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Perceptions of Parents Toward Parenting Education Programs for Improving Student Achievement: the Case of a Suburban Elementary School District in Monmouth County, New Jersey

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PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS TOWARD PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: THE CASE OF A SUBURBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT IN MONMOUTH COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

BY

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Education
Seton Hall University

2008
TITLE PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS TOWARD PARENTING PROGRAMS FOR IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT: THE CASE OF A SUBURBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT IN MONMOUTH COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

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DESCRIPTORS: CHILDREN; PARENT/EDUCATION; FAMILY STUDIES; SOCIAL CHANGE; YOUTH PROBLEMS; FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP; SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL-ACADEMIC; ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS; SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS; FAMILY PROGRAMS; CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT; SCHOOL LEADERS; SURVEY INSTRUMENT; JOYCE EPSTEIN; DOUGLAS THAMAN.

ABSTRACT This study was conducted to determine the perceptions of parents in more affluent school districts regarding the significance of and need for parent education programs. Most studies have focused on promoting parent education programs in low socio-economic districts. The rationale underscoring this study was to determine if parents, even in more advantaged high socio-economic areas, perceive that they are adequately prepared with sufficient information and knowledge regarding parenting. The study sought to determine if parents feel that they could benefit from parent education support from their district school. Parents from five elementary schools, grades one through five, in an affluent New Jersey school district were asked to respond to a survey questionnaire. The questions were taken and adapted from the previous research scales used by Dr. Joyce Epstein and Dr. Douglas Thaman. These questions were modified and supplemented with additional questions pertinent for this study. Written permission was granted by Dr. Joyce Epstein and Dr. Douglas Thaman to use sections from their survey instruments for this research project. The survey questionnaire contained a likert scale as well as open ended questions.
Information from parents regarding their perspectives, descriptions, suggestions and recommendations for developing and planning parent education programs was collected. The perception of parents was further assessed through four open ended questions. Answers to the open ended questions offered opportunities to detect commonalities and patterns that were organized and categorized for additional analysis. Parent comments centered on themes such as finding balance in family life, instilling values in their children, communication, and finding just the right discipline. Parents in this study also expressed concern about social pressures influencing family life. The findings found most significant were: (1) Parents even in a high socio-economic school district, agree with, support the need for, and would attend school sponsored parent education programs. (2) Parents have little formal training in parenting skills. (3) Parents have learned their parenting skills largely from their own parents or by trial and error. (4) Past precedent has shown that school programs have been modified as a result of social and cultural forces. (5) Parent skills training programs should be implemented in school curriculums. (6) School leaders and curriculum writers should examine ways to integrate parent education skills into and throughout the curriculum. The driving force is to prepare children to become good parents and family members. Parenting skills training and parent education programs support family needs. This type of family education will assist children’s learning and help them become knowledgeable and prepared for the future.
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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, Kathleen McGillion Briscoe, has successfully defended and made
the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this
Spring Semester 2008.

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submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.
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From the bottom of my heart, thank you all, for helping and inspiring me to this unbelievable destination.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with love to

John

My husband and best friend.
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

The Changing Family

During the last several decades a profound metamorphosis has occurred in the American family. The days of a stay at home mother and working father have followed the path of gas lit street lamps, trolley cars, and the milk man and faded into the past. The transformation of the family is likely to continue.

An alarming increase of problems affecting children has simultaneously occurred during this same time frame of change in the American Family. Consider the following dramatic issues currently impacting our youth. Eating disorders, namely, anorexia and bulimia, are now commonplace among our children. Childhood obesity is fast becoming an epidemic and a national health crisis. Drug and alcohol abuse make our youngsters chemically dependent. Teenage suicide, bullying, child abuse and neglect are serious problems requiring earlier and earlier intervention. School policy and curriculum standards have had to be modified to address these concerns.
Children are evidencing worrisome behavior problems. Now, even children are prescribed anti-depressants. Youth violence, high-school drop out rates, teenage gambling, and gang membership are more issues that contribute to putting our young people at risk (Children’s Defense Fund, 2008).

Alienated, isolated, unhappy youth, are affecting our school system. Two such alienated students at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, slaughtered 13 innocent people before committing suicide. More recently, at Virginia Tech University, Blacksburg, Virginia, a very troubled youth shot to death 32 students and faculty members and then took his own life.

The widening gap between rich and poor has created an over-indulged child seeking material gratification, while other children are impoverished and lack health insurance. In addition, growing numbers of parents have less job stability. This further contributes to putting children at risk. More children at risk create more children at risk to learning.

Films, music lyrics, clothing apparel, television, and the internet imbue our youth with explicit portrayals of sexual experiences. "While sexual activity among teens is hard on many parents, it probably is harder on teens, who
are at risk for emotional problems as well as for pregnancy and life-threatening disease" (Elkind, 1996, p.159).

Even college applications for our high school seniors have become a tremendous source of stress for our teens. The pressure to have countless service hours, superior athletic ability, and numerous advanced placement courses has overwhelmed and pressured our teens. The Dean of Admissions at Harvard, William R. Fitsimmons, stated, "Too many of them (referring to high school seniors) are going to experience one form or another of burnout, and that would be a tragedy" (Zernike, December 7, 2000, p. 1).

These troubling facts demonstrate an increase in mental and emotional anguish among our children. Society has not been able to curtail the growth of these trends. The need for a strong family support system has never been more apparent or more essential. Certainly, the problems in the modern family involve complex issues. But neglecting to understand the broad social implications of these trends contributes to growing numbers of children who are put at risk to learning and academic failure. "These physical and emotional problems mentioned above affect a student's mental readiness which, of course, is directly related to a child's success in school" (Saunders, 2005, p.
10). Is there a new meaning to the famous treatise *A Nation at Risk*? (US Department of Education, 1983).

