically significant but the author pointed out that the results in this category were limited by the fact that responses in the survey were only from teachers and students. Students’ reporting that they felt safe in the school and teachers’ commitment to the school were significant indicators under School Culture/Environment. Significant indicators in Staff Development included trust between principals and teachers, and between teachers; teacher agreement about expected norms and teachers encouraged to try innovative approaches; teachers who work collaboratively and share a collective responsibility for school improvement. The one significant indicator in Instructional Program was staff priority on student learning. The qualitative data from the seven schools showed that parents were consistently treated with respect, there was a high level of family participation in school events and there was a core group of volunteers in the school. These schools had high expectations for student achievement with some focus on test preparation, and distinctive instructional strategies. Reading instruction included a variety of balanced approaches including phonics, strategies for comprehension, opportunities for reading and responding in various ways, and careful monitoring of student progress.

After the analysis was complete, the Consortium concluded that the common thread in the schools with substantial improvement was a cooperative effort among all the adults involved. The availability of discretionary funds was noted as an important element in the school improvement efforts. This reader found it unfortunate that survey responses about school practices were not gathered from parents and community members who make up a significant number of the members of each school council. The authors had reported interviews with members of the school councils in the seven schools that were part of the site visits but there was no information about those results. Although Moore stated that these findings provide strong evidence that school based decision making is a promising strategy for school improvement, the emphasis in this study appeared to be on principal leadership and teacher empowerment with little attention to the role of parents and community members. Implications for continuing efforts in school reform and suggestions for further research were discussed at length but there was little mention of the limitations of this study, particularly the use of surveys as the primary data source.

The Chicago Annenberg Challenge began in 1995 as a six year project in the Chicago Public Schools in an effort to improve learning outcomes for all students and to strengthen community relations (Smylie, 2003; Sconzert, 2004). The focus of the project was on various aspects of educational practice, including instruction and curriculum, school climate, professional development, and involvement of family and community members. The research spanned a five year period from 1996 to 2001 and included 40% of the schools in Chicago, or 210 high schools and elementary schools, approximately 90% of which were elementary schools. The Annenberg schools were similar in

demographics of size, racial composition, and income to others in the Chicago system. Schools were grouped in networks of four to five schools with common interests and needs and matched with an external partner to work on local school improvement. The external partner, whether an individual, group or organization was expected to be the fiduciary for the Annenberg grants, provide material and intellectual resources for the network, help to develop local leadership, and assist the network in developing other funding sources. There were 45 external partners from universities (35%), cultural institutions (23%), education reform organizations (28%), and community organizations (14%). The Challenge provided training and workshops for schools and partners in developing plans for school improvement.

“The Challenge reflected a particular view of democratic localism and community organizing that placed great faith in the ability of local schools, in partnership with parents and their communities, to define their own problems, challenge their own assumptions, identify their own goals for improvement, and develop their own strategies to achieve them” (Smylie & Wenzel, 2003, p. 3). The Model of Essential Supports for Student Learning, a framework for school improvement that includes seven areas of school organization and practice was used as a template for measuring progress in this study. Essential Supports included classroom instruction, school climate, leadership, professional development, parent and community support, relational trust, and program coherence.

The study had a multi-method research design with four related strands of inquiry: 1) longitudinal field research at a number of sites which included classroom observations, samples of instructional assignments, teacher interviews, observations of meetings, and

review of school documents; 2) documentation of the Challenge as a reform initiative and organization through review of documents and interviews with Challenge staff;

3) analysis of survey data from students, teachers, and principals which were used to measure changes in the Essential Supports and student outcomes, such as, academic engagement and social competence over time and, 4) analysis of scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills with data that measured the rate of change over time in reading and math and regression analyses that were used to compare trends among schools. Specifics on measures were displayed in tables along with findings of means and standard change unit differences, and comparisons of differences between Annenberg and non-Annenberg schools were depicted in scatter plots. Analyses of the qualitative data were described in detail and the limitations of the use of survey data were cited. Another limitation discussed was the complexity of analyzing the effect of numerous variables on multiple improvement projects.

The final technical report was based only on the elementary schools, given the small number of secondary schools that participated (Smylie & Wenzel, 2003). Results were described in the lengthy narrative and displayed with details in numerous appendices. The authors reported that measures on trends in different student psychological and social outcomes were similar to changes in demographically similar non-Annenberg schools. Analyses of the standardized test scores showed that student achievement rose over the five year period but the rate or size of the gain did not markedly improve. Improvement was consistent with the system as a whole and the achievement trends in Annenberg schools did not differ in any significance from non-Annenberg schools with similar demographics.

Further analyses of the data from 12 field research sites found that higher levels of school development and improvement were related to the coordinated attention to the multiple supports, the use of multiple strategies for change, a strong base of external resources, and a strong, broad-based, distributed leadership. Successful schools drew external partners from various types of resources. The authors hypothesized that the lack of overall effect of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge may be due to flaws in the research design, lack of capacity of external partners to promote development, lack of commitment from the schools, and lack of support and school system forces that conflicted with the schools' efforts in school improvement.

Smylie and Wenzel (2003) discussed results based on each of the Essential Supports which found no statistically significant differences in the development of any of the essential supports between Annenberg and demographically similar non-Annenberg schools. In regard to parent and community support, the researchers tracked progress in terms of six measures: 1) teacher outreach to parents, 2) parent involvement in school, 3) teachers' use of community resources, 4) teachers' ties to the community, 5) teachers' knowledge of student culture, and 6) human and social resources in the community. Improvement was seen in the Annenberg schools in teacher outreach to parents and parent involvement in school but there was no statistically significant difference in the change in parent and community support between Annenberg and non-Annenberg schools during the five year period. The report indicated that the data were gathered from teacher and principal surveys, but there was no mention of data from parents or community members. Teacher outreach and parent involvement were defined in a conventional provider-receiver model with traditional parent activities like teacher

conferences and attendance at school fund raisers. Field research identified some individual schools with improved parent and community involvement practices, such as, volunteers and parent coordinators in the schools, and better connections to community resources. Qualitative data were gathered from 19 of the 45 external partners through interviews, observations and document reviews at three different points in the five year study (Sconzert, Smylie, & Wenzel, 2004). Partners stressed the importance of four major factors in promoting school improvement: leadership, communication and trust, coordination, and adequate human and fiscal resources.

The Annenberg Foundation awarded another Challenge grant to the city of Philadelphia in 1995 just as the city was adopting a systemic reform agenda called Children Achieving. The reform plan in Philadelphia envisioned parents as critical players in education reform and as leaders and collaborators with teachers and principals, with an emphasis on partnership and empowerment of parents, particularly those of low income and racial minorities (Gold, Rhodes, Brown, Lytle, & Waff, 2001). In this paper, Gold, et al. merely summarized the results of parent involvement efforts during this reform period in Philadelphia with no reference to study design, methods or analysis. They noted that Children Achieving was a response to a twenty-year-old desegregation case in the district and the focus on parent involvement was viewed as a key to equity in education. Parent involvement practices included creating standards and performance assessments, membership on local school councils, information sharing and relationship building, and community services and support. Parents who participated in the development of standards experienced a new level of inclusion in decision making but the conflicts and confusion around establishing a new standards based curriculum

overshadowed this success. The district put out publications and held forums about the reform efforts. They also developed small learning communities in the schools bringing teachers together to make decision about curriculum but parents were generally not included. “Information shared with parents reflected a unilateral school to parent communication, with parents playing a passive role as recipients of knowledge” (Gold et al., 2001, p. 10). The Children Achieving Action Design outlined a comprehensive family, school and community support network. The District developed the Family Resource Network with the goals of developing a volunteer program and informing parents about community services.

Children Achieving gave local school councils, with equal membership from parents and teachers, broad authority over policy decisions, including budget and resource allocation, safety measures, and transportation and facilities management, as well as, selecting and evaluating principals. The Philadelphia Federation of Teachers vigorously opposed the implementation of school councils and an agreement with the district resulted in council membership of 49% parents and 51% teachers, with the scope of the councils’ authority limited to discipline issues and school safety. “The district’s decision to forgo strong, school based governance by parents and teachers had widespread consequences for the legitimization of local school councils” (Gold et al., 2001, p. 7). The situation resulted in uneven implementation of school councils, and where they did exist, their authority varied widely. The authors noted that implementation was mirrored in traditional racial and class divisions with 90% of non-racially-isolated schools having councils, when only 58% of racially-isolated schools had councils. “The lack of invitation or opportunity to participate in meaningful decision making, in many

cases, resulted in the disappointment and disengagement of parents” (Gold et al., 2001, p. 8). The authors concluded that although Children Achieving had set out to make parents co-leaders and co-decision makers through the local school councils, the authority of the councils had been circumscribed by the power struggles in the reform effort and the vision of revising relations between parents and schools had been compromised.

Gold, et al. (2001) described two case studies to illustrate where parent engagement in the reform efforts did result in parents as co-decision makers. One study involved a group called TAPAS or Teachers and Parents and Students which was developed as a structure to bring people together for inquiry into the efforts of reform at different levels in the schools. The groups were racially diverse, included teachers and parents in various roles throughout the system, and were facilitated by a university researcher. Gold, et al., described the qualitative research design, and data collection and analysis that were conducted over a two and a half year period. The TAPAS report describes three inquiries: one in which a parent described her work with other parents to understand the connection between standards based classroom instruction and homework; a second where parents and teachers worked together on a project in a smaller learning community; and a third where a parent used his membership on a local school council to investigate school practices and foster change.

In the third inquiry a parent on the school council of an elementary school gathered data on numbers of referrals and disciplinary procedures in the school that highlighted racial and gender issues and linked disciplinary practices to the children’s access to standards based instruction. He took his concerns to the school council which consequently recommended improved referral and disciplinary practices in the school.

The authors said that this parent's "...membership on the local school council gave him access to quantitative data with which to shape and pursue his inquiry" (Gold et al., 2001, p. 43). The case studies cited showed "...parents using their knowledge of children as learners at home and in the community as well as in classrooms to push examination of equity and standards issues both inside and outside the classroom" (Gold et al., 2001, p. 50). In their discussion, the authors concluded that participatory inquiry facilitated parent participation in school reform; participation was learning; dialogue creates a context for the exploration of issues; school principals are important for opening space for parent leadership; parents can be leaders at different levels in a school district; and sustainable organizations and financial support are necessary for parent leadership.

Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1998) wrote about school based management and the implementation of required school councils in Ontario, Canada which began in 1996. The authors made reference in their discussion to literature that pointed to obstacles in the development of effective councils, which included power struggles and political conflict, lack of role definition, difficulty recruiting members, and lack of training. They described school councils as three different types distinguished by the greatest decision making power which included 'administrative control', 'professional control', and 'community control', and referred to those in Ontario as under community control given the majority of representation were parents and community members. The purpose of the study was to explore the nature, extent and conditions of influence of school councils and included a two stage mixed methods research design. The first stage involved school districts that had implemented school councils during the previous two years with the use of a survey of 3150 teachers in 95 elementary and 14 secondary schools that asked about

their awareness of and characteristics of the school councils; the council influence on their classroom practices; and the nature of parent-teacher relationships. Survey data were analyzed for frequency distributions, means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients. The second stage consisted of semi-structured interviews with a sample of 48 teachers who had reported positive, negative and neutral responses about classroom influences on the survey in the first stage. A sample of council members from the same schools, including principals, parents, teachers and secondary students were also interviewed to gather information about decision making and council initiatives. Results of the interviews were coded, analyzed and interpreted and then compared to concepts and theories in the literature.

Results of the study suggested that overall teachers rated the influence of the councils on their classroom work as very weak with elementary teachers rating influence higher than secondary teachers. “Generally, teachers responding to the survey saw parental influence on curriculum as indirect and limited to very few schools” (Leithwood et al., 1998, p. 14). Influence outside the classroom was rated only slightly higher and the type of activity that was mentioned most by teachers that had indirect influence on their classroom work was fundraising. Survey results showed only a weak relationship to variables such as SES, school size or teacher’s years of experience. Council influence was more positively associated with variables such as teachers informed about council activities, parental presence in the school, and little difficulty recruiting council members. Councils that were more influential had reported practices that were free of power struggles, had clear role definitions, made their agenda available before meetings and communicated well with the school community. These councils were chaired by people

who were knowledgeable about the issues faced by the school and engaged in consensual decision making. The evidence also showed that principal leadership, in conjunction with an effective chair, was also essential to council influence. The authors concluded from their results that, “School councils do not add value to the empowerment of parents, the technical work of schools, or the development of students” (Leithwood et al., 1998).

In a follow-up study in Ontario, Parker and Leithwood (2000) looked at school council influence on school and classroom practices, what conditions mediated that influence, what teacher behavior was associated with council influence, and what characteristics were associated with councils that did have a positive influence on school and classroom practices. They used a similar two stage mixed methods design in one district with 46 elementary schools and 5 high schools. The first stage included a sixteen item survey about school council influence on school and classroom practices completed by 631 teachers or approximately 50% of the teachers in the district. Overall mean and standard deviations were discussed in the narrative and mean influence ratings for each school were displayed in tables. Results of the surveys were used to select five schools for open ended interviews with 9 to 11 people in each school including parent, teacher, and student council members, principals, and non-council teachers. The schools included two with the highest mean influence ratings, two with the lowest mean influence ratings, and one with neutral influence ratings. The interview focus was on mediating influences, teacher behaviors, and characteristics associated with council influence. Interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach

Similar to the Leithwood study in 1998, Parker and Leithwood (2000) reported that teachers rated council influence as minimal with elementary teachers rating influence

higher than high school teachers. In schools with the highest mean ratings, school councils directed the school improvement plan which was endorsed and supported by the teachers and parent community. Teachers in these schools commented on parental support in their classroom, as well as, a high level of parental involvement in the school. These schools also had a higher level of staff involvement and professional development activities and interviewees reported a sense of partnership or collaboration with the school council and parents, teachers, and principal. The schools with positive influences reported the existence of parent involvement activities before the initiation of school councils. Schools with more influential councils reported strong principal support and participation in the work of the council, as well as, a willingness to share decision-making. “In sum, in schools where principals encouraged and facilitated professional development, where structures were in place for the sharing of information, where teachers were initiators, and where staff were engaged in learning, councils had the greater positive influence” (Parker & Leithwood, 2000). The authors concluded that the key variables for successful school councils are effective principal leadership, support from the district and effective group decision making processes, and councils that actively seek greater participation from parents.

Hertz-Lazarowitz, R., & Horowitz, H. (2002) reported on a study in Acre, Israel on the impact of a five year school family partnership project. Their goals were to improve children's reading and writing achievement and form a parent's task force to create community-wide involvement and change. Teachers and parents had training based on the school-family partnership (SFP) model developed by Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University. The sample included 520 parents of first graders in 21 classrooms in

7 Jewish schools, with 236 parents involved in the SFP model and 274 in the comparison schools. Measures included teacher questionnaires about curriculum, child achievement and perceptions of parents as partners; parent questionnaires focused on literacy practices at home; and a city wide reading and writing test to assess children's progress. Low, medium and high levels of implementation were defined and determined based on observations, interviews, list of activities and parent feedback. The researchers used structural equation analysis with the data. Findings indicated that parents', teachers', and children's outcomes were higher in the SFP program than in the comparison schools. The comparison program and the low-level implementation group were similar in parents' and teachers' outcomes. Higher test scores for children were related to the highest level of implementation. The authors concluded that parents' participation and a better home literacy environment explained children's academic success. Although the authors were clear to point out that the city of Acre had a mixed Arab and Jewish population, they chose to complete this study in only Jewish schools. Their data did reflect a mixed SES sample.

School improvement councils (SIC) were first established in South Carolina under the Education Finance Act of 1977 and then included in the Education Improvement Act of 1984 (Kijai & Norman, 1990). The councils include two parents, two teachers, and two students at the secondary level. The purpose of the councils is to assist the principal in development and monitoring of the school improvement plan. Kijai and Norman (1990) conducted a study to examine the structures, roles and responsibilities of school councils in relation to student achievement and six indicators of school effectiveness: school climate, principal leadership, high expectations, emphasis on academics, frequent

monitoring of student progress, and home-school relations. Data were gathered through a survey questionnaire mailed to principals and two other council members in 600 elementary, middle and high schools, with a return rate of 34.5%. School effectiveness was assessed through teacher perceptions and student achievement was assessed using data from two standardized tests obtained from the State Department of Education. Results were described in the narrative and displayed in tables of descriptive and comparative statistics. Although the data showed the number of responses from principals and council members, they did not delineate council members as teachers or parents. The authors concluded that most of the councils were in compliance with the state mandate and 70-80% of them had basic structures of by laws, regular meetings and defined roles and responsibilities. They noted some duplication of efforts with other groups, such as, the PTA and a need for training in communication and group process skills. Approximately 30% of the councils had not developed school improvement plans and there was a reported lack of teacher support from 30-40% of the councils. The study concluded that there was no relationship between council characteristics and student achievement. The schools that were identified as having high impact councils had higher expectations for student performance, more monitoring of student progress and better home-school relationships. The same researchers conducted another study the following year to further identify the characteristics of high impact councils using survey data again from principals and council members in 38 schools in one district (Kijai & Norman, 1991). Results were discussed in the narrative and displayed as descriptive statistics in tables. The researchers reported that three characteristics were significant predictors of

the level of impact of school councils on school progress: level of support from principals, group processes and teacher support.

The School Council Assistance Project at the University of South Carolina continued its' research in order to describe the organization, function, activities and accomplishments of school councils and to provide some direction for training and technical assistance to school councils (Monrad & Norman, 1992). Eight schools (two high school, two middle schools and four elementary schools) were selected based on the data from the 1990 study that identified them as schools with effective school councils. Data collection methods included site visits with observations of council meetings, review of related documentation and interviews with the principal, council chair and teacher, parent and student representatives on each council. Descriptive statistics, such as, demographic information about each school, membership composition of the councils, and data on council activities were discussed in the narrative and displayed in tables. Although the triangulation of data collection implied a qualitative study, there was no description of qualitative data analysis. Results showed that schools varied in their level of sophistication and activity and the authors concluded that, "The capacity of SICs to work effectively on school improvement issues appears to be related to their developmental maturity in the areas of organizational capacity, council functioning, and school and district level support" (Monrad & Norman, 1992, p. 51). Organizational capacity referred to the existence of by-laws, agendas and meeting minutes, as well as, the composition and experience of members and attendance at regular meetings. Effective functioning was related to the group process in council meetings and the work of committees outside of meeting time. Principal and teacher support of school councils was

reported by all principals and council members as critical to council success. School councils relied on local school boards for training and discretionary funds but many of the members interviewed reported that school boards were not aware of their work. Many of the interviewees spoke of the need for more training, resources and time to accomplish their goals and the difficulty of recruiting parents for council membership.

In 1990 the school board in Leon County in Florida established a volunteer program of Site Based Decision Making (SBDM) councils as a way to include teachers, parents and community members in the governance of local schools. Education reform legislation in Florida in 1992 reinforced this type of participatory governance. A central SBDM Council was set up to coordinate the efforts in the district. Southard, Muldoon, Porter & Hood (1997) presented findings of an evaluation conducted five years after the implementation in Leon County. The purpose of the study was to determine the participants understanding of their role in SBDM, their perceptions of the effects of SBDM and any barriers to their success, and to determine what corrections should be made. Data were collected from 34 of the 41 participating schools and methods included interviews with 61 Principals and 34 council chairs and surveys of current and former members. The researchers sent out surveys to a random sample of 678 council members and received 206 responses, a return rate of 30%, with 15% from parents and 61% from teachers. The authors said that interviews were conducted by the 20 central SBDM members but no other information was presented about the context or format of those interviews, except that the questionnaires presented in the Appendix included semi-structured questions. There was very little description of data analysis except that results of interviews and surveys were grouped according to specified study questions and

reported as frequencies in the Appendix, and a random sample of interviews and surveys were reviewed for coding and data entry errors.

