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Parental Involvement In an Urban Minority School District

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN AN URBAN MINORITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

BY

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2011
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ABSTRACT

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN AN URBAN MINORITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Literature suggests that parent involvement is an important factor in student achievements. Research findings reveal that the most effective parent involvement programs used personal contact, cultural sensitivity, accommodations, communication, and a focused approach to reach parents and students. In recent years, as the population of Latinos rapidly increased, educators find themselves looking for ways to better assimilate Latino families into the public school system. The purpose of this research was to explore if the education of minority Latino parents are met in an urban Saturday program. The study revealed that students who came to the program improved as measured by regular completion of homework and attending school. As parents increased basic skills in English due to attending English as a Second Language in the Saturday program, they were better able to help their children with homework. The program helped parents and students meet their social and academic needs.

The methodology was qualitative; it included focus groups and individual interviews. More specifically, 3 focus groups were each composed of 10 parents, 10 students, and 10 staff members. Twenty-five individual interviews were conducted as follows: 5 parents, 5 staff members, 5 support staff members who had been involved with the Saturday program for more than 1 year, 5 community members who were involved in the Saturday program at the time of the investigation, and 5 students who graduated from high school and had participated in the program for more than 1 year. The participants in
the Saturday program were 90% Latino. Informants reported their perceptions pertaining to what was important while attending a Saturday program that was offered in the district.

The results indicated that the implementation of intervention in 4 domains – school environment, curriculum, self-development, and program improvement – can affect the development of a successful parental involvement program. These should be considered when implementing a program that will affect the academic and social well-being of students, particularly urban Latino students and their families. Recommendations were made and directions were provided regarding the development and implementation of a Saturday program in an urban school district with a predominantly Latino population.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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My good friend, Lisann Richardson, always believed in my success. She once shared a quote with me that I strongly believe, “The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will.” I feel that is my strength. I greatly appreciate the encouragement I received from all my close friends, especially Dr. Dulce Rodriguez, we walked along the same path.

Nothing in life can be accomplished without having a spiritual force. I want to especially thank God, Maria Rodriguez, and Edna Perez who helped me every week with their prayers. Thanks, to my guardian angel, Rose Lopez. She was the person who taught me that nothing is impossible if you really want it. She believed in me as a leader. Today, as I accomplish this goal, I remember her with humility.
Este proyecto es el mayor regalo que yo le puedo dedicar a mis cuatro hijas Zenovia, Lizbeth, Leezenia y Belizia, y en especial a mis padres Aleja y Mariano. I also want to acknowledge my sister Lissette Robles Velez and brother-in-law Matthew Velez, who were supportive while I was in the process of such a huge task. My family has been the driving force behind my success. Thank you.
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Introduction

Positive parental involvement has been linked to indicators of student academic success (Fan & Chen, 2001; Desimone, 1999; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The evidence that parental involvement has beneficial effects on students' academic achievement is so compelling that policymakers, school board administrators, teachers, and parents all agree that parental involvement is critical for children's academic success (Fan & Chen, 2001).

When schools support parents' involvement in their children's learning, regardless of the families' income, education level, or ethnic background, children are more likely to: earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs; be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits; attend school regularly; have better social skills; show improvement in behavior and adapt well to school; and graduate from high school and go on to postsecondary education (Christenson, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Epstein, 2001a; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

Parents want assurances that their children will receive adequate preparation that will lead to rewarding adult lives. For children, parents are the most important influences in their lives. They help shape the morals, values, and manners that will help them to succeed in school and life. Parents serve as the first and most enduring teachers who play a crucial role in helping their children learn (Miller, 2001).
In the 1990s, Epstein and researchers at Johns Hopkins University conducted studies to identify and understand what schools need to know and do to develop and implement a comprehensive program of family-school partnership. As a result, Epstein and these researchers developed a research-based framework of the six major types of involvement that form a family-school partnership (Epstein et al., 2002). These six major types of involvement explain how schools can, with families and communities, become and stay informed and involved in children’s education at home and at school (Epstein, 2001). These six types of school-related opportunities for parental involvement are: parenting: assisting parents in child-rearing skills; communicating: school-parent communication; volunteering: involving parents in school volunteer opportunities; student learning at home: involving parents in home-based learning; decision making: involving parents in school decision-making, and collaborating with the community: involving parents in school-community collaborations (Epstein, 2001).

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) produced standards for their parent and family involvement programs (National Parent Teacher Association, 2006). The standards were created around the six types of parent involvement identified by Epstein (National Parent Teacher Association, 2006). Nearly 100 professional education and parent/family involvement organizations, state departments of education, colleges of teacher education, and school districts endorse them. The standards clearly delineate those practices that have been shown to lead to success and high-quality parent involvement programs (National Parent Teacher Association, 2006).

Community members and parents have benefited from collaboration to improve student education. Education research shows that conventional avenues to involvement in
the schools are closed to parents (Bermudez & Marquez, 1996; Giles, 1998; Onikama, Hammond, & Koki, 1998; Osterling, Violand-Sanchez, & von Vacano, 1999; Rosado, 1994; Weidman & Romero, 1996). This is because effective participation requires specific cultural knowledge of normal activities in schools. Non-conventional activities, such as workshops that help parents to manage family finances, can encourage the parents to participate in their children’s education through parental involvement in school. Participation must be encouraged in the manner in which those non-conventional activities that encouraged the parents to participate in their children’s education through culturally responsive communication and activities (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Schools have benefited by learning how to attract, promote, and increase parental participation in the school’s activities. However, examples of non-conventional activities are workshops that are flexible and motivate parents to help their child at home. These activities have helped families to come together and they have built the relationship between school and parents.

Background of the Problem

There is a consensus among parents, educators, and researchers that parent involvement is an important factor related to academic success in children (Szente, 2006; Wright & Willis, 2004). Parent involvement is positively related to student academic performance, and increasing this involvement may reduce the achievement gap between high- and low-performing students (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Despite parental consensus about the importance of their involvement, there are differences in the types of parental involvement. Lee and Bowen (2006) stated that parents’ involvement in their children’s education may vary and it includes different activities such as attending parent-teacher
conferences or programs that feature their children and other students, or participating in volunteer activities. On the other hand, parents' involvement may include at-home activities such as helping their children with homework, discussing their children's schoolwork or school experiences, and structuring educational activities in the home.

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (2004) reported that it is important for parents to continue with their school involvement during the middle school years, since this participation continues to be related to school success (increased academic success, increased positive attitudes, decreased absenteeism, decreased dropout rates and retention rates, and increased motivation). However, even parents who are actively involved in their children's education during the elementary school years tend to become less involved when the children reach middle school. Studies also show that while parent involvement is associated with increased student success, parent education, Supplemental Education Service (SES) level, and ethnicity/race are less associated with student success (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2004, pp. 2-4). However, these factors have served as moderating variables related to parent involvement.

While parents may agree regarding the need to be involved in their children's education, there may be differences in parental involvement levels based on moderating variables. Geenen, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2001) reported that United States schools are becoming more and more diverse. They projected that by the year 2050 the majority of students will come from culturally diverse groups. Trends in education also indicate that as the number of minority children in school continues to increase the family risk factors that affect their school achievement also increase. These risk factors are
related to student achievement (Sanders & Harvey, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2004a). An early childhood longitudinal study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education investigated risk factors as they relate to parent involvement and student achievement. Findings from this study were that poverty, lack of parental education, and being a single parent negatively impacted student achievement gains (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b). More information is needed to fully understand these and additional factors that moderate parent involvement.

Trotman (2001) examined factors that affect parental involvement such as family structure, parent socioeconomic status, and parent educational level. Single parent families are increasing along with the needs for these parents to work. Trotman stated that lower levels of parent education, as well as work needs, are related to lower levels of parent participation. Also, cultural influences may affect parent involvement in their children’s education. Trotman stated that it is important to understand cultural views and individual perceptions of what constitutes parental involvement. Parent involvement practices vary within and between cultures. Some parents perceive themselves as participating in their child’s education if they are involved in the school setting as a teacher’s aide or tutor, if they attend field trips, or if they assist with fundraising activities. Others perceive parent involvement as including the following activities: providing their children with a place to study, helping their children with homework, monitoring their children’s degree of television watching, and setting curfews for their children. Trotman pointed out the importance of considering the parents’ perceptions of involvement when attempting to understand and increase their participation.
Statement of the Problem

The positive impact of parental involvement on student achievement has been demonstrated by a variety of research studies over the past several years, yet some parents continue to remain uninvolved. Reasons for this lack of involvement must be understood (Szente, 2006) and ways to encourage parental involvement must be developed.

Feldman (2003) mentioned that if parents do not show any interest in how their children are doing, if they ignore messages that teachers send home, or if they fail to come to conferences, teachers are likely to feel helpless. Teachers may fear that talking about the role parents need to play in their children’s education will sound like they are passing the buck. But the fact is that parents’ contribution to the education of their children is essential. Parents are their children’s first, and in many ways, their most valuable teachers.

Despite the awareness of the benefits of parent involvement in students’ lives and the attempts to improve parental involvement in the schools, the fact remains that minority parents often remain hesitant to participate in school programs.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore if the educational needs of minority Latino parents are met in an urban Saturday program. If the needs of minority parents are met, then it is likely that these parents will be able to help with homework, as well as improve the attitudes and behaviors of their children (Gestwicki, 2001).
Also, it is important to understand the reason that some parents do not get involved in their children's education. Research has suggested that family structure, education level, and perceptions of involvement are related to levels of parent involvement. However, reasons for the continued lack of parent involvement in the education of their children remain unclear. Epstein and Jansom (2004) reported that the demographics of American families are changing.

Theoretical Rationale for the Study

Districts are reaching out to find ways to improve parental involvement in their schools. According to the National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA, 1998), when parents are involved in their children's education, those children have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and complete homework more consistently. With the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) legislation, educational administrators and teachers are highly interested in programs that result in positive student outcomes, higher school attendance, and an increase in parent participation in family programs. The school under investigation was working to achieve this goal.

Previous research noted that various elements enable school family programs to meet the needs of the parents. When the elements are visible, parental participation is not an issue, but an asset. The National Network for family Resiliency (1995) highlighted some common elements in effective programs. The first element is accountability: Programs need both ongoing and regular assessments to make services more responsive to families. The second element is a community base: Programs that are community based need to recognize that children are an integral part of a family and community.
Programs that encourage neighborhood and school involvement help communities respond to the needs of individuals and families. The third element is comprehensiveness: Programs that provide continuous, intense interaction with competent, caring adults and peers are more effective than programs designed solely for crisis situations. Effective programs focus on services that address the educational, health, social, and emotional needs of both the parents and children. The fourth element is empowerment: Programs that provide nurturing connections with others help families learn about community resources and link them to the world of work. Successful programs involve clients in shaping their own interventions. The fifth element is complexity: Programs must focus on root causes since addressing immediate symptoms is not enough. Early intervention and crisis prevention should be emphasized.

According to Lezotte (1991), the correlates of effective schools proved way to improve parental involvement and student learning. These correlates are a widely known set of research-based constructs with which to evaluate a school and enable a whole school to improve. The effective school correlates are as follows.

1. **Clear school mission.** There is a clearly articulated school mission in the effective school whereby the staff shares an understanding and commitment to instructional goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. The staff accepts responsibility for the students' learning of the school's essential curricular goals.

2. **High expectations for success.** In the effective school, there is a climate of expectation in which the staff believes and demonstrates that all students can attain mastery of the essential content and school skills, and the staff believes that they have the capability to help all students achieve that mastery.
3. *Instructional leadership.* In the effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and persistently communicates that mission to the staff, parents, and students. The principal understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program.

4. *Opportunity to learn and student time on task.* In the effective school, teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to instruction in the essential content and skills. For a high percentage of this time, students are engaged in whole class or large group, teacher-directed, planned learning activities.

5. *Safe and orderly environment.* In the effective school, there is an orderly, purposeful, businesslike atmosphere that is free from the threat of physical harm. The school climate is not oppressive and is conducive to teaching and learning.

6. *Home school relations.* In the effective school, parents understand and support the school’s basic mission and are given the opportunity to play an important role in helping the school to achieve that mission.

Research Questions

The following are the questions that will be investigated in this study. 1. What are some of the experiences parents encountered when coming to a Saturday program? 2. What type of courses will increase the participation of parents in the school? 3. To what extent do parent involvement programs benefit the community and education in general? 4. What are some of the parent involvement practices the program participants use to contribute to the Saturday program’s growth?
Research Design

A comprehensive description of the research method and procedures for this study is presented in Chapter III. This section is provided as an overview.

Three focus groups are identified by whether they are made up of parents, teacher, or students. The subject in each focus group were chosen based upon length of participation. To glean a more in-depth understanding of the participants’ perceptions as to what parental involvement practices contribute to the growth of the Saturday program, individual interviews were conducted. Overall, 25 individual interviews were conducted. Five primary questions were asked to all participants taking into consideration the common responses from the focus groups. Categories were used to group specific participants for interviews and codes were used for confidentiality (see Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
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<td>Five parents who participated in the Saturday program for at least one year. Codes: Inf. 6-10.</td>
<td>Five teachers who participated in the Saturday program for at least one year. Codes: Inf. 1-5.</td>
<td>Five support staff members who participated in the Saturday program for at least one year. Codes: Inf. 16-20.</td>
<td>Five community members who support the Saturday program for at least one year. Codes: Inf. 21-25.</td>
<td>Five high school students who participated in the Saturday program for at least one year. Codes: Inf. 11-15</td>
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After all the interviews were complete the data collected from attendance record were reviewed which indicated the length of participation in programs, as well as the continuity and retention of parents in family programs. A goal of this research was to investigate if parents' needs were being met and the factors that affected attendance in the Saturday program.

Program Description

The Saturday program is a family program that allows family members of all ages to come to school from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on Saturday and select various classes from adult or child oriented offerings. At the beginning of each semester the school sends registration forms with all the selections of the classes and registration dates to each of the students' homes. Some of the classes that can be selected for adults are: English as a Second Language, Computers, and Cake Decorating. Classes that are offered for both middle and high school students included: Reading Through Cooking, Computers Club, Basketball, and others. Classes that are offered to younger students are the following: Childcare, Pre-Kindergarten, Creative Writing, and Health/Physical Fitness. Also, there are classes for parents and children together. For example, Babies and Books is a class in which parents learn how to read to preschool children.

Due to the flexible structure of the Saturday program, the parents' attendance increased from year to year. By having classes that were very motivating and staff that were very familiar with the mission of the program and the needs of the community, the program retained parents and students for many years. The program was designed very
between Hispanic and White students (Pradon, Waxman, & Rivera, 2002).

Significance of the Study

Parental involvement increases student academic achievement; however, there continues to be a lack of parent involvement in schools across the nation. The findings of this study are of significance to students, parents, educators, administrators, school systems, school boards, public officials, and community members. The findings will provide information to assist educational researchers seeking to understand factors that affect parent involvement in school. The results of this study will assist administrators to develop and to implement parent involvement programs.

Limitations of the Study

The data for this study was collected from the responses of the interviewees. The research was also limited by time, distance, and scope. The research was conducted in an urban school district in central New Jersey; which offered a Saturday family program. Interviews were conducted outside of the program and at the convenience of the parents. Open ended question were asked of the participants. Although parents could answer questions in their native languages, the experiences of some parents was limited by a small vocabulary and a lack of education,
Definition of Key Terms

*Academic outcomes* refer to the knowledge and skill levels demonstrated by students based on curriculum and instruction compared to state-identified performance standards.

*Minority group* is defined in terms of its subordinate position: it is a group of people who are singled out from other people in the society in which they live because of their physical or cultural characteristics. The group is treated unequally and differentially, and as a result of such treatment, they regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination (Feagin, & Booher Feagin, 1999).

*Community* refers to local stakeholders, including but not limited to private citizens, organizations, businesses, political leaders, agencies, and universities.

*Family involvements* refer to the formal and/or informal ways in which family members assist with the education of the children at school or at home.

*Partnership* is a mutual agreement between school personnel and other educational stakeholders that encourages all parties to share information and resources as a means to develop a learning environment.

*School community* refers to the school personnel, students, families, and members of the larger community bound by a common spirit of involvement for the purpose of maximum social, emotional, intellectual and academic growth and development for all students.

*Curriculum* is everything that is taught in the school that is mandated by the state or any other local school authority.
Assessment in the effective school refers to the measurement of student academic progress. A variety of assessment tools are used. The results of the assessment tools are used to improve individual student performance and also to improve the instructional program.

Organization of the Study

This research was organized into five chapters.

Chapter I presents the introduction, background of the problem, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, theoretical rationale for the study, definitions of key terms, research questions, research design, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and the organization of the study.

Chapter II presents the review of the literature that includes: an introduction to parental involvement, the legal demands for parent involvement, educational approaches, evaluation of the effects of parent involvement, factors related to parent involvement, barriers to parent involvement, solutions to overcoming barriers to parent involvement, a discussion of parent involvement and student academic success, and the conclusion.

Chapter III provides a comprehensive description of the research methodology used for this project. The chapter has five sections: Overview of Research Design, Participants, Instruments, Data Collection, and Treatment of the Data.

Chapter IV describes the results of the study with three major sections: Focus Groups, Individual Interviews, and Program Participants’ Attendance.
Chapter V includes the interpretation of the data from interviews with the participants in the Saturday program. Their perceptions of the program or reasons for participating in it are explained with an overview of the research and discussion of the findings.
Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provided a rationale for the present research on parental involvement. The review of the research literature related to the topic of investigation was organized into nine sections: (a) Introduction to Parent Involvement; (b) Legal Demands for Parent Involvement; (c) Educational Approaches; (d) Evaluation of the Effects of Parent Involvement; (e) Factors Related to Parent Involvement; (f) Barriers to Parent Involvement; (g) Solutions to Overcome Barriers to Parent Involvement; (h) Parent Involvement and Student Academic Success; and (i) Conclusion.

Introduction to Parent Involvement

School administrators and teachers need to appreciate the customs and beliefs of culturally and linguistically diverse parents if they truly want them to be involved in their children’s schooling (Wandersman et al., 2002). Parental involvement has long been associated with increased academic achievement; it also has been correlated with a decrease in minority dropouts. Recent literature has given even more power to parents by stating that parents play a major role in assisting their children with matriculation (Vadem-Kiernan & McManus, 2002, 2003). Also, literature suggests that teachers’ perceptions of minorities play a role in minority children matriculating. Teachers must reflect on their own values and attitudes and see if their attitudes are keeping them from developing a positive relationship with minority parents (Espinosa, 1995; Weaver, 2005). A strong partnership between teachers and minority parents contributes tremendously to minority children’s matriculation (Espinosa, 1995).
Cultural and language differences hinder Hispanic parental involvement at school; Parents who do not speak English in their homes are least likely to participate in activities at their children’s school (U.S. Department of Education USDE, 202b). Espinosa (1995) argued that successful involvement of Hispanic parents begins with understanding their culture and values. Failure to understand Hispanic parents’ values and culture may lead to negative outcomes for schools and students. For instance, Hispanic parents prefer face-to-face communication over handwritten notes sent home by teachers. Additionally, American teachers traditionally prefer a structured parent conference, whereas Hispanic parents prefer a more relaxed conference setting. Failure to recognize simple cultural values could hinder the academic success of the Hispanic child and the involvement of the Hispanic parent (Inger, 1992).

Parent involvement is an important factor related to student development and achievement (Wright & Willis, 2004), yet current data show a lack of parental involvement in some instances and a decline in parental involvement between early grades to middle school grades (Szente, 2006; Wright & Willis, 2004).

Hoover, Dempsey and Sandler (1995) define parental involvement through the following mechanisms of influence: modeling of behaviors, reinforcing school values and home-based instruction. Involved parents encourage pro-school ideals through reinforcement of behaviors likely to increase learning (e.g., study, regular attendance). Fan and Chen (2001) assert that the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) model holds considerable appeal as a compressive model of family involvement that attempts to both explain parents’ rationales for involvement and describe mechanisms for involvement.
Deforges and Abouchaar (2003) describe the most efficacious forms of parent involvement as those that encourage parents to interface directly with their children on learning activities in the home.

Parent involvement researchers have also examined parents' motivations and reasons for becoming involved in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey 1995; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel 2001). This body of research is based on the Hoover-Dempsey's (1995) model of family decision making. Hoover-Dempsey (1995) conducted a study of parents of 250 elementary school students in urban schools using surveys that were sent home to parents. Hoover-Dempsey found that parents' motivations for becoming involved in their children's school were based on three factors: parental role construction, parental beliefs regarding what they are supposed to do; parents' sense of self efficacy - how effective parents believe they can be; and parents' perceptions of the invitations and demands from the school with regard to parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey 1995).