We must consider certain social forces that have influenced the course of the American family during this time frame. A look into the social climate that has transformed our families may help us understand and explain the upheaval that our children are feeling. Over the past few decades, the family has become much more mobile. It is no longer assumed that children will grow up in a neighborhood where everyone knows them. People move so often today that neighbors are strangers instead of that extra set of watchful eyes from a past generation. We are too busy to even get acquainted with our neighbors. Neighbors, for the most part, are to be kept at arm’s length rather than included as extended family or community. Pat Mara, an Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Tewksbury, PA, offered her amusing remedy to creating friendlier neighborhoods: “Government subsidies for front porches, so families have a place to sit and socially interact with one another and the social interactions of the neighborhood” (Hunt, 1999, p. A15).

More mothers are now working and many return to work before the child is the age of one. Today, the internet, e-mail, Blackberrys, voice mail, and cell phones, further
increase parents’ working hours by extending work into homes, weekends, vacation time, and family travel time. Parents, therefore, are spending less time with their children. "...the Council of Economic Advisors showed families today are spending an average of 22 fewer hours per week together than families did 30 years ago" ("Council of Economic Adviser," 1999).

Wade Horn, (as cited in Anderson, 1996) Assistant Secretary for children and families at the Department of Health and Human Services, reports that almost a fifth of children in grades six through twelve "had not had a single conversation lasting at least 20 minutes with either parent in the last month" (p. 6). Esther Schaeffer, an executive director of Character Education, reported, "Over the course of a year the teenagers said, they were spending 1500 hours watching television, 600 hours in school and 33 hours in conversation with parents" (Bronner, 1999, p.17).

Credit card excess and overextended financial burdens have impacted families in great numbers. These burdens increase the need for two incomes. "Contemporary economics often requires that one or both parents work longer hours in order to manage family finances. This translates into less time for children, as working parents readjust family schedules to accommodate the demands of fulltime work"
(Elkind, 1996, p.76). The stress to pay not only financial debt but also the burgeoning rise in housing costs further create demands and pressures on parents that lessen their ability to provide for the emotional security of their children.

In the past, families gathered together more frequently at mealtimes. Then, mealtimes were consistent, on a schedule, and centered around the dinner table. The microwave and eating on the run were not yet aspects of our culture. Mealt ime can create important opportunities to teach children manners, conversation, and social skills. Family dinner affords children time with parents and a good chance to recount the events of the day, especially, the school day. The importance of family mealtime should not be overlooked. "The National Merit Scholarship Corporation profiled National Merit scholars from the past 20 years trying to find out what these stellar students had in common. They were surprised to find that, without exception, kids came from families who ate together three or more nights a week" (Knight, 2002, p.30).

The proliferation of affordable and easily available television sets, cell phones, stereos, satellite radio, videos, video game systems, x-box, portable CD's, DVD players, lap top computers, cable TV, the internet, i-pods,
MP3 players, instant messaging, and chat rooms have allowed children to isolate themselves in their rooms during dinner and away from family social discourse opportunities. The television seems to have become surrogate parents imparting others’ morals and values. Dr. William Doherty in his book *Take Back Your Kids* advises parents “to unplug their children.” He borrows PBS commentator Bill Moyers observance: “Kids are being raised by appliances” (Reagan 2000, p.11).

There were other times that families spent together a generation ago that have declined today. Going to church or synagogue together, going on outings and being together on birthdays and holidays were all regarded as essential to normal and healthy family life. Togetherness worked to the advantage of children and youth. It ensured that they would be involved with their parent in meaningful ways on a regular basis. Such involvement satisfies young peoples need for security and protection and allows them to devote their energies to the tasks of schooling and socialization (Elkind, 1996, p.76).

The number of family members has also seen a decline. Smaller families are more prevalent today. Past generations lived with, or near, the extended family, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. This extended family provided support
and assisted parents in the family's upbringing. The smaller families make fewer adults available to needy children and equally needy parents. Stressed as perhaps never before, there are more families in the United States living in poverty, high divorce rates, and greater number of families in which both parents work in order to maintain an adequate standard of living. The phrase 'family break down' has become commonplace in describing the state of our nation's families. (Davies et al. 1993 b, p. v)

These stressed parents are finding it difficult to provide their children with the time, attention, and affirmation that children continuously warrant throughout their childhood. "Yale child psychologist and child advocate James Comer believes there are more influences on kids now than ever before. And he says this is happening when time with caring adults seems to be diminishing. When these two forces combine, we can expect inconsistencies in our children" (Elias, 2002). This leads us to the question: "Will children in the future be sufficiently nurtured and equipped to keep the nation evolving in healthy fashion?" (Preston, 1996, p. 97).
The family today is different from previous generations. Nancy Thompson (as cited in Wysocki, 1999) a middle-aged telephone operator, reflects about the changing family "...family routines have broken down. It used to be, you came home from school, and an hour and a half later you all sat down and ate dinner. Then you watched one TV show and did your homework. You had a Sunday afternoon dinner. There's none of that today. It's all haphazard" (Wysocki, 1999, A. 9).

Families now encompass a variety of forms: single parent, couples of the same sex, individuals joining together with their own sets of children, grandparents assuming the role of primary caregiver, as well as the traditional family. Some government policies have even had negative impacts on families. Federal government assistant programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) reduced the subsidy to the family if there was a working male in the household. This had a devastating impact on many poor, especially minority families, by encouraging the father to move out (Hewlett & West, 1998).

Society can no longer long for the good old days of the traditional family. Famous TV portrayals, such as, "Ozzie and Harriet," "Leave It to Beaver," and "Father Knows Best," of the so called ideal family may have been
just that, portrayals. There were imperfections in the family then, too. Research, however, does show that children of the traditional family model fare better both in and out of school (Bradshaw, 1988). Nevertheless, there is no going back. The need for both parents to work is now a necessity not a luxury. Millions of children are in childcare. However, childcare is expensive and in some cases care is not of the highest quality. It may also mean baby sitters are raising children or even worse children are raising themselves. Yes, a new social phenomenon has been coined, "latch key" children. "Schools close at 3:00 p.m. and latch-key children often roam the streets while their parents at work feel helpless and anxious" (Davies et al., 1993 b, p. vi). In addition, older children are often assuming the parent role earlier and earlier. These children left alone without adult guidance often are ripe for situations for which they are ill-prepared. In essence, society has helped shift the nurturing role onto children themselves (Elkind, 1996).