The results of the study concluded that most council members were satisfied with the decision making process in their schools, although 75% of respondents described problems or barriers to success, including lack of time, needs for training, difficulties with new Principals in their leadership roles, need to reach out to uninvolved parties in the school community, and a need for more representation from parents, students and community business members. The majority of members viewed shared decision making as an empowering experience for all those invested in the school and many felt that the work of SBDM councils had a positive impact on student performance, but when asked to provide examples the majority of respondents had difficulty citing any specific measures of academic performance. The most common issues addressed by these schools councils were curriculum and instruction, technology, discipline, and school improvement plans. Finally, the local SBDM councils were unclear about their relationship with the central SBDM council in Leon County.

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 required that all schools establish school councils consisting of three teachers, two parents and the Principal by 1996 (David, 1994; Din, 1997; Kannapel, 1994). The councils are generally responsible for instruction, administration and personnel. A five year study of the implementation of KERA was conducted by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory and one of six aspects they explored was the implementation of SBDM in 20 schools in four rural districts. Kannapel, et al. (1994) reported that 10 of the 20 schools in the districts had implemented SBDM but their study focused on the 7 schools that began formal implementation in

1991-92 school year. Research questions addressed the manner of decision making shared amongst the role groups, how SBDM affected reform efforts in the schools, and what factors facilitated or hindered effective SBDM. The study was qualitative and based on two and a half years of fieldwork conducted by the four researchers. Data were collected through interviews with school superintendents, school board members, principals, and teacher and parent members of the school councils; observation of school board and school council meetings; and review of minutes from all school board and school council meetings, as well as, analysis of any local newspaper articles.

The authors reported their most critical finding as "...SBDM does, indeed give councils significant authority over school functioning if individuals take the initiative to exercise that authority" (Kannapel, Moore, Coe, & Aagaard, 1994, p. 4). There was no description of their data analysis other than they categorized councils as balanced, educator dominated or principal dominated in order to determine the manner of shared decision making. They described balanced councils as those where all members participate in making decisions, educator dominated as those where teachers and principals make decisions with little parent input, and principal dominated as councils that function in an advisory role to the principal. Among the seven schools, the researchers identified only one with a balanced approach and three each of educator dominated and principal dominated. They observed that those councils that were dominated by educators were moving closer to a balanced approach but there was little progression in those that were dominated by the principal. In relation to efforts of school reform, all of the councils made decisions about personnel and discipline and the councils with balanced and educator dominated approaches made decisions about budgeting,

scheduling and curriculum. Kannapel et al. described the factors that supported or impeded effective implementation of SBDM as principal support and facilitation, leadership of other council members, neglect of parent involvement by educators, and council training. The authors referred to the notion that educators generally do not encourage or welcome parent involvement but reported from this study that "...the lack of effort to involve parents appeared to be a matter of negligence rather than an overt attempt to thwart parent involvement" (Kannapel et al., 1994, p. 14). The researchers concluded that councils need training in group process and decision making, more information about the issues to be addressed and strategies for encouraging more involvement of all member groups.

A paper presented by the Bay Area Research Group at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in April 1995 reported on the third year of a five year study of the connections between council decision making and changes in curriculum and instruction (David, 1994). This case study included data from interviews in 13 elementary and middle schools in 9 districts in Kentucky. The researcher interviewed teachers, parents, principals, school board members, superintendents, administrators at the Kentucky Department of Education, and members of the Kentucky Association of School Councils. She also reviewed newspaper articles that mentioned SBDM in Kentucky between July 1993 and July 1994. Although this appeared to be a qualitative study, there was no description of the interview process or format, nor was there any explanation of the data analysis.

Results were discussed in a narrative that focused on council formation, structures for decision making, changes in classroom practices, and school district supports. At that

time 60% of schools across the state had established school councils. Introductory training was provided and recruitment of parent members, particularly minority parents was challenging. School councils were beginning to move away from a focus on discipline and extra curricular activities to more substantive issues like school budget and personnel, but there was not yet any evidence of links between school council work and curriculum and instruction. Structures that were identified as crucial for effective decision making included school councils that function like a board of directors gathering information from all members of the school community and accessing information from working committees in the school. The author also stressed the importance of effective two-way communication with parents, as well as, the crucial aspect of principal leadership. Barriers to effective decision making were discussed as tendencies to micromanage, lack of parent representation and insufficient time and information. Some changes in classroom practices were linked to the other provisions in KERA. District and state supports for school councils were limited as everyone at all levels was accommodating to these changes. The report concluded that characteristics of effective school councils were: “Leadership that focuses attention on student learning; a role of setting policy, coordinating and approving recommendations; a dynamic and interconnected committee structure; a communication network inside and outside the school; strong parent representation on committees; and access to knowledge and professional development” (David, 1994, p. 14).

Din (1997) reported on data from surveys of school council members in rural districts in Kentucky. The purpose of this study was to determine what councils understood as their mission, what benefits they had gained from SBDM and what

problems they had encountered. The researchers used a randomized stratified sample and sent surveys to 252 schools, of which 132 responded with a 52% return rate. They surveyed current members of school councils including each principal, and one teacher and one parent. The survey questions were based on the provisions of the KERA that delineated the mission of school councils and also included open ended questions about the benefits and challenges experienced by council members. Although the format of the surveys was described there was no description of the data analysis. Data were reported as frequencies or percentages of council time spent on various aspects of their duties. Din reported that only 20% of schools addressed all parts of the mission but most dealt with the majority of the mission. Respondents said that their schools had benefited from attention to policy development, communication, reviewing curriculum and selecting personnel. They also identified problems as lack of parent involvement, time constraints, local politics, poor understanding of legal requirements, and little focus on instruction and curriculum.

Robinson (1997) points out that the desire for better student achievement has led to many reform efforts in public education but that these mandates must be examined to determine their substantive impact. He was interested in evaluating the effectiveness of shared decision making by school councils in Massachusetts and looked at the process and impact of school councils during their first three years. Research questions addressed member's perceptions of the implementation of policies and procedures of school councils, and perceptions of their accomplishments. This research was described as a case study utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Robinson's sample included members of five elementary school councils in each of four urban cities in Massachusetts.

Methods of data collection included research questionnaires with a Likert type scale given to all council members and structured interviews with six individuals that represented each school district and each constituent group. The author described the process for analyzing both the quantitative data from the questionnaires using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures and the qualitative data of audiotaped transcription by coding, categorizing and interpreting the responses from the interviews. Robinson concluded that there were significant and positive changes but not all schools were equally successful in establishing policies and procedures around issues of curriculum, discipline, attendance and other areas. Council members perceived that they were more successful when they had training, and when they were involved in the development of the budget and the school improvement plan. Members described barriers to their effectiveness as lack of cooperation from teachers and administrators, budget constraints, lack of parent participation, lack of training and an overwhelming workload. Important factors that facilitated the work of the councils were knowledge of school board decisions, awareness of current educational issues, and cooperation of council members, flexibility of meeting times, and understanding the development and implementation of the school improvement plan. The author discussed the limitations of the study and made suggestions for further research.

The Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission (MERRC) was established in 1993 to oversee the implementation of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) (Minkoff, Cale, Cronin, Moscovitch, & Mirabile, 2001). Their first Annual Report in 2001 was based on data gathered in 28 schools on a series of indicators in the areas of standards and assessment, accountability, district capacity, teacher

capacity and finance. The authors noted that schools were chosen in communities that had a poverty rate over 20%. The schools were broken into two groups based on those who were considered performing above prediction and those performing below prediction. Methods included site visits that included focus groups with parents and teachers, interviews with principals and superintendents, and review of documentation. Analysis identified trends and patterns for schools performing above, and schools performing below expectations.

Among the various aspects reviewed, results showed that many high performing schools did not have a well functioning school council and school councils in some of the low performing schools were uninformed. School councils were generally not viewed as an effective vehicle for school improvement due to lack of training, financial constraints, lack of parent and community involvement, and confusion over role definition. Although many school council members were well intentioned, they were frustrated over their lack of authority and the lack of funding to implement some of their recommendations. Some principals saw the school council as another bureaucratic chore and the authors noted that school principals are usually not trained in consensus building. Schools also reported having difficulty recruiting parents and community members for seats on the councils. The report recommended that more training and financial support be provided to school councils and that councils should be encouraged to develop multi-year improvement plans. The authors also called for more research on the effectiveness of school councils. MERRC also published a second annual report in 2002 but there was no data or discussion of local school councils. Funding for MERRC was discontinued in the state's fiscal 2003 budget.

After several years of implementation of the reform act in Massachusetts the MERRC supported a study of the Department of Education's (DOE) capacity to carry out its role in implementing the goals of education reform and providing the structure and resources to facilitate the changes (McDermott et al., 2001). Data were gathered through document analysis of reports and documents about education reform, interviews with 73 current and former state officials, and surveys of local educators, including superintendents, principals and teachers about importance of various elements of education reform, communication with DOE, and balance in roles of state and local officials. There was a detailed description of the analysis of the survey data presented in an Appendix with narrative and tables of figures using factor analysis and descriptive statistics of frequencies and means. Appendices also included interview questions, survey instruments and lists of documents reviewed but there was no description of the analysis of the data gathered from interviews or documents.

McDermott et al. (2001) reported that the Center for Innovation, a research and development unit at the Massachusetts DOE was assigned the task of implementing school councils and site based management. They issued guidelines but provided very little technical assistance to school districts, and the unit was disbanded in the mid 1990s. The authors referred to a report they reviewed by the Education Management Accountability Board which noted in its' audits in 1999 and 2000 that many districts had not fully implemented the governance changes and student improvement plans did not address issues of student achievement. Many of the interviewees said that school committees and school councils were in need of training that had not been available from DOE. "Lack of state level monitoring and support for local governance and management

changes is most likely the result of both scarce resources and a higher priority given to other issues such as standard setting and student assessment” (McDermott et al., 2001, p. 39).

Conclusions

The history of educational philosophy, practice and legislation resonates with the importance of family and community involvement in children’s social adjustment and academic achievement. Parent involvement in education has existed from the beginnings of formal education in the United States during the 19th century, through the changes in legislation to empower parents in the mid 20th century, to the inclusion of parents and community members as collaborators and decision makers in the more recent education reform efforts of the present day. Reform initiatives in various states have requirements for school based teams or local school councils, including schools in Massachusetts under the Education Reform Act of 1993 (MERA).

This philosophy and practice is supported by ecological and developmental systems theories that stress the importance of relationships and the interconnections of environments where children grow and learn. The concept of parent involvement in education is framed in the academic literature as the ideological organizer of the family school relationship. The focus of parent involvement has shifted from one of activities to relationships and families and community members are now viewed as collaborators rather than receivers of a service. This change in focus is evident in the history of educational legislation with the emphasis on parent empowerment.

Research on educational partnership models was limited and showed mixed results with a need for more objective and longitudinal study. Other studies looked at outcomes in academic achievement, school adjustment, and attendance with various constructs and research methods. Many studies used qualitative methods but did not adequately describe the design, data collection or analysis. Much of the research in parent involvement includes small case studies and few experimental ones, with mixed results, leaving the reader with a positive sense of the potential impact of parent participation in the educational process but with the knowledge that more research needs to be conducted. Several authors pointed to the complexity of research design and the many variables in studying relationships, as well as, the lack of funding available in this field.

Although provisions for parent involvement in school governance are mandated by state and federal laws, the research on these efforts is significantly limited. The implementation of school councils across the country and in Massachusetts has been inconsistent and the evidence of their impact has been limited. Some of the research describes positive outcomes when councils function in schools with good communication, trusting relationships between principals, teachers and parents, and where there is good leadership, district support and adequate funding for school improvement projects. There is a need for further qualitative research that could provide a detailed description of the organization, function and accomplishments of local school councils and could identify challenges or barriers to effective policy development and lead to recommendations for improved practice.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Overall Approach and Rationale

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of family and community involvement in school governance, I chose to use a qualitative methodological approach in my study of local school councils in Massachusetts. In contrast to a quantitative approach that involves a hypothesis with dependent and independent variables, qualitative research seeks to understand relationships, organizations or specific phenomena by posing specific research questions. It is "...research that delves in depth into complexities and processes", and, "...seeks to explore where and why policy and local knowledge and practice are at odds" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53).

Qualitative research is conducted in the natural setting and implies that theory is emergent, rather than preset, and evolves from the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out "...that the purpose of our analysis is to build theory" (p. 88). This idea is often referred to as 'grounded theory' developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, which means that "...theory is derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). "Here, the researcher does not search for the exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories of the statistician but, instead, identifies the salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 159).

The significance and prestige of qualitative research has grown in recent years. Qualitative research stresses the importance of context, setting, and the perspective of participants and uses multiple strategies to produce rich and variegated analyses. “Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials--case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Previous research on school councils had focused on their implementation and accomplishments as an entire entity but had described neither the relationships of council members nor the impact or experience of family and community involvement. These studies had primarily reported quantitative descriptive statistics from survey data without the opportunity for the exploration of the social phenomena that is afforded by qualitative methodology. This research takes the form of a case study which allows in-depth description and explanation of the organization and function of school councils. Case studies “...seek to understand the larger phenomenon through close examination of a specific case and therefore focus on the particular. Case studies are descriptive, holistic, heuristic and inductive” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 104).

Qualitative inquiry involves the processes of description, analysis and interpretation of data. Through the triangulated methods of observation, interview and document review, I describe the function and influence of local school councils on school improvement and explore the impact of the school council on the relationships between school staff, families and community members. As a researcher, I am drawn to qualitative

inquiry as it provides a more comprehensive picture of individual lived experiences, behaviors and emotions that influence organizational functioning and social relationships that are not available in quantitative statistics. “Qualitative research, then, is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena. Its’ various genres are naturalistic, interpretive, and increasingly critical, and they draw on multiple methods of inquiry” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p 2).

Site and Participant Selection

Marshall and Rossman (2006) discuss site selection in reference to the probability of a mix of people and interactions needed for the research, the ease of entry, the ability of the researcher to build relationships with the participants, as well as, the quality of the data and the adherence to ethical standards. Considering the limits and practicality of a dissertation study, this researcher chose three elementary schools in different western Massachusetts communities, one in a large urban city (School A or SA), one in a small college town (School B or SB) and one in a small suburb (School C or SC) in order to gain a range of perspectives on the subject, from school size, ethnic and socio-economic influences, and elements of urban and suburban communities.

School A (SA) is a pre-Kindergarten to grade five school with an enrollment of 634 students in 2007-08, 269 females and 365 males. The school population is 66.9% Hispanic, 11.4% African-American, 15.3% White, 5.2% Mixed race, and 1.3% Asian. The low income students are 66.9% of the population with 27.6% characterized as First Language Not English and 15.6% as Limited English Proficient. Students with Special Education services make up 27.8% of the student body.

School B (SB) is a Kindergarten to grade six school with an enrollment of 476 students in 2007-08, 234 females and 242 males. The school population is 13% Hispanic, 6.5% African-American, 54.2% White, 10.1% Mixed race, and 16.0% Asian. The low income students are 25.4% of the population with 18.7% characterized as First language Not English and 12.8% as Limited English Proficient. Students with Special Education services make up 14.9% of the student body.

School C (SC) is a pre-Kindergarten to grade four school with an enrollment of 280 students in 2007-08, 139 females and 141 males. The school population is 10.0% Hispanic, 7% African-American, 85.7% White, 0% Mixed race, and 3.2% Asian. The low income students are 19.3% of the population with 5% characterized as First language Not English and 2.5% as Limited English Proficient. Students with Special Education services make up 21% of the student body. (Statistics gathered from Massachusetts Department of Education website).

Although Punch (1994) pointed out that researchers may have difficulty with access to research sites due to gatekeepers, this researcher was fortunate in recruitment. Initial contact with three principals was made by telephone during the summer of 2006. Two of the three (SA and SC) were responsive and agreed to meet with me to discuss the study in more detail. During our meetings in August 2006, both principals described their experience with school councils and assured me that their school council members would be interested in participating in this study. I gave them each a proposal abstract and asked them to share it with the school councils. The third principal was interested but hesitant, citing his lack of experience with the school council and he asked me to contact him again in the Fall. He suggested that another school principal in the district might be more

receptive. I did attempt a couple of times to contact him in the Fall of that year but had no response. In March 2007 I spoke to the Principal at the other school (SB) in that district on the telephone. He was somewhat reluctant, and mentioned a concern about interviewing teachers but did not say why. After some discussion when he asked me about my research questions, he agreed to let me have access to the site. We agreed that I would send him my proposal abstract and he gave me information on council meeting dates in April, May and June 2007 and said he would put me on the agenda. During discussions with each Principal I asked about any provisions for research approval in each school district and all three said there was no need for this study and two of the Principals pointed out that school council meetings are covered by the Open Meeting Law.

The next step in entry was my first meeting with each school council which happened in February and April 2007 when I explained the purpose, significance and process of the study, and described the methods of observation of school council meetings, review of documentation and interviews with members of the school community. I explained that all information gathered would be anonymous and confidential, including the names and locations of the school, and that I would be contacting people individually for interviews and would ask for written consent although it was not necessary. The intended study participants were members of the school councils and other members of the school community, including teachers, staff, family and community members, other parent or community groups, such as, the PTO, or members of the school boards. Continued access to participants was through contact with the Principals and through individual contact during visits to each school and through

telephone and e-mail contact to schedule interviews. Upon request each Principal gave me contact information for school council members. After an e-mail request the Principal at SA in the urban district replied with a list of e-mail addresses for school employees and told me I could get the contact information from the parent member when I attended the next meeting. Without my request the Principal at SB in the college town gave me a typed list of all council members with telephone and e-mail contact when I met him at the first council meeting. After one e-mail and two telephone calls to the Principal at SC in the small suburb, he left me a message with contact information for two teachers and two parents who were members of the school council.

This researcher contacted each school council by mail via the Principal in April 2008 to update them on progress of the research and offer access to review of transcribed interviews or observation data. Although this researcher encountered some minor difficulties, initial access to the sites via the principals, attendance at school council meetings and reception to interviews from participants were successful.

Data Collection Methods

This case study employed multiple methods to collect data between February 2006 and January 2007 through observations, semi-structured interviews, and review of materials related to the activities of the school council, school improvement and communication within each school community. The design of this study required a variance in this researcher's participation at the sites, from general observation and informal conversations, to specific observation of council meetings, and individual

interviews. As Hertz (1996) said, “Researchers are now acknowledged as active participants within the research process not passive observers or scribes” (p. 5). I had the opportunity to visit the schools during school hours, as well as, after hours when most school council meetings were held, which allowed me to meet various members of the school community, have informal conversations about the study, maintain relationships with gatekeepers, and gain access to records.

This researcher took handwritten notes during each visit which included specifics about the date, site, events, and participants and stored those notes in a separate file for each school. Information management also included a log of data collection activities. Data gathered through observations, through the process of all interviews and document review were kept in an observational record, usually referred to as field notes. As the researcher is immersed in qualitative inquiry at any site, the value of keeping field notes in order to maintain some objectivity and process reflections on one’s own subjective reactions is essential to maintaining openness and receptivity (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Field notes are detailed descriptions of what is observed and the researcher’s comments about those data. Qualitative researchers should take notes of their initial and on-going impressions, describe the physical and sensory environment, focus on key events and observe participants responses and interactions. “As fieldwork progresses and becomes more focused on a set of issues, fieldworkers often subconsciously collect a series of incidents or interactions of the ‘same type’ and look for regularities or patterns in them” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 29). Handwritten notes and tape recorded interviews were

transcribed into word files on the computer in an organized design, and this researcher used qualitative research software to assist in the data analysis.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) maintained that, “Observation is a fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry” (p. 99). General observations were therefore recorded about initial and ongoing access to the sites, conversations with gatekeepers and interactions that related to this study. Punch (1994) described qualitative fieldwork that “...employs participant observation as its’ central technique and that this involves the researcher in prolonged immersion in the life of a group, community or organization in order to discern people’s habits and thoughts as well as to decipher the social structure that binds them together” (p. 84). Observations of council meetings allowed this researcher to gather information about council activities, observe the interactions and conversations of members and note the challenges and barriers facing each council. As Alan Peshkin (1988) said the researcher should look “...for the warm and the cool spots, the emergence of positive and negative feelings, the experiences I wanted more of or I wanted to avoid...” (p. 18).