Parent involvement is positively correlated with student academic performance and increased parent involvement may reduce the achievement gap between high- and low-performing students (Lee & Bowen, 2006). As noted by Geenen, Powers, and Lopez-Vasquez (2001), United States schools are becoming more and more diverse; with increased numbers of low-performing minority students. Therefore, it is important to understand factors related to parent involvement, particularly in minority populations. Poverty, lack of parental education, and single-parent households are negatively related to student achievement gains (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b). To further complicate the issue, findings of effects of parent involvement are inconsistent, which may be due to differences between the perspectives of teachers and parents. For
example, Green et al. (2005) reported on the perspectives of 308 African American, Hispanic American, Native American, and European American parents and 52 school professionals. The survey findings suggested that minority parents are more active in their participation in the school transition processes than European-American parents. In contrast, professionals perceived the opposite. The following sections present research findings regarding factors related to parent involvement.

**Legal Demands for Parent Involvement**

Legal sanctions are related to efforts for increasing parent involvement in the education of children. For example, Congress enacted The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program in 1997 as cited in (Desimone, 2002). This program resulted in state education agencies receiving $145 million to award grants to schools, of which $120 million was for Title 1 schools, which are subject to accountability. According to Desimone (2002), the law states that schools must meet CSRD program criteria including meaningful parent and community involvement.

Osborne and de Onis (1999) reported that one of the eight National Education Goals is to increase parent involvement. The National Parent Teacher Association in collaboration with education professionals and the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education developed the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (2006). These standards apply to Parenting (Standard I), and related to parenting, Communicating, Student Learning, Volunteering, School Decision Making and Advocacy, and Collaborating with Community (Standards I-VI). According to Osborne and de Onis, these standards must be applied in each school district, and the school board must fully accept parent and family involvement. School boards and school
administrators must develop plans to promote and monitor parent involvement. This programs is to include a range of options and activities with goals for implementation and evaluation. The school board must supervise parent involvement and assure parents of representation at school board meetings. Osborne and de Onis state further that the school board must ensure parent involvement with increased communication, participation, cooperation, and collaboration.

According to Trotman (2001), additional legislation, including engaging parents in the education of their children is no longer just a school issue. On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into effect the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Office of the Press Secretary, 2002), which is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The NCLB requires that all children regardless of ethnicity and background receive a quality education. The major goals of the NCLB are: (a) stronger accountability for results, (b) more choices for parents and students, (c) greater flexibility for states and school districts, and (d) use of research-based instructional methods (U.S. DE, 2007). In addition to these aforementioned goals, President Bush also has an agenda for high schools (U.S. Department of State, 2005). President Bush’s high school agenda is written so that students not only graduate from high school, but are also prepared to enter college. The agenda states that on an international level, American high school students are falling behind in math and reading. Bush’s agenda suggests four interventions that districts could use to ensure high school matriculation. One of these four interventions includes, beginning at the middle school level, designing an intervention that will help students who are at risk for academic failure and dropout (USDE, 2007). According to the National Center for Education
Statistics (2004), 471,000 students dropped out of school in the 2000-2001 school year and student drop-out rates continue to grow while the job outlook for drop-outs continues to decline. The unemployment rate for dropouts in 1998 was 75% higher than for students with a high school degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Students who dropout of high school are more likely to be unemployed than those students who complete high school. Furthermore, when dropouts are employed, they will most likely earn less than people with a high school degree. The median salary for students who dropped out of school in 2003 was $12,184, and for students who did graduate from high school in 2003 the median salary was $20,431 (USDE, 2007).

Drop-outs are having a difficult time finding jobs that they want because employers are searching for personnel who are literate, technology savvy, and more educated. This leaves drop-outs to depend more on the government for welfare and food stamps and this ultimately contributes to a society of lower-class people (Ash, 1993) and costs tax payers money (Rumbergor, 2001). Many factors are associated with students dropping out of school including: (a) working more than 14 hours per week (Mann, 1986, 1987), (b) lack of parental involvement, (c) socioeconomic status, (d) minority status (Horn, 1992), and (e) pregnancy (Asche, 1993). President Bush's goals (i.e., more choices for parents and students, intervention beginning in the middle school to help students who are at risk for academic failure and dropout) point to involving parents in the educational process at the middle school level. Research continues to show that children whose parents are involved in their education obtain higher grades in math (Epstein, 2001a; Galloway & Sheridan, 1994) and reading (Quigley, 2000), become involved in school activities, and complete more homework. Furthermore, when parents
assist their children at home with academics, students’ grades and morale improve drastically (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Desforges & Alberto, 2003; Epstein, 1995, 1987). In addition to NCLB, Title I, a federally funded program, requires all schools that receive federal funding to collaborate with parents. If schools are found in noncompliance with programs like Title I, they could lose their federal funding (USDE, 2007).

The elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), have supported the need for parents to be more involved in their children’s education. The NCLB Act demands that state and local school districts develop plans to increase the involvement of parents (The U.S. Department of Education, 2002a, 2002b).

Educational Approaches

As part of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, U.S. Department of Education, 2002b), schools are being held accountable by the U.S. Department of Education to demonstrate improvement for all students, including those with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELLs), those living in poverty, those who are highly mobile, and those who are homeless (Christenson, 2004). Although the U.S. Department of Education recognizes that parent involvement is important, the NCLB Act does not define the responsibilities of parents. The main responsibility for student success and partnerships between families and schools appears to be given to educator.

The literature supports the argument that school and classroom practices influence family involvement. Better educated families are more involved in schools. “But families with less education and lower incomes do become just as involved if schools
have effective programs to engage them" (Epstein & Sanders, 2000, p. 291). In addition, teachers who do not frequently involve families were found to give more stereotypical ratings to single parents and to those with less formal education; marking them lower in helpfulness and follow-through than other parents (Epstein, 2001). Most teachers do not know the goals that parents have for their children, the ways that parents help them to learn, or how parents would like to be involved in their children education. Most parents do not know much about the educational programs in their children’s school or what teachers require of them (Epstein & Sanders, 2000).

Anderson and Minke (2007) surveyed parents at three elementary schools concerning their roles in their children’s education. The most notable findings were related to the addition of resources and specific teacher invitations. Teacher invitation had the strongest relationship with parents’ involvement behaviors and role constructions. Therefore, invitations are likely influential in encouraging parents to participate. The perception of being invited may be particularly important for low-income parents because they are often viewed as having lower levels of participation (Anderson & Minke, 2007).

When it comes to addressing language barriers, most school strategies include some bilingual services to help educators communicate with families about school programs and children’s progress. Many schools successfully use bilingual parent liaisons, instructional aides, counselors, and parent volunteers to reach out to families through a variety of school-home communications as well as parent workshops or classes (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Green (2005) suggested the following school or teacher initiatives to encourage parent involvement in their children’s language development:

1. Assign homework that requires interacting with someone at home.
2. Provide training for parents concerning how to help their child develop language skills. Be sensitive to issues related to the day of week and the time when the training is offered. Additionally, understand that some parents also will have issues with child care and transportation that inhibit their ability to participate.

3. Invite parents into the classroom to see what is going on. Observing how a teacher provides instruction can help a parent gain strategies for working with their child.

4. Provide open computer lab times at the school where parents and the child can work together on language development.

5. Encourage parents to participate in language learning, especially if they are not fluent in English. Demonstrating that learning English is important and can help provide motivation to a child.

6. Provide a host of resources that parents can use to help their children with language development. One example is directions and hours for the local library. (Green, 2005, p. 57)

In order to be actively involved, families need more information and guidance from schools. School districts nationwide are being encouraged to reexamine their parent involvement policies and programs and demonstrate innovative initiatives if they want to receive federal education funds (Kessler-Skar & Baker, 2000). Kessler-Skar and Baker conducted a national survey of school districts in the spring of 1995. The goal of the survey was to generate information about current district policies, programs, and practices regarding parent involvement in order to build on and extend the knowledge
Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar (2002) analyzed 41 studies that each evaluated K-12 parent involvement programs. The studies sought to determine if the programs were effective and improved student learning. More specifically, the characteristics of the parent involvement programs were examined. The authors found that there was a lack of empirical evidence to support the claim that parent involvement programs improved student achievement or change behavior in students, parents, and teachers. It was not concluded that the programs were ineffective, it was noted that more studies are needed to evaluate their effectiveness.

The authors based this conclusion on the fact that studies tended to have design, methodological, and analytical flaws which had led to results that may or may not have been valid. For example, the definition of parent involvement varies by study. Parent involvement is a difficult concept to define since it includes many perceptions and activities. A widely used classification system was developed by Epstein and associates in the 1990s; this system includes communicating, volunteering, parenting, participating in decision making, support for home learning, and collaboration with the community. This classification system is confusing since parenting, volunteering, and home learning refer to parent efforts, but the remainder of the classifications (communicating, collaborating with community, and participating in decision making) include involvement from the school and community.
Mattingly et al. (2002) noted that another problem with the studies of parent involvement is the failure to consider influences of schools and communities on student achievement when studying effects of parent involvement. It remains unclear which factors actually affected outcomes. Studies do show statistically significant relationships between student success and parent involvement, but it is uncertain what aspect of parent involvement affects which outcomes. Involvement patterns have been identified in the parent involvement research. For example, involvement tends to be from mothers, and this involvement tends to decrease as a child enters higher grades. Low income and less education are related to less involvement. Barriers to parent involvement have been identified as attitudes and beliefs of parents and teachers, emotional problems of the parent, school and community characteristics, and teacher and parent practices. Mattingly et al. state that studies that correlate parent involvement with student outcomes show relationships, but do not show cause and effect. More information is needed to evaluate the issue.

Lopez (2001) evaluated parent involvement by investigating the ways in which parents are involved. Lopez used qualitative research methods to compile a more complete view of family involvement and how parents view their involvement. A sample of 5 immigrant/migrant families in Texas was used for the study, but the author only presented findings from 1 family. The children in the family were described as being very successful in school in both nonacademic and academic activities. The family had a history of academic success, as all of the children graduated from high school and all were in the top 10% of their class and on the school's honor roll. Observations and in-depth interviews with the parents and family members were conducted over 6 months.
Individual and family interviews were conducted.

Lopez found that this parent appeared to be uninvolved in their children's school and education. However, the family defined involvement in a broader sense, as compared to the definitions of the teachers. For this family, teaching their children the value of hard work and the value of education was within their view of being involved in their education. The family had five children and each of them experienced hard work at an early age. They were told by their family that their future would be limited if they did not receive an education. The children were exposed to the work world and shown that their choice was to work hard at school or work hard in a field. These immigrant parents went to work in the fields at an early age and were not educated, but they encouraged their children to stay in school.

Lopez's findings also suggested that the parents did not involve themselves in school activities such as parent committees, and they did not go to meetings with the teachers. They attended conferences occasionally, but were primarily too busy working to attend. They reported that showing their children reality and teaching them to work hard in school was their way of being involved in their child's education. For this family, the lesson is simple: "If you don't work, you don't eat." The hardships of a migrant life were communicated to these children and the children chose to stay in school and work hard at their education. The father took the children to work with him to help his children understand reality. Lopez concluded that is important for educators to understand that there are many views as to what constitutes parent involvement. These unique perspectives of a parent's involvement can lead to successful outcomes. Thus, to evaluate parent involvement, one must understand what factors and perceptions are
related to this involvement from the parent’s perspective.

Sheldon (2005) used a structural equation model to examine parent involvement in a partnership program by exploring its implementation and the outcomes of parent involvement for the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS). NPPS was established in 1996 at the Johns Hopkins University. This model proposes that students experience school success to a greater degree if educators, families, and the community work together to support this experience. Structural changes in the school, as well as with planning and evaluation of involvement activities are part of the model. There are six types of involvement and activities, are related to volunteering, decision-making, collaboration with the community, learning at home, communication, and parenting. Important elements of the program include internal collegial support and external district support.

Factors Related to Parent Involvement

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) reviewed the literature and reported reasons parents become involved in their children’s education. These researchers noted that there are many possible factors that influence parents in their involvement in their children education. These include: gender or role efficacy, Supplementary Educational Services (SES), family structure, family culture, education level, and perceptions of involvement. Hoover-Dempsey et al. stated that parents’ level of involvement is based on their perception of their role in this involvement and their sense of efficacy as related to this role.
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Barriers to Parent Involvement

Although engaging families is imperative to student success, barriers persist that make it difficult to develop and implement strong family engagement programs. Christenson and Sheridan (2001) identified barriers to parent involvement as perceived by parents and educators (see Table 2). The barriers for parents included: feelings of inadequacy; adoption of a passive role by leaving education to schools; linguistic and cultural differences; lack of role models, information, and knowledge about resources; suspicion about treatment from educators; and economic, emotional, and time constraints.
Constantino (2003) found that the largest barrier to family engagement is time. Many families indicate that they have little time for their children and even less time to involve themselves in their children’s school life. This is especially true for single-parent families or families in which there is one parent, guardian, or family member responsible for children. Other barriers and challenges to family engagement can be culture or language, school size, location, curriculum, adolescence, and number of teachers in the school (Constantino, 2003).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers for Parents</th>
<th>Barriers for Educators</th>
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<tr>
<td>Feelings of inadequacy</td>
<td>Ambiguous commitment to parent involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adoption of a passive role by leaving education to schools</td>
<td>Negative communication about students’ school performance and productivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Linguistic and cultural differences</td>
<td>Stereotypes about families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of role models, information, and knowledge about resources</td>
<td>Doubts about the abilities of families to address schooling concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susicion about treatment from educators</td>
<td>Lack of time and funding for programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic, emotional, and time constraints</td>
<td>Fear of conflict with families</td>
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In a meta-analysis study, Eccles and Harold (1996) found a number of studies documenting the relationship between parent involvement and family characteristics.
such as "family income, parents' educational level, ethnic background, marital status, parents' age and sex, number of children, and parents' working status" (p. 6). They also found that better educated parents were more involved both in school and at home than other parents and that parent with fewer children were more involved at home. Family size was not found to affect the amount of parent involvement at the school and employed parents were less likely to be involved at school were as involved at home as unemployed parents (Eccles & Harold, 1996).

Drummond and Stipek (2004) interviewed 234 low-income African American, Caucasian, and Latino parents about the importance of helping their children in reading, math, and homework. Parents reported on whether they had taught their children in math and reading, and read with their children in the past. Parents rated the importance of helping their children with academics. Trotman (2001) reported on the problems associated with parent involvement in an increasingly diverse student and parent population. African American children are failing school at higher rates than other students, and factors related to this problem include low parent involvement rates, poverty, lack of resources, and poor home-school communication. Thus, factors that affect parental involvement include family structure, parent socioeconomic status, and parent education level. Due to an increasing number of single parent families living with low income, more parents are forced to work. These parents are hard to reach and may not have the time or transportation to attend meetings and school activities. The work schedule of the parents affects the level of school involvement in two-parent households as well as single-parent families. Lower levels of parent education are related to low income and work efforts, and to lower levels of parent participation. The race and gender
of the child as well as the income of the family, may affect teacher expectations and attitudes. This in turn, may contribute to low parental involvement especially if the parent perceives the teacher as hostile and insensitive. Teachers may not understand that the parent perceives him or herself as involved, since this involvement is defined differently among parents of different cultures or even within the same culture.

Bridgemohan, Wyk, and Staden (2005) conducted a qualitative study to describe communication in home-school relationships. The study was exploratory and descriptive and did not provide information about causal relationships. Three primary schools were included in the study, one was from a lower middle class community, one was from a poor community, and one was from an affluent community. Communication about the school, parent-initiated communication about the child, school-initiated communication about the child, and barriers to effective communication were assessed.

In their findings, they reported on the importance of overcoming distance and other barriers to close contact and home-school communication in the early school phases. The early childhood program is designed to improve the way educators and parents work together to achieve optimal child development. Communication is considered the key factor in parent involvement programs, and so it is likely involved in increasing parent satisfaction as well as student success. Bridgemohan et al. stated that two-way communication is not only the most critical factor, but it is the factor that is most difficult to measure. Communication varies with each individual, as does his or her description of adequate communication. In addition, languages differ among parents and teachers in many parts of America. Parents must communicate with teachers to increase parent involvement and student success. Communication has verbal and nonverbal forms
that can be interpreted differently by different individuals.

Winnail et al. (2000) also reported on barriers to parent involvement, with a specific focus on involvement in middle school health education. Again, parent involvements were considered by these researchers to be a key factor in student success. These authors noted that this involvement decreases as the student leaves elementary school, despite the ongoing need for it. Barriers that prevent this involvement include mistrust of schools, miscommunication, time constraints, lack of subject knowledge, and a parent lacking the understanding of how to be involved. These barriers continue in middle and high schools. Winnail et al. sought to understand the factors that are perceived to be barriers, specifically in middle school educational programs. He studied two middle schools from upper middle class and Caucasian neighborhoods. A pilot study gathered qualitative data from the parents to identify barriers to their involvement in health education. A 53-item questionnaire was developed from the pilot study and mailed out to parents. Sections on the survey pertained to the student, feedback on important subjects and health education topics, personal family history of involvement, perceptions of barriers to involvement, family demographics, and perceived enablers to increase involvement. Parent involvement was the dependent variable and it was measured by parent self report rating of their involvement.

Findings showed that most of the respondents were mothers, ages 40-49 years, with two or three children. Most of the respondents had a college degree, were Caucasian, and had an income of at least $50,000. Most were married and PTA/PTO members. They reported themselves as active or very active in their child’s education and health education. They ranked barriers to involvement and the five most frequently
reported were time, lack of awareness of opportunities to participate, lack of chances to volunteer, not being asked by the school, and perceptions that the curriculum did not encourage their involvement. Factors related to these barriers included a lack of knowledge about the material being taught and about what the child were learning at school. Winnail et al. concluded that schools and teachers must develop (a) effective ways to help parents understand the need for their involvement and (b) opportunities for their involvement, as well as more methods to increase involvement.

Traditionally, and in most schools today, teachers “claim the ground that is school, and design and enact policies, procedures, programs, schedules, and routines for the children of the community” (Pushor 2007 p. 10). Teachers use their professional education and knowledge to claim this space and become the decision makers, oftentimes without input from the parents. This is a dynamic that has implications for creating or maintaining interactions between parents and teachers. If the parent-teacher relationship was more of a partnership, it might look more like a friendship or a business relationship in which there can be mutual reciprocity and relatively similar levels of resources. Some partnerships, however, do involve the domineering pattern of one person over another and this may not be ideal for the parent teacher relationship. In some cases, parents and teachers may bring equal resources to the encounter and these resources should be recognized. If that happens, both parties can take the lead and they can work together to ensure that everyone’s needs are met in satisfactory ways. This did not seem to be the case for the teachers I interviewed in this study. Pushor (personal communication, Sept. 30, 2008) states that teacher “professionalism is used as a boundary to keep parents out, something to hide behind.” This may be the case with the teachers I interviewed in this study; they may be using their professionalism to try to negotiate boundaries between
themselves and parents. There is more to be learned about how teachers and parents interact and why they act as they do. Are parents frustrated because they are sometimes shut out of schools and classrooms? Are teachers frustrated because parents do not give them information that they need? These are questions that further study might examine.

The way that parents and teachers communicate offers insight into the way the partnership plays out in practice. The literature on parent involvement misses a crucial aspect of parent-teacher interaction that explains how the relationship is not a true partnership. One recent study by McGrath (2007) found that among 13 mothers of 2 year olds who attended a child-care facility, the trust between teacher and parent generated was a “forced trust.” McGrath gathered personal, in-depth perceptions from mothers based on interviews, observations, and informal interactions. McGrath found that mothers trusted teachers because there was an immediate need for them to obtain information from the teachers. The teachers in this study reported lack of trust of the mothers because they would sometimes contact the school director directly, rather than speaking to them first. Though more researchers are paying attention to parent involvement, they are not addressing how communication occurs nor does the research unpack the type of partnership that really exists between parents and teachers. The existent literature does not sufficiently explore how teachers set the terms for relationships with parents or what affect that has on the relationships between parents and teachers. We need to study the parent-teacher relationship as a two way process, with recognition that teachers have power as to how and when communication occurs.
Solutions to Overcome Barriers to Parent Involvement

Trotman (2001) stated that parents and teachers must interact to overcome misperceptions and barriers to parent involvement. This author reported that teachers must urge parents to be active in the school process. To assist with this goal, the teacher must develop a case history of the family to determine barriers to involvement and strategies to overcome them. Rapport with parents must be established with positive communication. For example, teachers can allow parents to become the authority by asking their advice about their children’s development and interests. Parents must not be judged, and they must be sought as collaborators in the teaching process.