What has always appeared necessary, but has been missing from both past and present education is the very knowledge of parenting. When have we been educated in how to parent, how to raise a family? The long gone Home Economics curriculum may have come the closest to
addressing the combined needs of home, family life, and child development.

When has parenting in most people's education been considered, at the most it has been glossed over by piecemeal or included as fragmented parts of another curriculum? However, the understanding of family constitutes the well being of individuals within families and is the necessary basis for the welfare of society as a whole. (Bradshaw, 1988, p.10)

Connection To Education

The cultural family transformation provides a poignant message for education. The social forces impacting family have a relationship to student learning. Our schools may need to incorporate a parent assistance program to help address the current needs, problems, and issues of parents, children, and the family. Schools need to educate parents so that they understand ways to develop, motivate, support, and nurture bonds within the family that will help make children secure, confidant, and ready to learn. Reflect on the following quote stated by family psychologist, Father Martin Padovani (M. Podavani, personal communication, February, 1995) at a school PTA meeting. "Give me the parents and I’ll cure the children." Schools can provide a
family-like atmosphere for children who may not experience the important nurturing effects of family. Breakfast programs, drug education programs, teenage suicide prevention curriculum, bullying policy, driver education programs, full day kindergarten, after school care programs, and preschool programs have become additions to our school programs. As of September 2007, schools in New Jersey must now abide by new nutrition based guidelines (in order to address the growing obesity problems of children. These guidelines (New Jersey School Nutrition Policy, August 2007) state that only food with nutritional value can be served to children. This legislation now regulates school vending machines, school lunches, and school snacks. The above mentioned programs have all had their inception in the changing needs of society. Given these precedents, the widespread issues of the family, and the increasing neediness of children, society may now more than ever be ready to support parent skills training programs in all school communities, including both low socio-economic and high socio-economic school districts.

Schools Can Assist

During this period of rapid change in the family, a U.S. Department of Education (1983) report entitled A
Nation at Risk identified another emerging crisis. A Nation at Risk defined a major problem: increasing numbers of our students were failing academically and they were ill-prepared with the foundations necessary to meet the demands of increased global competitiveness. "All regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost" (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1983, p.1). This document exposed the need for reformation of our schools and its educational curriculum.

Since the publication of a Nation At Risk, proposals from the government have recognized and included the importance of parents to educational reform. In 1994, Congress enacted the GOALS 2000 Educate America Act. An essential component of this federal legislation advocating school reform recognized and specified in Goal 8 that, "Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children" (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1994, p.3).

The most recent federal legislation is: No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). It also recognizes the impact parental involvement has to a child’s
academic success. "For the first time, a federal law defines the term 'parent involvement.' Based on National PTA's National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs, NCLB defines parent involvement as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication with the school regarding student academic learning and other school activities" (PTA Position: No Child Left Behind Act, 2002, p. 2).

A Bank Street School of Education catalogue (1999) listed this course offering:

"School Change: The Transformational Leader"

Current school reform efforts emphasize vision, shared decision making, professional autonomy, positive school structure, and restructuring. How are these concepts being realized in current practice?" (p. 9).

If the transformational school leader is charged with emphasizing vision then school leaders should be promoting policies and practices that strive to strengthen and support the family, recognizing that a healthy family, however configured, is fundamental to society.

New economic pressures on parents mean that there is less time and energy for parenting than ever before, yet the irony is, given the challenges of modern society, children require more intensive and longer periods of
nurturing. If children are to become economically viable in an increasingly skill-intensive era, they must be well educated, and if children are to become socially viable in an increasingly complex culture, they must have strong, stable attachments to adults. In other words, the need for parental investment and involvement in children has reached new heights just when moms and dads are increasingly unable to be there for them (Hewlett & West, 1998, p.74).

Driving social forces are changing all families and creating increased challenges for both families and our youth. Uri Bronfenbrenner, a professor of Family Studies and Child Development at Cornell University, stated: "The social forces now affecting the family in this country are a social time bomb and our children are the casualties of the fallout" (as cited in Hass & Parkay, 1993, p. 145). One can only view these social forces regarding our children as alarming. The problems affecting our youth and family create a far-reaching impact and lessen the ability for our children to learn. These problems greatly influence children's perception, capabilities, and their readiness to learn. The social capital of our youngsters must be considered in the "success for all debate." Children must be emotionally prepared to fulfill their academic potential. Our children must be emotionally
secured and prepared to learn to their maximum capacity. "The old paradigm held an ideal of reason freed of the pull of emotion. The new paradigm urges us to harmonize head and heart" (Goleman, 1995, p. 29). We must be child centered in addressing the needs of our youth. "There is growing conviction that providing services that promote family health from the conception of a child is not only cost-effective (eliminating the need for expensive intervention) but a far more humane approach to children" (Davies et al., 1993 b, p.vi).

Schools may need to address these phenomena more specifically in order to safeguard our youth and to provide our country with its future capital. Our schools must produce sufficient leaders for our country in 20 to 30 years who possess the qualities of integrity and moral character necessary for responsible citizenship. Parent education should be considered as an essential and omnipotent part of school programs.