The study design called for observations of two or more council meetings at each site. At School A in the urban city I observed four meetings in February, May and June 2007; at School B in the college town three meetings in April, May and June 2007; and at School C in the small suburb two meetings in April and November 2007 given a variety of scheduling issues and cancellation of meetings. I was also able to attend an evening community meeting at SC about parent involvement at the school in November 2007, which was prompted by the parents on the school council who reported that other parents

had concerns about the school but did not heed their suggestion that they bring them to the council.

At SA and SC I was asked to join the council members at the table and at SB the Principal initially asked me to sit off to the side to observe, although at one meeting members asked me to join them at the table. Although council members were aware of my presence and my role as a non-participant, there were some comments from teachers at SA that they must be boring to observe and comments and questions about my thoughts on school council work from members at SB. Although I attempted to take notes during meetings it appeared to intimidate some members and also distracted this researcher from the activities or interactions at hand, therefore, I either took quick notes during the meetings or short notes made right after meetings which were transcribed into the observational record soon thereafter.

Interviews were conducted individually in private locations and participants were asked for their written consent with an explanation that their responses would be anonymous and used in analysis to determine categories and patterns in the data (Appendix C). Each interview was semi-structured in that it followed a standard format of questions with opportunity to ask further questions for elaboration or clarification of interviewees' responses. As a mature educator with many years of experience working with children and adults from diverse backgrounds, I have developed good listening and interviewing skills with the ability to make participants feel comfortable and respected. I was able to engage participants in meaningful dialogue about the subject matter and remain objective in the role of the researcher. Interviews provide the opportunity to "...capture the deep meaning of experience in the participants' own words" (Marshall &

Rossman, 2006, p. 55). Interview questions were based on the stated purpose of the study and research questions discussed above and are outlined in Appendix D.

The study design called for four to six interviews at each site with a balance between school staff, parents and other community members. This researcher invited all those whose contact information I had to participate in interviews and offered multiple times and location options. Five interviews were completed at each school with a mix of participant's roles from each site. At SA in the large city interviews were conducted separately with the Principal and two teachers who are members of the school council. Multiple attempts to contact the two parent members of the school council received no response. I conducted one telephone interview with a district administrator whose responsibility is to facilitate parental and community engagement in the schools. And a fifth interview was conducted with a paraprofessional who is in a paid role as a parent facilitator at SA.

At SB in the college town interviews were conducted separately with the Principal, two parent members of the school council, one community member of the school council, and another member of the school community who is a parent and president of the parent organization. Multiple attempts to contact teacher members of the council received little response except a couple of e-mails from one teacher member of the council who expressed interest in being interviewed but never responded to proposed dates after a few e-mail attempts. At SC in the small suburb interviews were conducted separately with the Principal, two teachers, and two parents who were all members of the school council. See Table 1 for numbers of interviews and roles of participants.

TABLE 1

Interview by Participant Role

Role	School A	School B	School C
Principal	1	1	1
Teacher Member of Council	2	-	2
Parent Member of Council	-	2	2
Community Member of Council	-	1	-
Others in School Community	2	1	-
Total 15	5	5	5

The study also included a review of the materials or documents related to the school council and the involvement of parents and community members in the schools. Data from materials provides background or historical context and can confirm or contradict what the researcher is told or observes. These materials were analyzed for their content, and information from the material review was also entered in the observational record. Access to documents was primarily through interaction with the principals with some minor assistance from secretarial staff and review was conducted as a solitary task.

At SA in the urban city I reviewed the district and school's website, which included a student and parent handbook and a mention of the district's Office of Parental and Community Engagement. The Principal gave me his file of school council agendas and minutes and I spent some time reviewing the materials and copied some of the documents as well as a district handbook about school council work. In addition to the handbook, I also had a copy of notes and agenda for school council training or what this district refers to as School Centered Decision Making (SCDM) which included information on the decision making process and specifics on developing a school improvement plan.

When I was at SA I collected and reviewed correspondence that was in the office for faculty and families and some that was in the Principal's SCDM folder. One was a SCDM form used by teachers and parents for reimbursement. Another was a welcome back letter in October 2006 to SCDM members from the Administrator for Parent and Community Engagement, which focused on increasing parent involvement and asking that teams schedule meetings with them to meet that goal. I also picked up a newsletter from Arts in Education, a publication of the local museums, a flyer about workshops from the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (PAC), and a letter to all parents in May 2007 from the Superintendent about banning all cell phones in the schools. I also reviewed the school improvement plan and the Home-School Compact forms used by the district.

Review of materials for SB included the district and school website which included a page about the Parent Council with a description of their activities and goal, as well as, contact information for officers and room parents and a link to sign up for

newsletters. The Mission and Beliefs page is headed as the SB School Council and includes the mission statement whose last sentence states that, “We seek a full partnership with parents in realizing our shared goals for students, for staff, and for our school.” There is a link to the school improvement plan on the school website and I was also given a hard copy and drafts of revised copies as the school council was working on it when I attended their meetings. I reviewed and specifically copied some of the minutes of council meetings during the 2006-2007 school year and I also reviewed a book of several months of newsletters that go home to families every two weeks which appeared to be put out by the principal with information from the parent council included. There are bulletin boards in the foyer of the school with information for parents, with a particular section devoted to Parent Council membership, and another bulletin board and more flyers in the main office.

At SC minutes of council meetings, flyers given to parents and copies of newsletters were given to me by the Principal after I had asked for access. There were one, two or three newsletters each month although he mentioned to me that he tries to get it out each week. The Principal also gave me a demographic report from October 2007 which gave stats on the 2006-07 school year in enrollment, comparative data from 2005, 2006, and 2007 on reading levels from the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA), and Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) data from Spring 2005 and 2006. There is a bulletin board in the foyer of the school titled, “parent bulletin board” with some information and flyers. The flyers were from 2004 and 2006 about speakers at the school and a theme study, and included a memo to parents about parking outside of the school. The agendas and minutes of council meetings were a smattering, as there were

a few from each of the last three years. The Principal also gave me a form which was a copy of a Home-School Compact. Included in the packet of information were copies of the parent surveys from 2004 and 2007 which included the number of surveys returned, data gathered on a Likert scale about statements that focused on curriculum, relationships with school staff, facilities, technology and communication. The SC Principal also gave me a copy of the school improvement goals from 2003-2004 and the School Improvement Plan 2005-2008 which was longer and more detailed with specifics of measurement, timelines, resources needed and those responsible.

Data Analysis Procedures

Gathering, analyzing and interpreting data are intertwined processes in qualitative study (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The analysis for this study was guided by the research questions and the related concepts in the literature. This researcher used what Rossman and Rallis (2003) call ‘analyst constructed’ categories identified through experience and the related literature, as a preliminary guide for data analysis. Data analysis is a systematic procedure for identifying the categories and relationships evident in the description. Wolcott (1994) describes qualitative data analysis as a “subset of technical procedures to be followed” (p. 27). Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the analytical tools of asking questions and thinking comparatively. Besides questions of how and what, the researcher should ask temporal and spatial questions, such as, frequency or duration and where, or circumstances of an event; and informational questions or those that address cultural or

moral values. “Comparative analysis is a stable feature of social science research” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 78). In qualitative research we compare incident to incident looking for similarities and differences, and we use theoretical comparisons to help us think about the properties and dimensions of categories we identify in the data. It is important for the researcher to continually identify data to follow up on and, “The analyst should keep a list of emergent codes available for reference” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 222). Much of the literature about qualitative data analysis stresses the importance of reading and rereading the data collected. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) said, “It is useful, therefore, to keep coming back to the same data with fresh analytic perspectives” (p.16), and,”...We should never collect data without substantial analysis going on simultaneously” (p. 2).

In this research study data analysis began with open coding in order to generate concepts or themes, or what Wolcott (1994) called looking for “...patterned regularities in the data” (p. 33). Open coding is a process of microanalysis, as data are broken down into small parts and examined and compared for similarities and differences. “Codes represent the decisive link between the original ‘raw data’, that is, the textual material, such as interview transcripts or fieldnotes, on the one hand and the researcher’s theoretical concepts on the other” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 27). Although we do not think of qualitative analysis as numbers or counting, we are looking for themes or patterns that occur a number of times or in specific ways. After the initial open coding of the sources the codes/categories numbered twenty-eight and were taken from the study questions, such as, *council activities and function, agenda and decision making, council membership, diversity issues and school culture*. Using the qualitative analysis software

I entered a short definition of each code and made some changes during this initial coding. I also used an annotation window in the software to make comments about a code reference. Code frequencies showed high numbers (over 40) for agenda and decisions, communication, culture, council membership, and school council function.

After the identification of general codes/categories, analysis continued with the search for sub-categories and through axial coding this researcher identified relationships between categories, and some categories were combined with others and some were expanded in definition as relationships were discovered. It was evident that some codes intersected as two codes sometimes were applied to a segment in a source and several codes needed redefining and were divided into subcategories. “Codes or their segments can be nested or embedded within one another, can overlap, and can intersect” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 36). Axial coding is the process of reassembling data that were broken down during open coding. The result was twenty-one categories. See Table 2 for the list of codes/categories and their frequencies found in the data.

The term ‘axial’ is used because coding happens around the axis of a category linking them to subcategories along their lines of properties and dimensions. “Axial coding not only stimulates thinking about linkages between concepts or themes it also raises new questions” (Neuman, 2003, p. 444). I expanded and refined the definition of each code/category and described the properties and dimensions of each. Subcategories answer questions about the phenomenon, such as, where, who, how, etc. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the properties and dimensions of axial coding, “...properties give us a means for examining the data” (p. 81), and “...properties are the general or specific characteristics or attributes of a category, dimensions represent the location of a category

along a continuum or range” (p. 117). In axial coding the researcher also looks at process or the actions or interactions that influence the phenomenon. “Process in data is represented by happenings and events that may or may not occur in continuous forms or sequences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 166). Coding the data in a qualitative study is a dynamic process and the researcher must be aware that “axial and open coding are not sequential acts” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.136).

Like many qualitative researchers I used analytic memos as a natural way to keep track of information and visual diagrams as a concrete way to view that information from various perspectives. Strauss and Corbin (1998) said “...memos and diagrams evolve. Perhaps the most important point to keep in mind is that there are no wrong or poorly written memos. Rather, they grow in complexity, density, and clarity as the research progresses. Memos usually become more abstract as the research progresses and are often sorted by category. Later, memos and diagrams may negate, amend, support, extend, or clarify earlier ones.” (p. 218). My memos grew in complexity from the early ones that stated facts to the later ones that described categories and attempted to better define their properties and dimensions. The qualitative software provided a means to diagram the relationships between categories and I changed and refined those diagrams as the analysis continued. The memos and diagrams helped me to document the process and the growth or change in analytical and theoretical thinking during this research. Memos helped to record progress, feelings and the direction for analysis and results.

As the analysis progressed, this researcher used selective coding as the process of integrating and refining the theory (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Neuman, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I began to identify the similarities and differences in each school site

through the specification of the properties and dimensions of categories. Straus and Corbin (1998) describe different techniques used in selective coding and note that the researcher “has been immersed in the data for some time and usually has a gut sense of what the research is all about, although the researcher might have difficulty articulating what that is” (p.148). That had been my experience as I initially gathered the data and continued to read through the sources I was struck by the power or influence of the local culture on parent involvement, and on the function of each school council. Further analysis found a high frequency of *culture or school climate* in the coding as well as significant data around *school council function* and its subcategories of school council activities and agenda and decision making, and *parent involvement* with its subcategories of enhance parent involvement and PTO. These three major categories were linked by *communication*. Straus and Corbin (1998) state that, “The first step in integration is deciding on a central category” (pg. 146), therefore, I reread memos and referred back to the data for each category to illustrate themes or comparisons and I used the qualitative software to draw diagrams and maps to illustrate the connections between categories and to visualize how they were organized around a central category.

Although it was clear that these three major categories were strong, I continued with process coding or asking questions about the conditions (structure) and looking at the actions/interactions (process) in the data. The *culture or school climate* was a condition that affected parent involvement and partnership efforts. Partnership was a subcategory of parent involvement and a philosophy that is a consequence of culture or school climate. The *culture or school climate* was also a condition of *school council function*. The process of action/interactions of the *culture or school climate* that evolved

over time affected parent involvement and its' corresponding relationship to school council function. Final analysis identified the central category in this case study as the *culture or school climate* which affects the structure and process of *school council function* and *parent involvement* in the school, and that *communication* is the strategic set of actions/interactions that facilitates and acknowledges behaviors in the school culture. (see Figure 3).

Qualitative data analysis does not guarantee that any theory or significant findings will be reached. Interpretation in qualitative inquiry may be inductive, developing generalizations from the data or deductive, providing predictions from the observations or concepts identified. Wolcott (1994) cautions that the "...novice researcher should err on the side of too much description, too little interpretation. The prudent course is to bank on the contribution to be made through careful descriptive efforts and cautious analysis" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 36), therefore, this researcher will be clear about the relationship of data to the description of results.

TABLE 2
Code Frequencies

Code	Total	School A	School B	School C
agenda/decisions	72	27	27	18
benefits	16	3	9	4
budget	19	2	6	11
challenges	38	15	14	9
communication	77	25	26	26
community influence	14	8	5	1
culture or school climate	94	45	37	12
diversity issues	14	3	11	0
enhance parent involvement	48	22	11	15
learning needs	25	8	8	9
parent involvement	37	17	6	14
parental influence	43	8	22	13
partnership	58	9	33	16
principal leadership/influence	29	8	17	4
professional development	6	3	2	1
PTO	67	17	43	7
school council activities	67	33	15	19

school council functions	56	24	23	9
school council membership	36	4	19	13
school improvement plan	42	14	16	12
teacher influence	18	13	4	1
Total 21	876			

Trustworthiness, Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Punch (1994) writes about the challenge of fieldwork as the researcher is continually negotiating with various people and situations and often facing ethical dilemmas. These situations sometimes include deep personal involvement, role confusion, or the demand of physical or mental effort in research. Building trust and cooperation with study subjects is essential to the validity of the data and the integrity of the study. The only ethical dilemma that this researcher faced was that access to one of the schools was through a previous professional relationship with the Principal at SA, who had been an Assistant Principal and colleague for three years at a secondary school in this urban district, where I left my position four years previously to work in another district. Our working relationship had been a positive one but I was somewhat concerned when he introduced me to the school council with accolades for my professional work, as

I worried that council members would be reluctant to talk to me. Although two teachers did respond to requests for interviews I am not sure whether the lack of response from others was due to my relationship with the Principal.

Qualitative researchers know that confidence and trust of participants build over time through multiple interactions. The timelines for completing qualitative studies often shift to accommodate this growth. I had hoped to complete the fieldwork in the Spring of 2007 but circumstances at two of the sites extended my timelines. I attended a fourth council meeting at SA in the urban school in order to make contact with a parent member who later did not respond to my requests for an interview. I sought out other sources about parent involvement in the district and conducted interviews with an administrator and a paraprofessional in the fall and early winter of 2008. Cancellations of meetings at SC in the small suburb in the spring and fall of 2007 found me attending a council meeting in November.

Researchers need to be sensitive to the politics of the site while negotiating the complexities of relationships during field work. Although I hoped for some sense of social acceptance by the participants at each site, I was aware of the need for objectivity and avoidance of close identification with any individual or group. Strauss and Corbin (1998) wrote about the balance between objectivity and sensitivity during the process of qualitative research. "In qualitative research, objectivity does not mean controlling the variables. Rather, it means openness, a willingness to listen and 'give voice' to respondents, be they individuals or organizations" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43). I did note during the data analysis of the interviews that I occasionally offered comments and personal experience which may not have been necessary in an effort to connect with the

interviewee. I was able to remain objective by comparing data from similar events, gaining multiple viewpoints from participants and looking at a phenomenon from various perspectives, such as interviews and observations. My familiarity with the literature related to the research questions enhanced my sensitivity to specifics in the data and provided a source for comparison during the analytical process.

Ethical concerns in research generally include issues of harm, consent, honesty, privacy and confidentiality of information. “Conventional practice and ethical codes espouse the view that various safeguards should protect the privacy and identity of research subjects” (Punch, 1994, p. 92). The design of this study called for all participants to be adults and this researcher used a private coding system to identify the sites and participants during the data collection with pseudonyms used in the study results. All participants received an abstract of the study proposal describing the purpose, data collection and analysis, and process of the study and I was able to give an oral presentation to each school council. Each participant who agreed to be interviewed signed consent to use the information from the interviews and for their permission to be tape recorded. The verbal explanation and written consent specified that all information is confidential and that participants will not be identified by name.

In qualitative research the author must convince the reader that the analysis, interpretations, and conclusions are truthful, believable, or plausible which is similar to the notions of validity and reliability in quantitative research. Validity in qualitative research refers to the processes we use to evaluate the trustworthiness of our observations and the appropriateness of the interpretation made from the analyzed data. The credibility of results in qualitative studies is dependent on the triangulation of data collection

through multiple methods which offers data from various perspectives, as well as, the rigorous analysis of the data. This study included triangulation in data collected through observation, interviews and material review and the authenticity or credibility of the data is supported by the careful description of the data collection and analysis in detail in the previous section. In addition to being aware of one's own subjectivity, this researcher was conscious of my own effects on the data while at the sites and I looked for deception or ulterior motives in the data. Peshkin (1988) recommended systematic monitoring of the self by checking on the subjective 'I's, such as the ethnic 'I', the justice seeking 'I' or the pedagogical 'I'. This researcher checked on the meaning of outliers or negative evidence in the data, and sought validation from participants on previously collected data from interviews or on macro information from observations and document review.

With the exception of the aforementioned professional relationship with the Principal at SA, all other relationships with participants were pleasant, cordial and participants seemed genuinely pleased to assist me with this research. Not surprisingly, principals were somewhat reluctant as they see themselves as responsible for the school councils although I assured them that I was not there to evaluate the effectiveness of the council but only gain a better understanding of the function of school councils and their relationship to parent and community involvement. Teachers at SA in the urban school and SC in the small suburb were somewhat cautious and careful in their answers to my questions in interviews and I was not able to engage any teachers from SB in the college town. Parents at SB and SC were actually delighted that someone was looking at the role of parents in school governance. This experience only reinforced my understanding of the complexity and time consuming effort of qualitative research. Although I was at each site

several times and talked with participants informally and in interviews, I would have preferred additional time to observe and interact with participants at each site with the goal of enriching the data.

This study adds to the literature about parent involvement in education but its' focus is specific only to the role of parents in school governance. Limitations of the study's design are that there are only three sites, all situated in Western Massachusetts with a relatively small sample of participants compared to the number of members of school councils across the state. The richness of the data may have been impacted by this researcher's non-continuous presence at the sites, the willingness of participants to be interviewed and the short duration of this dissertation research which limits the trust in developing relationships. My visits at each site were at different times of day and I was not able to observe as much as I had hoped. There was a smaller amount of data from SC due to loss of two interviews that could not be transcribed due to tape recorder failure and observation of only two council meetings and very few council meeting minutes in the material review. Those who were recruited for interviews represented various roles in each school community, although the balance at each site varied and the participants were mostly female with the exception of the three male principals, and the participants were not representative of the ethnic population in all the sites. Although the site of this research study is situated in Massachusetts, some of the findings may or may not be applicable to local school councils in other states.

The following chapters describing the results of this study are rich with examples of the interactions and data collected at each site. "An in-depth description showing the complexities of processes and interactions will be so embedded with data

derived from the setting that it is convincing to readers” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 201). The information from this study may be transferable to other sites with local school councils as the data from multiple settings and multiple participants should strengthen its’ validity.

Personal Biography

My professional work as an Educator has spanned thirty years and I have learned a great deal about the lives of families and their influence on the development of their children. As I finished my undergraduate training in Special Education I assumed that I would be working in a classroom with children but, with very few teaching positions at that time, my career path took me into social/community services. My first experience was in a state institution for people with mental retardation who had been placed there by their families at the advice of professionals. This isolation of people with disabilities and lack of involvement with family and community led me to graduate work in Early Childhood Education in preparation for work in Early Intervention, a system which provides services and supports families and their disabled infants and toddlers. During many years in Early Intervention I learned about parenting, family systems, social services, interdisciplinary treatment approaches, and the vital links between children, family and community.