The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (2004) presented recommendations for parents to increase their involvement in their children’s education in the home:

1. Talk with your child about what happens at school every day. Ask often if there are messages from the school.
2. Spend some relaxed time with your children. Share a meal or a snack. Tell them often what you like about them.
3. Listen to and share their worries. Support what you believe to be good about the school and offer your help to change any school practices that you believe could be harmful to your child.
4. Avoid scolding and arguments when your teenagers bring bad news home.
5. Listen to their reasons and offer your help to improve the situation. It helps if your children know you believe they will be successful.
6. Value their education by encouraging homework and reading.
7. Help your children choose a good time and place to do their assignments and special projects.

8. Provide the necessary materials and give them your unconditional support.

(p.2)

Parents with middle school children need to consider the following (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2004):

1. Get to know several teachers, not just one. Don’t wait for a problem to talk to them.

2. Keep in touch with the guidance counselors. They generally know all of the students in the school, and they can keep you informed regarding the progress and behavior of your child.

3. Read all information on school policies and curriculum carefully. Normally, schools send this information home at the beginning of the school year.

4. Review your child’s school records each year. It is your right, and you should know what information is in the file.

5. Keep informed about your child’s grades and test results, especially in any subjects in which he or she has problems. Ask for help if it is needed.

6. Request periodic meetings with the teachers. If you don’t speak or understand English, ask for a translator or bring a bilingual friend or family member with you. Request information concerning programs that the school offers for students with limited English proficiency. Be sure your child is placed in the program that best meets his or her needs.

7. Get to know other parents and form support groups to work on problems and
issues of mutual interest.

8. Answer notes and other correspondence the school sends. If you do not understand these messages due to language problems, ask the principal to send them to you in the language you understand. (p.3)

Parent Involvement and Student Academic Success

Many studies have identified a positive relationship between parent involvement and student academic success (Chistenson, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Drummond, & Stipek, 2004; Epstein, 1994; Fan & Chen, 2001; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Epstein (1994) found that six types of involvement can guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive program of partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home, with potentially important results for students, parents, and teachers. For instance, students can become more aware of the importance of school develop, a positive attitude toward schoolwork, and develop an awareness of careers and options for future education and work (Epstein, 1994). Parents can become aware of their child as a learner, which would help them to respond effectively to their child’s problems. Also, parents can interact with other families in community activities. Teachers become aware of families’ backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and their views of their children. Teachers communicate clearly in the school-family partnership (Epstein, 1994).

It is well established that parental involvement is correlated with the school achievement of both children and adolescents (Long, 2007; Rich, 1987). Elementary school children gain greater academic, language, and social skills (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994), middle and high school students have greater achievement and future
aspirations (Eccles & Harold, 1993) and spend more time doing and completing homework (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Research shows that parental involvement is more important to children’s academic success than their family’s socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, or educational background (Amatea & West, 2007; Henderson & Berla, 1994).

When examining the literature review conducted by Henderson and Mapp (2002), a number of studies pointed to a relationship between student-community interaction and improved school performance. Studies concluded that students with involved parents, no matter what income level or background, are more likely to have success in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Henderson and Mapp’s (2002) research was organized into three broad categories that reviewed: (a) the impact of family and community involvement on student achievement; (b) effective strategies connecting schools, families, and community; and (c) parent and community organizing to improve schools. Outcomes reported in this research review included; higher grade point averages and scores on standardized tests or rating scales, enrollment in more challenging academic programs, more classes passed and credits earned, better attendance, improved behavior at home and at school, better social skills and adaptations to school. Results of parent, family, and community organizing contribute to: upgraded school facilities, improved school leadership and staffing, higher quality learning programs for students, new resources and programs to improve teaching and curriculum, new findings for after-school programs and family supports. This research clearly shows that school programs that emphasize family involvement have students who outperform those in schools lacking effective parent involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).
Zellman and Waterman (1998) found that parent involvement in children's education appears to be associated with a range of positive outcomes for elementary school children including fewer behavior problems, lower dropout rates, and higher student achievement. Zellman and Waterman (1998) investigated the impact of parenting styles and enthusiasm on children's cognitive and emotional outcomes. They examined a small number of families from two public elementary schools in one school district, three public elementary schools in a second district, and a private school with an ethnically diverse student body. Their findings, when controlled for child IQ, SES, and ethnicity, showed a higher level of reported parent school involvement associated with better test scores in reading and teacher ratings of fewer learning problems (Zellman & Waterman, 1998).

An increasingly multidisciplinary body of research supports the assertion that parents' attitudes, behaviors, and activities, as related to children's education influence students' learning and educational success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) theory suggests that a parent's involvement is motivated by two belief systems: role construction for involvement and a sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school. Parental role construction includes a sense of personal or shared responsibility for the child's educational outcomes and concurrent beliefs about whether one should be engaged in supporting the child's learning and school success. Parental sense of efficacy for helping a child succeed in school includes the belief that personal actions will help the child learn (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis to synthesize the quantitative literature about the relationship between parent involvement and student academic
achievement. The findings revealed a small to moderate, and meaningful, relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). In this analysis, the parental aspirations/expectations for children’s education achievement had the strongest relationship with students’ academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001).

In a study conducted by Grolnick and Benjet (1997), a multilevel model of parental context was combined with a multidimensional conceptualization of parent involvement to examine the factors influencing parents’ involvement in their children’s schooling. Three sets of factors were identified: parent and child characteristics, family context, and teacher behavior and attitudes. A diverse sample of 209 mothers, their third to fifth grade children, and 28 teachers participated. Parents, teachers, and children reported on three types of involvement: school, cognitive, and personal. Mothers who felt efficacious, who saw their roles as that of teacher, and who viewed their children as less difficult were more involved in cognitive activities (Grolnick & Benjet, 1997).

Parental involvement affects student achievement because the interactions affect students’ motivation, their sense of competence, and the belief that they have control over their success in school (Grolnick & Benjet, 1997).

Miedel and Reynolds (1999) gave further evidence of the long-term relationship between parent involvement and student achievement. The authors interviewed 704 low-income parents of eighth graders about their involvement when their children were in preschool and kindergarten (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). All the students were part of the long-term Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS). The authors found that the more activities parents reported taking part in, the better their children did in reading, the more likely they were to be promoted to the next grade, and the less likely they were to need special
education services (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). The parents’ reports were confirmed by separate teacher ratings of parent involvement.

Miedel and Reynolds (1999) pointed out three implications of their work. Parent involvement is an important component of successful early intervention and should be emphasized in both new and established programs. Implementing early parent involvement programs can promote future family-school relations and a successful transition to first grade. Parent involvement programs can be a protective factor in overcoming risk conditions such as poverty, which lead to low achievement (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

The authors also found that involved parents may not be able to increase children’s IQ scores but they can monitor their children’s educational progress and intervene when their children get into trouble at school. This can prevent grade retention, placement in special education, or both. Parents may be able to stop the cycle of school failure by intervening when their child begins to falter (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

Conclusion

Parent involvement has been shown to be important when it comes to student development and achievement (Wright & Willis, 2004). Study findings support the ideas that family structure, poverty, and lack of parental education are related to poor student achievement (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b). Legal sanctions focus on increasing parent involvement (Desimone, 2002; Osborne & de Onis, 1999; Trotman, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2002a, 2002b). Parent involvement effects have been evaluated. Mattingly et al. (2002) stated that research findings are inconclusive, and
this may be due to problems with study designs and analytical flaws. Studies are not consistent in their definitions of parental involvement, and they may fail to consider moderating factors that affect outcomes. Lopez (2001) pointed out the importance of considering all types of parent involvement.

Sheldon (2002) found that child gender and grade level were not factors in parent involvement, and Trotman (2001) noted that there are differences in types of parent involvement that vary within and between cultures.

Educators must understand barriers to parent involvement (i.e. family structure, parent education level, and race) at all grade levels (Epstein & Jansom, 2004; Trotman, 2001).
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to explore if the needs of minority Latino parents are met in an urban Saturday program. Four research questions guided the study.

1. What are some of the experiences parents encountered when coming to Saturday program?

2. What type of courses will increase the participation of parents in the school?

3. To what extent do parent involvement programs benefit the community and education in general?

4. What are some of the parent involvement practices the program participants use to contribute to the Saturday program’s growth?

This chapter presents the methodology that was used for the focus groups and individual interviews in the study. The perceptions of the informants provided information as to what they perceived to be of importance when attending a Saturday program at their children’s school. The chapter was divided into five sections: (a) Overview of Research Design, (b) Participants, (c) Instruments, (d) Data Collection and (e) Treatment of the Data

Overview of Research Design

This research investigated a program in a New Jersey school that represented a non-conventional approach to parent involvement of minority parents in their children’s education. Interviewees were community members, staff, minority parents, and children
who attended a Saturday program in one school. The families came to the program to increase their job skills and to improve academics and English communication skills.

Focus group research methodology was selected for the first stage of the research design. Three focus groups were organized with 10 participants in each group. Group A was composed of parents who attended the Saturday program. Group B consisted of staff that worked for the Saturday program, and Group C was composed of students (18 and older) who also attended the Saturday program. The purpose of this methodology was to answer the four research questions.

After all three focus groups were completed, 25 participants were selected randomly in the district to be interviewed in order to gather in-depth information. The informants were divided into five categories: parent, staff, student, community members, and support staff. The participants all had been participating in the program for at least 1 year. Each participant was interviewed for at least 2 hours, and all the data gathered was audio tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Furthermore, to examine in more depth the reasons that program participants attended the Saturday program, attendance data for 4 years were reviewed and analyzed to identify the classes that were well attended. During the course of the program, surveys were distributed and reviewed to make program improvement recommendations, and changes were made. Attendance records would provide information about the growth of the Saturday program from year to year.

Location of Study

The program studied is located in an urban district in central New Jersey. The
study focused on the Saturday program that was founded in 1992, serving both students and their families. The goal of the program is to involve all members of the family in the learning process and strengthen the family unit. The program keeps families together while they are learning. Classes are provided for their varied needs and tastes, thus there were opportunities for children and adults to learn new skills and enjoy learning as well.

The Saturday program is offered at no cost to the families. The only requirement is that one adult family member be registered and accompany the child to every Saturday morning session. Parents from the neighboring communities are invited to attend on Saturday mornings from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

The parents attend classes to study English as a second language, and there are other classes offered in some areas as computers, arts and crafts, parenting, literacy, babies and books, and citizenship. Young children learn math, receive tutoring, study about health, science, ecology, and learn how to read using the computers. Adolescents participate as staff assistants and develop leadership by directing and attending to young children in the various activities provided during outings.

The program seeks to hire teachers from diverse backgrounds. This allowed them to relate to minority students as instructors and mentors. However, there are non-minority staff and staff members who do not speak Spanish. Students have the opportunity to relate to minority teachers and see them as role models. Organized class enable parents and children to learn together in their individual areas of interests. The issue of childcare is very important to parents and has been noted as an element for a successful program. The availability of classes in areas that are of interest to parents, such as English as a Second Language, encourage more participation in the program. Classes are held for
adults and their children during a 2 ½ hour schedule.

Teachers and paraprofessionals work in the Saturday program. During the week, the staff work at the same elementary school at which the program is held, or at surrounding schools in the district. Volunteers serve various capacities, such as facilitators for teaching and seminars on different community issues. The advisory board consists of representatives from various community organizations, such as industry, higher learning institutions, and administrators of an elementary school as well as school staff members and parents. They board assist in managing and supervising the program.

Funding for the program comes from both public and private sources. Public funds come from the after-school program budget and a federally funded 21st century community learning center program. The federal government provided funds to district to develop and implement after-school and extended-school programs. Private donations come from different corporate sponsors. Also, the school sponsors fundraising activities that included, but were not limited to, an annual awards dinner-dance. At this event, a high school senior who had participated in the Saturday program for more than 3 years is awarded a one-time $1,000.00 scholarship to assist with future college tuition. A duly appointed committee, which often included a board of education member, administered a fair and equitable selection process for this award. During the year, surveys are completed to assess the needs of the parents and the quality of the classes provided. Modifications to the program are made based on this feedback.

Participants

The unit of analysis is participants who attended the Saturday program and who
were involved in the development and implementation of the program. The sample for this study consisted of: (a) 3 focus groups, and (b) 25 individual interviews. The total sample size was 30 participants who took part in three focus groups and 25 individuals who were interviewed. Some of the participants for the individual interviews were also included in the focus groups.

The participants in the study are guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality in writing by the researcher, who conducted the qualitative research interviews according to the training received in this area. The informants' participation was completely voluntary and any of the informants could refuse to participate or choose to discontinue their participation at any given time. The focus group participants were: (a) 10 staff members who had worked in the program at least 1 year; (b) 10 parents who attended the program for 1 year; and (c) 10 students who attended the program.

Twenty five individuals were selected for individual interviews that would provide the data used to answer Research Question 1, 2, 3 and 4. Five parents who had attended the Saturday program for more than 1 year. They provided data with regard to Research Question 1. Five staff members and five support staff members who had been teaching in the program for more than 1 year. Their responses gave the study information about Research Question 2. Five community members who were currently involved in the Saturday program gave the information related to Research Question 3. Five students who were graduates from high school and had participated in the program for more than 1 year. They responded to Research Question 4.

The selection of the sample was not been done at random. The participants were chosen following the criterion for selection established for this study. The selection
criterion required attendance at the Saturday program for at least a year or participation in the implementation or the development of the Saturday program for at least 1 year. By requiring that interviewees were involved with the program at least 1 year. I was confident that they were thoroughly familiar with the program, the classes and the mission of the program. This was to maximize the accuracy of responses. Letters of invitation were sent to potential participants of the Saturday program. Code numbers were used to protect participants’ confidentiality. Participants were informed of the measurement to insure confidentiality both verbally and as part of the Permission/Consent form (see Appendix A).

Instruments

The first instrument used was an interview protocol that was formulated to address the four research questions. This interview protocol was developed by myself and an outside person that had experience conducting focus groups. This was done because of conflict of interest. The university mentor reviewed the questions before they were approved. This was done to reduce bias and to gather accurate information. Various meetings were held between I and the moderator (the outside person who has experience conducting focus groups). Four primary questions were developed and asked during each focus group. Additional questions were formulated based upon the responses obtained in the focus groups to obtain even greater details. The following are the four primary questions based on the four Research Questions that were asked of members of all three focus groups.

Can you tell me why you attend/work the program?
Can you describe how you would change the program?

Can you tell me what you have learned as a result of your participation in the program?

What can you tell me about the Saturday program?

A second instrument, a qualitative interview or an ethnographic interview, was also used following (Spradley, 1979). The participants interviewed were involved in the program more than one year in the program. A set of five primary questions was asked to all participants. These questions were developed from the common responses received from the focus groups. These questions were developed by an outside person who was familiar with the process of interviews; this was done to ensure that response were objective. These interviews were conducted using: (a) the standardized interview, which begins with the assumption that the interviewers do not know the questions in advance, so they cannot predetermine fully a list of questions to ask; and (b) the semi-standardized interview, which uses systematic and ordered questions but permits freedom to digress (Berg, 1998).

The major intention of this study was to investigate the participants' perceptions with regard to their participation in the Saturday program. The informants were divided into five categories: parent, staff, student, community members, and support staff. The following are some examples of the individual interview questions.

Parent

Why did you decide to participate in the Saturday program?

Can you tell me how the program relates to your children's interests?

Can you tell me some of the things your child tells you about the program?
Give me examples of classes that you have taken in this program.
Can you describe how has attending this program helped you?

Teachers and Support Staff
Why did you decide to work in the Saturday program?
Is teaching in the Saturday program different from your teaching responsibilities during the week? If yes, how would you describe the difference?
What personal satisfaction do you get from teaching in the Saturday program?
What do you think motivates the parents and students to participate in the Saturday program?
Can you describe what makes the program different?

Student
Tell me something about yourself.
Why do you come to the Saturday program?
Is coming to school on Saturday the same as going to school during the week?
Can you describe why children like coming to the Saturday program?
Can you describe why do you enjoy coming to school with your family?

Community Members
Tell me something about yourself.
How did you hear about the Saturday program?
Can you describe why do you participate in the Saturday program?

Data Collection
The primary focus of the data collection was to learn what factors influenced
parents' decisions to attend a parental involvement program, and to learn the reasons why parents attended the program. The interviews allowed access to the informants' descriptions and perceptions about parent school involvement (Patton, 1990).

The focus group interviews typically lasted about 2 hours and they were conducted by a moderator who served as a research assistant and maintained the group's focus. The interviews were taped and transcribed. The three focus groups were composed of parents, staff, and students. The expectation was that the research would identify the elements needed to meet the needs of minority families in parental involvement programs.

Individual interviews were conducted with 25 participants in the Saturday program. The numbers for each category depended upon which participants would be available for individual interviews at the time. Due to work and location, it was impossible to interview all 30 subjects who participated in the focus groups. However, it was important to examine the perceptions of participants in the program who were not available at the time the focus group were conducted.

The review of attendance data consisted of an analysis of the attendance records of the Saturday programs for the past 4 years. Consistency in attendance, class choices, and the growth of participation for each year were examined.

Treatment of the Data

The interview responses identified common themes and patterns that were catalogued into broad categories of information. The individual interviews revealed the number of times that each theme appears (Spradley, 1979). From the informants
responses four domains were identified: school environment, curriculum, self-development, and program improvement. The analysis of the data provided understanding results that were use answer the question of why parents, students, and staff attended the Saturday program.

Attendance records from the past 4 years were examined for individual consistency in attendance. This examination led to the development of three categories, (a) parents who participated in the program, (b) students who participated in the program, and (c) total number of participants who attended the program.

An increase in participation is an element of a successful program. Various tables showed consistency in attendance for 4 years of the program from 1998-2003. These years were chosen randomly.

Summary

The methodology was developed to address the four research questions that guided the study. Three focus groups were formed consistently of 10 staff, 10 parents and 10 students, respectively, the three focus groups allowed me to inquire about common domains that all participants recognized. From these common domains, questions were developed by an outside person who had experience in working with focus groups and conducting individual interviews. Twenty-five individual interviews were conducted as with five parents, five staff members, five support staff members, and five students.

Four common domains were identified and explored in depth with the individual interviews. The results of the individual interviews allowed me to formulate findings that would be used to address the hypotheses of the study.
Chapter IV

RESULTS

This chapter provides the results of the study from informants who participated in focus groups and individual interviews. The reports of the informants revealed what they perceived to be of importance when participating in a Saturday program in an urban school district. The chapter is divided into three sections: Focus Groups, Individual Interviews, and Program Participation and Attendance.

Overview of Results

The purpose of the study was to explore if the needs of minority parents are met in a family involvement program. This study concentrated on four research questions as follows:

1. What are some experiences parents encountered when coming to a Saturday program?

2. What type of courses will increase the participation of parents in school?

3. To what extent do parent involvement programs benefit the community and education in general?

4. What are some of the parent involvement practices the program participants use to contribute to the Saturday program’s growth?

The researcher answered the four questions and identified the domains that affected the attendance of participants and the growth of a Saturday parental involvement program. Data was provided by the focus groups and the individual interviews. The study
welcome when they came into the schools. This environment facilitated establishing relationships that helped to keep them in the parental involvement programs. From the responses of the participants research question 1 was answered: What are some experiences parent encountered when coming to a Saturday program?

**Domain 2: Curriculum**

A survey is given at the end of each semester about what and how educators teach. Participants asked, "Are educators teaching students enough for them to be the future work force? Are they bringing into their classrooms activities that can prepare students to work in society today?" There was a need to constantly assess and analyze the results of surveys to make curriculum attractive, and at the same time, teach to the students’ needs. It should be noted that the curriculum is driven by the State Core Curriculum Content Standards. However, unless students enjoy what they are learning, they will not focus or retain the necessary skills to pass the High School Proficiency Test (HSPT). The responses of the participants answered the second research question of the study: What type of courses will increase the participation of parents in the school?

**Domain 3: Self-Development**

The key to parental participation, as determined from the interviews, was that parents needed to see and experience how their involvement was directly connected to their growth, as well as their children’s growth. When parents were able to see that the time they were taking away from the home routine was beneficial to themselves and their
childrens, they were more willing to come to school. Participants also discussed how the community was involved and how extra resources were obtained because of their participation. It was perceived as something positive. This information answered the third question of the study: To what extend do parent involvement programs benefit the community and education in general?