Statement of Problem

Many proposals calling for educational reform in the last 25 years have committed to the premise that all children can learn and that the future of American society
depends on it. Education literature and now legislation, 
_No Child Left Behind Act_, have addressed the importance of 
parent involvement and parent education programs. Research 
ahas also linked the more involved, informed parent to an 
increase in children's school success (Epstein, 1995). 
Parents proactive in their child's education create 
conditions for greater academic success. Parents 
positively involved with their children foster social and 
emotionally healthy climates necessary for children to be 
ready for academic success. Neuroscientists have increased 
our understanding of the brain as well as our knowledge of 
child growth and development. Some research even reflects 
about the importance of critical time periods in meeting 
children's needs. Another way of looking at it is, "It is 
not what you keep from a child that will save him, nor what 
town you move him to. It is what you put into him in the 

Children today face more challenges at a time when 
 fewer adults including family members are available to 
them. This puts more children at risk, as well as more 
children at risk to learning. The focus in most of the 
educational literature, however, has targeted and addressed 
the poor or low social economic districts in promoting more 
parent involvement or parenting education programs. Fewer
studies address the needs and perceptions of parents in high-socio economic school districts as to their needs. In this time of rapid changes in family structure and increased social and economic pressures that is pervasive to all in society, the perception of parents in high-socio-economic demographic school districts is also relevant. Since the problems influencing our youth affect all racial, economic, and cultural groups, the educational focus should include families and children even in wealthier school districts.

Parent involvement is a necessary ingredient and an essential part of educational reform needed across all socio-economic classes. Key legislation (GOALS 2000, No Child Left Behind) now presents policy about the importance of parent involvement to increasing students' academic success. Yet, parent involvement appears to be subject to interpretation by each specific school community. The perception of parents can have great input in determining the structure of parent skills programs. The needs of more advantaged parents for parental education programs may be under researched but their perceptions and input are vital to the education of their children. The perceptions, beliefs, and problems of higher socio-economic groups of parents should be ascertained. This should contribute to
lessening the risks of academic, social, and emotional problems among this group of children as well. Ameliorating the issues detrimentally affecting our youth should be paramount to school leaders and should be addressed in policy, leadership, and equity in every school community. Wealthier school districts must also consider cultural and social forces. School leaders in wealthier school districts may need to recognize and promote parent support programs at this time when help is clearly needed.

Social problems impact our homes and these problems invade our school building (Elkind, 1996). School leaders in high socio-economic school districts should elicit the perceptions and needs of parents so that all children have the needed safeguards that will prepare them to learn. "Our children may be only 20% of our population but they are 100% of our future" (Riley, 1995).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of parents in more affluent school districts regarding the significance of and need for parent education support programs. The study will determine whether parents in these districts feel that schools can assist them in supporting their family needs thus helping them support
their child's preparedness to learn. The research also seeks to assess if parents perceive a need in parenting or help in assisting their children toward increased academic success. Using this information, the researcher aims to establish ideas that school administrators can use to guide or design parent education programs.

Research Questions

The central issue addressed in this study is the perception of parents regarding parent education programs and what specific parent education programs; workshops or ideas can assist them toward their child's success. Parent perceptions regarding the following questions will be addressed during this study. This research will collect responses in the following areas.

1. What are the perceptions of parents regarding school sponsored parent education programs?
2. What are the perceptions of parents regarding the best topics for parent education workshops?
3. How did parents learn to parent?
4. How and where do parents frequently access information on parenting?
5. What are the most difficult aspects of parenting?
6. What factors impact student achievement?
7. What are the perceived greatest concerns of a parent?

8. What after-school activities describe how children spend time?

Theoretical Rationale

The assumptions of this study are:

1. Parent involvement programs in schools positively affect the academic potential and social-emotional health of students whose parents participate in the programs.

2. School district policy should include provisions for parent education and support programs.

3. Inclusion of parent education programs that support age appropriate child development will increase parents' sensitivity and knowledge and will enhance the social adjustment of their children.

4. School progress is better when schools and parents share in the planning of parent education programs.

5. Parents who participate in the parent education program will improve their child's academic success if they create a homework ready environment with the methods they learned.
6. Parent education and support programs are a link to student learning and could positively alter the lives of children and families. This could benefit the common good.


The questions that we must always keep in mind as we move into the future and change the curriculum are: "What kinds of people do we wish to produce? And what kinds of human behavior do we wish to encourage?" (Haas & Parkay, 1993, p. 65).

Significance of the Study

"While I was at the School of Public Health, I began to think about kids, and I decided that the only place in society because you can't get to families earlier-is the school. Everybody comes down that pathway" (Comer, 1995).

This study is significant because of its connection and relationship to children. The study provides feedback that could be valuable to administrators, parents, and teachers with regard to best practices of parent-education programs.

Parents are also invaluable resources for the academic, social, and psychological development of
students. Although education is a long term process, most teachers are in contact with students for only one year at a time. When it is possible to engage parents in active support of the education of their children, the children have a source of support that extends from year to year (Comer, 1986, PHI DELTA KAPPAN, P. 446).

Children who are denied parental support may not achieve their potential or mature into self-reliant adults. Successful resolution of family problems is critical to the future of our nation. Ill-equipped graduates of our educational system may have a lingering effect on society. "It has been estimated that the dropout phenomenon affects one out of every four youths and costs our society approximately $145 billion each year" (Hass & Parkay, 1993, p. 48).

Schools can be an auxiliary support system for families in contemporary society. Schools are common to all families and can be a major contributor of solutions to problems confronting our families.

Information is needed on successful parent programs even for our affluent school districts. Specific information to guide administrators, teachers, and parents
in the implementation and design of parent education programs for these districts would be very worthwhile.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The limitations of this study are the number and type of schools chosen for this research. The focus of this paper was a case study of a suburban elementary school district. As was stated earlier, there is much literature and research on the importance and type of parent programs implemented in low economic school districts. The widespread difficulties of children today, however, necessitate further information on parent needs from affluent, suburban, New Jersey schools such as in Monmouth County. This can only be accomplished in a relatively narrow scope because of the burden of examining too large a selection of wealthy schools. Using five elementary schools in one affluent school district may narrow the scope of the study. However, as was stated before, the social and educational forces that affect all youth today also impact students and parents in this type of district.