This interest in children and their families drew me to the doctoral program in Child and Family Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst at the same time that I moved into a position in the public schools as a special education coordinator. My

experience taught me the power of family and community involvement on the development of young children and led me to my current research focused on parent involvement in the public schools. I worked for a few years in a large urban high school and then moved to the same position in a suburban elementary school. As I moved through my doctoral studies, I began to focus my research on school-family partnerships. I was particularly interested in the role of parents in school governance and its' relationship to academic achievement. During the last few years, I have studied and written about the concept of parent involvement, parent-teacher relationships and the role of parents and community members in school governance efforts in research on school reform. As I read the research on parent involvement in education and the inclusion of parent involvement in federal and state education reform efforts, I began to look at the role of school councils in Massachusetts. Besides a few basic guides on how to run a school council published by the Massachusetts Department of Education when education reform was passed in 1993, I found very little information on their function or any review of their implementation. At the urban high school, I interviewed teachers about their methods of engaging parents in their teenagers' education. I also interviewed some members of the school council, reviewed documents, and observed a couple of meetings

In the Fall of 2003 I conducted a pilot research project in a local elementary school as part of a Qualitative Research course at the University. The purpose of the study was to explore the function of one school council and describe the members understanding of school-family partnerships. I had worked part time in this school for less than a year, so I had established some relationships but my knowledge and experience with this community of people was still new. I remained cognizant of the

limitations of conducting research in my own backyard. After gaining access and permission for the study from the Principal, I sought consent from council members by communicating with them through a letter explaining my study and asking for their participation through observation at their meetings and through individual interviews. I purposely chose a semi-structured interview approach so I could address specific questions but also leave room to pursue themes brought up by the interviewees. After five interviews, observations of two council meetings, and review of some materials I was able to describe why council members chose to participate, the type of issues that were addressed, specifics about the roles of council members, and how the work of the council related to the policy development in the school. I identified some themes and some questions, with a focus on the relationships and communication patterns in the school. There were apparent power struggles between teachers and parents, and I was surprised to find the fact that the PTO influence and role had shifted significantly since the school council was established. From other members of the school community I learned that many teachers and parents knew very little about the purpose or work of the school council. I gained a deeper understanding that this type of research needs to be longer in duration and include more than one site in order to adequately describe the work of school councils and members understanding of school-family relationships. The course time frame and cancelled meetings only provided two opportunities to observe the interactions between council members.

My values and assumptions encompass ideas that community support and family involvement in children's education lead to better outcomes for everyone, and specifically for children's academic and social development. I have always been

interested in organizational structure and interactions, or what Rossman and Rallis (2003, pg. 95) refer to as “actions organized in social patterns”. Qualitative research certainly speaks to my interest in understanding the social world and is a very good fit for my well-developed interview and observational skills and my understanding of the value of material culture.

Although my professional experience instilled a belief in the power of parental involvement in a child’s development, my review of the literature about parent involvement in the public schools, with particular attention to the role of parents and community members in school improvement, showed inconsistent empirical evidence to support my beliefs. In fact, much of the literature about parental involvement in education appears to be based on beliefs, rather than the results of research. I was aware of the bias in my beliefs as I began this research process. The intention of this study is to provide some rich qualitative description of the role of parents as it relates to the education of children.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Overview

The following three sections describe the results of the data analysis in terms of the family and community involvement in school governance at each site and the function and influence of the local school councils on school improvement efforts. This narrative also describes how the activities of local school councils meet the spirit and intent of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA) and describes the relationship of the school council to school staff, families and community members. Analysis of the data identified the central category or theme in this case study as the *culture or school climate* which affected the structure and process of *school council function* and *parent involvement* in the school, and that *communication* was the strategic set of actions/interactions that facilitated and acknowledged behaviors in the school culture. As I gathered the data and read through all the sources I was struck by the power or influence of the local culture on parent involvement, and on the function of each school council and the insignificant impact of any state or federal regulation on the understanding of council responsibility, although it was clear that each principal understood those mandates and their corresponding administrative responsibilities.

The *Culture or school climate* describes “the patterns of behavior, artifacts, and knowledge that people have learned or created” (Spradley, pg 86) that describe the school community and reflect the school district and community at large. Properties include values, demographics, history of council work, actions/interactions or attitudes that highlight a sense of community, attitudes or commitment to school council work, and school district practices that influence the work of the council. Dimensions include shared to opposing values, and cooperative to adversarial practices in the school.

School council function describes an individual and community understanding of the structure and responsibilities of the school council. Properties include knowledge of regulatory role of the council and local processes for membership, council activities, agenda and decision making, and communication with the school community. One dimension includes the role of the council from decision making to advisory to managerial. There is also a second dimension along a continuum of power from a balanced approach where all participate in decision making to educator dominant where teachers and principals make decisions without parent input, and principal dominant as councils that function only in advisory role.

School Council activities, agenda and decision making and *school council membership* are subcategories of school council function and tell the story of the local structure and routine interactions in school council work. Properties of school council activities include identifying the learning needs of the students, reviewing the annual school budget, developing an annual school improvement plan which may address assessments of class size, student-teacher ratios, issues in professional development, enhancement of parental involvement; school safety and discipline; issues of school

climate; extra-curricular activities; concerns about meeting the diverse needs of all learners or other issues. Properties of agenda include type of agenda items and how/who places them, and properties of decision making include the type of process, such as consensus or voting. Agenda can be plotted along a dimension of policy to information to management. Dimensions of decision making include autocratic to collaborative processes, and informal to advisory to formalized decision making. Agenda and decision making are the contextual conditions (how) of school council activities (actions). Properties of council membership include recruitment/election, type of roles (parent, teacher, administrator, and community member), group make-up (parity and gender), history, longevity and size. Membership is a contextual condition of school council function and a consequence of school culture.

Parent involvement refers to values or attitudes about parent engagement and actions that include families in the school community. Properties include parent and teacher expectations, communication between parents and schools, parent participation in school activities; and parent participation in school governance. Dimensions include positive to negative values or attitudes, type of model from provider/receiver to partnership (teacher/school directed activities to one of relationships in collaboration and partnership), more or less involvement based on socio-economic status or language.

Communication is one property/condition of the efforts to *enhance parent involvement* and the how (actions/interactions) of *parent involvement*. *Partnership* is a subcategory of *parent involvement* and a philosophy that is a consequence of *culture or school climate*.

Communication is the exchange of ideas, messages or information and focuses on communication with parents and other members of the school community. Properties

include verbal and written communication that can be broken down into general communication in the school and communication about the school council, with properties that specify types of communication and to whom from whom. Dimensions include informal to formal, controlled to open, and seldom to frequent.

School council function is a consequence of and intersects with the history and culture in each school/community and the understanding of authority and power over decision making. The data show some confusion over the role of the school council around what is 'advisory' and what defines 'policy making'. In order to include all members of the school community in participatory governance, MERA established the requirement that every elementary, secondary, and vocational school in Massachusetts have a school council. (Education, 1994, Modified 2005) "The law contains language such as "assist" or "consult with" the principal. Clearly it envisions that councils will share in decisions that are the formal prerogative of principals, to whom the law has given increased responsibilities for the operational management of the school." And "...to meet regularly with the principal and assist in identifying the educational needs of students in the school, reviewing the annual school budget, and formulating the school improvement plan." (www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/advisory/schoolcouncils/part3b.html)

The first section describes the culture at each site and the relationship and influence of that culture on the function of the school council. The second section describes the relationship of the culture to parent involvement at each school and the influence of parent involvement on the work of the school council. The final section

describes the local culture and school councils as they relate to theoretical frameworks of parent involvement, particularly Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and Joyce Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence.

The Relationship and Influence of Culture on School Council Function

This section is divided into three parts by school site, and addresses the research questions about the activities of each school council and their relationship to student achievement; members and others' understanding of the function and role of the school council; and the challenges and barriers to the work of each council. The first section in each part describes the school and community culture and the history of council work at each site; the next section tells the story of the structure in council work, including the composition of membership, and describes the processes in agenda and decision making; and the last section describes the general communication in the school and specific communication about the work of the school council.

The Urban School

The Culture and History of Council Work

School A (SA) is located in an urban district in a busy city neighborhood that is mixed residential and business and adjoins a public housing complex. It is a large building only built two or three years ago with a large asphalt parking lot but no outdoor

recreation space for children. The Principal told me they use the gymnasium inside for recreation. The district has an active teacher's union and a history of school council teams or what is referred to locally as School Based Decision Making teams or SCDM teams which predate education reform. The culture has a tension or power struggle about decision making between administration and the teachers (union) which appeared to be a result of union negotiations over the years. There was some confusion from members about whether the school council makes policy and one of the teachers commented that it used to be consensus in decision making but with the new union contract the Principal has the last say. The Principal talked about policy as a district or administrative role and the power struggles with teachers who want to bring those policies to the school council.

The Principal at SA had been a Teacher and Assistant Principal at the secondary level for many years and has been the Principal at this elementary school for the last two years. He described the history of SCDM in the district that began as a project based group effort for betterment in the schools in the early 1980s but efforts for change were often stymied by the power struggle between the administration and teacher's union over policy and decision making. When education reform legislation was passed in 1993, there was a shift for teachers (union) from more power in decision making to more of an advisory role. The Principal described the conflict, "The Education Reform Act had come in, and somehow, the Education Reform Act stated that SCDM was to be an advisory board to the principal of the building. But the teacher's contract that had existed in the district said that SCDM was to be a policy making decision board of the building." "To where you had the teacher's union saying no, this is an advisory board and we have teachers who have power and input and all policies have to go through this and had to be

decided on by this board, which is totally contrary to what the law was now saying was supposed to happen. But the school department seemed to go along with it and said that no, this was in the contract. So therefore it was going to somehow exist. So you had this policy at the district that was in direct conflict with the law” (SA Principal).

The Principal continued to describe his experience with the SCDM Team when he arrived at SA two years ago, “Either SCDM was dysfunctional, didn’t happen at all in any buildings from what I heard, especially I think at the elementary level, or on the secondary level, it was in conflict all the time on things that happened within this district that I could view. When I arrived at this school currently the principal, when I arrived here and inquired about SCDM, I was told the SCDM team was pretty much just dysfunctional, didn’t really exist too well. There were at that time, there were two members of the staff were still on it, one was the adjustment counselor, and one was the collaborative development teacher for math, and the principal by the end of the year. And at the last meeting, those were the only people who were at it. I was like, where were the parents? They said, well some people kind of dropped off, stopped coming. They didn’t do much. They might have gotten together and you know, didn’t really happen. And I said, no, that has to change”.

Although this urban district has a history of school improvement efforts, the changes brought on by education reform and the power struggle between the teachers’ union and administration has created a culture that appeared to impede the work of the local school council.

The Structure and Process of Council Work

This urban district has a city wide SCDM Resource Team which provides training for SCDM Teams (school councils) and has a handbook that explains the responsibilities of SCDM which are described as policies; updates from principal; review of budget; planning faculty meetings, extended days and staff development; and identifying a work plan for developing a school improvement plan. Membership is described as parity between teachers and parents. The twenty-one page document includes a general description of SCDM Teams in the district and a series of questions and answers broken down by topic, i.e., budget, school committee policies, management issues, etc. The stated purpose is to help the SCDM team be an effective decision-making body. They state that the basis of their information is the collective bargaining agreement. I also reviewed notes/agenda for a SCDM training which included information on the decision making process and specifics on developing a school improvement plan.

The membership of the school council or SCDM Team included the Principal, six teachers, and two parents, one of whom was the PTO President. All members were women with the exception of the Principal and one male teacher. All members were white with the exception of one parent who is African-American. In this large, urban district the teachers and the parents are paid a stipend for their work on SCDM. At the beginning of the 2006-2007 school year the school secretary also attended but by mid-year was out on a leave and the PTO President was then hired as the temporary secretary. Review of the minutes of thirteen meetings during that year found the Principal was always present; the PTO President was present four times; the other parent representative

was present for six meetings; and there was an average of five teachers at each meeting. The SCDM team met twice a month in the late afternoon around a child sized table in the school library. When asked what the benefits were or why they became members of the SCDM Team teachers said, "I think that if the teachers aren't active in that, that it's important to have a voice. I think it's really your way to be heard to the principal and whoever else is here. I don't mind doing it. It's only an extra hour a week. And I don't mind doing things like, I'm a person who doesn't mind going to the computer and typing the notes. So I don't find that extra work. And they pay you" (Teacher 1). Teacher 2 explained, "...so I have sort of been looking for ways to reach out and be more a part of like I said, the community".

The structure of the SCDM process at SA appeared stiff and embedded in the tension between the administration and the teacher's union as there appeared to be very little cooperative work beyond sharing of day to day details. "I mean it was more these, this is the process of SCDM, rather than the product" (Teacher 2). Activities at council meetings included setting a calendar of SCDM meetings, information on the school budget from the district, setting a date for open house, review of a mission statement, course selection after teacher survey, day to day problem solving, i.e., schedules or use of copy machine, no discussion of a school improvement plan, and the principal's report on management issues. The SCDM meeting appeared to be a place to share information, hear complaints from teachers, and a place for the Principal to answer questions about professional development, class allocation, field trips, and the process for evaluation of paraprofessionals. "And so we talk about the things that are important to teachers, but sort of these larger, or smaller issues I guess, not really larger issues, the smaller things.

And then the principal always has a chunk of time to talk. And it seems like he's always talking about like staffing issues, because we always have staffing issues; people who haven't been hired and will be hired – all of that kind of thing. And he talks about any of the directives that come down from downtown” (Teacher 2).

The agenda followed what appeared to be a routine format: ‘Speak out’ where general information and concerns are shared; ‘Principal’s report’ of information and issues; ‘PTO report’; ‘Old business’ and ‘New business’. “But it’s basically the same thing on the agenda every time. It’s nothing, we don’t, and I think that’s a function of we don’t really know what to put on the agenda” (Teacher 2). At one meeting there were many comments from the Principal about system issues such as communication about reading initiatives and professional development throughout the meeting. “We’re in such a large school district maybe - that so much comes from the top down and not so much is happening within the buildings” (Teacher 2). At another meeting the agenda items and conversation appeared to be teacher-dominated with the exception of the two reports from parents, one a report on PTO fundraising and the other which included a parent reporting on funding secured from her husband’s company, and a couple of questions from parents. No one commented on parent reports nor asked their opinion or input on other issues. “Because I don’t get the sense that anybody knows or cares what we talk about unless it’s directly related to them” (Teacher 2).

During my observations of four meetings there were no examples of substantive decisions except the responsibilities for timekeeper, facilitator and taking minutes at meetings and a decision on a date for an Open House. Conversation was congenial with several side conversations between teachers. Minutes of meetings showed lists of topics

with pieces of information but no indication of any team decisions. Responses to questions in interviews about decision-making reflected the historical shift in SCDM function and uncertainty about role of the council. “They (teachers) used to have more say in what went on and always everything had to be by consensus. No longer, it should be consensus but the Principal has the last say.” “But we don’t really vote. We usually talk about it and everybody agrees. It is consensus” (Teacher 1).

“Or maybe it’s whatever side the principal votes on, that’s the winning side. Something like that. But he definitely gets more of a say in things. He can also put anything on the agenda that he wants to at any time. So the principal definitely gets more of a say in things than the teachers do. And I feel like that sort of comes across in the fact that principal’s report is always longer than any of the proportions of the SCDM meeting. And like I said earlier, it does go back to the fact that he’s got a lot to tell us, but it seems like that’s more of what our meeting is, is him telling us things rather than us deciding things” (Teacher 2).

“Also, it now states in the (union) contract that SCDM does not have to be decided by consensus, everyone agreeing. It can be decided by vote with the majority. I think it’s a two thirds majority if I’m correct – approving something. But nothing can be approved unless that two thirds majority includes the principal” (Principal).

Teacher 2 talked about her experience working in two districts and commented, “Is it better to be in a place where you have the struggle of no PD (professional development) and no curriculum, but yet you can sort of help develop that kind of thing? Or is it better to be in a place where you got all of that but you don’t have any say in what it is?”

When asked about challenges to SCDM work the Principal said, “ I think trying to really get this to be what it will be when the new contract comes out, moving in that direction. Maybe more in compliance with what the law says, than what has been in previous times. And always try to make sure that SCDM stays not as a complaint department, but that it stays hopefully as that entity to move the building forward.”

Teacher 2 said, “I think that the primary one to me seems like the fact that so much of what our school has to do, comes from central office. And that we don’t have a lot of autonomy in deciding anything, much less really being a decision making body.”

At one SCDM meeting the Principal said there would be a visit from someone from central office and he explained the process for evaluating the School Improvement Plan (SIP). In the interview with him he explained that the SCDM Team does not develop the SIP but is responsible to monitor it. “There’s actually a team that’s formed. It’s not the SCDM team that writes the plan necessarily. They have to have the final approval of it before it goes to the school department to be approved.”... “But it’s the SCDM to make sure that it is implemented however” (Principal). “SCDM has to approve the school improvement plan. The school improvement plan is developed by like the math person, it’s usually by committee” (Teacher 1). The SA SIP is data driven with scores from both MCAS and criterion referenced tools, like the Diagnostic Reading Assessment used at the school. There are three goal areas in English Language Arts, Math and Science and some of the objectives are taken directly from the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. “The plan is totally based on data, it’s data driven” (Teacher 1).

Teacher 2 described the relationship of the SCDM team to the School Improvement Plan. “But she does it. So it’s not like it’s the SCDM team sat down and

said, how are we going to do this part of the math school improvement plan? Let's do a problem of the week. It was the ILS (teacher) that came up with that. She happens to be a member of SCDM so that blurs lines anyway. But it, I don't feel like we ever sit down. In fact one of the new members of SCDM said, does everybody have a copy of the school improvement plan? And we all were kind of like um, no we don't. So (Principal) was going to get us all copies of it. So I guess that sort of tells you how much we refer back to it when nobody has copies and nobody really thinks about the fact that we should have copies. And she brought it up because she used to be at a different school where maybe things ran differently. I'm not sure."

The data from SA showed several discussions at SCDM meetings about the development of a mission statement for the school but it did not appear to have any relationship to the school improvement plan. The only mention of budget issues in the data was when the principal reported on it from the district level. The only data on learning needs or student achievement came from information in the School Improvement Plan and a few mentions of grants and specialty curriculum programs used in the school at SCDM meetings, but there was no discussion about achievement or learning needs. At one meeting a teacher asked about scores from a standardized achievement test and there was a brief discussion of the demographics in the city schools that affect the scores but no suggestions or plans for addressing the issues. Minutes of some meetings listed professional development as an agenda item but there was no other information.

Although this urban district has written materials and provided training for SCDM teams (school councils), the structure of meetings was predetermined by the teachers'

contract, and the agenda and discussion involved primarily day to day management issues. Membership was educator dominant with limited presence or participation of parents.

Communication

Participants in this urban school made comments about communication with other teachers and communication about the SCDM meetings in the building, “They’ll (teachers) come to us in the hall or in our office and say could you bring this up or what can I do about this. And we usually say bring it to SCDM because what can we do about it. “ And, “I know that in SCDM you are supposed to post the minutes and post the agenda for the next meeting somewhere public, so people can in fact come to the meetings and know where they are. We’re not good at that and that’s something we should improve this year” (Teacher 1). “SCDM minutes are always posted for the faculty in the faculty lounge” (Principal).

In summary, the most significant cultural influence on the work of the local school council, know as the SCDM Team, in this urban school was the historic power struggle over decision-making between the administration and the teachers’ union. SCDM membership was educator dominant with inconsistent attendance of the two parent members. The structure and process of the SCDM work appeared rigid and the agenda followed a scripted format presented in district training materials that reflected the teachers’ contract. There appeared to be very little cooperative work or decision making beyond the sharing of day to day managerial details. The School Improvement

Plan is not developed by the SCDM Team and there was no substantive discussion about achievement or other school improvement issues. There was minimal communication about the work of the SCDM team with school staff or families.