Domain 4: Program Improvement

According to the informants, there is no perfect program. The interview data suggest that a positive component for a program would be constant evaluation needed to assess the needs of the participants. As mentioned previously, one of the concerns of the Saturday program was not only to increase attendance but also retain students. The results suggest that transportation, childcare, school environment, and selection of courses had a significant impact on family programs. The informants answered Research Question 4: What are some of the parent involvement practices the program participants use to contribute to the Saturday program’s growth?

Introduction to Focus Groups

The findings for the focus groups are divided by category of participant: Group 1 was staff; Group 2 was parents; and Group 3 was students.

Informants expressed that they did not know how to go about teaching their children because they lacked English language skills or academic skills. Parents were very pleased that the school took the initiative to teach them what they needed to learn in
order to help their children at home.

Focus Groups

A focus group approach created an open environment that allowed different points of view and perceptions to be aired within the context of a carefully planned discussion. Reasons for participation in the Saturday program were identified using the focus group interviews.

Focus Group 1: Staff

Domain 1: School Environment

Staff informants felt that they were relaxed, able to be creative, and enjoyed their work. They stated that young students, as well as adults, had a variety of courses from which to choose. The staff attributed the success of a program to the freedom students had to choose courses, their self-motivation, a non-threatening environment, teamwork, and the knowledge that participants had ownership of the program. Other reasons were that participants were able to express their opinions, make suggestions, and have them implemented. The staff stated that participants felt as though they were part of a family. This was an indication that the program environment was a positive. Therefore, the program had the flexibility and creativity to maintain the participants' attendance in the program.
come in and work with the teachers. So we have a different perspective of what’s going on out ‘in the business world within the educational field’ (Informant 3).

There were benefits to inviting college students to come in and perform community service, according to the informants. Participating college students were able to build their self-esteem and character. The following were comments made by a staff informant:

My own son was a volunteer, and it showed him how to do volunteer work. It showed how to give of yourself. Well you have to teach a child that everything isn’t for money. That you have to give of yourself to a community. Whether it is your community or another community. It’s very important. Whether you work in a hospital, or whether you work in a school. Whatever the service, it’s very important. More people would be better off if we all gave community service. (Informant 2)

According to staff responses, they viewed education as a long journey that never stops, but occasionally needs to be refueled. The range of age groups participating in the program allowed the participants to see that all students, regardless of age, could learn something that would benefit them in the long run.

Domain 4: Program Improvement

Staff informants mentioned that they had the power to change the program by suggesting ideas to improve the program. This was their opportunity to give their opinions. As informants mentioned throughout the surveys, there is no perfect program, and this is why it is important to be able to change according to the needs of the participants.

Data gathered suggest an answer Research Question 2: What type of courses will
increase the participation of parents in the school? If teachers and staff are able to teach to students' interests, then students and families are more likely to attend a program. They are learning something to which they can relate and use in the future, and at the same time is enjoyable to them.

In conclusion, when teachers are given the flexibility to develop their own curriculum and are allowed to use their creativity in the classroom, parents, as well as students, learn more effectively. Also, findings suggest that a curriculum needs to be related closely to real-life situations. Students need to be able to identify the relevance of what they are learning.

Focus Group 2: Parents

Parents perceived their involvement in the program as a way to improve their lifestyle by developing job skills. It was a way to unite them with their own families. They believed that a family that learned together grew together. The parents also indicated that the diversity of the participants attending the program allowed them to become more sensitive to others and to expand their knowledge of different cultures.

Domain 1: School Environment

Parents who were interviewed unanimously agreed that they felt welcome in the school, and they were gaining something that would improve their quality of life. The parents indicated that diversity was an advantage to the program. They were able to learn from each other about different cultures and become more sensitive to each other. A
parent explained:

I think that the different cultures, from the different countries are beneficial for all because one could learn art, including foods, music and many more other things from a culture. Then it is very important because you will raise your own knowledge and future, you get deeper knowledge. What I think is very important is to have people from different cultures. (Informant 9)

**Domain 2: Curriculum**

According to parents, the curriculum, (the second domain), was flexible and met the needs of the students. The parents indicted that the Saturday school was different from the school during the week because they saw students earning good grades and focusing more on their studies. Also, since students came with their parents, the students were more focused on what they were learning.

Parents realized that attending classes was necessary if they wanted to improve their lives as well as the lives of member of their families. Also, parents mentioned that their classes met their needs. Participants were pleased that the teachers understood that they were not native speakers and used their language for instruction whenever possible.

**Domain 3: Self-Development**

Self-development was another important domain that was identified. Parents indicated that attending with their family united them. They thought that they were becoming closer to each other. Also, the data suggested that, through the program children gained more respect to their parents.

The parents said that the program developed their job skills, thereby allowing
them to improve their family’s financial situation. A parent commented:

I think that the program helps us expand in different areas, in the job, looking for improvements. It helps us with our families, in this case with my kids, can now converse with them, and I can also be a guide for them. I work for the State (of NJ), and they recognize me for my knowledge, computing, accounting. They know that I didn’t speak English very well, but I write it perfectly. I won (taking tests) over all of them including Americans. They placed me in a low salary because of the English, but they pay courses for me to go to school, and to take courses to keep on progressing. My boss, she said that I am speaking more English and that in July she was going to give me a promotion as a supervisor, this thanks to coming here every Saturday. (Informant 9)

Domain 4: Program Improvement

The fourth domain, program improvement, refers to the constant assessment of the participants’ needs as well as matching curriculum to needs, matching curriculum to participants needs, and the upgrading of knowledge and skills for all families. A parent commented: “Because they want each person to be comfortable in the program, not because they want you in that program. You are the one to choose where you want to go” (Informant 7).

Data from the parents’ focus group helped to answer Research Question 4: What are some of the parent involvement practices the program uses to contribute to the Saturday program’s growth? Childcare was an obstacle that had to be considered by the perspective staff. Offering childcare services to the participants was a significant incentive. Thinking of the whole family is what makes parent involvement programs successful. The retention and the growth of participants the program from year to year is an indication that the program is successful; that the program is meeting its goal.

Obstacles that parents encountered in coming to a parental involvement program were
taken into consideration when making improvements from semester to semester. One informant mentioned that at the end of each semester, surveys were filled out to help staff better understand the needs of the participants.

In conclusion, perceptions were identified from the parents' focus group interviews. The parents felt that diversity was an advantage to the program. They were able to learn from each other about different cultures, and they became more sensitive to each other. Parents realized that attending classes was a necessity if they wanted to improve their lives as well as the lives of their family members. Parents felt that attending with their family united them. They became closer to each other. They felt that they were growing together. It also gave children more respect for their parents. Offering childcare services to the participants was an effective incentive. Thinking of the whole family is what makes parent involvement programs successful.

Focus Group 3: Students

The students held a common perception: Attending the Saturday program kept them off the streets. It was a place where they could go and not get into trouble. The school was a place where they could improve their skills and increase their career awareness through practical experiences.

Domain 1: School Environment

The program on Saturday was different from other programs in the district because it was based on what the students wanted to learn, and it was conducted in an
informants often mentioned that if interesting courses were offered, they would attend the classes. They mentioned Reading Through Cooking as a good example for teaching reading, which is a content area that students in the group do not like. However, when reading is integrated with cooking, it becomes more engaging. Students learned how to read a recipe, and at the same time, they are learning a lifelong skill. This is the key. Giving the students what they want and combining it with academics is a better way of learning. Courses need to be life connected and students need to see the connection.

Basketball was another course in which academics were integrated with reading, particularly at half-time. Students needed to read a sports article and write about it.

In conclusion, several perceptions were identified in the student focus group interviews. Program participation were viewed as helping adolescents off the street and out of trouble, and it gave them a place to practice basketball. Interaction with students of different ages was possible. Basketball playing kept them in shape, in addition to allowing them to improve their sports and academic skills.

The program developed physical as well as intellectual skills. It helped students to become more independent by learning how to cook and how to work out their problems. It taught them new things, such as cooking. It opened job opportunities, and it made them aware of more career opportunities. It developed leadership skills. They learned how to work with groups and manage their personal lives more effectively by attending counseling sessions. It was educational, and at the same time, it was interesting because they could choose the course that they wanted to attend.

It connected the academic world to the real world. According to informants,
participation in the program developed a more humanitarian and social side of the students. They learned to help others in need through community service.

Domain 3: Self-Development

The third domain identified was self-development. Students indicated that volunteering in the program provided them with an opportunity to feel good about helping others. The following are comments from some of the students who volunteered their time to the program.

Well, I would like to become a surgeon, but I was thinking about becoming a teacher if I didn't get into medical school I would like to become a bio teacher. So I think that I'll take courses to see if I can do it. (Informant 7)

Well, I have to say the first time I came here I was really amazed with myself. Quite honestly I think maybe it was partly because I got ... I thought originally we were going to work with children... and when I was trying to teach kids like math. They weren't just ... at it, they were very good at it. That was something that really amazed me, and then helping them out with the ... I left with a really good feeling. It's just one of those things I like that feeling, and so it's one of those things that I'm willing to do. I like doing it, and it's kind of enjoyable. So you know, I'll go out there and do it. (Informant 5)

I love helping people. I love doing service. Community service for anyone, and it's also for me. When I help someone it makes me feel good, because whether it's tutoring math. I mean I know I understand math. So that makes me feel good. So I don't need anyone to say, "thank you." It's for me, and I'm glad I can help people. If I can, I should. (Informant 10)

Domain 4: Program Improvement

The students made the following comments when asked on ways they would improve the program.

I would try to be in contact with other different schools, like have them compete and have like practice every Sunday. Then the following next Saturday, or
Sunday we're have a different game or a practice. (Informant 5)

I would put more activities besides basketball, maybe baseball or football. I would put that into the program, and that will bring in different people that don't necessarily would like to play basketball, but will like to play other sports. They could come in and socialize with everybody else. (Informant 6)

Another student explained that transportation is an issue because the New Jersey Transit bus schedule sometimes does not follow the program schedule. Therefore, her recommendation was to repeat some of the classes for which there is high interest during different times of the day. Another recommendation that students mentioned was bringing more college volunteers to share their college experience and to encourage students to attend college.

Summary of Focus Group Results

After the three focus groups were completed, it was evident that informants shared common views. I identified four domains that emerged in all three focus groups: school environment, curriculum, self-development, and program improvement. The research questions were also answered. Therefore, I decided to complete 25 individual interviews in order to explore perceptions in greater depth.

Individual Interviews

Introduction

Interviewees provided insight on the four domains and various factors that were identified for each domain. Domain 1 factors (school environment factors that affected the growth of a parental program) were identified as the building of relationships, the
retention and recruitment of staff, an effective teaching and learning environment, and strong leadership. Domain 2 (curriculum) factors were identified as program assessment, delivery of instruction, and connecting Saturday classes to Monday through Friday classes. Domain 3 (self-development) factors were identified as personal growth, self-confidence, job opportunities, and role models. Domain 4 (opportunities for improvement) factors were identified as weaknesses, length of school day, weather, transportation, and variety of classes. Participants gave personal accounts of how these domains were addressed in the program.

Informants were each assigned a code for confidentiality as follows: teachers, Informants 1-5; parents, Informants 6-10; students, Informants 11-15; support staff, Informants 16-20; and community members, Informants 21-25.

Individual Interview Results

Domain 1: School Environment

Domain 1, school environment, represents various factors that affected the growth of the parental program. They were identified as the building of relationships, the retention and recruitment of staff, an effective teaching and learning environment, and strong leadership. Information from the participants related to the domain, helped to answer the first research question: What are some of the experiences parents encountered when coming to a Saturday program?
week it’s so hectic, because you have, you get up, you got to work. They go to school, they come home, and they do their homework. Being teenagers, they’re into their own little world. On Saturday it was much different. Saturdays we were able to get up together, have breakfast together. After the program was over, sometimes we would have lunch. (Informant 3, p. 4)

According to staff informants, one thing that programs were missing was a way of maintaining the close relationship between children and parents. Districts do not develop programs that involve children attending with the parents. It is very difficult for parents to find a place where they can leave their children, so that they can go to a program at school.

According to staff informants, academics are not always important. Sometimes parents need to have another part of their lives nourished, the social side. The parents who attended the program were recent immigrants. They had little time to meet other people. Therefore, the program was an opportunity, an avenue, to meet different people. In addition, they had the opportunity to practice their English.

The parents shared their success stories with their teachers. They were able to meet others parents in class who offered to be their babysitter and care for their children if they needed to go out with their spouse. Parents were able to meet a new friend or build relationships with others. For them, it was like having an extended family and a place where they could develop new relationships.

Finally, one of the staff informants said that parents were motivated because of their strong desire to improve their English-language skills. Another appealing element
was that the Saturday program offered breakfast. It was an incentive they could not pass up. They were also motivated to speak more in English once they were all having breakfast together. The family ate breakfast together and after 30 minutes they dispersed to their own classes. Breakfast turned out to be a much needed socialization activity between children and parents because, during the week, the family did not eat together.

According to staff, the parents were immigrants who did not know English. Therefore, one of the main factors in the lack of communication between parents and teachers is the language barriers. Parents wanted to feel welcome in the school that their children attended. A teacher spoke about her experiences when coming to this country and not speaking the language and how difficult it was for her. That was why she felt that communication with her students’ parents was a priority in her class. This was the reality for the staff members if the parent’s first language was not English. The staff was more sensitive to parents because of their own personal experiences as immigrants.

Teachers were sensitive to parents in this situation, and this reduced parents’ concerns that an insensitive person would be taking care of their child. This was the reason the staff needed to know the children’s language and culture. To build a better relationship with parents in an urban district where the majority of the parents speak a language other than English, it was important for the staff to have some knowledge of their language.

According to staff informants, the teachers who saw the advantages of having parents involved had more parents come to school. However, some of the staff informants indicated this was not the case at other schools. They saw parents as more of a
problem because they asked questions, and these teachers felt that they did not have the
time to talk to them or explain the student’s work. However, the teachers who did spend
time with parents made a significant difference in the students’ academic outcomes for
that school year. This is an important finding that illustrates that parents need to be
included in their children’s learning process. A holistic approach to education was taking
place in the classes. The emotional and academic boosts occurred together when if
children saw that their parents were working with the teacher as a team. Learning would
not stop at school; it could actually continue at home. The children gained so much more
when the parents felt that they were contributing to their children’s success in school.

Finally, staff informants indicated that this program brought everybody together.

One teacher informant stated:

I would probably say that the Saturday program provides skills, learning skills
that a parent can learn to help their child. It brings the community together. It’s a
fun program. Like I say, even though we do academics it is also fun. It’s a close
family. Everyone gets along well. They just need to come to the program and see
for themselves how well the program runs. People just come in. We have new
staff members that come in and they’re hooked, they’re here. They stay. Oh! I’ll
be here just one semester and they’re here the next semester. So it’s program
that brings everyone together. (Informant 3, p. 19)

Building relationships according to parents.

According to parents, building relationships was one of the most important
characteristics of the program. This program provided the opportunity for this
relationship building by having parents come to school with their children.

Parents in the study indicated that they realized their children’s progress was due
to their involvement. Also, parents were very pleased to see that communication with
their children improved. They felt that attending classes helped them to communicate
effectively with them. As a parent informant explained,

Better communication, more, where they tell me a lot. Where before it was like, “Ah how was your day?” “Oh fine.” But now we’ve learned how to ask them in different ways, to show them that we do care. To also, to show to read with them while they’re doing homework. If we have the time to read something, with the newspaper, magazine, or whatever. So it’s taught all of us how to be a closer family. (Informant 5, p. 7)

A parent informant explained that her relationship with her child had improved because she was able to ask questions about his day immediately after the program. An informant explained,

I’ll pick up my child from at the end of the class in the cafeteria and everyone is so happy as we’re driving home in the car. Oh how did you spend your day, I’m getting all the news. Oh, it was fantastic, we did this. He really likes that Science program that the Rutgers kids help with. He really truly enjoys that. (Informant 8, p. 3)

Building relationships according to students.

The students mentioned that it was very difficult getting youth involved and having them stay for any length of time in extended school programs. However, this was not the case at the Saturday school because the students came voluntarily. Therefore, the students who attended did so because they were self-motivated and because the program offered something of interest to them. Information gathered from interviews with the students showed that the program helped improve their relationships with their parents.

A student stated that attending the program on Saturdays improved her relationship with her mother. They came to school together and, during their travels, they talked about things she did at school. She even tried making some of the recipes learned at the school. (At the time, she was attending a reading through cooking class.) Teachers recognized this class as enjoyable for students. The students did not realize that they
A student stated that attending Saturday classes helped her relationship with her sister. She stated that, during the week, they went to different schools but now, on Saturdays, they attended the same school. They had time to talk while they traveled to and from Saturday classes.

When one of the student informants was asked, “What do you see when you come to Saturday school?” She replied, “Kids coming in with their parents.” If the child is below fourth grade level, a parent must be present. This requirement motivates parents to come and help their children. The parent has to take the classes and learn, and as a result, the parent can then help the child. Additionally, parents may take an English class to help their children with homework. This interaction helps to bring families closer together. Furthermore, as a student informant explained, it brings friends closer. An informant explained,

Even during the during the week when I was doing childcare, we used to laugh and talk about, oh yeah! Remember when this happened and remember when this happened. It kind of gets us closer because we had to work with each other every Saturday, and we saw watch other during the week. So our friends are close because we had something to talk about, to bond on because of our experiences in the program. (Informant 12, p. 14)

*Building relationships according to support staff.*

According to support staff informants, when building relationships with parents, it is important to build a warm environment for parents and students. The Saturday program had classes, but it also had components that made parents comfortable, from a security guard to counselors working with parents on social issues and family concerns.
A support staff informant explained that he has seen an improvement in the involvement of parents, not only on Saturday, but during the week as well. He attributed this to building relationships with the school. He explained,

You see a lot of the parents getting more involved in not only programs with the Saturday school. After that they turn around they go onto other programs that we have here at night during our after-school programs. I see almost the same amount of parents that come for Saturday school get involved in our night programs. (Informant 19, p. 3)

Support staff informants mentioned that when participants came to school in the morning, the warmth of the relationship between student and staff was evident. An informant explained,

Well, I see a lot of the parents will come and maybe hug their teachers they had last semester. So that just shows how comfortable that they feel here. Their commitment to continue in the program. The children also show their affection by hugging, or coming up and showing, "This is my teacher," This is my teacher last semester." So they’re very proud, and the parents always have a very nice smile on their face because they know that we’re very accommodating here to their needs. (Informant 20, p.10)

Building relationships according to community support.

The community support informants’ perceptions were based on the components of the Saturday program and the positive feedback from the community. The Saturday program had a positive outlook. The program helped participants to develop relationships. One of the significant components of the Saturday program was that students were very clear on the mission of the program: strengthening the family unit. This, in turn, affected the outcome and the duration of the program.

According to the community support informants, the parent liaison is a key in facilitating parents to become involved in the school. This is a person who is in charge of developing programs that will attract parents. While it’s not the solution, attracting
However, it was clear throughout the study that when working within a larger urban district, the task of developing activities is much more difficult. In one school, the parent liaison needed to be visible, interacting with parents when they were dropping off their children and picking them up. This was an effective way to get to know the parents and advise them of activities that might be of interest. It was important to build a trusting relationship with parents. If parents became comfortable with the parent liaison, then the invitations to activities were welcome.

According to community members, people from the community seldom had a chance to see what happened in the schools. A characteristic that was important about the Saturday program was that it involved more than teachers, parents, and children. It included the community in the development of the program, allowing it to have ownership. When members of the community were invited to program activities, they had a special interest in attending activities. From the mayor to a bank president to a board member, community leaders were kept informed and involved. A community member informant explained,

I believe from a business point of view my interest was that the teachers here at the program know the educational part of it. As far as the business part of the world, business world, myself and some of the others that are involved I thought it was very important. So we get involved to show that the industry and education can work together. That’s one of the reasons why I’m still in it. I want to make sure that people know that the industry (if you got the right people), and the educational world you can work together on a program like this Saturday program. When I was growing up, we didn’t have anything like this. So you know, I come from a poor neighborhood and to get the exposure, for children to get exposure to the business world at a young age, I think it’s a big advantage for them. (Informant 23, p. 3)
Children were exposed to the business world in the Saturday program educators were building an environment that would enable students to take their skills out to the world of work. To do this, educators needed to build relationships with community members to foster collaboration for one common goal: to educate all. This was not only for students, but for parents as well. The Saturday program was an avenue for immigrants to learn about the advantages they had in their communities. When they participated on Saturday, they saw the president of their banking institution teaching a finance class. They also saw local business owners giving seminars to help parents. A community member informant explained,

Kids are like sponges at that age, and in this program they are thirsty for knowledge. It is very motivating atmosphere. It’s a very positive atmosphere. Everybody is very helpful and very much interested in making kids intellectually grow. These are special type of individuals. These are all volunteers. Nobody puts a gun to their heads to attend. So it is born within them to want to help others that perhaps are less fortunate, but perhaps they can benefit from the knowledge. So it’s very rewarding. It’s almost selfish to say this, but people that go there get as much as what they put into the system. (Informant 21, p. 3)

For businesses to be involved in education, they often need to examine what their profit would be. Some business volunteers did not seek a profit when coming to the school. They found other rewards. Volunteers who gave back to the community were recognized for their efforts and commitment in the community, and this had far-reaching results, such as more business involvement.