This study also did not delve into the topic of spirituality's possible affect on family and parenting. Despite the old adage, "Families that pray together, stay together," the inclusion of specific spirituality questions
might have been considered inappropriate for a public school study. Spirituality was, therefore, not a focus of this study because of the issues related to church-state separation.

Procedures and methods used in this study included a survey questionnaire. The survey questions were adapted from Joyce Epstein and Douglas P. Thaman’s research (1998) in this field (permission was requested and kindly granted). Questions included likert-type as well as open ended questions. Subjectivity of answers may impact the validity and reliability of responses since responses are based on self reported perceptions and may be true or not true. Confidentiality may weigh on some parents’ responses to the questions. This study is in one geographic area with one type of demographic that is designed to keep the study more manageable.

Definition of Terms

Parent Education: "Any form of information or training which increases the skills of the parents in helping their children or in improving themselves" (Thaman, 1998, p.10).

Parent Workshops: school parent programs designed to enhance parent education.
Parent Programs: Activities that provide information for successful parenting.

Wealthy or Affluent District: School districts in upper income residential area designated by the state of New Jersey as I-J districts. I-J districts are the district factor group or demographic grouping category given to high socioeconomic school districts in the state.

Student Achievement: "Assessment of student learning based on observations, student records, interviews, and questionnaires from students, parents, and/or other school personnel" (Thaman, 1998, p.10).

Policy: District procedures and statements pertaining to educational issues.

Parent Involvement: No Child Left Behind defines parent involvement as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication with the school regarding student academic learning and other school activities (PTA Position: No Child Left Behind Act, 2002).

Involved Parent: "Any parent who participates in three or more school sponsored activities during a school year" (Thaman, 1998, p.10).

Uninvolved Parent: Any parent who participates in fewer than three or more school sponsored activities during a school year" (Thaman, 1998, p.10).
**Family:** "Broadening the definition of parental involvement requires changing the term 'parent' to 'family', thereby including grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, neighbors, and other caregivers (Davies 1993) (Phelps, 1999, p. 155).

**Elementary School:** A school that serves the primary grades up to but not including grade 6.

**Human Capital:** "Human capital has the fundamental attributes of the basic economic concept of capital; namely, it is a source of future satisfactions, or of future earnings, or both of them. What makes it human capital is the fact that it becomes an integral part of a person" (Burrup, Brimley, & Garfield, 1996, p. 17).

**Social Capital:** "Social capital refers to connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called 'civic virtue'. The difference is that social capital calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19).
Family-Like School: Some schools make their students feel part of a "school family" that looks out for their interests and provides unique experiences for each child" (Epstein, 1987, p. 132).

Our children are growing up in a difficult society and are faced with a myriad of complex social pressures. The concerns and problems of our youth have skyrocketed. At the same time the changes in the family have been rapid and followed an altered course. We are not attempting to turn the clock back to a simpler time. However, to address today's needs, more and more school leaders may need to make deliberate efforts to fortify the family. The strong winds of change must transform school leaders into advocates for increasing family support. No one knows what the perfect family should look like but we do know, the common good of society depends on our commitment to the family and the institution to which all people belong. Beginning in the nineties, politicians from both sides of the political aisle began to recognize the growing urgency of family and children's issues. "Children need to know that they are loved and supported. When the community they live in is interested in them, supports them, and encourages their successes, they will thrive" (Quayle, 1996, p. 276).
The ideas presented in this paper are generated in an effort to heighten the awareness and role of school leaders to effect change and bring more and more parent education program and skills to parents and children in our schools. Examination of successful parenting education programs and a blueprint model of best practices is desired and necessary because of its strong relationship to student learning. Widespread parent education skills should be a vision of a new paradigm not just for the poorer school districts but for high socio-economic ones as well.

Children who go unheeded are children are going to turn on the world that neglected them. But children, who get the early attention they need, from family and the village, will repay our efforts a thousand-fold, in the strong bodies, minds, and characters they carry into the future. (Clinton, 1996, p. 109)

"Children are the hope for the future. We are the hope for theirs."

(NJEA Review, 1997)
Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Research on family is unique because the issue is of broad social, economic, political, and religious significance. A plethora of parent magazines, books, and newspaper articles has emerged primarily in the last two decades. This points to the magnitude and scope of parenting's significance and needs. The genre of literature would be incomplete without recognizing the abundance of everyday parenting issues that newspapers, magazines, and books, as well as research literature explore. Even results from the survey included in this study reported that parents access their parenting information largely from magazines, books, and the internet.

Given the widespread issues of the family discussed in Chapter I and the needs of children, society seems ready for an updated version of Dr. Spock's landmark book, Baby and Child Care. The book published in 1946 elevated Dr. Spock to a household name. This milestone publication became the bible of parenting. Controversy has been generated by Dr. Spock's permissive outlook on parenting;
nevertheless, the book remains one of the best selling books of all time.

The current issues of society are vastly different from 1946 and the pressures are even greater on the youth of today. These issues and pressures are eroding the structure of the family. Is there a new paradigm needed to assist parents given the far reaching issues of parenting in today's world? Do we need more material directed to parents giving them knowledge in how to provide a nourishing, emotional, and educational environment that emphasizes time, attention, and affirmation, thereby providing children with some of their basic needs. "Parenting forms children's core belief about themselves. Nothing could be more important" (Bradshaw, 1988, p.1). Schools simply cannot avoid the family issue of developing core beliefs. Now the question is which?

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan was the Assistant Secretary of Labor. As a public representative he wrote for the Office of Policy Planning and Research a publication entitled The Negro Family: The Case for National Action. In his publication, he cited evidence that the African American family was in jeopardy. For pointing out that the African American family was in trouble and asking for national action "Moynihan was
blasted for being a racist and insensitive" (Quayle, 1996, p.219).