The College Town School

The Culture and History of Council Work

School B (SB) is in a small college town situated a mile outside the center of town in a residential neighborhood with plenty of outdoor playing fields and a new playground structure. The building was built in the 1970s and the school council discussed applying for state funds to do some improvements. When I asked the Principal to tell me about his role in the school he said, “I’ve been principal in this school for 17 years. I’ve also lived in the community for 25 years. And both of my children, who are now out of college, went through this school and through the public schools.” He told me that the previous principal had a building committee in the 1970s before the building was built and he kept that group as a planning committee which grew into the school council. “So it was a fairly smooth evolution to just go from that planning committee into the planning council. Traditionally the planning council at SB had, basically had decision making authority over, once the budget was set, how many teachers would be at each grade level. So they didn’t get to choose how many teachers the school had, but if it was choice between you know, did you have four teachers at grade five and three at grade four or the other way around, that was one of the decisions that was the purview of the planning committee to

make. And the old planning committee when, and some of that tradition carried over to the early years of the school council. Over time I moved things to more, in my view, more consistent with the state law, which is that the school council is advisory to the principal” (Principal). In addition to the strong history of family and community involvement in school governance, another significant part of the culture of School B is the Parent Council, rather than a PTO, which is very active and the conduit for parent members of the School Council which is described in the second section of this chapter.

The Structure and Process of Council Work

The School Council membership at SB includes the Principal, three teachers, five parents and one community member. There are six women and four men including the Principal. All members are white with the exception of the community member who is an African-American. Parent members appeared to be highly educated individuals who have specific interests and expectations for their child’s education. In an interview the community member on the council described the make-up of the group, “....a group of very like minded individuals. I have to say I think it was by design in some ways. I think so, because a lot of the people who were on the council were approached by one or two different people.” From my observations and review of minutes of seven meetings during the 2006-2007 school-year the Principal was always present, the community member was present four times, and there was an average of two teachers and three parents at each meeting. The school council met in the early evening at a comfortable conference table in the Principal’s office. The atmosphere was collegial and respectful, and they were

welcoming of this researcher. They brought snacks to share and the agenda was directed and productive with some differing opinions and the conversation about some issues was intellectually stimulating. There did not appear to be any tension on the surface between teachers and parents but I was not able to get any of the three teacher members to respond to my request for an interview. I did, however, get many responses from parent members.

The SB Principal described his role in the school council work, “That I have felt my responsibility as the principal of the school was to keep the focus on students who were not succeeding, and making sure they were immobilizing resources to close the achievement gap. And while parents have not been strongly opposed to that, that’s not you know, it’s not the thing that’s closest to their heart. And you know, so I think there’s probably almost always in a school like this anyway, that kind of inherent tension between the principal’s vision of what the thing is all about, and the parent members at least of the school council.” The Principal commented on the composition and election of council members, “So never has the election, I think on either the staff or the parent body, given us a council that was representative anywhere, racially anywhere near in proportion to the body. Now that’s not so much because a white majority elected the white people and didn’t vote for people of color, it’s more because people of color didn’t put themselves forward or weren’t recruited or didn’t feel you know, interested or ready or welcome to be candidates.”

Responses to my question about the benefits of council membership elicited these comments. “... But I’m not sure that’s really why I said I would run. I think it is more that (Principal) is actually a personal friend” (Parent 1). “I became involved because I was recruited by a good friend, an aerobics teacher of mine, who happens to be the parent

council president. She's extremely active in the community and that it would be a valuable experience for me to do, especially since I had a son that would be going into kindergarten, actually starts this September. So I thought it would be a good idea to get involved prior to him starting, to get to know a little bit of behind the scenes of how the school works. And I'm a firm believer in getting involved because it's very easy to stand by the sidelines and complain and say that things aren't going well, but not to do anything about it" (Community Member 1).

School council members talked about the challenges of getting to night meetings, dealing with budget issues, and one parent thought it would be a challenge to be on the school council if her child's teacher was also a member. Community Member 2 who is not a member of the school council talked about the challenges of school council work, "I think in terms of policy, I think there's limited amount of policy decisions they can make at level School Council, because so much of that is really made at the level of Superintendent's office, district level, at state level, at national level." Community Member 1 commented, "And you want to do the best for your child. And if you're in a position that you can make it happen, then you think okay, but is that the right decision for your child or ultimately _____ the community. So that was a challenge".

A Parent member of the school council talked about the challenges in the changing demographic in the community, "I think probably the school has an additional challenge in that more and more people are apartment dwellers who tend to move and it's really hard." And the Principal spoke about the challenge of equitable representation of all families on the school council, "I do think one of the challenges school councils in this school have, tended to be parents from more entitled families with students who for the

most part are on the more successful end of the academic performance continuum. So it is difficult, whatever their values and principles, it's difficult for the council to truly be a force for the school serving the most disenfranchised and the least successful students. And I think that's an inherent contradiction in the whole structural things."

The data showed that activities of the school council included review of the School Improvement Plan (SIP), application for state funding for a project, discussion of budget issues, issues of enrollment, PTO playground project, issues of diversity, communication between teachers and parents, environmental issues, and advocating with the school committee. The minutes of their first meeting of the year indicated that the agenda was an overview of the school council, including the history, members' roles, and the responsibilities of the council which "include input into the budget and school improvement plan, advising the principal on issues, and serving as liaisons with the greater school community". They also talked about why they chose to be a members, reviewed the decision making process and set meeting dates for the remainder of the year with decisions on who would take notes and who would bring snacks.

Review of minutes of all the meetings indicated information being shared, the principal asking members for their opinions about budget issues, discussion of diversity issues related to achievement and social justice, and review of and decision making about goals in the school improvement plan. "The most concrete piece is going over the school improvement plan every year" (Parent 1). "Prior to that every time (Principal) would give us an update on budget issues as they were being discussed among the principals and his information was always ahead of and, in terms of SB, more detailed than the information I got from the (town)" (Parent 1). "This last council, one of the key contributions it made

was it raised issues about the relationship between school and environmental preservation and restoration” (Principal).

The SB School Improvement Plan for 2007-2009 has five goals with corresponding objectives. The first goal is student learning; the second goal around enhancing skills for staff and students, including social justice; the third involves creating a culture of achievement; the fourth goal is about communicating and connecting with parents; and the fifth goal is about an effective transition with a new principal (as this principal was retiring at the end of the school year). Objectives under communication with parents were outreach to parents of incoming Kindergarteners, monthly curriculum letters from teachers, attendance issues, and opportunities for affinity groups to meet.

The data also included comments and descriptions of collaborative decisions. The Principal commented that the school council has an advisory role rather than decision making although he said that decision making at the council meetings is by consensus which was agreed on at the beginning of the year. If they need agreement for a deadline, they take a vote. “I think the faculty sees the faculty and me as the key decision makers, not the council.” ... “I would argue that decision making is not the key role of the council, that it is input and view points that make a big difference” (Principal).

The Principal reported that he sets the agenda for the first meeting of the year and “....they end every meeting with you know, what do you want on the agenda next time? But usually a council gets a, there are things that you learn the council always wants updates on. What’s happening with the budget? Are there any staff changes?”

The principal described his role and the co-chair, “Everybody gets to talk. Everybody gets their say. So for the, I mean everybody’s aware that there are co-chairs, but people pretty much look to me as the leader in the council.”

“My assumption has been that the principal sets the agenda. And my assumption has been that the principal ultimately makes the decisions, but with advice and feedback from the teachers and parents on the committee. But that is an assumption” (Community Member 2). “I think (Principal) very clearly sets the agenda. At the start of every meeting he says these are things we need to discuss. I think decisions; I don’t think we ever really voted on too much” (Parent 2).

“And then (Principal) would mention any particular things that he wanted to put on the agenda., so he would go and put those items up and ask if anybody else had items. And often times they did. And we would follow those. Sometimes because of the two hour time constraint, we wouldn’t always get through things. But he was pretty good at sort of monitoring the time, sort of like if we were really spending a lot of time on an issue, he would ask if it was okay to drop, to move some of those later items to the next meeting – unless somebody had a very specific reason why. So it was very controlled. It wasn’t a sort of free for all. It always had a very defined path” (Community Member 1).

“We meet once a month and he (Principal) was very good at checking in and remembering. So you know, maybe third or fourth meeting, he would mention okay, this is what we talked about, anybody want to make changes? And we had a note taker. We had an official note taker every meeting. We rotated that responsibility. And our notes were published, so we actually had to write them up and then we sent them to (Principal) who reviewed them. And often he would make changes or corrections, and then those

minutes became public for anybody that wanted to read them” (Community Member 1). Participant’s responses to interview questions about the process of decision-making: “I think (Principal) was asking for guidance and sort of an ear. I think ultimately he made the decision” (Community Member 1). “I think it’s collaborative certainly, there’s certainly open discussion” (Parent 2). “It was very much consensus” (Community Member 1).

The process and structure of school council work at School B appeared to be a cooperative one with the agenda set and managed by the Principal with consensus in decision making. Membership numbers were larger for parents than teachers and the school council was actively involved in developing and reviewing the school improvement efforts.

Communication

Examples of data about communication at SB was school council communication with school committee through written letters and attendance at school committee meetings; biweekly newsletters and e-mail calendar from parent council; information on the school web site which includes the school improvement plan; discussions of communication with parents at council meetings; family directory; surveys and letters about school council; and parent conferences. The newsletters included information on school events and fundraisers, Parent Council meeting dates, MCAS schedules and the role of standardized testing, information on the new practice of assemblies, requests for volunteers, and Special Education Parent Advisory Council meeting dates and agenda.

Parent 2 reported that school council meeting dates were in the e-mail calendar but there was no mention of school council dates or their work in the newsletters reviewed.

Comments gathered in relation to communication about the school council: “I’m thinking perhaps once or twice a year, some memo is sent out with a big packet of other information that describes some of what School Council has done. Occasionally there’s a survey that goes out that would be brought back to School Council” (Community Member 2). “Well the communication is definitely through the school committee, which if people are interested, they would hear that. The school improvement plan is also posted on the website. I believe, and I’m not certain, I believe that (Principal) makes an announcement, either in some start of school, handbook, that there is a parent council, and what that function does. Actually it’s true. I just received something in the mail that there’s a parent school, there is a school council, and what that does.” (Community member 1) “And we have not done a lot frankly, to publicize the work of the school council” (Principal).

The Principal talked about the influence of the school council and various members at the town level, “I have used the council though, and you know, and I hear that phrase you know, but parents have used it this way and teachers have used it this way, I mean any number of us have used the council to mobilize support and to be an advocacy group for certain decisions at the school committee level.” Efforts in communication in this college town school overlapped in many ways with face to face and written communication by school staff and the Parent Council, and between the school council and the school committee.

In summary, the culture at School B is influenced by a mix of many well educated parents and the needs of a diverse student body, as well as, a strong history of family and community involvement in school governance. There are passionate beliefs about the value of parent involvement and dedicated efforts among staff and parents to engage all families. Another significant part of the culture is the influence and work of the Parent Council, which is very active and the conduit for parent members of the School Council. The process and structure of school council work was formal, yet comfortable, and the agenda was set and managed by the Principal with consensus in decision making. The school council is actively involved in developing and reviewing the school improvement plan, as well as, discussing budget and student achievement. There are many layered efforts to communicate with families face to face within the school and through written newsletters and electronic mail.

The Suburban School

The Culture and History of Council Work

School C (SC) is in a small suburban city located in a mixed residential and business area with an outdoor area that is mostly blacktop. The building is over a hundred years old and presents challenges for the school, i.e., they have no gymnasium and limited funds for any upgrades. The Principal has been there for six years and had worked as an administrator in other districts before and after education reform. The culture at SC appeared to be a comfortable, cooperative one. I did not sense any tension between

teachers and parents on the school council and their work together appeared to be informal with a practical, problem solving approach. Both teachers and parents welcomed me and responded to my requests for interviews. A sense of positive attitudes about community efforts came through in the observations, interviews and material review. The description on the district web site: “The schools are governed by a seven member School Committee, which includes the Mayor, elected every two years. Active parent involvement is encouraged in the Parent Teacher Organization, School Councils, _____Community Association, School Volunteers, Chamber of Commerce, and the Regional Education system which is well maintained and has been cited by the State Department of Education as a leader in collaborative site-based decision making.” I found the most poignant example of the culture was when one of the teachers had passed away during the previous year, parents and family members volunteered to substitute in the school so all the staff could go to the funeral. “We have a good community that when there’s something going on, seems to be able to drum up some backing and get some things accomplished” (Parent 2).

One of the teachers described the collaborative work in the community before education reform was passed, “At that time, just before ed reform, the district was also pulling together all the different school improvement councils and coming together as a district to do a collaborative agreement between all the administration, the teachers and the school committee. So we had a collaborative agreement. We looked at Patrick Dolan’s work about change and systemic change. So representatives from family, from the parent community, the regular business community, and the school system, came together at these larger meetings and we learned more about system change, which was

about to happen with the ed reform.”... “We called ourselves School Improvement Council. And at that time we would come together with at least two community members. I think we had the fire chief and we had the community police officer and about four or five parents and about three or four teachers, as well as the principal, sitting in a group. And the kinds of things we talked about were budget suggestions, parent involvement activities – not PTO like, but more like how to bring families in and do literacy kinds of things, math nights” (Teacher 2).

The culture at this small suburban school was reflective of the history of collaborative efforts in school improvement that included families and community members before the inception of education reform and continued with an informal, problem solving approach in the school council with an emphasis on communicating with families.

The Structure and Process of Council Work

The Principal at this suburban school described the function of the school council, “Primarily our school council is an informational kind of a meeting.”...“ The relationship is a good relationship. I mean it’s not; it’s not an adversarial thing. It’s not; I’ve never felt like it’s us against them or anything like that. But I also will say that you know, and I think I said this to you when we first started this whole thing, it’s not a real dynamic kind of a situation. It’s not a, it’s not a situation where, it’s not a team. I don’t feel like it’s a team. I feel like it’s a meeting where we’re kind of sharing information and hearing concerns. I mean that’s how I see it happening.”

Although I never received an official list, it appeared that the School Council membership at SC included the Principal, two teachers, and two parents. There are four women and one man who is the Principal. All members are white. Another teacher attended one of the meetings I observed but I was not clear on her membership. One of the parent members told me there were three parent and three teacher seats on the council. There was no current community member but had been in the past and both teachers and parents interviewed talked about that and wished they had a community member. The council meeting was held in the Kindergarten classroom next to the office around a small table, sitting in small chairs.

The principal described recruitment of parents for school council members, “Primarily our school council is an informational kind of a meeting. We don’t have a lot of interest in being on the school council from parents. And part of that is I think, it’s still not really clear. I don’t think parents are really clear as to what it is. So we kind of have to recruit people to serve you know, the empty seats. And it’s a struggle for us to get teachers to be on it too because it’s another meeting, it’s voluntary and so forth.”... “We put a thing in the newsletter in the very beginning of the school year, asking you know, explaining what the school council is, the level of commitment that’s involved, and asking anybody to sort of self nominate. And then at open house we’ll have a little election.” A teacher and a parent told me that the membership is supposed to be two years but they had been on the council for several years due to lack of interest from others. A parent and a teacher described the benefits of council membership, “No, I actually think that it gives you a voice. And the thing is, it’s really nice to know, it gives you an insight of what’s going on, what the problems are that the school is facing, what

the upcoming events are.” ... “It gives me the chance to sit down and really say the things that I’m worried about and bring up the parent concerns” (Parent 2). “But what you can do is, you can have voice. And that means a lot you know, just to have voice” (Teacher 2).

In response to questions about challenges for the school council both parents and teachers talked about budget issues. “I think sometimes we feel like we don’t really have all that much say in the larger policies. A lot of educational policy comes down from the state or federal government” (Teacher 2). One of the parents talked about scheduling issues and that it was a challenge for recruiting community members.

The data showed that the activities of the school council were planning for what they called ‘coffee talks’ which were evening sessions for parents to gather and talk about the school and their ideas/concerns; physical building issues and parent assistance with specific projects; safety and parking; budget issues; MCAS results; open house and math night; School Improvement Goals update; and parent surveys. “It is still a place to talk about budget in a seasonal way. It’s still a place to talk about the school goals. It’s still a place to talk about a survey of parent concerns or interests” (Teacher 2).

The principal directed the agenda and the council set up the agenda together for the next meeting. The agenda is a simple list of topics, and decision making is relaxed/informal and consensus. “Mostly the agenda is set by (Principal). And if I had anything that I thought we should discuss, I could always email it to him and he could add it on there” (Parent 2). “So the agenda is open for anybody to add anything, but the principal who facilitates it pretty much sets the agenda. He knows that we’re supposed to talk about the budget or share MCAS data or you know, arrange certain opportunities for

the parents to get together and talk with teachers, things like that” (Teacher 2). “And I think we talk about a group, it has a group of ideas and just try to, I mean there’s no formalized vote or anything like that, which is kind, try to figure out what’s going to work best and come up, try some things really” (Parent 2).

The Principal gave me materials to review which included copies of minutes from some meetings and he seemed a little embarrassed that he did not have more documentation. Four agendas from 2007 (with no minutes) focused on issues of room parents, school improvement plan, budget, MCAS news, coffee talks and parent survey. Two agendas from 2006 (with no minutes) focused on parent member election, school improvement plan, PTO involvement, parent program, budget and MCAS. One agenda and three minutes from meetings in 2005 focused on term limits for council members; review of school improvement plan; improvements to the building; setting up coffee talks for parents and reporting on their success; and budget issues. Minutes reflected information shared and discussed but no specific decisions cited. “You know, there’s more of a process and attendance and minutes and things like that, where we don’t officially take any of that. I used to take minutes, but we never looked at them so I stopped taking minutes. We all take our own notes kind of, and revisit them the next time” (Parent 2).

The SC school improvement plan for 2005-2008 was detailed with specifics of measurement, timelines, resources needed and those responsible. This copy had a column that documented progress in 06-07. There were five major goals in student proficiency, teacher excellence, community and family involvement, student wellness and physical facilities with objectives related to NCLB and district and school objectives. Key actions

under family and community involvement included the use of the home-school compact, family event nights, volunteer program, use of Title 1 Parent Liaison, transition activities to Kindergarten as well as transition from fourth grade to the middle school.

The Principal described the relationship of the school improvement plan (SIP) to the district goals and the school council's role with the SIP, "The goals from the school improvement plan are, emanate from the district improvement plan and it's curriculum, it's school culture, so you know, it's all things that you know, it's all things that we're all working on anyway. So in that sense it does sort of come from the staff as well."..."I'll update them periodically throughout the year on how things are going with it. And then as we near the end of the year, we'll review it and address it and just you know, talk if there's anything we want to adjust in it. It's primarily my work that they, that I get input from them on. It's not something that we just, we literally do together. It's more of an input kind of a thing." Parent 2 commented on the school improvement plan, "I also think it's important just to make sure that the school is following the improvement plans set by the school committee."

The goal of student proficiency in the School Improvement Plan included objectives around the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, differentiated instruction, attendance issues, and training and implementation of a reading grant. During one meeting that I observed the Principal brought the MCAS results and explained them to the council members. Parents asked questions and the Principal described the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and the teachers' role in the testing process. There was no other discussion of plans to address the issue.

The structure and process of the school council meetings was informal with the Principal setting the agenda that focused on school improvement efforts but also addressed issues brought up by other members. There appeared to be parity in membership between teachers and parents and the approach to decision making was a cooperative, problem solving one.

Communication

Examples of data about communication at SC are school council/principal communication with the school committee; information shared at faculty meetings; weekly newsletters to families and flyers about specific events; parents listening and talking on the playground with other parents and bringing issues to school council; room parents who communicate with other parents about needs of the teacher/classroom; information on the school website; and parent surveys, parent bulletin board and a parent handbook. The weekly newsletters reviewed were written by the Principal and were from the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years and are focused on the current issues and season of the year; positive results of the MCAS test; information about community events/resources and for the 'school community'; comments about sports events and how they connect to the children's learning in school (math); school themes and events; planning about parking and safety issues; and information about the PTO, the School Council and the School Committee. Each newsletter has a text box with important dates and events listed which included PTO, School Council and School Committee meetings. The School Council was mentioned several times, e.g., in June 2007 he explained that the

school council sent home a parent survey a few weeks prior and that they use the results to set goals for the school improvement plan. In the school newsletter in January 2006 there was a reminder of the School Council meeting, a brief description of the council work and an invitation to all parents to attend. In September 2006 there was a section describing the school council and its work, and asking parents to fill out a form that was sent home if they were interested in running and telling families that ballots are cast at open house.