According to community member informants, more educators should develop programs for parent involvement. Schools recognized the need for collaborators, in part, because of the scarcity of funds that were available for introducing new parental programs such as these.
Informants stated that the Saturday program staff was aware of all of these issues. It made business and community contact one of its top priorities to assure community support through the implementation of programs at no cost to the participants of the Saturday program. As a community member informant stated, when dealing with the business environment, the question was, “What is in it for us?” The Saturday program was able to respond by providing opportunities for mentoring and developing job skills that would be advantageous for the community’s businesses.

The school administrator was able to convey clearly the message to potential supporters within the community. This was the reason for the community’s strong involvement in the program. One of the informants explained:

Well, the Saturday program was an interesting piece. I’ve seen an opportunity with two-folds. That there was a program that was starting; I believe it’s going to 11 years where it was a new school. Being director of recreation, you know, I like to spread all the recreation programs throughout the whole area of town. This was a different situation where my program from Office of Recreation. I have adult recreation, and I have children recreation. This was going to give me an opportunity of combining adults and children together, which I liked that idea. That was something new: a new vision that the director had, and I liked that idea a lot. I wanted to be a part of that, because that was something new, and something innovative that we didn’t have in the city. Usually all our recreation programs, all our programs in the city are geared for children do their things, or adolescents do their things, and adults. This gave an opportunity where you bring the families together, and do something together, whether it was doing something from an educational piece or recreational piece. I liked the concept, and I wanted to be part of the concept. (Informant 25, p. 5)

This community member saw the advantages of being involved with the program, and for those reasons, he had an interest in collaborating with the school.

The program extended itself outside of its local community. An informant explained its involvement as follows,
Well, there have been a lot of things, but mostly it’s been the teaching. I mean we have taken some of the kids. We have invited some of the kids to the Colgate facility, for instance, and they have toured the facility. We have talked to them about what we do there to encourage them to become a chemist, or engineers, scientists. We have also participated in trips. We have sponsored a trip down to Puerto Rico, for instance, and we have talked about doing tele-video conferencing in its early days with Puerto Rico, between the Colgate facilities in the U.S. and Colgate facilities in Puerto Rico. That was very exciting for the kids. The kids learned a lot of progress, a lot of cultural as well as scientific things. (Informant 21, p. 7)

The program showed that collaboration with existing resources was critical. It was a financial advantage to collaborate and to receive money from businesses instead of requesting funds from the local educational budget.

The more the stakeholders were involved in the program, the stronger the program became. A community member informant stated that it was time to find innovative ways to involve stakeholders for the benefit of the community. This was also how one of the informants perceived education. A community member informant explained,

One of the things that I like about the program, and that I think it’s very beneficial for the district, it’s because, besides the academics it has the sense of family. You know, and that’s very Latino! The family it’s something that we value, and it’s very difficult sometimes to do things without the children. Like for example, you want to go and do an activity, but- Who’s going to take care of the kids? In our community in which we have parents with very low income levels, is very difficult for them to pay $10.00 an hour for a babysitter, and Saturday is a day that many, many parents do not work. Sometimes work, but many parents do not work, the children do not come to school. So, I think in my point of view, it is the ideal morning, or day of the week for the families to come together, and to do different kinds of activities. (Informant 24, pp. 2-3)

According to community member informants, educators made it very clear that schools could no longer teach students without the parents' and the community's
participation. The need to recruit community members was evident from the informants' responses. The staff went out to the stakeholders with specific tasks so that the community could become involved. This was how the partnership was achieved.

Retention and recruitment according to staff.

Another factor that was mentioned by the staff that has an effect on the school environment was retention and recruitment, because from semester to semester, they saw the same families return. Staff informants had the perception that educators thought people attended activities when there was something new. The challenge was how to keep them coming back to the school.

According to one informant, food is generally one effective way to encourage repeated attendance. A staff informant explained,

Saturday breakfast that motivates them to come. Of course they can see a lot of improvement on the part of their children when it comes to learning English, and it’s nice. I think they’re also motivated once they’re having breakfast all together. The family eating together breakfast and then after 30 minutes they all disperse and to their own classes. I think that’s a nice motivation, seeing their children and then the parents learning at the same time. (Informant 5, p. 5)

Another factor that brings parents to the program and retains them is that they see benefits when they are able to improve their lifestyle, in addition to how their children benefit from the program.

A staff informant explained:

Well I see that the parents come; they learn a lot with the computers and the ESL classes. They want to better their life. I think also too the children see their parents coming and they’re like, “Oh mommy and daddy”, they’re in school. They’re in this class and they’re doing this. Even they tell me that, “Oh Mommy showed me how to do this on the computer”, or she’s baking a new cake. She learned how to bake cakes or sew or “Mommy’s reading with me in English”, “which they like. (Informant 1, p. 5)

For parents to come to programs, they need to see instant gratification in addition
to how their participation will improve their children’s academic performance. It is not difficult to convince a parent to attend program or school activities if he or she sees the results, and it’s not a waste of time.

Retention and recruitment according to parents.

According to parent informants, an essential component for any family program was for the administrator to understand the needs of the parents. Educators suggested surveying parents and asking them what their interest. It did not make sense to provide classes that did not interest parents. The surveys would inform the decisions made about courses. The program staff analyzed the surveys and took the requests for particular classes very seriously. Classes were offered according to the interests reported in the surveys. A parent informant explained,

Okay, the reason why I keep coming back is that you offer a lot of programs, there’s a wide range of programs. So each year I try to take something different, but the computer stayed with me for a while because I really need it to get a better background in computers. But then I tried the arts and crafts because I’m constantly running around with my kids and that was a leisure thing to just kind of relax. Then I also took a family program which also helps me to understand my children, and just working better at home in my relationship with my husband and understanding because I have a teenager. Just to understand different problems with teenagers. So that was a very interesting program, too. (Informant 8, p. 4)

Another aspect of the program that retained parents was the acceptance of a wide range of participants. Age was not a limiting factor. Some parents did not have cars to take their children to babysitters if they were to attend the school. Parents were able to attend school with children of all ages. A parent informant explained,

The whole spectrum is here. You have teenagers who come to participate in the teen clubs. Then you have the young couples who come with a small child. Then you have the older couple with the teenagers. Then they’re bringing in their
The little grandparents come to the arts and crafts classes who enjoy the fact that she can be with other people while her daughter is upstairs learning in the English class. So, I mean, well, I don’t want to leave my mother home alone, so we take care of her. Make sure she doesn’t get hurt on anything. She looks forward to it. She’s got her own little set of girlfriends that she sits with and they swap stories we laugh, we have a good time. That’s what it’s all about. So you have babies who can barely walk to older people who would probably be home vegetating. I mean coming out at least getting their minds occupied and having a good time. Having a good time. She’s always so happy to see everybody. It’s a great feeling. It really is the big spectrum. (Informant 7, p. 17)

Information gathered from the parent informants suggested that they wanted respect and wanted the school staff to acknowledge that they wanted equal treatment. Non-native speakers felt that they were treated as second-class citizens sometimes, and this offended them. That was one reason why they did not attend school activities and felt like they were not wanted in the school. One parent said that she enjoyed coming to the Saturday program because whenever she had a question about her daughter, or was having a particular problem herself with her job, she always felt comfortable reaching out to the school counselor who was available on Saturdays for the parents. She felt they were always available to lend a hand and refer them to resources.

Retention and recruitment according to students.

According to students, they would not attend enrichment programs unless they were interested in them. A student informant reported how she became involved and how her life changed through the years.

Interview: I started off doing community service for my confirmation.
Evaluator: How many years ago was that?
I: About 5-6 years ago.
E: Why did you continue after you did community service?
I: I just like that way the program was going. The people made me feel comfortable.
city’s recreation department funded the ballet and karate classes. The adult school funded the adult English as a second language classes. The adolescent (13-18 years) component of the program received funding from the 21st Century Grant. The funding for elementary grade classes came from the after-school budget. The district had resources available. Then, it was a matter of focusing on the specific needs.

According to community member informants, expectations affect outcomes. It was important to make the learning environment warm and friendly. Teachers affirmed the program’s expectations when they stated that the learning environment was hospitable and enjoyable. Administrators or program coordinators saw teachers making an effort to communicate to all of their students, especially if they were adults. They had a vested interest in ensuring that parents returned the following week.

Strong leadership.

When discussing strong leadership, which is one of the correlates of effective schools, the informants mentioned that the administrator acted as an instructional leader. The administrator understood and applied the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program. This was clear in the Saturday program. The administrator was very focused and clear about the program’s mission and communicated this to the staff. The entire staff worked on achieving an environment that communicated at every level that school was a place for learning. The staff was loyal to the program and recognized that their involvement and commitment was what made the program work.

Strong leadership according to staff.

According to staff, strong leadership allowed for a successful program. A teacher
informant explained,

We get to see the coordinator. We don’t get to see our principal or administrator during the week. A lot of the times, administrators during the week are very busy and can’t be seen. I think she came in once this year to even ask me, “Did you need anything?” “Is everything alright in your classroom?” (Informant 1, p. 11)

Of the staff informants, 80% agreed that it was essential for the administrator to be visible. It was very important that administrators show their concerns for the staff. The Saturday program staff felt strongly that they had that connection with the administrator and that they all worked for the same purpose. A staff informant explained,

The staff, we have is one who knows their duties. Who are very responsible, and I think that’s because it’s like building a house. You put your poles, and then you put the rest, and that’s how we hold on, and people still coming back to the program, because we have a very good staff. (Informant 2, p. 14)

It was very important for parents to see the administrator as a person who was there to help them. It was also essential that administrators had a good demeanor and that they provided recognition to their staff through positive reinforcement. Administrators gave their staff confidence so that they could approach anyone regarding any concerns or issues they may want to discuss. A staff informant explained,

Well leadership is something very … But not everybody is able to get. We have weekly meetings before we start the class. If there are any problems, she will address that problem at that moment. Nothing goes by, and I think that’s why we’re still strong because it’s like a big family. It’s like a big family. We all have to work together. We have respect for each other; we have respect for the director, and she’s a very good leader. (Informant 2, p. 15)

Strong leadership according to parents.

The parents’ point of view on strong leadership was that teachers were
educational leaders who needed to work with parents to ensure they were involved in the planning of programs. The administrator of the Saturday program recognized the advantage of parental input and assured that this would happen in the planning of the program. A parent informant explained,

> We got involved in it; they were looking for a parent to come into the advisory committee to lend an opinion, a suggestion, an observation, and as I got into workings of the Saturday program. What exactly is involved, it's quite a bit of work that's involved with this. The program coordinator is... I mean a jack of all trades. Let me tell you there is nothing that we have not done, everything from security to helping wipe some little child's nose, to filling out registration forms. It's incredible the amount of work that has to be done to keep this program going smoothly, and dedication. (Informant 7, pp. 11-12)

**Strong leadership according to support staff.**

The support staff, perceived the administrators to be supportive of the mission of the school program. The administrator was indispensable in implementing parental involvement activities, the one who could set the tone for a warm and positive environment. Administrators at the Saturday program had portrayed an unwelcoming image to parents. That image could affect parents and deter their future participation in school activities.

However, if the parents' first experience is pleasant, and the administrator makes the environment warm and welcoming, then they would not have a problem coming to the school. It was very important for the administrator to speak and know the language of the community. At the Saturday program, the teachers, as well as the administrative team, were aware of the parents' languages and made sure that parents were welcomed into the school in their native language. This bred familiarity and allowed them to
communicate immediately with little difficulty. The program also set guidelines that everyone followed, ensuring that the program ran effectively. A support staff informant explained,

Well first it's well managed. The program practically runs by itself, and it's not a new program, it's an older program. It has procedures, and the staff that's working knows it well. The coordinator is very good. She makes sure that everything is running the way it should be, so that alleviates the administrator from having to do that, too. (Informant 16, p. 3)

According to support staff informants, it was very important in the school to have a program that ran well and did not cause problems for the administrator of the school. They felt that, in general, administrators already had their hands full with their weekday responsibilities. If they saw that the program was a burden, it would likely be eliminated. The results of this research suggest that when programs were well run and the school administration supported them, they became an asset to the school.

Strong leadership according to community members.

According to the community members, educators should be clear about the vision of their organization. Informants agreed that a strong leader was not sufficient. A person needed to be focused and willing to go the extra mile. Informants indicated that leadership was a skill one was born with; it could not be learned. Community member informants felt that how leadership was communicated was important. Personal skills were needed to transmit needs in a positive way so that little resistance took place.

It was very difficult for community people to accept change. Shared information reduces the possibility of misunderstandings between community people. The end goals of the Saturday program were an integral part of success. The community members felt
Effective teaching and learning according to staff.

Reports by the staff with regard to the effective teaching and learning environment indicated that the teachers' experiences in the Saturday program class seemed to be very different from their experiences in the weekday classes. This may be related to factors in the Saturday program such as smaller classes and a flexible curriculum in the Saturday program. Nevertheless, the expectation of educators was that all classes needed an academic focus and must be enjoyable. A staff informant explained,

It’s very different. It’s a more laid back atmosphere based on academics. You have small group of children. At times you may rotate the children, but it’s usually the same families that come. You already know these children because they’ve grown up in the program. So it’s like you’ve seen them in second grade, third grade, fourth grade, and now you’ve seen them as teenagers also come here. (Informant 1, p. 3)

The following are some teachers’ comments regarding the size of classes on Saturday,

It is nice to have a group of six kids and work with six kids. Instead of working with 25 kids where there’s a lot of stress behind it. It’s fun. You do fun activities, things that you can’t do because of the time restraints during the week, so it’s a time where you also get to express yourself with your kids and do different things with them. They enjoy it so it’s good. (Informant 1, p. 9)

Another teacher stated,

I see that there’s a less rigorous climate. There’s no need to dress up. You come as you are. You know you want to throw on a pair of sweat pants, not that I’ve ever done that. A pair of sweat pants you can, and you do what you have to do. Your dress attire doesn’t entail who or what you teach. You come as you are. It’s more at ease. It’s less rigorous. We have administration and all those things. They know we’re doing our job, and if you happen to walk by my room and I’m standing on a chair, it doesn’t mean I’m hanging up a decoration. I’m actually teaching them something. Usually what I’m doing on a chair is teaching them body parts. Not naked, dressed. (Informant 4, pp. 4-5)
Analysis of the interviews indicated that teachers felt relaxed. When students were interviewed, they described classes as being fun, but learning did take place. A teacher stated, “It is hard to get up on a Saturday morning; however, after a couple of minutes in the class, time just flies because it is just fun. I am able to be me, and be as creative as I can be. That is how teaching should flow. This should not only be happening during Saturdays, it should be also happening through the week.” A teacher informant explained,

The structure and the curriculum, it’s different from during the week, because during the week, like I said before, it’s mainly academic, there are certain things that you have to accomplish. I work in the school system, you have to accomplish certain things within a time frame. On Saturday morning there’s different programs. Everything is working at its own pace. Some might be advanced, some might be moderate. Like I said, everyone works at their own pace. The classes are much smaller than they are during the school week. During the week they are much bigger. On Saturdays they are smaller so can work with them one to one. Then during the week we have a big class, and you are trying to spread yourself thin trying to make sure that each child is absorbing or getting the message that you’re trying to get to them during the school week. On Saturdays, like I said, it’s a smaller class, it’s one to one, and it benefits them more. (Informant 3, p. 8)

It was sometimes a problem structuring enough space for flexibility and creativity. According to staff informants, educators needed to take time to reflect and help other teachers find a way to do it all, but in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Effective teaching and learning environment according to parents.

With regard to the effective teaching and learning environment, parents reported that there was a misconception on the part of some veteran administrators that if students are having fun, no learning could be taking place. They said to have effective learning, a positive and caring learning environment was needed. This concept was not only for
children’s classes, but for adult classes as well. A parent informant explained,

It’s a very warm relationship. I think that’s because the classes are very small so it’s like a very intimate level with the child. Everybody’s here because they want to be here. Because you have to give up your Saturday, it means that you have to really dedicate things that you’re doing, and I think that the children feel that. You get that one-to-one tutoring working in class with those teachers, so you really get a lot of the class you attend. (Informant 8, p. 6)

A parent expressed that parents learn from others in the class because, for the most part, they come from another country. This concept was what educators called peer teaching. Teachers frequently paired up children so they could learn from each other, and this was another strategy that was used with adults. They came to class with different experiences, and they were able to share and learn from each other. The classes in the program ranged from enrichment classes to academics. A parent informant explained, “This year I heard that they have guitar playing. One of my co-workers is doing that” (Informant 9, p. 5). Another parent informant stated, “My son comes with me and I heard they are going to add Spanish as a second language. I like that so by the time he gets to middle school, he’s exposed to Spanish” (Informant 8, p. 7).

Effective teaching and learning environment according to support staff.

According to support staff, the environment was favorable and conducive to learning. Parents returned because they were motivated and because they saw their children achieving. They wanted to be part of that success with their children. Another concept that affected the learning environment on Saturdays was the support staff who worked there. A support staff informant explained,

I think number one is because of the staff. They feel that we are loyal to them. That we are there to meet their needs, and they feel so welcomed and loved. Why wouldn’t they want to come and participate in such a program? I know
two or three of those students were former students here. They always give
me that nice little smile, and I think it’s just nice that they know that someone
knew them, and someone still knows and recognizes them. Now they’re
becoming adults. (Informant 20, p. 8)

The classroom teacher is the person who motivates the students to learn. Parents
came because they saw that teachers and support staff did care for them, and it was a
warm and family-friendly learning environment. A support staff informant explained,

One thing that sticks out in my head is that we’re family. We are very family
oriented in this program. The parents I believe are very comfortable. They
feel very comfortable among our staff. Our staff is very welcoming, very
warm, very helpful. It’s different than other programs because it is flexible.
They’re able to pick and choose what classes they want to go into. What
they want to attend to. The school is a place where not only they are going to
grow, but also their children are going to grow. (Informant 17, p. 7)

Support staff informants identified the main characteristics that drew parents to
the program. It was the family environment that parents felt when they entered the
program. What also worked well was that all staff members interacted as a team. They
worked for one single goal: to give the parents and students the best they could offer.
This motivated the parents to try because, in return, it would change their lifestyle and
their children’s behaviors would change. A support staff informant explained,

Like I said before, we’re very welcoming. Very family oriented, and it’s very
positive program, which allows them to obtain information in a lot of different
areas. It’s well-rounded program. It’s strong, and I believe that one of the major
reasons why they continue coming back to us. You know taking classes, you
know, developing as a whole with their child. (Informant 17, p. 8)

Effective teaching and learning environment according to community members.

Community members and staff made similar comments about the program. A
community member informant explained,
children they now faced another obstacle: how to help their children. In the parents’
countries of origin, parents were accustomed to schoolwork ending when the school day ended.

The native countries of the parent informants, parents did not have a role to play at home with their children’s education. The teacher and the school were responsible for the child’s academic achievement. However, this is not true in contemporary American education. Parents had difficulty understanding that they were an important part of their children’s academic lives. Educators wanted the parents’ involvement through the whole school experience. Educators wanted teachers and parents to become a team when it came to the education of the child. This was a problem for the new parents who came to the United States.

It was important for the schools to help parents through the learning process. This help ranged from teaching them English so they could communicate with everyone to learning academics so they could help their children at home. However, this would take considerable time, so the short-term goal was to facilitate parents to coming to the program and feeling welcome in the school so they could get immediate help with their needs and learn how things are done in their children’s school system.

The parents felt that providing childcare allowed them to come to school without worrying about their preschool children. The parents felt the obstacles that they had experienced in the past were not an issue in the Saturday program. The programs provided activities for the whole family, and now they were able to attend school with their entire family and learn together.
Summary

The primary domain identified in the study was the school environment of the program, which parallels one of the effective schools, correlates (Epstein 1995). When the staff, parents, students, and community members feel that the school is a friendly, warm, and welcoming place, their involvement becomes positive. The program’s administrator was very clear on the mission of the program and communicated this to all involved.