Are we to continue to ignore statistics about our families in America? Problems are present in families of all races, religions, and economic models. Issues have only grown and become more pervasive affecting families everywhere. “The house is on fire, but like the fable of the emperor with no clothes, we are not supposed to look” (Bradshaw, 1988, p. 4). The problems in society require us to heed warnings that Moynihan cited more than 40 years ago but may have become exacerbated by our neglect.


Each day in America.

1. 2 mothers die from complications of pregnancy or childbirth.
2. 4 children are killed by abuse or neglect.
3. 5 children or teens commit suicide.
4. 8 children or teens are killed by firearms.
5. 32 children or teens die from accidents.
6. 78 babies die before their first birthdays.
7. 155 children are arrested for violent crimes.
8. 296 children are arrested for drug crimes.
9. 928 babies are born at low birth weight.
10. 1,154 babies are born to teen mothers.
11. 1,511 public school students are corporally punished.*
12. 2,145 babies are born without health insurance.
13. 2,467 high school students drop out.*
14. 2,421 children are confirmed as abused or neglected.
15. 2,483 babies are born into poverty.
16. 3,477 children are arrested.
17. 18,221 public school students are suspended.*

*Based on calculations per school day (180 days of seven hours each).

The aforementioned statistics and the tremendous changes in the family warrant investigation into implementing parent education programs in all schools.

**Historical Overview**

Prior to the 1960’s family and parent involvement was not commonplace in schools. “Most families were expected to deliver their children to the schoolhouse door and then go home while educators did their jobs” (Lynn, 1997, p.4).

Then during the 1960’s the landmark Head Start Program began. One of the primary focuses of the Head Start
Program was to prepare children especially underprivileged children for school. Head Start promoted parent education and parent involvement as key components of their educational philosophy. Thus, the program recognized the important role that parents and family had in developing a child’s readiness for school. Head Start launched parent education programs to prepare children for school. They incorporated their parent involvement/parent education programs primarily in lower socioeconomic areas (42 USC 9801 et seq., 1965).

The importance of family was again addressed in 1980. Pope John Paul II in his work, “Familiaris Consortio,” responded to the World Synod on the Family held at the Vatican. The Pope’s “Apostolic Exhortation,” translated into English means “On the Family.” In his exhortation the Pope communicates his concerns about family life. “The family in the modern world as much as and perhaps more than any other institution has been beset by many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture” (John Paul II, 1981, p. 1).

Pope John II also highlighted the family’s significance to teaching social principles and spoke of the family as
...the first and vital cell of society. The family has vital and organic links with society, since it is its foundation and nourishes it continually through its role of service to life: it is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself. (John Paul II, 1981, p. 29)

In 1983, The National Commission on Excellence in Education published A Nation at Risk (U. S. Dept. of Education, 1983). This publication identified another emerging problem: increasing numbers of our students were failing and major improvements to educational curriculum were necessary. "All regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost" (U. S. Dept. of Education, 1983, p. 1).

As a result of the publication of A Nation At Risk, efforts to restructure American education began. The President and the nation's governors met to create National Education Goals. These efforts eventually became known as Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994).
During this same time frame, researchers began to see a connection between parent involvement and positive academic outcomes. Hence, one of the eight goals in Goals 2000: Educate America Act included a goal on parental involvement. "By the year 2000, every school will support partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children" (U. S. Dept. of Ed., 1994).

More recent legislation, No Child Left Behind, continues the emphasis and importance of parent involvement. The parent involvement provisions in NCLB are designed to strengthen parent's participation in their children's educations.

...In implementing the NCLB parent involvement provision, school districts should ensure that parents:

Play an integral role in assisting their children's learning;
Are encouraged to be actively involved in their children's education at school;
Are full partners in their children's education;
And are included, as appropriate, in the decision making and on advisory committees to assist in the
education of their children.

(PTA: PTA Position: No Child Left Behind Act. (p. 2).

Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships

Significant research about parental involvement has come from Johns Hopkins University's Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships. Dr. Joyce Epstein, renowned researcher and Professor at John Hopkins University, is the director of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships. Dr. Epstein "has over one hundred publications on the organization and effects of school, classroom, family, and peer environments, with many focused on school, family, and community connections" (Epstein et al., 1997, p. ix). Dr. Epstein indicates that there are "three major contests in which students learn and grow—the family, the school, and the community" (Epstein et al., 1997, p. 3). She speaks of these three interacting concepts as "overlapping spheres of influence" (Epstein et al., 1997, p. 3). Consistent with the theory of overlapping spheres of influence is the theme of family-like schools. "A family-like school recognizes each child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach" (Epstein et al., 1997, p. 4).
Out of this concept of overlapping spheres of influence Epstein has developed a plan that includes six types of involvement to foster school, family, and community partnerships in order to ultimately improve children’s learning.

The main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work. (Epstein et al., 1997, p. 2)

Her plan guides educators in ways to partner with parents and the community. The framework is clearly defined and numerous sample practices delineated.

The following enumerates Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnerships:

Type 1: Parenting-Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.

Type 2: Communicating-Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and their children's progress.

Type 3: Volunteering-Recruit and organize parent help and support.
Type 4: Learning at home—Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

Type 5: Decision making—Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.

Type 6: Collaborating with community—Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. (Epstein et al. 1997, p. 8)

The magnitude and scope of Dr. Epstein’s ideas would be enough to complete several research studies. Dr. Epstein is a leading expert at Johns Hopkins University in the field of School, Family and Community Partnerships. Reviewing and implementing the practices generated by the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships certainly would be a powerful guideline to shape and forge quality relationships among each of a child’s overlapping spheres of influence.
Social Forces

William Doherty, a professor of family social science at the University of Minnesota speaks of strong, broad, cultural and social forces that have impacted children, families and communities. He defines these social forces as "The problem of time: over-work, over-scheduling and a chronic sense of hurry. We have become the most productive and the most time-starved people on earth" (Doherty, 2000, p.1).