Teacher 2 described their efforts to communicate with the school committee, “Oh, one thing that we are going to do this year I hope, and we haven’t really done it in a couple years, is bring our concerns, communicate them at school committee so that we have representatives that have a little more clout than just teachers – we have parents going in and either congratulating the schools for what they do, or asking for something that they feel maybe the school needs. So we’re going to try to reach up to the school committee this year.” The principal described the communication among parents, “The parents that are on it are good about sort of listening to other parents and hearing what issues are. And they’re good about bringing them into the meetings and bringing them up with me to see if there’s anything we can do to address them. So that’s pretty much it.” “Well we have about three of us who are teachers who sit on, so the information that gets shared at school council is often the same kind of information that’s shared at our “nuts and bolts” staff meetings, so that there’s a way that the information is shared and flows. And our principal obviously facilitates that. So that’s one way” (Teacher 2). When asked about communication about the work of the school council Parent 2 said, “I think mostly through the newsletter that (Principal) puts out. And then he goes to the school committee

meetings and anything that is really of substance or importance that needs to go back to them, he will transmit that to them.” Parent 1 said she assumed that the principal talked about the council work at the faculty meetings. Efforts in communication with families at this suburban school came from the Principal and teachers, and from the parent members of the school council.

In summary, the culture at SC appeared to be a comfortable, cooperative one with a history of collaborative efforts in school improvement that included families and community members before the inception of education reform. The structure and process of school council work was informal as the principal set the agenda and others added their concerns as they came up. Members described the council as a place to discuss ideas, and that decision making was by consensus. The Principal wrote the School Improvement Plan based on district goals and feedback from parent surveys and shared progress with the school council once a year. Members understood that their role was advisory to the Principal but both teachers and parents talked about the importance of having a voice. There are regular efforts to communicate with families about school and community events through face to face interaction in the school and through weekly newsletters, which include recruitment for and communication about the work of the school council.

The Relationship of School Culture to Parent Involvement

Just as the culture in each school impacted the function of the school council, similar aspects of the culture influenced the attitudes about parent involvement and the efforts to engage parents and community members in the school. This section is divided into three parts by school site and addresses the research questions about the types of parent involvement at each school, and the influence of parent and community involvement on school council work. The first section in each part describes the attitudes toward and efforts to involve parents/families in the school; the next section describes the patterns of communication that influence parent involvement and the types of involvement evident at each site; and the final section describes parent involvement on the school council and the work of the PTO.

The Urban School

Attitudes Regarding Parent Involvement

This researcher found little data about communication with or efforts to engage parents at School A (SA), despite district documents and the initiation of a district office to facilitate parent involvement. Material review showed suggestions from the district website on how parents can help, which include ideas insuring attendance; meeting the teachers and attending events and parent conferences; talking with your child after

school; going to the library; limit TV; enroll child in sports; volunteer in the school; and how to help with homework. Parents are described as partners with a general description of parent-teacher conferences and invitation to visit classes anytime by making an appointment. Parent organizations are listed including SCDM teams (school council) in each school.

The district set up an Office of Parent and Community Engagement a couple of years ago and it encompasses several things, including parent engagement, school volunteers, ‘school to career’, and an initiative called Step Up (District). These efforts are described on the district web site, “Step Up (District) is a community-wide campaign to help (District) Public School students reach proficiency in their academics and character development. We are asking parents, community-based organizations, the religious community, businesses and others to “step up” and be accountable for the education of our children, not leaving it solely in the hands of teachers”. Other information from the Parent & Community Engagement web page cites other resources, such as, the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (PAC), Department of Education (DOE) and the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). There is no mention of the local PTO or School Council. There are links to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) web site.

In an interview with a the Administrator of Parent and Community Engagement I learned that at the beginning of this school year (07-08) the district began to fund parent facilitators at every elementary and middle school. They report to this Administrator and to the principal, and they coordinate parent events and an action plan which is coordinated with the school improvement plan. The Office also runs workshops for parents in topics like efficacy, parenting skills, and homework help, and they also put out

newsletters. The parent facilitators help develop the home school compacts which are required under NCLB for schools with Title 1 funds. The Administrator mentioned that the facilitators interact with other community organizations and I asked if they had any contact with the PTOs or SCDM teams and she said yes and that some of them sit on the SCDM teams. The parent facilitator at SA had worked part time for approximately six months and in an interview with this paraprofessional she described her role, "I am like a bridge to engage the parent to be more involved in the kid's activities in school. I translate the flyers and letters. I call the parents like if there is a problem with the children I do home visit with the counselor as well with the teacher." She also said that she calls parents if there is an attendance issue and provides Spanish interpreter services for teachers during parent conferences. She stressed the difficulty of the language barrier in involving parents in the school and reported that she had been an interpreter for parents in some special education meetings but knew nothing about the SCDM Team.

It appeared that staff at this urban school think that parents are not able to be involved due to the high rate of poverty, working parents and second language issues. "Schools, elementary schools that are in more affluent sections of the city, tend to have greater parental participation than those elementary schools that are in socio-economically depressed areas of the city. Where I am, tends to be one of the areas that's more socio-economically depressed." ... "that there doesn't seem to be as much parental participation as we would like to see. Parents come, once again, when you invite them" (Principal). "We have a lot of parent participation on moving up day for fifth grade. Most of the parents will come. When we have programs the parents will come" (Teacher 1). "Sometimes they do not get that involved unless it's like a big activity"

(Paraprofessional). “But I just, I don’t get the sense that we really are trying as a building to really reach out to parents. I feel like a lot of people have the attitude that ‘oh they’re not going to be involved,’ and sort of write it off.our idea of what parents are willing to do, isn’t always right. And we’ve got to keep trying because if we don’t keep trying, we’ll never know if they’re going to do it” (Teacher 2).

Despite the acknowledgement and efforts at the district level to reach out and involve parents and community members in the schools, the attitude of the staff at this urban elementary school is that parent involvement is difficult due to poverty, working parents and second language issues.

Communication and Types of Parent Involvement

Examples of communication at the urban school included a letter to parents about attendance, flyers at open house, information on resources on the district and school web sites, a parent information bulletin board, monthly calendar, and efforts to interpret for second language users. The SA website says that it houses a Family Support Resource Center. Teacher 1 mentioned that this resource center is some kind of neighborhood outreach that is housed in the school and that they used to come to SCDM meetings but no longer do so. The school website mentions that there is a monthly newsletter and that parents are encouraged to be part of the SCDM team, and that PTO meetings are held monthly with childcare. Under Academics there are parent resources listed in three categories: 1) Policies and procedures with links to the (district) handbook and policies around district reading, math, technology plans, etc.; 2) Forms and documents with

nothing on the page except a 'coming soon'; and 3) Family support with the same message of coming soon. During the 2006-2007 school year the SCDM Team had been working on a mission statement for the school which stated that they will work "closely with families and community members". One of the teachers reported that many people in the school were involved, including students, the cooks and the janitors.

A Teacher commented on communication with parents, "I mean we have, we did ask the secretary, one of the things that we talked about was doing, we used to do a school calendar that went out. But the primary function of that was sort of the lunch menu. And now the new lunch company sends out their own menu. So we've gotten rid of our own like school calendar and school newsletter that went out. And we've just, (Principal) was talking with some of us and we've asked the school secretary to reinstate that school calendar and newsletter." And, "There's a lot of contact with parents about negative issues you know, when their kids are misbehaving, when something's going wrong. And very little contact about positive issues" (Teacher 2).

The data showed that parents are involved in the school as volunteers and that they come to events when invited. Teacher 1 commented on efforts to involve parents, "There are many things but it is not through the SCDM Team. It's just other people making efforts. We do fundraisers like Macdonald night. That wasn't a PTO thing. That was just a school thing. Our PE teacher was spearheading that." And "...once a month we have a parent teacher conference time scheduled...It's not like other schools where you have like one night where all the parents come in. No, it's not like that. Yeah, you actually have to call and have them come in" (Teacher 2). "I think most of us try as hard as we can to communicate with parents. I think we try to make a welcoming place here.

That's why we do things like the math nights and open house. When they come we really do welcome parents" (Teacher 1). It appeared that communication with parents at this urban school was infrequent and specific only to school/class events or to individual child attendance or performance issues.

The School Council and PTO

This researcher found little data to show that parents are actively recruited for the school council or SCDM at this urban school. When asked about challenges to parent involvement, Teacher 1 said that there is no parent participation in SCDM, and that in the neighborhood there are a lot of parents who are not comfortable in the school because of a second language. This teacher, the Principal and the Parent Facilitator all spoke about the challenges of involvement for working parents, some of whom work second shift. The Principal described the PTO and its relationship to SCDM, "Quite often it's representatives from PTO who have joined on. PTO is usually mothers; usually a president, vice president, secretary, secretary/treasurer, who's on. SCDM will have some parents who might show up, four or five, and they'll participate in the fundraiser. But that's about it."... "(PTO) Mainly parents. And as a result, they will usually, I'll usually contact them and ask them if they will be on SCDM. So the president of the PTO is on SCDM. Another parental representative too is also on SCDM. So I have two parents that are on SCDM." Both teachers noted the limited parent and community participation in

SCDM and Teacher 2 responded to a question about parent membership, “So I don’t think parents, I would be surprised if there’s any parents that know about SCDM and if there’s even such a thing and more than, even more than that, that they can be a part of it.”

In the review of materials at SA there were notes/agenda for a SCDM training which included information on the decision making process and specifics on developing a school improvement plan. Staff and principal are mentioned but reference to parents or community members are absent. One of the teachers also commented on that training and noted, “...that based on the size of our school, we’re allowed to have up to seven parent volunteers, I think it is volunteers, seven parents on our SCDM team, and we have one. And judging by the PTO, our PTO has like three parents that are active in it, out of 700 kids” (Teacher 2). In the SCDM handbook there is a page length of description of the responsibilities of business partners and only one statement that the PTO represents parents with no description of parent responsibility.

The data showed several comments about the PTO being very small. “And I guess a few years, I guess the year before I came, it was bigger. But they were having the meetings at like 6:00 at night. And then they started having them at like 4:00 in the afternoon and parents wouldn’t come anymore. And they thought that it was probably because the parents that would be the ones to come, are also the ones that are probably working. That having it later in the evening – so we were actually, that was one of the things we talked about at SCDM yesterday, was asking the PTO president if she would consider moving the meetings back to 6:00 or 7:00 at night so that we can try to get more parents to come in” (Teacher 2). The teachers and Principal identified the PTO’s main

function as fundraising and their role at SCDM meetings was to report on fundraising. “They do, I’m going to say at least two to three fundraisers a year.” (Principal) When I asked about communication from the PTO the Principal said, “Not really a newsletter. They’ll send out like a flyer at the beginning of the year when there are PTO meetings, when they’ll be held, if there’s a fundraiser coming out that people want to help, participate or things like that.”

In summary, attitudes about parent involvement in this urban setting acknowledge barriers, such as, a high rate of poverty, working parents and second language issues that keep parents out of the school but staff report that parents come when they are invited. Communication with parents is around school events, attendance or student specific issues. The recent addition of a Parent Facilitator who speaks both English and Spanish is a district effort to strengthen communication. There is a small PTO that does fundraising and reports about their efforts at SCDM meetings. There is a limited effort to recruit parents for the SCDM team (school council) and the attendance and participation of the current two members is minimal. The district is aware of the lack of parent involvement in the schools and has begun to fund paraprofessional positions as parent facilitators.

The College Town School

Attitudes about Parent Involvement

The data showed that the culture of the community and School B (SB) embrace and encourage parent involvement. Examples in the data included comments about the

value in parent involvement and an opportunity for parents to make a difference; comments about being involved in policy making; the school council as a stepping stone to the school committee; and addressing issues of diversity. “We pursue parents very vigorously and insist that that happen. And if they absolutely can’t get to the school, we’ll do it on the phone. The last two years we’ve set a goal along with the rest of the district, of every child having one of their parents visit the school by October 15th. And we’ve hit 100 percent both times.” ...“So yes, parent involvement has always been high. If anything, I think it’s higher than it used, it’s more diverse and broadly distributed than it used to be” (Principal). There was a sense of openness and cooperation with parents, “...from October through May, Tuesdays and Thursdays are visiting days. And any parent, really any community member, can come without an appointment and observe in classrooms” (Principal). “It is a stepping stone for politics in (district). Very often school committee candidates come out of school councils in the elementary schools” (Parent 1).

Community Member 1 said, “I learned that (district) is a very committed community. They really value the involvement of the parents. It’s a unique place. I came from a suburb of Boston. And I find this unique because first of all, you have a large concentration of pretty educated people you know, which I think also adds to high expectations”. The data showed an awareness of the needs of diverse families, both from an economic and cultural perspective. ”But I do think we have expanded the involvement of low income parents and parents of color, and really pursued that and built relationships.”... “With our Cambodian parents we’ve had you know, at open house night we had the Cambodian teacher invite them to come a half an hour early and the Cambodian teacher and paraprofessionals and ESL teachers would go out and give them

rides to get them here” (Principal). “My hope in being a parent involved in the school is to help shape policy and attitudes around diversity issues” (Parent 1). This community appeared to embrace parent involvement in the schools and parents in this college town value and expect to be involved in their child’s school.

Communication and Types of Parent Involvement

Examples of data about communication with families at the school in this college town are information on the school web site which includes the school improvement plan and information about the Parent Council; visible parent bulletin board in the school foyer; biweekly newsletters and e-mail calendar from the parent council; discussions of communication with parents at school council meetings; a family directory, surveys and letters about the school council; open house and parent conferences; and school council communication with the school committee. On the school web site the Mission and Beliefs page of the SB School Council includes the mission statement whose last sentence states that ...”We seek a full partnership with parents in realizing our shared goals for students, for staff, and for our school.”

Material review showed that there are newsletters that go home to families every two weeks. It was not clear whether they were a principal newsletter or collaboration with the parent council. The newsletters included information on school events and fundraisers; Parent Council meeting dates; MCAS schedules and the role of standardized testing; information on the new practice of assemblies; requests for volunteers; and Special Education PAC meeting dates and content. There was no mention of school

council dates or their work. “And we have not done a lot frankly, to publicize the work of the school council.” ... “I have regularly communicated to the parents as a whole through the school newsletter, school improvement plan goals, guiding principles, homework policy that was endorsed by the council” (Principal). There are multiple efforts throughout the year to keep parents informed and engaged in school events and issues.

The Principal commented that Parent Involvement at this school is primarily through the Parent Council whose work and influence are described in the next section.

The School Council and PTO

The school has an active parent group, known as the Parent Council (rather than a PTO as there are no teacher members) which also welcomes and encourages parent involvement in the school, and recruits and holds elections for parent members of the school council. “So what the Parent Council does, which I would say is the primary way in which parents get involved, does a number of different things. So one important thing we do is fundraising. And that’s something really that the school can’t do, and the School Council can’t do.” ...”In addition to that, we do events that could be social, could be educational, could be cultural, that bring families into the school in some ways” (Community member 2). “And our parent council has done a nice job of sort of reaching out to folks and having some events that appeal particularly to people who are not in the dominant culture majority” (Principal). The community member of the school council commented on the work of the Parent Council, “And they want the parents to feel like they can make a difference to contribute.” The Parent Council uses funds to support

performances, scholarships for field trips, a book fair, a used book exchange, and recently a new playground.

The President of the Parent Council (Community Member 2) described their activities and positive relationship with the Principal, “We have resource coordinators that work with families of color, single parents, families who, you know English is the second language, etcetera, same sex parent families. Again, we decided that was important, we just created it, that was done. We wanted an email newsletter, we started that last year. Just you know, there’s clear ways to measurably impact what’s happening in Parent Council. And you know, and that’s in part because we have a very good relationship with the principal.”

The Principal talked about the election of school council members, “Well I think how the parents are chosen ends up making a big difference in how effective a council is. And the last couple of years we’ve had parent council leadership, which has been very pro-school, very respectful of me, very eager to work collaboratively with me, and has sought out, because you know, they have to recruit candidates for the most part. It’s not like they’re beating down the doors.”... “We have parents on the school council. They are selected by an election in the, by the Parent Council. And the Parent Council, bylaws includes all the parents in the school, parents, guardians, in the school. Basically the work is done by an executive board or committee and membership meetings. I don’t think they ever get more than 25 people to a meeting, and that would be a good one. But there are probably 100 parents

involved in projects you know, at one point or another during the year, which I'd much rather have people doing projects and not coming to meetings, than the other way around" (Principal).

The Principal described the relationship of the two councils and the influence of elections, "Well the parent council technically chooses the school council members. And sometimes, some years, the parent council has really used the parents on the school council as the conduit for anything coming from parent council to the school council. Other years that relationship has not been strong. And I think it's mostly a matter of who the individuals are. And parent council has written to me directly or sent their officers to see me directly. And sometimes I'll deal with something directly, and sometimes I'll say, thank you for all this information, I will take it to the school council." ... "And the parent council, when they are soliciting nominations for the school council, they put out a description of the nature of the school council and the nature of the parent council." One of the parent members of the school council talked about her experience with the Parent Council which she described as doing primarily fundraising but said she pursued membership on the school council because she wanted to work cooperatively with teachers on setting priorities in the school. "When I went to parent council meetings I would report back anything that was important to the parent council but that was not a regular thing" (Parent 1). She said that communication in that direction was haphazard and not expected. Another parent talked about the potential power of the two councils working together. "I would like to see school council along with parent council talking about what we are going to do to raise money for the school" (Parent 2).

The President of the Parent Council (Community member 2) described some confusion between the two councils, “I’m thinking perhaps once or twice a year, some memo is sent out with a big packet of other information that describes some of what School Council has done. Occasionally there’s a survey that goes out that would be brought back to School Council. But even when that occurs, almost everybody puts that survey in the Parent Council mailbox. The Parent Council in the school is very, very visible because of all of these activities, and the fundraisers and the events. School Council is really, really not visible. And I would say 90 percent of the parents in the school if you said what’s the difference between School Council and Parent Council, wouldn’t have an understanding they’re two different bodies.”

One of the parents described the climate of the school council meetings, “Very respectful, collegial. We laugh together a lot. It’s really a friendly relationship.” The Community member on the school council described the atmosphere as cordial and welcoming. The principal said that there is “an excellent working relationship now (with parents). And the staff has become, in my mind, much more collaborative.” The community member on the school council described the first meeting of the year, “So one of the first things that we did was, we went around the table, we introduced ourselves and our connection to SB, and what was important to us about SB, and what things that we would like to see change, stay the same, what ideas that we had, and if we want to pursue any particular agenda items.” The Principal described the collaborative work of the school council, “I mean part of what I like best about the council, is the chance for parents and teachers to have to hear each other and make their comments in front of each

other. I just think it improves the dialogue and educates people and just keeps a broader prospective on you know, regardless of what your role is. And we've had some I think some good input from community members."

At the School Council meetings there was substantive discussion around the goals of parent engagement in the school improvement plan, as well as, discussions of reaching out to diverse groups in the school community. At one school council meeting a parent noted that there was no other mention of parents except in goal number four, and objectives in that goal did not mention parents in general but only 'affinity' groups. The group agreed to some language that would include all parents. "The council will sometimes suggest that parents need to, I mean teachers need to provide more information to parents about how to do homework, or when they communicate about upcoming events" (Principal).

The Principal described a school council a couple of years ago that was interested in environmental preservation and how that interest extended to a building renovation committee and was led by some parents on the school council, "And we ended up putting it in our relatively short list of guiding principles for the school. And that came totally out of the membership of the council, both parents and teachers, but particularly a couple of strong parents. So it wasn't actually a decision, but it was a major input from the council that affected the documents that we send to the state, I think will effect the renovation of this building when it finally happens, affected what we have identified as our core principles. So it's that kind of thing that I think is a much more, is the real impact of the council."