People attended the Saturday classes because they understood that if they came, they would learn. This learning would be beneficial in helping their children with homework and projects at home. At the same time, their family dynamics would change with each improvement they made. Staff morale was very high because they saw that their efforts made differences in their students’ lives. All benefited from the effort put forth. Teamwork made the program effective.

Domain 2: Curriculum

Various factors were subsumed under Domain 2, which informants perceived as affecting the curriculum of the Saturday program. These included, program assessment, delivery of instruction, and connecting Saturday classes to Monday through Friday classes. Information from the participants was used to answer the second research question: What type of courses will increase the participation of parents in the school?

A parent informant asked, “Are educators teaching students enough for them to be the future work force, and are they bringing into their classrooms activities that can
prepare students to work in society today?” Questions were asked by participants about what and how educators taught. There was always room for improvement in the curriculum, according to informants. Therefore, there was a need to assess and analyze the results of surveys on an ongoing basis to make improvements in the curriculum used in the Saturday program.

Program assessment according to staff.

At the end of each semester, the staff is given a survey to identify the weaknesses and strengths of the program. The information from the survey is used in planning changes for in subsequent semesters. Moreover, the staff is given the opportunity to develop their own curriculum, and participants attendance is used to evaluate the value of the curriculum to the parents and families. Students will only go to classes that are interesting and in which learning takes place.

Before the program begins each Saturday, a staff meeting is held. At this meeting the staff is informed of changes. A staff informant explained: “Before we start the program we usually meet and we have a meeting with all the staff members just to go through what’s on the agenda for the day, the programs if there’s any changes” (Informant 3, p. 8).

By implementing changes based upon staff input, the staff was given ownership of the Saturday program. The sense of ownership was a way in retaining staff in the program. The staff felt their voice was heard and that they played an important part in the development and implementation of the program.
Program assessment according to parents.

For parents in the program, assessment was crucial for any Saturday program. Parents needed to see that attending classes was not a waste of their time. Keeping this crucial factor in mind, the Saturday program staff assessed the participants (parents and students) yearly. This assessment was used to update the program and make it current. A survey assessed the changes the parents' needed from one year to the next. Assessment was one of the strongest points of the program. To have effective parent programs, educators needed to go to the source, to the client being serviced. The program is evaluated so classes could be developed to meet the participants' individual needs. A parent informant explained,

They had surveys. They asked the community and the parents what would they like. Then they discussed is this fixable? How could we get these kinds of programs? Because some of the programs they have to go to partners or business. The business had to agree to come and teach them. They had to make an atmosphere for those businesses to want to come and stay. (Informant 6, p. 16)

Parent informants discussed the different classes in which community members were involved in educating parents and students. One example was a banking class taught by a staff member from a national bank. Adults used the information from this class to make decisions on opening bank accounts, balancing their checkbooks, and using the computer for online banking. Another example was a class offered on health and the environment. During the class, staff from Colgate Palmolive, a future 500 corporation demonstrated how their products are engineered and manufactured, and what health benefits customers could reap when they used these products. This allowed students to be educated in health and environmental issues. These examples were made possible
The support staff informants expressed that it was important to know the needs of the parents. Having people working in the program who were from the area and who knew the community was an advantage. When people worked together as a team, then programs were successful. People felt that they were valued and that self-confidence would make the program successful.

**Delivery of instruction.**

Concerning delivery of instruction, informants stated that, now that the school had a clear understanding of what the needs of the program were, the next step was identifying the best delivery of instruction. For example, an informant mentioned that participants need to see that what they are learning will have an impact on their lifestyle, and that will have a significant impact on program attendance. Teachers needed to make every learning experience an interesting and attractive activity, so participants would want to come back to the following class. The activities needed to be hands on. An important element was making activities enjoyable and flexible; activities in which learning took place, but in a way that students were so involved that they did not realize they were learning. According to informants, this had always been a challenge for educators. The Saturday program offered an opportunity to learn content in many ways.

**Delivery of instruction according to staff.**

Another important element of academic learning was that the students wanted a variety of teaching tools to make the subjects interesting. Educators should not just lecture and expect students to be interested. This was an important component for making the program effective. In addition to surveying participants, educators provided the
course changes that participants expected. The incorporation of all of the above components then allowed educators to maintain, and even increase, the attendance of their participants.

Delivery of instruction by teachers was varied and nontraditional instruction was compared to weekly instruction. A teacher informant explained,

I think the children are not stressed with the fact that there are tests, or there’s something that they have to do. When we do like different projects and things on the computer, they like to do it, something that they learn from it. They don’t feel the stress that they have to be here. They come. They really like coming. (Informant 1, p. 4)

According to informants, education at the Saturday program was not driven by tests. Teachers enjoyed teaching and spent more time in teaching-for-learning rather than teaching-for-testing. A teacher informant mentioned,

It’s more like fun. We do it differently. We have a schedule to follow, and we have a program to follow, but still we create our own environment. We work relaxed with the students. The students think it’s not a school because it’s a Saturday, and they make it fun. It’s different. (Informant 2, p. 2)

The staff had the flexibility to use their creativity and teach the course using any methods or techniques that could accomplish the course objectives. A teacher informant explained,

I do different hands-on activities. We do things on the computer. We play games. The kids explore what they want to do. If they want to read a book about animals, they do it, then we just take it from there. There’s a lot of active learning going on, hands on, fun stuff. Arts and crafts, there was a lot involved. (Informant 1, p. 10)

Delivery of instruction according to parents.

Observations made by parents in the Saturday program regarding the delivery of instructions indicated that classes had to be interesting and fun to maintain attendance.
Staff members tried to keep this in mind when developing their courses. The following were parent informants’ comments about what their children communicated to them after every Saturday class. A parent informant explained,

Oh, they have a lot of exciting things. They explore science and math through different ways, not the standard ways, but exciting ways to keep them excited about what they need to learn and what they need to have in life, but in a fun way, not just book and speaking. It’s hands on. And for the little ones, it is quality time for me and them so that they can learn the concept of reading because I is in “Babies and Books.” (Informant 6, p. 1)

Another parent informant explained,

They tell me what they did today. They tell me about different things that they do and learned from Colgate, from the science and all that stuff from Reading through Cooking. They’re excited about it, so they come and they tell you what they did, more so than if they are in regular school. (Informant 6, p. 3)

The objective was for the students to get as much as they could, so that they could go from one grade to the next with little or no difficulties. It was clear during this study that sometimes the environment and the delivery of instruction made a difference in the learning that took place. A parent informant explained,

Monday through Friday was basically, I think that they still think it had to be book and... that’s how you learn. I think the State thinks that way. They need to change a little. They need to see that each child is different, everybody learns in a different way, not to be afraid, try to teach children in anyway possible, to make them excited about education and coming to school. (Informant 6, p. 18)

It was a type of environment where teachers felt “no pressure” to deliver. In addition, the teachers’ class expectations and goals changed. Students perceived this positively and it enhanced the learning process so that it could take place differently. A parent informant explained, “The academic part, because it’s like it (is) continues of what they’re getting at school, but there’s no pressure of tests or anything” (Informant 8, p.
16). The same informant said,

They are still learning. Because look at that literacy program in the library. Which I think it’s real excellent because they are getting them from that really tender age, so by the time they get to kindergarten, they start reading the Golden Books first grade. That’s where we really want them, so that’s really good with what you’re doing. (Informant 8, p. 16)

Delivery of instruction according to support staff

Another resource that the Saturday program brought to parents and children was community service. Students were able to do extra work to get credit for specific assignments. A support staff informant explained,

Usually volunteers come to us from the church, from the community, or the schools. Some just want to volunteer their time to help them with their college resumes. I think it’s very rewarding because she still talks to me about it. “Oh I like that program.” I told her, “Well, you know, if you find time we can always use volunteers.” It allows them to grow. I allow them to become responsible. They’re within a school setting. She did this because she wants to go into teaching. So this gave her an opportunity. “Do I like working with children?” “Is this for me?” and it did. I did clear-up a lot of her questions, and she does realize. She does want to work in the educational field. You know, so it gives them a lot of different opportunities. Not only does it helps them, helps the community, but it helps themselves. It helps themselves as well. (Informant 17, pp. 14-15)

A support staff informant said that community service should be ongoing during the week. Another informant mentioned,

Well, the curriculum on Saturday is flexible, I believe. You’re given a class, you’re given a title, and you pretty much obtain the materials yourself, and you teach to the best of your ability within that subject. Usually people are very knowledgeable within that area because they choose to teach this class. So I think it’s very successful that it allows the teachers to be open in obtaining different materials from different areas to the teach the same concepts. (Informant 17, p. 3)

Most of the informants mentioned that the teacher’s creativity made the class enjoyable. Teachers were able to achieve this because less stress was put on them.
Objectives were achieved while students had fun learning.

*Delivery of instructions according to community members.*

Community members saw that business support was very essential to the school. The goal was to get them motivated. The Saturday program seemed to have achieved that goal. The program was partially funded by corporate donations. As an added bonus, they sent some of their employees to teach courses in the program. For example, a community member informant explained,

I believe from a business point of view, my interest is that the teachers here at the school they know the educational part of it. As far as the business part of the world, business world, myself and some of the others that are involved I thought it is very important. So we get involved, to show that the industry and education can work together. That’s one of the reasons why I’m still in it. I want to make sure that people know that in industry, if you got the right people, and the educational world... you can work together on a program like this, Saturday program. When I was growing up, we didn’t have anything like this. So, you know, I come from a poor neighborhood, and to get the exposure. For children, to get exposure to the business world at a young age I think it’s a big advantage for them. (Informant 23, p. 3)

Once the business people were involved in teaching, they then became involved in developing curriculum for classes. A community member informant explained,

Well, what happened is that we became part of the organization. We support it both financially, and with manpower, and we organized a curriculum, of course that had gone through several versions. It started as health for kids, and then we touched on science. What I do is that I coordinate the people that actually participate in the program from the Colgate side. I’ve designated some people to be the key individuals to participate in the program, and what they do is they design a curriculum. They make a schedule, and take turns to teach kids in the program. I myself being one of the individuals that teach and participate. (Informant 21, p. 2)

The following question was asked to the same informant (21): "Now why did employees from Colgate come out on a Saturday and volunteer their time?" The
community member informant explained,

Well, it is a very simple answer. The course is very unique. The value of the course is seen immediately. Kids are like sponges at that age, and in this program they are thirsty for knowledge. It is very motivating atmosphere. It's a very positive atmosphere. Everybody is very helpful, and very much interested in making kids grow intellectually. These are special type of individuals. These are all volunteers. Nobody puts a gun to their heads to attend. So it is born within them to want to help others that perhaps are less fortunate, but perhaps they can benefit from the knowledge. So it's very rewarding. It's almost selfish to say this, but people that go there they get as much as what they put into the system. (Informant 21, p. 3)

It was important for volunteers to attend the program and offer their skills and time. Volunteers saw that their reward was being able to give someone something of value. It allowed them to do something that took them away from their routine. Now they were involved with children or adults. It was a way of giving back to the community. As one of the informants mentioned, “You have more than they have, and now you can share that wealth with others.” An informant stated,

Helping somebody and making a difference in their life was more rewarding than working one hour in a lab because it was different. It was instant gratification. Yes, what you do in a lab can, in the long run, make a difference in people’s lives, but teaching a course can change a person’s mind and future at that very moment. (Informant 23)

According to community member informants, educators understood that not all students learn at the same time and in the same way. Therefore, educators needed to give students as many enrichment opportunities as possible to allow students enough time to understand the skills presented. This could only happen if students had the opportunity to have topic explained to them in a different way, a second time.

According to community members, the way instructor’s present material to students was very important because students’ learning styles varied. Educators knew
there were different types of learners so they made their lessons appropriate for different learners. Some students needed more motivation than others. It was critical to consider those factors when developing programs for the older students.

**Connecting Saturday classes to Monday through Friday according to staff:**

According to teachers, working a sixth day, need is, in the Saturday program, required highly motivated teachers who enjoyed working in the program. Teachers understood that this program was not developed by the school administration and passed down to them. In contrast, the needs of the participants were the driving force to the success of the Saturday program. The Saturday program changed according to the results of the surveys completed from year to year. This allowed parents and staff to take ownership of the program. When asking a teacher informant what was different in the Saturday program compared to Monday through Friday classes, the teacher informant explained,

I try to do a lot of these things, hands-on activities during the week, but there’s also so much curriculum that you have to do throughout. Just from September through April for the test or through May to get them ready for next year. That it’s hard to just stop and do a fun activity that might take an hour because that’s valuable time that you could be doing something else that you have to go through the curriculum with during Monday through Friday. (Informant 1, p. 10)

According to teachers, the curriculum that they deliver during the week limits their creativity in classes of the Saturday program. However, when they were given the opportunity, they demonstrated creativity. Another teacher informant who taught a class called Reading Through Cooking explained:

Because when we go to do a recipe they have to write ingredients. They have to measure the ingredients, and they have to read to me what the procedures is after they write it. I want to make sure they got the recipe right. So before we
This was the benefit of having programs that did not follow the traditional school curriculum. Academics were being taught in the Saturday program, but through very innovative methods. A teacher informant explained a nontraditional method used to teach,

Like I said, this program offers so much and video conferencing is another, not so much skill, but it's another opportunity for a child to learn. Because learning doesn't only take place in the classroom, it takes place outside of the classroom. Like I said, if they couldn't get to there in person, they can get it through video conferencing. From my understanding, Saturday morning students they thought it is great. They are amazed that they can talk to someone else from their own chair in the classroom. They couldn't believe that they are actually talking to somebody. I think it is great experience for them. (Informant 3, p. 18)

This was creating a teaching opportunity. This was exactly what should always happen, one teacher informant explained,

Last semester I think we took them to the bank, Banco Popular. They are able to see the background of a bank and how it works. We've done video-conferencing with the Bronx Zoo, so they aren't physically able to go there, but they went through the long distance learning. They are able to see different animals and their habitat. We've also done science projects with the Liberty Science Center. Sometimes members from Liberty Science Center, or Colgate Palmolive come and give the classes to the kids. So if we can't get there, they come here. They've also gone to Colgate Palmolive. (Informant 1, p. 7)

According to staff informants, when creativity was allowed to happen, the end result was satisfying. One informant was asked, "What type of personal satisfaction do you receive in teaching at the Saturday program?" The teacher informant explained,

I think it's great, because I myself am an outgoing person. I try to get along with everyone. I love working with the kids. I think that's why I did it. I've been in the program so far for 6 years. Every year I say I'm going to take a break, the break comes and I never take it. So I think it's fulfilling to me because, like I said, I like working with the kids. I think it's an experience. Like
I said before, we get to grow with each other. You learn from them, and they learn from you. (Informant 3, p. 2)

It was clear from the findings of this study that the staff who worked for the program was very committed, and they wanted to make sure that their delivery of instruction was effective in the classes they were teaching. This allowed for learning to take place outside the traditional school setting. Therefore, this made the staff enjoy teaching and project it to the students. They enjoyed coming to Saturday school because it was a relaxed learning environment, yet learning academics material was taking place.

The classes were developed to be enjoyable, but academically enriching at the same times. One such class was Reading Through Cooking. The student read a recipe, followed it, and made the food. Math and reading were involved, but the students did not even realize they were learning because they were having fun preparing food and eating it at the end of the class. Students went home at the end of the class semester with a recipe book of the foods they had prepared. A teacher informant explained,

When the boys come, they come with a macho image, that the girls are the ones to the kitchen. Once they start getting involved in the class, they will peel bananas, they will peel potatoes; they will even do the dishes. I teach the same to both. But it’s the way I guess I teach the whole class it’s what makes them come back. I teach them the same. I said, “Come on, let’s go. We have to participate. This is very nice. We’re all going to eat.” So I guess the way I talk to them is how I get them involved. (Informant 2, p. 13)

I like that type of group because it’s like working with my daughters. So you know what is, we grow as an adult and sometimes we kind of forget when we were that age. So it kind of reminds me, it brings me back to reality in terms of what is going on with the teenagers now. How to approach them. How to talk to them. How they open themselves to you. So that for me I love that age because they come and they talk to you. Maybe sometimes stuff that are afraid to talk to somebody else. They come and they open themselves to you. So they’re more, you can talk to them, and you can teach them. They like to cook, get close to the stove and stuff. (Informant 2, p. 11)
Connecting Saturday classes to Monday through Friday according to parents.

When the participants registered for September, they opted to continue until June. According to parent informants, this happened because all the courses included some enrichment classes based on Core Content Curriculum Standards. Teachers were knowledgeable of the curriculum and students. Sometimes the teachers taught the same students during the week. Therefore, they were aware of the students' weaknesses. A parent informant explained,

Well, yes. In some ways it helps, because as I told you, for example, the science, or the math they can review things that they did in school, or thinking they're going to do. I think yes it helps. Also it could help some questions they could ask, it's good for them. (Informant 10, p. 4)

According to a parent informant, following the regular school's class curriculum during the Saturday program allowed for students to ask questions on Saturday and get the extra help they needed if they did not understand something previously taught. It was evident that parents had a clear understanding of what their children were learning on Saturdays because after classes, they were discussing what the students did that morning. This allowed for more communication between parents and children. A parent informant explained,

They work on projects which shows them how the balloon stuff that he brought home, he also worked on a phone project. And so he had a class at school, it doesn't stop him of coming up with ideas because he gets some wonderful ideas from the Saturday program, and the writing program is wonderful. Because like I said, he so enjoys reading. So combination of the writing program, and his reading, and he's also very good with art. So who knows where it will take him in illustrating children's books. (Informant 8, p. 3)
This was an additional advantage of offering courses on Saturday; there were
different opportunities for students. The opportunity was significant in that it allowed for
multiple doors to open. According to informants, in today’s society, students needed more
positive career awareness experiences so they can make good choices. A parent
informant explained,

The whole family comes, and the oldest daughter who just entered high
school now. She came to Saturday program. She just stopped like about last year,
because of her scheduling with dancing, which started like from 11:00 until 6:00
on Saturday. So it is too much for her to come. But you know, she also embarked
on some really wonderful programs. She did a Power Point which she is able to
use at her school, to do a school project with a group of kids, so it’s a real
wonderful program. (Informant 8, p. 2)

It was important that students developed different skills to improve their school
work. Students needed to know how to use technology appropriately, not only for school,
but for future job interviews and other opportunities as well.

Connecting Saturday classes to Monday through Friday according to support
staff

Another important element was that classes were smaller on Saturdays. This
relieved stress on the teachers. It was easier to give more one-to-one reinforcement to the
students and to use computers for learning with smaller class sizes. During the week, it
was more difficult for the students to use computers because there were more students
than computers. However, on Saturday, the goal was to keep classes small, so that when
lessons involved computers, the students were able to work without obstacles. It was
essential that students learn in a comfortable environment. One support staff informant
explained,
Definitely. I see that the children that do attend the Saturday, I see them more involved in the library. They feel more comfortable going up, because we do that as an activity during our family literacy sessions. I observe the children answering more questions about books. They feel more comfortable. (Informant 20, p. 4)

Support staff felt that learning should be without boundaries, endless. Learning should always be happening throughout students’ lives. A support staff informant explained:

Absolutely, absolutely, because it just reinforces the skills that the teachers are trying to help them learn throughout the week, and you do see a difference in those students who are coming on Saturdays. You know you can see that they’re more eager, they try harder. There is a difference in grades. Differences in their effort. The way they view school in itself. It’s totally different. (Informant 17, p. 12)

According to a support staff informant, grades were a goal for the program, for a student to come to school 6 days a week so he could see an educational difference. The student’s attitude shifted and learning became positive. A support staff informant explained,

The students love the college students from Rutgers. Usually Rutgers students work with elementary staff, with elementary students, and it’s from Cook College which deals with the farming, and the animals, and the sciences. Talked to the students about their habitats, allow them to touch the animals, which are real life experiences. Children view these Rutgers students as role models. They’re young kids, 18 years old and 19 year olds. They’re volunteering their time, and they are in college, so it allows students to look at things through a different perspective, and through a different window. (Informant 17, p. 13)

Connecting Saturday classes to Monday through Friday according to community members.

It was clear in this study that, although non-mandatory, the students felt comfortable attending the Saturday program and they enjoyed what they were doing. This
helped them to return every Saturday on their own. Students did not see the Saturday program as traditional school, so they were more open to this new learning environment. It allowed learning to happen without them realizing it. Moreover, the teachers had different approaches to teaching. Some came from the business world, and that made a positive difference. Business people came in with a different perspective, so they taught what was needed to succeed in the business world. For example, a community member informant explained,

Well my approach is probably a little bit different than the way they teach Monday through Friday. I just sort of like, number one really get to know the parents and the children very well. I want them to feel very comfortable with me. I'm an outsider, so I don't know if I have the teaching skills that a normal teacher would have. If I show them that I care about them, I let them alone, and not show intimidation. They will get to know me and then a comfort zone will be there, and the learning process takes place from that point on. (Informant 23, p. 6)

According to community member informants, caring is important to any learning situation. When educators demonstrated that they cared and listened, the learning environment was changed. More students were willing to learn because what they had to share was going to be heard.