Doherty feels that this problem of time is of broad social consequence. He makes the analogy or likens this problem to another new broad social issue, that of the rising national epidemic of obesity. Doherty sees both these problems as social justice issues resulting from "broad institutional and cultural forces at work" (p. 2).

As Doherty referenced, the problems and percentage of overweight children has steadily climbed over the last several decades. "During the period 1976-1980, only 6 percent of children ages 6-17 were overweight. During 1988-1994, this proportion had risen to 11 percent, and it continued to climb to 18 percent during 2003-2004" (America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2007, p. 64). The source listed "advances in technology
and trends in eating out" as possible causes to the increasing numbers of overweight children (America’s Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2007, p. 64).

This epidemic, estimated at 10 million overweight children, has led the federal government to establish nutrition policies to combat the trend.

For more than a year now, all districts participating in the federally funded breakfast and lunch programs (essentially, all districts in the country) have been required to file health and wellness policies outlining goals for any food served at their schools. (Kopkowski, p. 32)

For example, the nutrition policy in New Jersey dictates: the elimination of products that contain sugar as the first ingredient; the reduction of trans fats; and elementary school drinks must fit into these categories, "100 percent of all beverages offered shall be milk, water or 100 percent fruit or vegetable juices" (New Jersey School Nutrition Policy, August 2007, p. 4).

The following research and information from renowned author, Mary Pipher, speaks to a different social issue. Dr. Pipher set the stage for societal introspection and reform when she wrote her previous best seller, Reviving
Ophelia (1995). Reviving Ophelia is a treatise on how our current view of American girls is shaped by the media presentation of women on the covers of magazines, on television, and in the movies. Our adolescent girls have become look-obsessed and when they cannot meet society's image they develop disorders of eating, low confidence, poor self-esteem, and a depressed sense of self.

Dr. Pipher (1997) wrote another bestseller on the family entitled The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding Our Families. The issues that Dr. Pipher mentions are similar to the cultural force theme that Dr. Doherty spoke about above.

Pipher speaks of the broad cultural forces that have caused problems in our families. She discusses the impact on children of excessive media exposure, the emphasis on money and the "rise of the electronic community" (Pipher, 1997, p.7). "Technology has brought the outside world into the living room" (Pipher, 1997, p. 12).

Family members may be in the same house, but they are no longer interacting. They may be in the same room, but instead of making their own story, they are watching another family's story unfold. Or even more likely, family members are separated, having private
experiences with different electronic equipment.

(Pipher, 1997, p. 14)

Children are now growing up faster. They are privileged to information that adults are not even capable of processing. Talk shows, the Internet, cable television and movies are among the influences that bombard and work against the family.

This researcher attended a Sunday afternoon workshop on Parenting. It was attended by over 600 parents. In addition to the sell out audience all the books, tapes, and videos that were offered for sale were sold out. This demonstrates that parents want, need, and may even be pleading for a call to action. This is occurring just as the literature is defining the need for societal help for families. The public school has the opportunity to become the focal point and community center for this information and help.

That family issues and problems are growing in momentum is unquestionable. One hope of remedy is the school. A strong partnership between the parents, school and school community can best meet children’s needs?

Nonetheless, it is painfully clear to many educators that the emotional and physical needs of an increasing number of students erect perilous obstacles to their
ability to learn. It is equally apparent that teachers cannot by themselves take on the responsibility for students' mental and physical well being in addition to the sufficiently difficult task of educating them. (Barth & Mitchell, 1992, p. 98)

Today we know so much more "about how the human brain develops and what children need from their environments to develop character, empathy, and intelligence. When we put this knowledge into practice, the results are astonishing" (Clinton, 1996, p.17).

In his theory of self-actualization, Abraham Maslow, (as cited in Hamachek, 1995) a renowned psychologist, states:

... all humans share a hierarchy of needs that need to be met before one can reach his/her full potential. They are: 1) a need for food, 2) a need for security, 3) a need for love and belonging-good relationships, 4) a need for self-worth, 5) a need for knowledge, curiosity and fun, 6) a need for order and goodness, & 7) a need to reach full-potential, 8) and a need for spiritualization. It is important to remember that "a deficiency in any one or more of these needs prevents one from going on to the higher-level growth needs. (p.46)
Establishing good self worth in children cannot be overemphasized. Parents are thought to be the first affirmers of self worth (Bradshaw, 1988). Today many homes in crisis may not be a nourishing environment that fosters self worth. Building a positive self-esteem is necessary. In order for children to reach their full academic and life potential we must help them build self-esteem and a positive mental attitude.

In addition to an understanding of basic human needs, there also exists research regarding commonalities of successful families, which are helpful for educators to know. "A healthy working family does not have to mean perfect. My car, for example, may have rust spots on the trunk, but if it drives well, then it is fully functional" (Bradshaw, 1988, p. 41). A functional healthy family creates an environment that provides for the emotional needs of each member, allowing each member growth and development while still accepting the individuality of its members including the parents. "One of the paradoxical aspects of functional and healthy families is that as individualization increases togetherness grows" (Bradshaw, 1988, p. 55). The family must also provide the fertile soil for self-esteem to grow. The family needs to provide its members a vehicle for socialization where communication
is exchanged and encouraged. Flexibility in the family is important and there should be fun and spontaneity. "Flexibility is the key. Every family is unique, so the solutions must also be. But the desire to create time together must be the same" (Shields, 1996, p. 10).

Let us look at some solutions as stated in the literature.

Social-Emotional Learning

According to some, school success for children is highly interdependent on social and emotional factors. The focus of schools has usually emphasized efforts to strengthen the curriculum in order to improve test scores. This focus has not typically included the social and emotional components of learning.

James Comer (1997), child psychiatrist at Yale Child Study Center, speaks to the importance of designing schools that combine academic learning with social learning. Comer recommends that adults within the school community establish and exhibit strong connections so that children have role models to follow.