At one school council meeting the Principal announced that they would present their school improvement plan to the school committee the next week. “So they (school committee) are always I think, very pleased to hear the reports of school councils and school improvement plans, because it’s a time when they get a lot of information about what’s actually going on, and often about good things that they haven’t heard about.”

(Principal) One of the parent members of the school council described the interrelationship of school councils and work at the school committee level. “...And on the (district) Parent Coalition list some of the more involved select board and school committee members have pushed, tried to make the school councils more of a voice. If you have a problem with something in your school, go to the parents who represent you on the school council.”

In summary, the culture of the community and School B (SB) embrace and encourage parent involvement with active efforts of school staff and the Parent Council to bring families into the school building and keep them informed through newsletters, flyers and electronic mail from the Parent Council. The Parent Council is very active with various subcommittees and uses its’ funds to support many events and scholarships for families in need. Parent members of the school council are recruited by the Parent Council and sometimes are the conduit for the agenda of the parent group. There was clear evidence of parental influence on the work of the school council as there were more parent members than teacher members; parents were always present; and parent and community members advocated for the needs of parents and affinity groups in the school.

The Suburban School

Attitudes about Parent Involvement

The culture at School C (SC) appeared to be an informal, comfortable one with an emphasis on community which welcomes families and wants all children to succeed. Both teachers and parents described the importance of parents having a voice. “We have, overall I would say we have a fair amount of involvement. We run a series of parent events that involve the kids usually doing something with their parents, and it being informational as well” (Principal). “I think parents can be involved in the school at any level they want to, as far as coming in and volunteering or you know, just being in touch with the teachers and trying to help them in any way they can.” ... “Because I think that that’s the only way kids can really succeed in school, if parents are working hand in hand with the school” (Parent 2). The sense of community was evident in June 2007 when one of the teachers passed away and parents and family members volunteered to substitute in the school so all of the staff could go to the funeral.

Communication and Types of Parent Involvement

Two parent members of the school council at this suburban site talked about being present in the school and getting to know teachers as the primary way that parents become involved and knowledgeable. They acknowledged the difficulties for working parents and one parent said that those parents who are here on the playground to pick up

their children get more information and one teacher agreed saying that working parents, socioeconomic status and geography are issues for involvement. “I came to pick up my kids. I’m here every day. I see the teachers. They see me. And you loose so much when your child goes on a bus” (Parent 2).

One of the teachers reported that parents help out in the classroom, come to parent conferences, and participate in fundraising. There was discussion at one council meeting about parents volunteering to paint some of the rooms in the school. “We’ve talked about the physical plant and how to maybe come together as a parent community and do some of those kinds of things that would help take the burden off the regular maintenance things. One great thing that came out of that was some beautiful artwork that some parents donated and have put up in the school. We have coffee talks. The parents run these little coffee talks where the parents get together and gossip and schmooze and talk about their concerns” (Teacher 2). The parent members of the school council started ‘coffee talks’ or evening get-togethers to bring parents into a comfortable situation to discuss their thoughts about the school and their involvement. Coffee talks included discussions about nutrition for children, the future of the PTO and SC school involvement, and parking around the school. Parent 1 made a point of telling me that they provide childcare for coffee talks with the help of high school students who are taking a child development class.

Examples of data about communication with families at SC are information on the website; weekly newsletters and flyers about specific events; listening and talking on the playground with other parents and bringing issues to the school council; room parents, parent surveys, parent bulletin board, and parent handbook; and ‘coffee talks’ or

special meetings set up for parents to discuss their ideas and concerns. “Well we also have, the principal also has a newsletter and there’s a place for school council news right in the newsletter. There are also these organized family nights, or coffee talks, where it all comes together” (Teacher 2). There are also information nights about a certain curriculum area, such as, math. As a Title 1 school SC also uses a Home-School Compact which is a one page form with statements from parent, teacher and student about what they will do with a place for signatures. Parents pledge to support homework, provide materials, visit school, keep lines of communication open and provide a safe, healthy environment.

The value of the relationship between parent involvement and child achievement was evident in the statement in a newsletter from September 2005 when the Principal talked about measuring the effectiveness of the school and that one way to do that was through student and parent satisfaction and another was parent involvement. These statements were a beginning statement for his explanation of the MCAS test. Each newsletter has a text box with important dates and events listed which included PTO, School Council and School Committee meetings. The School Council was mentioned several times, e.g., in June 2007 the Principal explained that the school council sent home a parent survey a few weeks prior and that they use the results to set goals for the school improvement plan. Results of parent surveys from 2004 and 2007 included the number of surveys returned and data gathered on a Likert scale about statements that focused on curriculum, relationships with school staff, facilities, technology and communication. At

this small, suburban school there are frequent efforts by staff and parent members of the school council to communicate with families and keep them engaged in their child's school.

The School Council and PTO

The school council reviewed the results of the 2007 parent survey and agreed that the data told them that they needed more parent involvement. Areas of concern included communication, parent knowledge of the curriculum, parent knowledge of child progress, and safety issues. I was able to observe a community meeting to discuss these concerns that was held one evening at the suburban school in a classroom on the second floor. There were ten parents and five staff present. The meeting was prompted by the parents on the school council who reported that other parents had concerns about the school but did not heed their suggestion that they bring them to the council. The Principal facilitated and explained the agenda of reviewing the results of a parent survey from Spring 2007 and brainstorming ideas. He presented the data using an overhead and passed out a breakdown of the data from the survey.

Parent and community involvement is one of the goals of the SC School Improvement Plan and key actions included the use of the home-school compact, family event nights, volunteer program, use of Title 1 Parent Liaison, transition activities to Kindergarten as well as transition from the fourth grade to the middle school.

One parent member of the school council told me she wanted to be involved in the decisions that affect her children's education. Both parent members of the school

council expressed their frustration with parents who complain but do not want to be involved and one of them talked about her role in representing other parents' concerns at the school council, "You know, just the biggest thing is, it's really frustrating when you hear parents complain and have opinions and get frustrated, but not become involved. I just feel like you don't have a right to complain if you don't try to change or become active and involved. And that's one of my primary reasons for being part of the school council. ...And also just the parents here at SC as I said, when you're out on the playground you know, you just end up talking about things and it ends up coming back to school council" (Parent 2).

There were notes from school council meetings about parents wanting to be more involved and volunteer but not knowing how and that the council needed to work on ways to make parents feel welcome. The Principal remarked, "The parents that are on it (school council) are good about sort of listening to other parents and hearing what issues are. And they're good about bringing them into the meetings and bringing them up with me to see if there's anything we can do to address them. So that's pretty much it." At one school council meeting there was a discussion and decision to have a night for parents to meet the special subject teachers and the council also agreed to establishing room parents, or one parent for each classroom who communicates with other parents about events or needs of the teacher. The two parent members agreed to contact other parents to set up this system of communication.

Parent 2 described her role in the community, "I think the responsibilities, at least on a parent level, is if you hear people having issues or complaints or you know, concerns, as a member of the council I know I bring those back and we kind of discuss it

as a group to see what we can come up with. I also think it's important just to make sure that the school is following the improvement plans set by the school committee. And also if there's any budget concerns on funding, as a school council member, I know I've attended some school committee meetings to voice my concerns and support over certain issues and to let other parents know that if they want to complain, then they need to get involved and attend those meetings as well. So I'm letting people know what's going on." Teacher 2 described the influence of parent involvement in the community at large, "When you have a major budget crisis and you're laying off teachers or cutting programs or closing schools, the parent voice is essential. You can pack a room with parents and it's so much more meaningful to the town council."

The PTO in this suburban district is a citywide group and this researcher's understanding is that there is a teacher and parent member from each school but there was little other data available. There is no mention of the PTO on the school or district website. One of the parent members of the school council said they do a lot of fundraising and she talked about herself and another parent member, "Yeah, and as a matter of fact, I know myself and (Parent 1) would try to juggle the PTO. She'd go to one; I'd go to the next one to make sure we had a voice. And we were kind of a liaison to report back what was going on at SC and the school council there."

In October 2006 the Principal's note in the weekly newsletter explained that the PTO is representative of all elementary schools and that it is a place where decisions are made and where people can help out. He followed with a note that the school council is also a place to get involved. The second page of the newsletter has an explanation of the school council and a ballot with the names of parents who were interested in running.

“And beyond that (membership in school council) it’s probably the more traditional parent conferences, regular contact with school newsletters, parent and teachers contacting parents, those kinds of things” (Principal).

In summary, parent involvement is acknowledged and encouraged in this suburban school as a natural part of the school/community experience. Efforts to involve and communicate with parents were evident in classroom volunteers and room parents; frequent communication through weekly newsletters; event nights and ‘coffee talks’; and parent surveys. One of the goals of the School Improvement Plan is Parent and Community Involvement. The parent members of the school council talked about their role in representing the voices of other parents, and they also expressed their frustration that some parents have ideas but do not get involved. When the parent surveys told them that parents wanted more information, they used the school council as a means to organize periodic evening meetings to meet those needs.

School Culture and Theoretical Frameworks of Parent Involvement

As part of the purpose of this qualitative study was to provide a better understanding of family and community involvement in school governance, it is essential to reflect back on the theories that support the development of family-school relationships. The central category or theme identified in this case study was the culture or school climate which affected the structure and process of school council function and parent involvement at each school. Culture describes the patterns of behavior and knowledge that people have learned and reflects the values and practices in each school

community and their respective districts. This final section describes aspects of each school culture placed within the frameworks of ecological and developmental systems theories that stress the importance of relationships and the interconnections of environments where children grow and learn (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Epstein, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978).

The literature includes the work of many researchers who describe human development and family and school relationships from an environmental or ecological perspective. The most notable is Urie Bronfenbrenner who described his ecological systems theory of human development or the layers of environment which affect the child's development. Bronfenbrenner described the principle of interconnectedness within settings and the linkages between these settings. He described these settings as systems that affect individual development and defined them as *a microsystem, a mesosystem, an exosystem and a macrosystem*. They are represented visually as concentric circles that surround the child. The context of familial relationships, physical home, and activities guides the cognitive and social development of the child.

The microsystem is the layer closest to the child and within the structures where the child has direct contact/interactions with his/her immediate surroundings. Structures in the microsystem include family, school and neighborhood. The school is also a microsystem for the child with teacher and peer relationships and activities that direct the child's learning and socialization. The mesosystem is the connections between the structures of the child's microsystems. "A mesosystem comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, the relations among home, school, and neighborhood peer group; for an adult,

among family, work, and social life)" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). It is the mesosystem that comprises the elements of family-school relationships.

As we have discussed in the previous sections, factors of poverty, work schedules, transportation, child care, second language issues and communication patterns in each school are part of the mesosystem for parental involvement and community involvement in the schools. At School A in the urban district the connections between school and family appeared weak with perceptions that parents were not able to be involved due to poverty, work schedules and second language issues and patterns of communication in that school culture did not encourage or facilitate parental involvement. In the college town at School B connections between school and family were highly valued and there were concerted and frequent efforts by staff and the Parent Council to communicate with families. The culture at School C in the small suburb also valued the connections between school and family, with weekly newsletters from the Principal and organized efforts by the School Council to facilitate parental involvement.

The exosystem is the larger social system in which the child functions. Bronfenbrenner discussed family processes in context and described an exosystem as "...one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). Bronfenbrenner (1986) explained that there are three exosystems that primarily affect the development of the child: the parents' workplace, the parents' social networks, and the community influences on family processes. As school councils are designed to have community members and PTOs often use community resources, the work of local school councils

and Parent Teacher Organization are, therefore, part of the exosystem that affect the development of the child. At School A in the urban district, the small PTO and minimal participation of parents on the school council do not facilitate connections between the family, community and school. In contrast, at School B in the college town the significant efforts to connect and communicate with families through the Parent Council and through the work of the school council encourage those connections. At School C in the mall suburb, there was no evidence of the impact of the district wide PTO but the work of the school council had positive impact on the connections between school and families.

"The macrosystem refers to consistencies, in the form and context of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). This macrosystem refers to the values embedded in the larger social context and the influences that class, ethnic, and cultural differences have on the developing individual. "The macrosystem operates at the broadest level of influence and is comprised of political systems, social policy culture, economic trends, and so forth" (Weiss et al., 2005c, p. xv). In relation to parent involvement in school governance the macrosystem includes the values in our culture about parent involvement in education and the corresponding legislation that includes it, as well as, the cultural beliefs and practices about engaging families in the local districts. The culture at School A is affected by the stressors of a large urban school with a very high poverty rate and the needs of a diverse ethnic population. Although the district's documents note the value of parental involvement and the staff acknowledges that it is important, current practices do not support those assertions. In the college town and at School B the culture

includes a strong value of parent and community involvement in the schools, as well as, the impact of many well educated parents and awareness of the needs of many diverse families. There are many efforts by staff and the Parent Council to engage families in the school community, and participants talked about parent members of school councils moving on to election to the school committee. The culture and practices at School C in the small suburb are affected by a history of community collaboration and beliefs that parent involvement leads to better outcomes for children. The weekly newsletters with information about school and community, and persistent efforts of the school council to bolster parent involvement are evidence of those beliefs.

In the comprehensive school reform efforts of the last twenty years, relationships between families and schools have changed from a traditional provider-receiver model to one of a partnership or collaboration and shared responsibility between families and schools. Joyce Epstein (1995) used an ecological perspective to describe her theory of overlapping spheres of influence and the framework she developed for a partnership model with six major types of parental involvement, (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaboration with community) described in detail in the literature review. Discussion of the data in the previous sections illustrated the efforts in parenting, communicating and volunteering at each site. This case study did not include data about learning at home activities. The description of the function and activities of each school council highlighted the type of decision making that involved parents. Although community partners were noted in interviews and material review at School A in the urban setting and School C in the small suburb, the data showed no evidence of community collaboration at the school council level. There

was a community member on the school council at School B in the college town who reported that she enjoyed the experience and learned a lot about the challenges of managing a public school but her role was somewhat ambiguous as she was recruited by the Parent Council and she would be a parent of a student in the following year.

The external structure of Epstein's model consists of overlapping or nonoverlapping spheres representing family, school, and community and they may be drawn together or pushed apart depending on the philosophy, practices and activities of the families, schools, and community members. The force of time refers to individual and historical time or the age and grade level of the child and the social conditions at the time. For example, parents and teachers may have more interactions during the early school years than during high school. Teacher and school philosophy about involving parents would also affect the degree of overlap. "When teachers make parents part of their regular teaching practice, they create greater overlap than would typically be expected." (Epstein, 2001, p. 29) Parents may also create greater overlap by increasing their involvement in their child's schooling. Dynamic patterns of overlap are seen as teachers change over the years and parents change their type or amount of involvement. Epstein (2001) states that, "The "maximum" overlap occurs when schools and families operate as true "partners" with frequent cooperative efforts and clear, close communication between parents and teachers in a comprehensive program of many important types of parent involvement" (p. 29). Placing the culture of each of the schools described above within these overlapping spheres creates different pictures for each site. The experiences and practices at School A in the urban setting push the spheres away from each other as the philosophy and activities there do not encourage parent and community involvement. At

School B in the college town the experiences and practices of the parent group and the school push the spheres together as there is a strong philosophy and many activities that include and encourage parent involvement. At School C in the small suburb the history of community collaboration and the practices in the school to improve parent involvement push those spheres together.

Epstein said, “The internal model of the interaction of the three spheres of influence shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community” (p. 703). Epstein explains that interactions occur within organizations and between them, and that interactions take place at two levels, a standard organizational communication or a specific communication between two individuals. Standard organizational communication would include information for all families about school policies, activities, or workshops available to all members of the school community. This type of communication would also involve the activities of a parent-teacher organization, a school council, or a community group. Specific communication would include, for example, conversations or written communication between a parent and a teacher about an individual child. In the previous sections we described the efforts at communication with parents at each site and communication about the work of the school council within each community. The patterns of influence or the local culture at School A in the urban setting were embedded in conflict over decision making power between administration and the teachers’ union and there were minimal efforts to communicate or engage families in the school. At School B in the college town the influence of a very strong parent organization and community philosophy of inclusion encouraged many forms of

communication with parents and promoted activities to engage families in the school.

There was frequent communication with parents at School C in the small suburb about school policies, activities, or available workshops and efforts made by parent members of the school council to encourage communication between parents and the school.

From these ecological perspectives we understand that the culture of each school is a product of the connections between systems that exist within the school and within the communities that encompass them. Each culture is influenced by the size of the school, diversity issues, and the socio-economics of the community, as well as, the political and social norms of each community and the mandates of education reform legislation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Education reform efforts in the last fifteen to twenty years at the state and federal levels have provisions for family/community involvement in the schools based on beliefs that partnerships lead to higher student achievement and better outcomes for students, parents and teachers. These requirements have embraced the concept of parent and community involvement in various forms including some aspects of school governance. The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 included this concept of participatory governance with the establishment of local school councils. The purpose of this study was to describe the function and influence of local school councils on school improvement and to provide a better understanding of the role of parent/family and community involvement in those efforts.

The results of this qualitative case study conclude that the function and influence of local school councils on school improvement and the impact of parent and community involvement on school council function are related to the overall culture of the school. Although this study only looked at three schools, the descriptive data shows there were significant differences in their cultures which had developed over time and that each school site has its own unique culture with strengths and challenges that reflect the school district and community at large. All three schools have a history of school improvement efforts before education reform. The culture affects the structure and process of school council function and parent involvement in the school, and communication is the

strategic set of actions/interactions that facilitates and acknowledges behaviors in each setting. Properties of each culture include values, demographics, history of council work, actions or attitudes that highlight a sense of community, commitment to school council work, and school district practices that influence the work of the council. Each site has a unique set of demographics and challenges, i.e., socio-economic influences, size of each school, needs of diverse populations, and second language issues.

School council function describes an individual and community understanding of the structure and responsibilities of the school council and properties include knowledge of regulatory role of the council and local processes for membership, council activities, agenda and decision making, and communication with the school community. The three Principals and a few of the other participants understood the responsibilities of the School Council under the Education reform legislation and others told the story of the local structure and activities. The principals and some of the participants acknowledged that the function of the school council is advisory to the Principal, but the data shows some confusion about the school council role and what defines policy and who makes it, and what is decision making and which decisions are made by the school council. Principals generally led the work of the school councils with some qualitative differences in each community, and the activities of each council followed some of the specifics outlined in MERA but also addressed local issues. There was some attention to the learning needs of the students, particularly in reference to MCAS results, but no specific actions taken by the school councils. There was no indication in the data of a relationship between the work of the school councils and student achievement. Budget issues were acknowledged at each site, with one council discussing and advising the principal on their priorities.

Each school has a school improvement plan, but only two of the three school councils reviewed the plan, and only one council participated in the development of the plan.

Parent involvement refers to values or attitudes about parent engagement and actions that include families in the school community. Properties include parent and teacher expectations, communication between parents and schools, parent participation in school activities; and parent participation in school governance. Results show that parent involvement in the school and parent influence on the work of the school council is strengthened by the relationship with the parent organization and other parent involvement activities in the school. The attitude and commitment to parent involvement present in the school culture, as well as, the efforts to recruit parent and community members with the resulting parity in membership also influences the work of the school council. Although there were mentions of community partners and interest in having community involvement in the schools, the results show very little, with the exception of one community member on one school council. All three schools have difficulty recruiting membership that is representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school community. The properties of communication which include verbal and written communication about general information in the school and communication about the work of the school council facilitate and encourage parent and community involvement.

In the urban district where School A is located the history of school improvement efforts included more power for teachers over decision making backed by the teachers' union with resulting tension when education reform moved the policy making to the administration/principal and the focus of their school council or School Centered Decision Making (SCDM) teams became more advisory. The district gives teachers and

parents a stipend for their work on SCDM teams and provides guidelines for agenda and decision making at meetings. The function of the SCDM team appeared to be educator dominant as there were five teachers present on average and there are only two parent members who did not attend regularly. Despite district resources and training for SCDM teams, meetings at School A appeared managerial in nature, with information about events shared, complaints from teachers about building or staffing issues, and the Principal reporting on district management and budget issues. There was little evidence of any decision making beyond dates for events. The only reference in the data to child achievement issues are the goals in the School Improvement Plan (SIP) which are based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The SCDM Team is not involved in the development of the SIP, and even though the Principal reported that they are responsible to review it, there was no evidence of that in the data. The only communication about the agenda and minutes of SCDM meetings was the supposition that they are posted in the teachers' lounge but participants reported that did not happen regularly. Participants at this site reported that the challenges to school council function were a lack of parent participation in the school due to poverty, working parents and language barriers, and the Principal said he hoped to move the group away from the conflicts in their history and more in line with the mandates of education reform.