However, when business people were observed teaching by the administrator, they were comfortable and seemed very natural. They had the opportunity to show their talent. In fact, some volunteers had retired from their businesses or jobs, yet they worked in the Saturday program, and took their teaching job very seriously. Informants said it was something that they had always wanted to do; give back to the community. Some informants noted that they found it interesting that there were people who thought that money was not everything.
The key, according to informants, was to tap all of the resources available in a community and integrate them to make learning happen. Not only professional educators were able to teach. People who were working in a field or industry that was interesting to a student could make a difference. Students could see how learning could be linked to a career or the real world.

According to community member informants, students needed to have role models to talk with and learn from. They needed to see that they could also have a bright future. A person with a passion for sharing could do that. This study took place in one urban district working with students at risk. Students needed to see the connection of learning to reality, to hear it from someone who had done it all before them. Students need short-term goals and reinforcement.

For coordinators to recruit, teachers from the community, they needed to talk to people who are working in the field that interested the students. In the Saturday program, this happened often because there were business people who came to the program to teach, classes in computers, health, and other areas. People who worked in the sciences or engineering were available also. These were possible future fields of interest for the students. These classes helped student to envision their choices.

Students were able to create a personal vision because business people shared their personal experiences and told them how to get there. This was truly an important mission; to link education to the real world. For this reason it was important to communicate clearly to the staff the importance of making the entire lesson as close to real situations as possible so that students could see the link to the work force of
Students will not come to a program if they are not interested or they cannot make a connection to everyday life. Therefore, it was important to ensure that the curriculum introduced on Saturday included activities that were hands-on experiences and highly interesting to students. That is why the informants mentioned it was important to analyze the survey to make sure the courses that were high in attendance were repeated, and the ones with lower attendance were replaced for the following semester. The courses that informants mentioned to be high in attendance were: Reading Through Cooking, English as a Second Language, Basketball, Computers, Arts and Crafts, Cake Decorating, Creative Writing, Environmental Science, Long Distance Learning, Citizenship in English, Literacy Through Digital Photography, Marketing, and Microwave Cooking. As a result of informants input some of these classes were repeated from semester to semester.

Summary

The second domain identified for study was curriculum. It was clear that a curriculum that meets participants' needs would draw them to a Saturday program that is offered by the school. Participants need to see that what they are learning is related to something that they will be able to apply to their future.

The informants' responses, suggested answers to the second research question: What type of courses will increase the participation of parents in the school? For students, they need to see that what they are learning is related to real life situations that they will encounter in the future. The students mentioned some courses that were of high interest: Reading Through Cooking, Cake Decorating, and Basketball. It should be noted
that, while each course sounded like a recreational class, all of the courses included math, reading, and writing. This was about making learning fun without losing sight of the important academic goal.

**Domain 3: Self-Development**

In the domain of self-development, the factors found to have an effect were personal growth and self-confidence. Information from the participants answered the third research question: To what extend does parental involvement programs benefit the community and education in general?

*Personal growth according to staff*

Staff stated that the Saturday program allowed them to teach subjects that they do not teach during the week. For example, the 21st Century grant (which is funding from the state of New Jersey) allowed paraprofessionals to teach a course. This was a great opportunity for the paraprofessionals to build their professional skills and to consider becoming a teacher. A teacher informant explained,

I: Oh, it is. My dream as I child was always to be a teacher. So when I came into the program as a paraprofessional it was okay. But since I wasn’t certified, I couldn’t hold my own class so I had to always have someone with me. It kind of put a damper on things, because when I was trying to do the class, the girls or whatever class I was teaching in. It was hard, because I couldn’t get their complete attention, because of the wandering looking at the other class that was there. Now that I’m a teacher and I have my own classroom, it’s great, it’s fulfilling a dream that I had since I was a child. And I like it because I connect more with the children, because I’m in my own room. I’m in my own structure. It’s the greatest feeling to have that accomplishment.

E: Now I know you don’t do that Monday through Friday, so it’s like just the beginning for your future?

I: Yes it is! Monday through Friday I’m an assistant teacher with another teacher, and it just opens a lot of doors for me. It gives me experience. It works up a relationship between the students and myself. Right now, I’m presently...
in school, and I should be getting my associate's by next month, December. So I think it's going to encourage me to continue, so I can be a teacher, a full-fledged teacher, instead of being an assistant.
E: So in other words, it’s given you that field experience at an earlier time?
I: Yes, yes and it is great. (Informant 3, pp. 6-7)

It appeared that this was an opportunity for people who had put their learning on hold.

Personal growth according to parents.

Parents saw that coming to an activity with their child was a direct connection to eventually changing their lifestyle. A parent informant reported:

I: Oh! Great personal growth. Which I’m able, well, I guess I’ll be a role model for my children to show them that it’s never too late to get there. And how important education is, because I’ll never stop learning. Right now I’m going to Kean University to try to get my bachelor’s. It’s going to take a while, but at least they’re seeing that how important education is, because although mommy is 45 years old, mommy is not taking a back seat and say, “I’m too old to do that.” Mommy is still going, even when she takes one class per semester. Eventually she’ll get there.
E: But you see yourself from beyond that?
I: Oh, definitely. Personally in my relationship with my children I’m as well as within myself. I feel so much better about myself. Because when you have young children, and you’re all alone at home, I think that’s another aspect that the school helps parents, too. It gives them that opportunity to get out of the house. You provide wonderful child care. There’s absolutely no excuse for parents not to take advantage of the program. So you know, I know what it did to me then. My family is all in England. So, I was here basically myself and the young kids. Not having any friends. So through the Saturday program I was able to improve my self-esteem, gain confidence in the work market, and made lots of friends. (Informant 8, p. 10)

According to parent informants, children needed to see that learning was a continuous process, a long journey. Parents needed to see that they could continue improving themselves, even if it was a little more difficult than when they were younger. The key to parental participation was that parents needed to see and experience how their
Research Question 2 asked: What type of courses will increase the participation of parents in the school? Participants’ responses illustrated some common elements. For example, the students enjoyed learning different topics that were not offered in school during the week, such as Reading Through Cooking and Basketball. Also, the parents enjoyed the English classes. It allowed them to develop their vocabularies and improve their language skills so they could help their children with homework.

Research Question 3

To what extent do parent involvement programs benefit the community and education in general?

The parents attended the program for English as a second language (ESL). They understood that if they learned the language, they could not only help their children with homework, but they could also move to a better position at work.

Parents could see that their children were building the skills that were necessary to develop as they were growing up. Academia alone was not sufficient. It was the combination of academics and social learning that made a difference in the success of the students. The student in the Saturday program could realize and develop themselves as independent persons. They could have an intelligent voice of their own. Parents made participation a high priority.

The community employer was aware that improving skills would be beneficial to her/him. Their interest was very high. That is why they made the effort to support the program. Seminars were offered during the Saturday program. Wachovia Bank and
Banco Popular are two of the banks that offered seminars during the Saturday program in an effort to educate the participants with regard to how to make better choices when it comes to making money and managing it. Community volunteers educated potential clients. In this way, both volunteers and attendees benefit from participation in the Saturday program. Therefore, it was not difficult to recruit volunteers from the community. No company gets involved unless it sees the potential for profit. This is an important point to remember when soliciting community members and members of corporate entities to volunteer their time and effort.

**Summary**

There were factors that affected self-development. If participants do not see the potential for their own career enhancement, they may not continue to participate in programs. They need to feel that their future will be affected positively and that what they are learning will make a difference in their lives. If they are able to see a connection to improving their lives as well as their families’ lives, then they will come to programs that have the potential for this type of change. They need to understand the mission of the program and agree with it. When the participants saw the connection of what they were learning to improving their job or obtaining positions in their company, parents felt it was a true benefit.

**Domain 4: Program Improvement**

In the area of program improvement, surveys were given at the end of every semester at the Saturday program. The suggestions and recommendation made on these surveys were always taken into consideration when staff made course changes.
Program improvement according to staff

According to staff informants, there was no perfect program. Nevertheless, a positive component for the Saturday program was the constant evaluation needed to assess the needs of the participants. As previously mentioned, the concern was not only to increase attendance, but to retain students. The study showed that transportation, childcare, the school environment, and selection of courses had a great impact on attendance. Taking all of the above into consideration and building around them could help to retain parents after they came to the program.

At the time of this investigation, the Saturday program had been in existence for 12 years. Participants' needs were assessed at the end of each semester by surveys. The staff saw the need to learn the language of the participants. Therefore, Spanish as a Second Language was introduced for adult learners. Like every new course, it takes time to publicize the new offering and for people to enroll in the class.

A primary program goal was to strengthen the family. This program served largely Latino. As a result, teachers anticipated that there would be a language barrier, so the program needed to have English as a second language classes.

The program offered classes in which children and parents worked together. This allowed parents to learn skills so they could work with their children in the program and at home. Reportedly, another need that was taken into consideration was that some families had children of different ages. Therefore, the program developed courses that were appropriate for groups from infants to young adults.
Program improvement according to parents.

Parents indicated that their families' needs were addressed. However, there was always room for improvement. One parent informant explained,

On a snowy day- I think they’re learning, and they feel comfortable to come here. It’s like a family unit, and there’s everything provided for them as well. So it’s like the weather is just an obstacle, but not something to really deter them from coming, help get other people to come down, and get them involved. Open their eyes and say “it’s a good program.” Come down and check it out.” I think once they come down and check it out, that’s it, they’re here for life. (Informant 10, p. 15)

A recommendation that parents mentioned was the need to expand the program.

Also, they suggested increasing the size of chairs and desks so parents could be more comfortable during the classes. (Parents were using child-size chairs on Saturdays.) Parents also reported that since some parents worked during the weekend, if the program could be offered on weeknight as well, the concern of those parents could be addressed. Parents were interested in summer school. They did not want to lose the 2 months that the program was not in session. Transportation was another issue. Parents wanted a bus to pick up parents who did not have cars and lived a distance from the school. All of the above suggestions were taken into consideration and presented to the Saturday program’s advisory committee.

Program improvement according to students.

According to students, the important factor that attracts them to the program are the choice of courses for example, (e.g. Reading Through Cooking), meeting new friends, and building relationships with staff.
According to a student informant, making the surrounding churches aware that community services can be done in the Saturday program could be important for program development. A student informant explained, “Well from my church when you’re in high school, in freshman year you have to do community service hours for your Confirmation. To make your Confirmation. They give you a list of places to go” (Informant 12, p. 12). This enables students to complete their Confirmation requirements and also allows them to start thinking about education as a field that they may want to pursue in the future.

Another recommendation from students is to have young teachers. According to a student informant,

They know what we like. Some teacher like more their style like back in the 80s or something, the 70s. I like a lot of teachers, for me I think the young ones like in the twenties or mid-thirties they know what we like. (Informant 15, p. 10)

Program improvement according to support staff:

Support staff mentioned that the key to success was teachers determining what worked and what did not work in the program. The teachers were the ones who knew their students and could perceive their needs. Therefore, the administrator would try to meet with teachers and survey what was working and what was not.

The program coordinator conducted staff meetings every Saturday morning, before the program started. These meetings seemed to be very productive because the staff was kept informed of any changes. These meetings allowed for better communication among the staff. Staff members were able to express any of the concerns they had and, if necessary, address them immediately.
According to the informants, staff participants had a voice in how the program could be developed and implemented. The program coordinator listened to the staff and took their recommendations seriously. These recommendations led to modifications to the program and its classes from semester to semester. Teachers and students alike were asked how to improve the program. A support staff informant explained,

Some of the suggestions I get from the children are, “Why do we have to leave already?” They want to stay a little longer. Once they’re here, and I tell them, it’s time to clean up, it’s time to go. They’re like, “Oh no.” They want to stay longer. So, I could see that they are enjoying themselves, and at the same time they’re learning. I really wouldn’t change our commitment, or philosophy of the family coming to school. I just think the only thing we would be able to change is just the classes and the sessions that are being offered. (Informant 20, p. 16)

According to this informant, it was important to listen to participants and try to meet their needs. Teachers believed that attendance would reflect the participants’ acceptance of their teaching. For participants to want longer hours meant that they were very satisfied with the instruction that they were receiving in their classes. Therefore, the staff became motivated to think creatively and find ways to make their classes interesting so attendance would remain satisfactory. Not only were classes always being reviewed, but the mission of the program was examined to assure that every participant need was met. A support staff informant explained,

I: Our commitment, our philosophy has been reviewed every year. That has been a struggle within our school. We still feel that our main focus should be educating the parents, at the same at the same time that the children are being educated.
E: Do you think that’s one of the success stories also, where parents have to come?
I: Definitely. They’re able to relate more to what is happening in the children’s lives. The children are in school 6, 7 hours a day. The parents have no clue of what they’re going through. Through the Saturday program, they’re able
to support. They become now a support system for their children and say, “Oh I know what you did.” “I saw what you did.” “Oh I saw the work.” Now there’s much of a home school connection through the Saturday program.

E: That’s really interesting what you just said. That the parents have become a support for education. Do you see that is happening more and more now in regular school days?

I: Definitely. As more demands are put on teachers in the class work. They’re becoming overworked with testing, paperwork, and worried about the children to learn. Parents need to become supportive, more involved to help the teachers. Is there anything that the teachers want to know that the parents need to write observations, anything that will help the teachers better understand and educate the children. So, in that way the parents know that they are connection with the school. To help their child learn better, because we’re having children come from different groups, different backgrounds, different prior knowledge. As teachers, we need to know that information. The parents are the sole provider of that information, which could lead to success for that child academically.

Program improvement according to community members.

Through the surveys, recommendations were taken into consideration when developing and implementing courses and activities every semester, from one year to the next. The informants mentioned that, for a program to be interesting and motivating, it needs to be closely connected to real life situations that improve the lifestyle of its participants.

A community member informant explained,

Well, tremendous growth. The numbers have increased to a point where we are at a maximum capacity, and we maintained that as far as I know from semester to semester. I have noticed that the program is ever-changing, and the reason for that is because feedback from parents and from staff. So that it continues to serve the needs of the population. Things that are working have been maintained. New ideas have been introduced, and when they’re successful they’ve been fostered so that the parents, I think they really have a voice here. They’re able to speak directly to the staff whether we do it verbally, or whether there’s some time of input survey. They have a voice about what they want, and amazingly, then, they get what they want. So there’s gratification. The parents feel like people are listening. That people care and
their very basic or very important needs are being met through this program. 

(Informant 22, p. 4)

This informant mentioned an essential element about the surveys. Requesting feedback through surveys demonstrated to the program participants that decision makers wanted to know what the participants were interested in learning. The participants would also understand that their voices were heard and that people do care to provide what they need. This realization was in evident, especially when participants saw classes being implemented according to their survey feedback. An essential element was flexibility and the willingness to change according to the stated needs of the program’s participants. Informants confirmed that the way coordinators could make a program succeed was to listen to the participants and, when possible, respond accordingly.

Research Question 3 asked: To what extent do parent involvement programs benefit the community and education in general? It was evident that the community members who were involved in the Saturday program shared a common mission with the educators (i.e., to educate students of all ages so they would be productive community members). It was important to educate parents so that they could improve their financial situation at home. Many of the parents improved their English and computer skills and these improvements led to promotion on their jobs. Also, some parents got better jobs with higher salaries. The community members that participated in the program realized that if more people in the community have the work skills necessary to complete the work, there would be more employees who could be hired from the community.
Research Question 4

The fourth research question was: What are some of the parent involvement practices the program participants use to contribute to the Saturday program's growth? If the participants' needs are met, then they will attend not only once, but from year to year.

The program administrators surveyed the participants on an ongoing basis during the school year. Therefore, the implementation and development of the courses offered every semester changes in accordance with recommendations and suggestions revealed in the surveys.

In addition, the informants gave recommendations and suggestions for future program changes. Informants mentioned that childcare was an important incentive of the Saturday program. The program served the whole family. If a parent had an infant or an elementary school student, the parent could still attend the program because somebody was available to take care of the child. The informants explained that it was important to have a safe place for their children. They attended the Saturday program because they could relax, knowing that while they were learning, their children were in a safe learning environment. This was one reason why the program had been successful for 12 years at the time of the investigation. Informants were verbal about what makes a parental involvement program attractive. They mentioned that childcare, school environment, and a selection of courses had a significant impact on their attendance in this program.

Research Question 4 asked: What are some of the parental involvement practices the program participants use to contribute to the Saturday program's growth? It was taken into consideration the surveys that the parents did at the end of the semester and from that
information changes were done to the program.

Summary

The participants felt their recommendations were taken into consideration. They did not have an issue expressing their concerns and offering suggestions. Participants felt validated. They saw changes from one session to another because they gave their opinions and were heard. The program was always improving based upon the recommendations made by participants, and this was important to the success of the program. Participants needed to see that they also had ownership of the program. They saw that what they recommended made a difference. That was what made this program different from others.

Program Participants' Attendance

The Saturday program was founded in the fall of 1992. On October 24, 1992, two classes were offered to parents, English as a Second Language and a literacy class. Nineteen parents in total attended the classes in 1992. At that time, five classes were offered to the children. The classes were Music, Computers, Ballet, Health/Hygiene, and a pre-school class. Thirty-eight school-age students attended the program. A total of 57 participants attended on the first date that the Saturday program opened its doors to families.

Ten years later, on September 29, 2002, 15 classes were offered to parents, including English as a Second Language, Conversational English, computer classes, and arts and crafts. At the same time, 11 elementary classes were offered to students.
including Childcare, Pre-Kindergarten, Spanish as a Second Language, Creative Writing, Creative Math, and Health/Physical Fitness.

A new component to the program was introduced during the fourth year. A teen component was added due to the increasing number of young students who had grown up within the program and now were young adults with educational needs. The teen component began with students from both the middle and high school. They attended Environmental Science, Book Illustration, Sports Club, Reading Through Cooking, Computer Club, and English as a Second Language Through Technology. A total of 156 parents and 141 school-age students attended; overall 297 participants attended during that time. This was a significant increase in participant attendance when compared to the first day, 10 years previous. As evidenced by the data, classes changed to meet the educational needs of all of the participants.

The years encompassing the winter of 1998 to the winter of 2002 were selected for study because they were similar semesters representing seasonal bad weather. In spite of that, attendance was consistent when compared with the previous years. The average attendance for this period was 2,214 attendees per semester.

A comparison of attendance was done to illustrate increases and decreases in attendance of the program (see Table 3). For example, for the winter term of 1998 there were 26 classes times 9 sessions, and the total of students participating was 2,600 attendees. This process was done for every semester so that a comparison could be made of the total attendees from semester to semester.
Table 3

Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Attendees</th>
<th>Classes offered</th>
<th>Class sessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winter 1998</td>
<td>2600</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1998</td>
<td>2138</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 1999</td>
<td>2588</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1999</td>
<td>2239</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1999</td>
<td>2197</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2000</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2000</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2000</td>
<td>2579</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2001</td>
<td>2066</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2001</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2001</td>
<td>2180</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2002</td>
<td>2246</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
<td>1222</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>1862</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2003</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31,580</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>2105</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The highest term attendance was the winter of 1998, with a total of 2,600 attendees, whereas the lowest attendance was the spring of 2002 with a total of 1,200 attendees. The lowest average attendance per semester was between the winter of 1998 and the winter of 2002, with a total of 2,214 attendees. The highest average attendance per year was between the fall of 1998 and spring of 2001, with 6,515 attendees.

There were various reasons for the decrease in attendance in the spring of 2002. The board of education implemented more Saturday programs throughout the district and these programs did not replicate the original Saturday program. This was a result of the implementation of a state grant for education awarded to the district. This, of course, temporarily accounted for the lower enrollment in the elementary component of the program. One such program was the English as a second language which was taught to elementary school children.

During the same time, the adult school opened its doors on Saturdays for parents to learn English as a second language. This also affected the enrollment at the original Saturday program.

The average attendance per class for each session in each year was an indication that classes were decreasing (see Table 4). The winter of 1998 the average attendance was 100; however, in the winter 2003 it was 58.

Also, the data suggests that the parents and children attending the program were changing (see Table 5). In the winter 1998 there were 1,417 students and 1,183 parents, but from year to year it would decrease or increase depending on the programs or activities offered at other programs in the community.
Table 4

Average Attendance per Class for Each Session in Each Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Average attendance/class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winter 1998</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1998</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 1999</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1999</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1999</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2000</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2000</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2000</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2001</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2001</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2001</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2002</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2003</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 1998</td>
<td>1417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1998</td>
<td>1064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 1999</td>
<td>1375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1999</td>
<td>1074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1999</td>
<td>1065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2000</td>
<td>1010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2000</td>
<td>885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2000*</td>
<td>286*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2000</td>
<td>1248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2001</td>
<td>988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2001</td>
<td>847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2001</td>
<td>1091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2002</td>
<td>1162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2002</td>
<td>597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2002</td>
<td>984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter 2003</td>
<td>1032</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. *Attendance and percentages are excluded from total and average.

Classes with 100 or more attendees on a consistent basis:

- Childcare
- Pre-Kindergarten
- ESL
- Arts and Crafts
- Sports/Basketball
- Cake Decorating
- Creative Writing
- Environmental Science
- Reading Through Cooking
- Marketing
- Literacy Through Digital Photography
- Citizenship in English
- Internet
- Microwave Cooking
- Make and Take
- Long Distance Learning

Conclusions

It is clear through the attendance data gathered for the first 10 years of the program that this program consistently draws parents to the school. The mission and goal of the program was strengthening the family unit by educating everyone in the family. Parents wanted to be able to come to a single location where all their educational needs can be met. According to informants, they wanted a place where they and their children were safe. They wanted an environment that was welcoming and nurturing, not intimidating, and one in which the people in charge would listen to their needs as they changed with time.

The families who came to the program felt comfortable in the non-threatening environment, and that was why there was such a high attendance and retention rate. The
parents also appreciated the flexibility that the Saturday program provided. This was evident because, after a couple of years of the program being implemented, a teen component was created. The program provided a variety of courses that were tailored to address the needs of all participants. In the interviews, the family members verbalized that they knew that this particular school and program was a unique program with a home away-from-home atmosphere. They visualized the school as an extended family. This was the concept that was projected throughout the Saturday program. The entire staff was there to help everyone. An environment that is warm, welcoming, and fostering of a sense of belonging is particularly appealing to Latinos.
Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Researchers have acknowledged that parent involvement is an important issue affecting the success of children in schools (Christenson, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Therefore, it would be beneficial for schools to partner with parents, but this can be a difficult task. In education, parental involvement begins when the administration and staff from a school communicate a genuine desire to involve parents by considering their needs. An example of this is when schools accommodate parents’ work schedules in the scheduling of meetings with teachers. Moreover, if schools held workshops in the morning, in the evening, or on Saturday, this flexibility would permit more parents to participate in their children’s education. Finding ways to include both the mother and father in the education of their children is imperative. The whole family should be involved and work together as true partners.

It is extremely important to increase communication. Some activities get better, build common respect, conditions students to share points of view, and think abstractly, according to Goodenow and Springman (1999). In the current study, it was clear that children benefited when parents attended classes in the Saturday program. The parents were able to help their children with homework. Communication between children and parents increased. The families came together to classes or had breakfast and spoke about school. Furthermore, children's schoolwork improved because parents acquired the additional skills they needed to help them at home. Parents were able to help their
children study for tests after they had acquired the necessary skills. Also, if they did not understand something, they would be able to ask the teacher on Saturday to explain.

This study was guided by four research questions.

1. What are some of the experiences parents encountered when coming Saturday program?

2. What type of courses will increase the participation of parents in the school?

3. To what extend do parent involvement programs benefit the community and education in general?

4. What are some of the parent involvement practices the program participants use to contribute to the Saturday program’s growth?

All four questions were answered through four domains that were identified when the focus groups were completed: school environment, curriculum, self-development, and program improvement. These domains were identified by participants to be most important in a parental involvement program.

Three focus groups were conducted to research how to increase the parental involvement of minority parents in an urban school district. Thirty participants were involved in the group interviews. From those participants, various elements were identified that could potentially increase participation of minority parents in schools. After the focus groups were conducted, I decided to complete 25 individual interviews to gather more in-depth information about what constitutes an effective parent involvement program. The informants were parents, students, community members, and staff members who were all involved in the Saturday program.
Reasons for Parent Participation

If parents' believe schools are trying to involve them, they would probably consider being involved in their children's education (Eccles & Harold, 1996). The school needs to frequently hold conferences with families, occasionally have personal contact with parents (not only when the school has problems with a student), emphasize collaborative homework that parents can do with their children, set up regular home/school contact, and constantly send learning packets home to parents to work with their child. Miedel and Reynolds (1999) found that parents may be able to decrease school failure by intervening when their child begins to lose interest in school.

Conclusions

There were four primary questions guiding this study. These four questions were asked in order to guide participants' responses. The first question posed in the study was What are some of the experiences that parents encountered when coming to a Saturday program? In general, the participants identified four issues. The first issue reported was childcare. The school's administration allowed children to attend school while the parents attended classes; thus, the issue of childcare was addressed.

The second issue was scheduling of programs. Parents often worked two jobs, making it difficult for them to attend school activities. This issue was addressed by the Saturday program through flexible schedules. The classes were given on Saturdays, when the majority of parents were not working.

The third issue identified was the school environment. Parents wanted to feel that they were welcome in the school. The parents found that the staff at the Saturday
program spoke their language and that the program had a family environment. That was
the primary reason they had no problem participating in the Saturday program.

The fourth issue was school curriculum. A variety of classes were offered.
Parents were able to learn English-language and academic skills that enabled them to
help their children at home. The parents’ academic and social-emotional needs were met
through the Saturday program curriculum.

The second question posed in this study was, What type of courses will increase
the participation of parents in the school? Participants’ responses again illustrated some
common elements. The participants enjoyed learning different topics that were not
offered in school during the week. The students gave various examples, such as Reading
Through Cooking. The students enjoyed coming to this class to learn cooking, and at the
same time they were learning reading in a different way. During Basketball, during half-
time, students were expected to read an article on sports and write in their journals. These
were just two classes that the students enjoyed that mixed recreation with academics.
Parents wanted to learn English; therefore, this course offering helped to increase the
participation of language-minority parents.

Staff members were willing to work a sixth day, and staff informants expressed
that they enjoyed sharing their knowledge with children and adults. It was a way of doing
something different and changing their weekly routine. The staff also shared that they did
not have to worry about teaching to a test. They were free to be creative and have fun
teaching while making it more enjoyable for students.

The staff spoke about the program’s structure and its objectives. Staff
interviewees shared a common feeling about being appreciated for their work and trusted
concerning how to introduce and teach the skills. They did say that they were accountable for their performance because if participants did not like their class it would be reflected in weekly attendance. Therefore, teachers made the classes interesting enough to ensure that participants would return on a consistent basis.

The third question posed in the study was, To what extent do parent involvement programs benefit the community and education in general? It was evident that the community members who were involved in the Saturday program shared a common mission with educators. It was important to educate parents so they, in turn, could help their children at home. If we have more people in the communities that have the skills necessary for particular jobs, the workforce will benefit because there will be more employees who could be hired from the community. The community members who were interviewed reported this factor to be very important and it was one of the reasons for their support of the program.

The fourth question posed in the study was, What are some of the parent involvement practices the program participants use to contribute to the Saturday program's growth? By way of the results of the surveys conducted every semester, the following recommendations were taken into consideration: (a) teach various levels of classes in English as a second language; (b) offer classes where children and parents can work together, because this would help parents to learn student skills that they could encourage in their children (c) develop courses that were appropriate for age groups from infants to young adults.

Research has shown that parents are a very important part of their children's education. Therefore, it is important for educators to communicate this to parents and
educate them with regard to how they can work as a team with teachers to educate each child. It was through the Saturday program that parents understood how important their role in education was at home with their children. Parents who attended the Saturday program received this message as they attended different classes year after year. Moreover, the parents welcomed the learning and demanded to learn more about how they could help their children. This is why it was very important to make the best impression possible during the parents’ first visit to the school.

Information gathered from the interviews suggested that high parental participation in the Saturday school was due to the following reasons:

1. Parents did not feel that language was a barrier because staff and the administration spoke their native language.

2. Staff and administrative personnel were sensitive to parents’ needs because they understood the culture of the school community.

3. Parents felt that when they came to the school program and participated in the activities, they were able to increase their communication with their families. The activities were conducted in the parents’ native language.

4. Diversity was an advantage of the program. People learned from each other, and they learned about each other’s culture.

5. Many opportunities for parents to learn English through English as a second language courses increased their abilities to help their children at home with their homework.

6. Parents learned to communicate effectively in English while working with their children cooperatively.
7. Parents were given opportunities to practice their English at social events and activities that the program offered.

8. Parents were more motivated to come to the school because they saw that their children appreciated their efforts. Parents were helping their children in English because they were becoming more confident speaking English.

9. Parents found that school was a place where they could meet new friends and develop their communication skills with their children.

10. Parents found that school was no longer intimidating; rather, it is a place where they could come and learn. They were able to share what they learned with their children when they were at home.

The results of the study showed that when parents were involved in the education of their children, children could succeed. The findings of the current study contributed to the parental involvement literature by identifying four domains and the elements that increased parental involvement. The study also identified a relationship between the characteristics of an effective school and the elements that made the Saturday program successful. School environment, curriculum, opportunities for self-development, and program improvements were determining factors for success in the establishment of a program that attracted minority parents on a continuous basis.

Discussion of Findings

Participants in the study provided a significant amount of information about their perceptions or their ability to recognize the elements that affect parental involvement in schools.
A primary reason that parents came to parental activities in the Saturday school was because of the positive school environment. This was the first domain (see Figure 1) identified in the study. Parents who believed that a school was warm and represented an extension of their family experienced a higher degree of motivation to attend the Saturday program.
Figure 1. Domain 1 and themes.
Parents also stated that attending the Saturday program allowed them to build relationships with other staff or adults, as in an extended family. In some cases, they looked forward to the program as a social event. They interacted with different people and learned about other cultures. Parents attended the Saturday program because the presentation of the information was not threatening to them. For example, courses were taught in their native language, and the subject matter was generally of interest to them. Therefore, the retention and recruitment of parents was successful in the school. The school gave parents what they needed so that they were more likely to attend and continue attending from week to week. In addition, parents were very interested in attending a program that would help them to help their children or develop job skills, which, in turn, would help their family economics.

Strong leadership of a school was a significant factor in parents’ participation in programs. The administration of the school created a warm and accepting atmosphere because they spoke the language of the parents. Parents felt that teachers and staff were sensitive to their culture and their needs. The administrator of the building had a clear mission that was demonstrated daily in working with the staff and the parents. Therefore, the school was an environment that was safe and sensitive to parents’ needs. This created an effective teaching and learning environment. The teachers and support staff were able to bring parents in and calm their fears, thereby increasing the potential for learning. The parents felt welcome and that made learning enjoyable. Parents did not want to feel intimidated when they attended classes. They wanted to feel that the staff was willing to help them understand concepts that they might not be familiar with so that when they went home they could share them with their family. Parents were willing to learn. How
concepts were presented and the appropriate scheduling of activities made a significant difference in obtaining positive results.

The second domain identified in the study was curriculum. According to informants, the most common mistake made in districts was that programs and workshops were developed without taking the parents' needs into consideration. The participating school surveyed the parents and then utilized these findings to accommodate their needs when developing the Saturday program.

Meeting the needs of participants was an important component of the Saturday program. According to informants, they did not want to waste their time; therefore, they needed to enjoy their time learning. The classes needed to meet the needs of all who were going to participate. That was why the Saturday program was successful; because it was a one-stop-shop. This happened only by surveying and planning carefully, ensuring that everyone's needs were taken into consideration. In addition, according to informants, the program needed to be linked with academics.

Program assessment was essential in developing and planning activities for parents. Attendance was used to check parent attendance and consistency in classes. Parents evaluated the classes, and it was evident that the growth of the Saturday program was based on these assessments.
Figure 2. Domain 2 and themes.
According to the informants, another important factor that was identified was the delivery of instruction. This was just as important as the need for instruction. Long-valued concepts needed to be presented in the language of the participants so they would feel comfortable and be more able to understand the material. The staff had to be sensitive to the participants and teach at their level. This was significant for all age groups. Adolescents needed to feel that they had a connection to the staff presenting the concept, as was reported by the teen informants. They made comments such as, “We like the basketball instructor. He can relate to us and speak at a level that makes us feel comfortable, and that is why we enjoy coming week after week.” This was also true when informants were asked about the Reading Through Cooking class. Informants said, “It is just reading in a fun way. No textbook. It is just reading recipes that we can relate to our daily life.”

The children’s classes needed to be connected to what was taught during the school week. According to informants, careful planning brought a review of the subjects and areas where children were having difficulties during the week. Learning on Saturday was an enjoyable and interesting way to work. For example, Creative Math was taught with manipulative methods. Teaching Reading Through Technology presented reading projects using the computer. Courses offered in the Saturday program had an emphasis on the academics.

The third domain identified was self-development (see Figure 3). According to informants, no one did anything without a purpose. This was fundamental to a
Figure 3. Domain 3 and themes.
successful program. The question was, What was offered, and what were the participants obtaining in return? Informants said they felt they achieved career enhancement. They were able to be promoted in their jobs as a direct result of being able to communicate in English with the people with whom they worked. English as a Second Language was a well-attended class. Learning English helped participants to qualify for better jobs, thereby allowing parents to improve their family's financial situation.

According to informants, now that they were able to provide better for their families, they could fulfill their personal self-improvement plans. The informants explained how learning skills built their self-esteem and taught them how to help their children. This made them feel good about themselves. It helped parents feel self-confident.

The fourth domain was opportunities for program improvement. According to informants, no program was perfect. That was why it was important to listen to suggestions and recommendations. Constant surveying and evaluating were necessary regarding what worked and what did not work. The Saturday program increased its parent participation because every semester was different; changing with the needs of the participants. Informants mentioned that the program staff was listening and making changes. For example, the teen component of the program started because, when the students got older, there were no classes for them to attend. Changes to the program helped to keep the students in the program.

According to informants, just as in other programs, there were weaknesses. Examples included: time (parents wanted the program to be all day), length of the program (the parents wanted the program to be offered all year around), and finances (not
having enough money to offer all the courses that parents would like to attend).

Nevertheless, recognizing these weaknesses allowed for improvement of the program and finding other resources that could help meet the needs of the parents.

Three main factors arose in the surveys. The first significant factor taken into consideration was childcare. The program provided childcare, and the parents felt very comfortable leaving their children while they were in class. Another main factor was transportation. Providing transportation to participants was not a concern because the locations were accessible to everyone, and all activities were available at the same location. District buses were available on limited basis at the Saturday program for field trips.

However, the most significant problem or concern for the program was financing. Not having a substantial budget that would provide for all the possible needs of the program was a limitation. The Saturday program administrators were able to find funds in grants and corporate sponsors, but this was also limited.

Figures 4, 5, 6, and 7 are a presentation of the domains, themes, and elements developed from the information gathered from the informants in this study.
Figure 4. Themes and characteristics for Domain 1.
Figure 5. Themes and characteristics for Domain 2.
Figure 6. Themes and characteristics for Domain 3.
The program began in the fall of 1992 with two classes offered to parents and five classes for students with a total of 57 participants. Attendance increased steadily every year. Eleven years later, 14 classes were offered to parents, 3 partners’ classes for parents and children, and 9 elementary classes were offered to elementary students. In addition, a new component to the program, the teen program, was available as a result of the need to provide older children with courses. Six additional classes were added to the program. The attendance totaled 297 participants for the semester studied. The number for that semester showed an increase of 247 participants in comparison to the first day that the program started in 1992. Classes changed, drawing new participants and increasing the enrollment.

However, there was a decline in enrollment beginning in the spring of 1999, not because the program changed, but because four elementary schools in the district began offering a Saturday program. At the same time, the Adult School opened its doors to parents on Saturday to teach English as a Second Language. Nevertheless, the decline in enrollment was not significant. A drop of approximately 7% was observed when comparing it to other years on attendance concludes that is was not significant. Still, the Saturday school attracted over 200 participants, young and old alike, every Saturday. The program maintained a steady attendance throughout the years. Results from surveys revealed that parents and students would attend programs if their needs were met in a safe and accepting environment. A district official said, “You will not get parents out or teens on a Saturday morning.” The program attendance was evidence that this was not an issue in the program studied. The difference was having a strong mission and having everyone properly aligned and working to meet that mission. It was a true community effort from
socioeconomic status, race, and gender may lead to improper teacher expectations and poor attitudes, which affect parental involvement. If a parent perceives teachers as intimidating or insensitive they may be reluctant to participate in parental involvement school activities. The teachers may lack the awareness that this perception exists among parents and they may fail to overcome these perceptions and fail to increase communication with parents. This, in turn, could influence parental involvement. This notion was supported by the findings of this study; as parents felt welcome and their participation in the school increased. Further research should be conducted to determine other factors that can increase parental involvement.

There is a major issue when parents report that they perceive disinterest in their children teachers during the school week. It's consistent with recommendations for parents by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (2004). For example, in accordance with OERI, parents need to get involved regardless of teachers level. The parents need to know several teachers before problems begin to occurred with their children and be in communication regularly with the guidance counselors. There is a need for parents to get involved in their child’s education and read and review their children’s grades and test results. This is something that does not happen regularly. Results from the current study, namely that (a) parent involvement included regular attendance in school activities and (b) included reaching out to the children’s teachers during the week, are also suggestions made by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (2004). It does not matter if a parent perceives interest by the teacher or not, the parent has the right to ask for help if it is needed and they have the right to request a conference with the teacher as many times as needed. In accordance with the Office of Educational
Research and Improvement's recommendation, parents need to get involved in order to know other parents, participate in school meetings, form support groups, and they need to ask for information from the principal when necessary. This recommendation was supported by the results of the current study: the parents were able to learn English to increase their communication with classroom teachers. Also, because building relationships was one of the positive factors of the program, the parents felt comfortable asking for help.

While this study provided important and useful information, a more in-depth understanding of the topic would be even more beneficial. Therefore, recommended that a future study further investigate the variables and findings from this study as follows, 1. Replicate the Saturday program environment during the week, 2. Examine the administrative styles, beliefs, and values of a successful administrative team responsible for family programs, 3. Investigate the impact on student achievement through Saturday programs, 4. Explore how to increase participation of minority parents in schools, 5. Develop funding sources for other Saturday programs

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study could be used by other schools to increase parental involvement. If parental involvement is seen as a priority, then the district, as well as the school, should include it in their school mission. Parents, in general, could benefit from school officials that make parental involvement one of their priorities in their schools.

Parental involvement programs should educate parents who, in turn, can educate students at home. This is a very strong reason for increasing the parental involvement of
Implications for Policy

The outcomes of this study have implications at the policy level in light of the No Child left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Office of the Press Secretary, 2002), which is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The NCLB demands that all children in spite of ethnicity and background obtain an equal opportunity and a quality education. The main goals of the NCLB are: (a) more choices for parents and students, (b) greater flexibility for states and school district, (c) stronger accountability for results, and (d) use of research-based instructional methods (USDE, 2007). Districts must now evaluate and implement programs that comply with the demands. Parental involvement is essential if educators want to attain greater student success in schools. The more advantages educators can provide, the greater student success there can be in schools.

Closing Remarks

The schools cannot provide all the support that students need to be successful. Therefore, schools need to build a partnership with parents so that when children go home, education can continue. That is why it is very important to develop family programs to educate parents not only in academics, but also in the importance of continuing the school day at home. Latino families are not familiar with this concept because they come from a culture where school is exclusively the place where a student attends classes. When students go home, and parents continue working with them, they are more likely to do better on standardized tests than students who do not get parental
support at home. Therefore, there is a need to educate parents, and it is important for the
district to work with the school administration to make this happen.

In spite of the diversity of ages, nationalities, personalities, education, awareness,
experiences, consciousness, and language abilities, the informants agreed that the
Saturday program had several strengths. The staff spoke the same language as the
parents and thus eliminated the parental fear of not knowing how to communicate. Also,
this eliminated an obstacle to participation. Parents showed a willingness to work with
the teachers once most of their concerns were addressed. A “trust-link” materialized
between staff, students, and parents. Staff showed understanding and sensitivity to their
cultures, backgrounds, and needs. The program was stable and showed strength. Also,
coming from a low-income level did not deter students or parents from investing in
themselves. They understood and confirmed that education was a key to their success.

If all of the above is taken into consideration, then family programs could be the
beginning of achieving greater success in schools. The children who are entering our
schools today are entering at a disadvantage because of parents who are not able to help
their children at home with schoolwork. The more advantages educators can provide the
greater their success can be. The key here is to educate parents. There needs to be a
commitment, a strong mission, and a dedication by all involved in education to assure the
success of a child.
References