The realities of a large urban school with a high rate of poverty and second language needs coupled with power conflicts between the administration and the teachers (union) has apparently created a culture that has little positive energy for parent engagement. In spite of efforts at the district level to improve family and community engagement in the schools, there was little evidence of any efforts to involve parents at

School A outside the traditional open house and occasional events. The district hired a part time parent facilitator for School A, who described her role as an interpreter for Spanish speaking parents, translating written communication and contacting parents when there are attendance issues. Although participants expressed an interest in more parent involvement, they described barriers to involvement which included poverty, language issues and the schedules of working parents, and they noted that some parents volunteer in the school and others come to events when they are invited. Efforts to communicate with parents were meager with some information on the school website, a letter to parents about attendance issues, a parent bulletin board and occasional flyers about events. One of the participants mentioned that they used to have a newsletter and hoped that they could restart it. The PTO consists of a few parents whose focus is fundraising. The president of the PTO sits on the school council at the principal's request but there was no other evidence that the PTO was involved in recruiting parent members for the council. The PTO president and the one other parent member of the council did not attend regularly.

When School B (SB) in the college town was constructed in the early 1970s there was a planning committee that included parents and community members and that group continued after the school was opened and was the base for the school council when education reform legislation was passed in 1993. The Principal described the original group as making policy decisions and that he gradually moved the group to an advisory role in line with education reform. The culture at SB in this college town is certainly influenced by a mix of parents who are highly educated and by the needs of a low income and immigrant population. Awareness of diversity issues and the needs of various affinity

groups were evident in school communication and events, and in the discussions at the school council. A history of strong parent participation continues with an active parent organization which is known as the Parent Council, as there is no teacher representation. The Parent Council recruits and holds elections for the School Council and some council members over the years have been elected to the school committee. Membership of the school council included five parents, three teachers and one community member. There was a general understanding that the school council function was advisory to the Principal and at the meetings there was a balanced approach where all participated in decision making. Members reported that the Principal sets the agenda and facilitated the meetings. There was a formality to the meetings following an agenda, establishing consensus about decisions and members rotating the responsibility for taking minutes. They discussed issues of diversity and social justice that were related to achievement; reviewed budget issues and discussed their views about priorities for spending; and they reviewed the progress on the goals of the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The Principal brought a draft of a new SIP for the next two years and the council worked on refining the goals. One of the goals of the SIP was about communication with parents. Participants cited challenges to the work of the council as budget issues, limited influence on policy, and school council membership as not representative of the school community. The work and activities of the school council were communicated through the school website, periodic letters and surveys to parents, and by letter and face to face report to the school committee.

The culture of School B embraces the value of parent involvement and encourages it in my ways. There is an open and cooperative attitude about collaborating

with parents and a concern about the diverse needs of families. Efforts to engage and communicate with parents include information on the website, letters and surveys, a prominent bulletin board in the foyer of the school and flyers and brochures in the main office, as well as regular newsletters. The school prides itself on high parent attendance at open house and parent conferences through communication and offers of transportation, and encourages parents to visit the school/classroom anytime without an appointment. Rather than a PTO there is a Parent Council which has many members, and subcommittees working on numerous projects, and they engage in fundraising for many purposes. The Parent Council puts out a family directory, has an email newsletter, provides scholarships for families in need, and has resource coordinators working with families. Parent members of the school council are recruited and elected by the Parent Council. Although the school council was viewed as the body that was concerned with policy, comments from some of the participants interviewed implied that certain parents were recruited by the parent council to exert some influence on the work of the school council. There appeared to be direct communication between the two councils through the principal and through individual parents, and yet some participants reported that there is some confusion in the school community about the role of each council. Parent members of the school council reported that the culture at council meetings was one of listening and collaboration, and that their ideas and concerns were respected and addressed by the group. While reviewing the school improvement plan, parent members advocated for expanding the goal about parent involvement from a focus on affinity

groups to all parents. Parent members joined the Principal at the end of the school year to report to the school committee on their activities, and several members of school councils in that district have moved on to run for seats on the school committee.

There was also a history of collaborative work among teachers, parents and community members at School C in the small suburb before education reform and the establishment of the school council. Members understood the school council function as advisory to the Principal and described their participation as a way to have a voice. There was parity in membership with parents and teachers but no community membership. Members understood that the Principal generally set the agenda but others could add additional items with ease. The Principal facilitated an informal meeting from an agenda that was a list of topics and there was no formal means of keeping minutes. The Principal developed the School Improvement Plan (SIP) based on district goals and periodically reviews their progress with the school council. One of the goals in the SIP is around parent and community involvement and is based somewhat on results of parent surveys. The school council reviewed the results of those surveys, discussed budget issues, MCAS results, plans for evening get-togethers for parents, and issues around building needs and parking. Communication about the school council is found on the school website, in weekly newsletters and in reports to the school committee.

At School C the culture is an informal, comfortable one with an emphasis on community which welcomes families and wants all children to succeed. There is a positive and cooperative attitude about including parents and community members. Both parents and teachers talked about the importance of parents having a voice. Efforts to engage and communicate with parents include information on the website, parent bulletin

board, parent handbook and surveys, weekly newsletters and special events nights for parents. Some parents volunteer in the school, and others participate in events and come to open house and parent conferences. Since the physical building is so old, there have been parent volunteer efforts to make some improvements through fundraising and weekend labor. Participants felt that School C had a fair amount of parent involvement but the parent members of the school council expressed their concern that other parents have ideas or complaints but do not get involved. They heard some of these ideas from parents on the playground and talked about the barriers to parent involvement for some due to economics, transportation and work schedules. Those concerns lead the school council to host periodic evening meetings they called 'coffee talks' where they hoped parents would be comfortable to express their ideas. The district has a city wide elementary PTO which includes teachers and parents and does primarily fundraising. Parent members of the school council reported that they try to be a liaison to the PTO but there was no other connection. Results of a parent survey that indicated a need for more parent involvement was reviewed by the school council and that prompted the group to host an evening meeting for parents to discuss the issues.

The philosophy and practice of collaboration/partnerships with parents and community members is supported by ecological and developmental systems theories that stress the importance of relationships and the interconnections of environments where children grow and learn. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) is well known for his ecological systems theory of human development or the layers of environment which affect the child's development. Bronfenbrenner described the principle of interconnectedness within settings and the linkages between these settings. The immediate setting or

microsystem for the child is the family, school and neighborhood. Factors of poverty, work schedules, transportation, child care and second language issues are part of the mesosystem which influence the involvement of parents in the school, and the exosystem is the larger social system in which the child functions which in this context includes the local school council and the PTO. The macrosystem which includes the values in our culture about parent involvement in education and the corresponding legislation that includes it, as well as, the cultural beliefs and practices about engaging families in the local districts has a significant impact on the extent and influence of parent involvement in school governance

Joyce Epstein (1995) used an ecological perspective to describe her theory of overlapping spheres of influence and the framework she developed for a partnership model with six major types of parental involvement. The external structure of the model consists of overlapping or nonoverlapping spheres representing family, school, and community and they may be drawn together or pushed apart depending on the philosophy, practices and activities of the families, schools, and community members. The experiences and practices at School A in the urban setting push the spheres away from each other as the philosophy and activities there do not encourage collaboration or parent and community involvement. The interactions or communication between the spheres and the patterns of influence or the local culture at School A are rooted in conflict over decision making power between administration and the teachers' union. At School B in the college town the experiences and practices of the parent group and the school practices push the spheres together as there is a strong philosophy and many activities that include and encourage parent and community involvement. The influence of a very

strong parent organization and community philosophy of inclusion encourages many forms of communication with parents and promotes activities to engage families in the school. At School C in the small suburb the history of community collaboration and the practices of the school to improve parent involvement push the spheres together, although there is concern there that parents were not as active as they could be. There is frequent communication with parents at School C about school policies, activities, or workshops available and efforts made by parent members of the school council to encourage communication between parents and the school.

The results of this qualitative study replicate some of the previous research that showed inconsistencies in the implementation of school councils across the country and in Massachusetts, and that the evidence of their influence on school improvement has been limited. Some of the research described positive outcomes when councils function in schools with good communication, trusting relationships between principals, teachers and parents, and where there is good leadership, district support and adequate funding for school improvement projects. In his study of the implementation of school councils in Massachusetts Bryant Robinson (1997) concluded that not all schools were equally successful in establishing school councils and he described barriers to their effectiveness as lack of cooperation from teachers and administrators, budget constraints, lack of parent participation, lack of training and an overwhelming workload. The first report from the Massachusetts Education Reform Review Commission in 2001 showed that school councils were generally not viewed as an effective vehicle for school improvement due to lack of training, financial constraints, lack of parent and community involvement, and confusion over role definition.

The results of this qualitative case study show that these challenges and barriers still exist. These include limited structures in and training for school council work, difficulty recruiting and maintaining parent and community involvement in school councils, time and budget constraints, and little focus on curriculum and achievement. Research studies in parent involvement in high poverty urban communities also showed that race and culture affect the perceptions and the power dynamic in family-school relationships which was evident in the urban school cited in this case study, and programs that were effective in engaging diverse families acknowledged and addressed cultural and class differences which was seen in the school in this study in the small college town.

The current climate in public education in Massachusetts is one of limited financial resources and significant pressure for schools to produce adequate yearly progress. Communities and their local school boards struggle to meet the demands of both state and federal provisions for student achievement as the funding to support those tasks continues to decline. The focus on MCAS results in Massachusetts diminishes the attention to other school improvement issues, and weakens any efforts to involve parent and community members in those efforts. In order for school councils to be a more effective means for school improvement there needs to be more support at the state and local level. The state should provide oversight and training for school councils in their regulatory responsibilities, which should include clarity over role definition and decision making around policy, and assistance to local schools in communication and recruitment of parent and community members. State funds or grants for school improvement projects linked to the particular learning needs in individual schools could stimulate local interest and more involvement from families and community members. Leaders at the

state and local level should emphasize the needs of diverse populations and efforts to include all members of the school community in school improvement efforts regardless of culture or class. Local school leaders should develop structures that welcome and include all families in school activities, including school councils. Schools should utilize varied, frequent and consistent methods of communication with families about school issues and provide needed supports for these efforts, such as, language translation or transportation.

The results of this case study also mirrored previous research that schools with existing parent involvement activities before the initiation of school councils had more positive influence on school improvement. This case study showed that parent involvement in the school and parent influence on the work of the school council is strengthened by the relationship with the parent organization and other parent involvement activities in the school. Further research and practice should explore the relationship of parent organizations to the school council and their interactions and impact on school improvement.

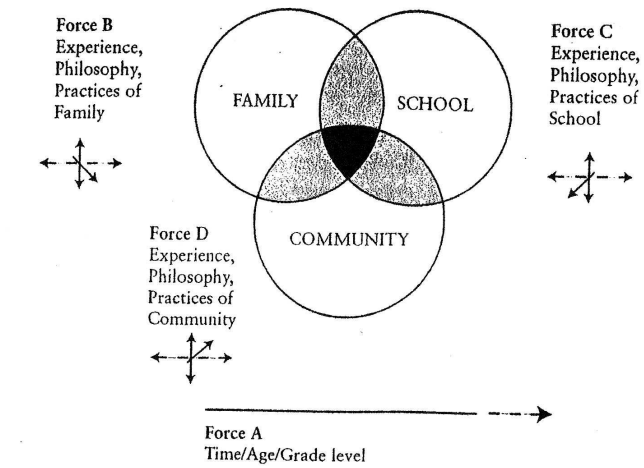
Perhaps new research on school-based decision making should consider changes or alternatives to this current model of school governance that could be more effective in school improvement efforts and certainly more inclusive of the stakeholders in each community. Additional research that would look more specifically at factors of class and family-school relationships might contribute to more successful models that could encourage parents to be involved in various activities in the school and more comfortable as a participant in school governance. In order to determine any relationship between

school council work in school improvement and student achievement, research would need to be longitudinal and include a much larger sample.

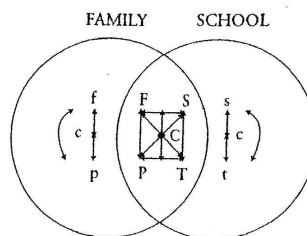
Although the wave of educational reform efforts in the last thirty years embraces the concept of parental involvement as an essential element in children's academic achievement and social adjustment, we have provided little pre service or inservice training for teachers or administrators about the philosophy or practices of engaging parents in all aspects of their child's education including school governance. Those who prepare teachers and principals/administrators for the field of education should include the study of ecological systems theory and how that relates to school improvement efforts. Educators need to acknowledge the historical mistrust and barriers to building relationships between schools and families and should create a positive and constructive attitude about parent and community involvement in the schools. Administrators and teachers should be knowledgeable about the development of partnership models that are integrated into a comprehensive approach to school improvement. Local schools should provide the structures and communication systems that support teachers in their relationships with families.

APPENDIX A

FIGURE 1. EPSTEIN'S OVERLAPPING SPHERES OF INFLUENCE



Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning (External Structure of Theoretical Model)



KEY: Intra-institutional interactions (lowercase)
Inter-institutional interactions (uppercase)

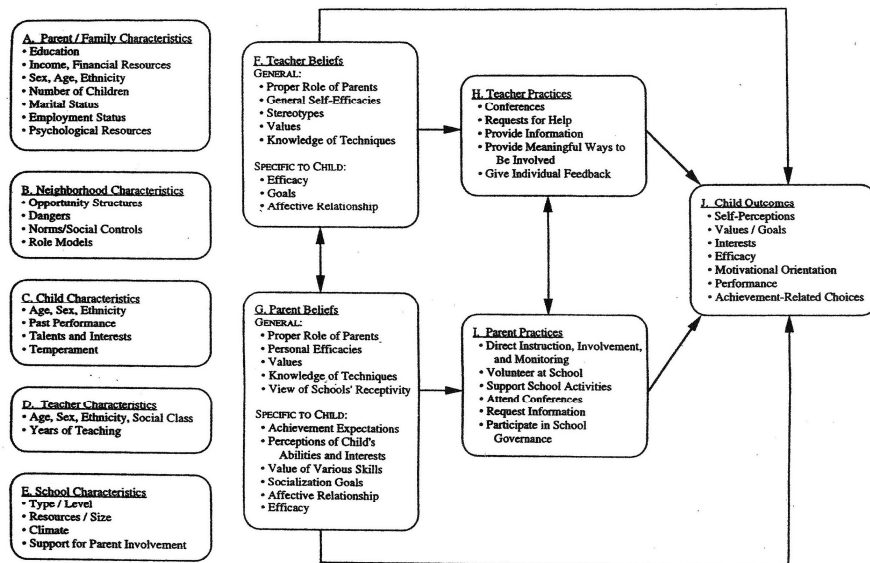
f/F = Family c/C = Child
s/S = School p/P = Parent
t/T = Teacher

Note: In the full model the internal structure is extended, using the same KEY to include:
co/CO = Community
a/A = Agent from community/business

Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning (Internal Structure of Theoretical Model)

APPENDIX B

FIGURE 2. ECCLES AND HAROLD'S MODEL OF THE INFLUENCES ON AND CONSEQUENCES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS



APPENDIX C

CONSENT FOR VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

This is a research study for a dissertation as part of the Child and Family Studies Program in the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The purpose of this study is to describe the function and influence of local school councils on school improvement and to provide a better understanding of the role of parent/family and community involvement in those efforts. Data will be gathered over a three to six month period in three elementary schools in different communities through observation of school council meetings; through interviews with members of the school council and other members of the school community, including teachers, staff, family or community members; and through review of relevant materials.

I volunteer to be part of this qualitative study and understand that:

1. I will be interviewed by Leslie Stein using a guided interview format consisting of a dozen questions.
2. The questions I will be answering will involve information about parent and community involvement in the school and the role of staff, parents and community members in the work of the school council.
3. The interview will be tape recorded to facilitate analysis of the data and transcribed from the tapes. Tapes and transcriptions will only be accessible to Leslie Stein and stored at the her residence
4. My name will not be used, nor will I be identified personally, in any way or at any time. I understand it will be necessary to identify participants by role or position in the data analysis and written description of the results.
5. Due to a small number of participants, approximately twelve to eighteen, I understand that there is some risk that I may be identified as part of this study.

6. I may withdraw from part or all of this study at any time.
7. I have the right to review material prior to the completion of this study.
8. I understand that the results of this study will be included in Leslie Stein's doctoral dissertation and may also be included in manuscripts submitted to professional journals for publication.
9. I am free to participate or not participate without prejudice.

Leslie B. Stein

Date

Participant

Date

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What is your role in this school community?

Please tell me about the ways parents/families and community members are involved in the school.

If you are a member of the School Council, please describe how and why you became a member.

Tell me about the work of the school council. What are the functions and responsibilities of the School Council?

Please describe the relationship of the school council to other members of the school community.

Please describe the relationships between council members and the impact parent and community members have on the work of the council.

How is the agenda set?

What types of decisions are made by the School Council?

What is the process for decision making and how would you describe the role of teachers, parents, and community members in that process?

How is the work of the School Council and decisions made communicated to other members of the school community, such as, staff, families, and other interested community members?

What are the accomplishments of this school council?

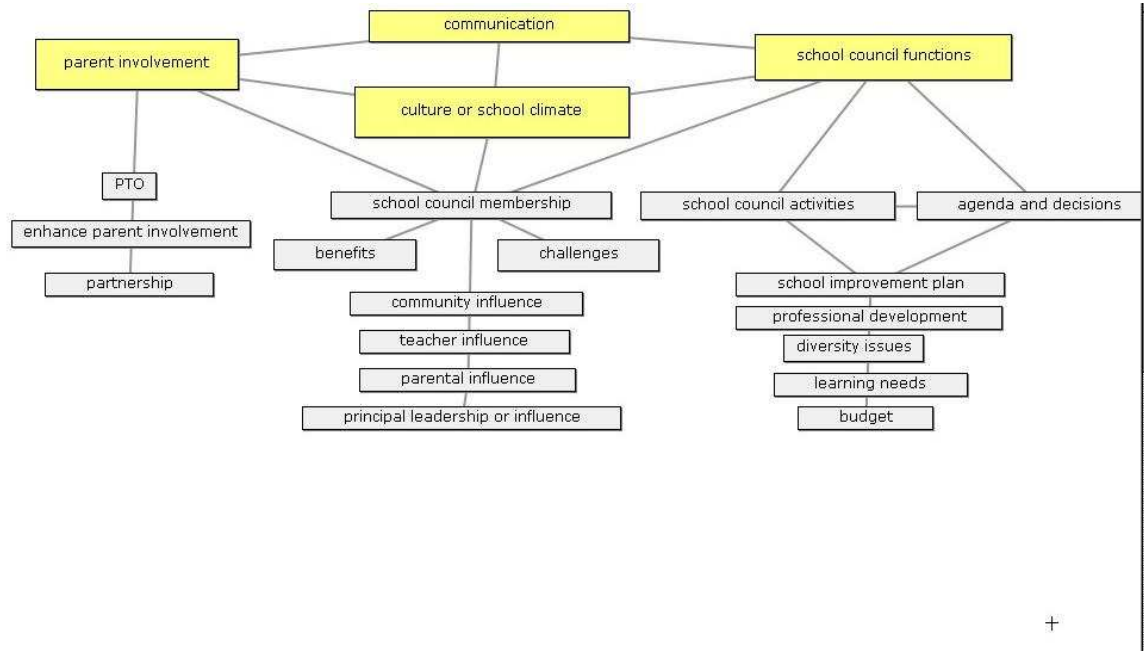
What are the challenges and benefits for you as a member of the council?

What are the challenges or barriers for the work of the school council?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the school council or parent and community involvement in the school?

APPENDIX E

FIGURE 3. CODE MAP



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