Our idea was to bring all the adults together to support children's growth along the developmental pathways—the social interactive (how to interact well with other people), the psycho-emotional (how to
control your emotions or handle your impulsivity), the moral-ethical, the linguistic, the intellectual-cognitive, and the physical. It is growth along all those pathways that facilitates intellectual academic growth. (O’Neil, 1997, p.8)

The School Development Program was established by James Comer to serve inner City Children. Comer integrated his own social skill development program into regular academics. The program is known as “Social Skills Curriculum for Inner-City Children” (1977). An important component in developing the program, was to capture the ideas and thoughts of the students’ parents. Teaching units were generated around themes uncovered by involving the parents. “We found that they wanted the same things that middle-class parents wanted—good jobs, families, responsible citizenship. We then asked them what kinds of activities would help their children develop the capacity to achieve those things” (O’Neil, 1997, p. 8).

According to Comer (1997), connecting social and emotional learning to academics should not be isolated to inner city children. Comer sees the trends that created problems for the Black community now creating problems for the White community.
They’re beginning to understand. If you look at the trends in social problems, the greatest growth is in the white middle class. Teenage pregnancy was once three times as great among blacks as whites. It’s now one and a half times higher. Thirty years ago, Daniel Patrick Moynihan made us aware of the disturbing fact that 25 percent of black homes were headed by single parents. That’s now true of the white community. So we’re dealing with a systemic problem; it just happened to show up in the most vulnerable group first. (O’Neil, 1997, p. 9)

Comer suggests that all communities, even affluent areas, would benefit from integrating social and emotional learning with academics.

Comer (1997) also speaks of the changes in society that have lessened the sense of community. Children and family move more often. This diminishes stability. He sees that as a major loss for children since children most benefit from continuity. To reestablish this link to continuity and stability, Comer looks toward the school as the critical link to supporting social and emotional roots. Neighborhoods are not natural communities anymore. And with the growth of mass communications and computers, children are being bombarded with more
information then ever before. For the first time in the history of the world, information goes directly to children rather than through important adults who can filter it. What we've got to do is reestablish or create a tighter fabric of support for children's development. To even have a chance to counter the negative aspects of these new developments, you have to connect home and school. (O'Neil, 1997, p. 10)

Arguments have surfaced to oppose Comers social emotional curriculum for schools. Opposition to his theory, centers around the feeling that schools, by integrating socio-emotional curriculum will by usurping the role of parent. Parents should nurture social emotional development and leave the schools to academic development. Academics should be the only concern of the schools. Comer's reply: "You can't argue with success. Where children are doing better, because families and teachers are all working together, you don't get many arguments" (O'Neil, 1997, p. 10).

Teachers and administers often cite strong concerns about adding additional curriculum material to already time restricted schedules and fully overloaded packed school days. Dr. Maurice Elias, (1997) professor at Rutgers University, and strong proponent of social-emotional
Learning has some advice regarding roadblocks school personnel have to the integration of social emotional curriculum oriented programs. One such solution to creating an environment and culture that incorporates a social-emotional component included this integrative approach.

Solutions to the problem vary. The lessons can become part of health education or social studies; the teacher can co-teach with the guidance counselor, using the lessons as a guidance period; or the lessons can be rotated through two or three different content areas (for example, one week social studies, one week language arts, one week health, back to social studies, and so on) (Elias, et al, 1997, p. 17).

Integrating social emotional learning curriculum throughout classes will eliminate placing more demands on teachers and help them from feeling overwhelmed. The significance and importance of social emotional learning in the first place is that social emotional learning is a powerful tool that can positively influence and protect children. Providing social emotional learning curriculum can provide children with the knowledge, skills, and strategies to learn how to act responsibly. Social emotional learning awareness can teach children to avoid
and prevent relationships that could lead to self-destructive behaviors such as drugs, promiscuity, dropping out, and alienation. "We are biologically speaking, social and emotional beings. To succeed in school, family, friendships, the workplace, community life, and democratic participation, students need a full complement of skills-social, emotional and academic" (Elias et al, 1997, p. 16).

The social environments that children face today are increasingly challenging. Elias agrees with research (Goleman 1995, Gardner, 1983, Sylwester,1995) that supports and acknowledges a connectedness among "emotions, thinking and actions" (p.16). Connecting academics to necessary social emotional skills in a meaningful way may help students navigate through life.

Dr. Doherty, the professor from the University of Minnesota, has spearheaded a national movement entitled "Take Back your Time." It began in 2003 and has resulted in becoming an organized annual national event centered around the week of October 24th. It is a hope that it will be the beginning of addressing the critical issue of time famine and balance in our lives and the lives of our children and families.

Take back your time is a major U.S. and Canadian initiative to challenge the epidemic of overwork,
overscheduling, and time famine that threatens health, families, relationships, communities, and the environment. The movement is not anti-work but seeks balance. Remedies include reclaiming vacation time and family meals, finding like-minded people in your community, and many more changes, large and small. The movement also has a legislative agenda” (Doherty, page 1).

“The movement is examining the forces of economic insecurity, consumerism, hyper-competition, invasive technology, out-of-control sports, and our failure to buffer our children and families from these toxic forces” (Doherty, p. 2).

Another possible solution to the social forces affecting our families is suggested by Dan Quayle. In his book The American Family Discovering the Values That Make us Strong (1996), Quayle cites family togetherness as an important ingredient to healthy families. This togetherness means family time together. One of the primary ways that family in earlier decades spent time together was at mealtime. Mealtimes were a gathering for family where children and parents could communicate about their day, learn table etiquette, and employ conversational and social turn taking skills. The dinner table was a good
place to exchange information and learn social graces. Many children come to school now and talk at the same time as someone else, rarely say "please" or "thank you" and do not even know how to greet people with a simple "hello" or "good morning." Family togetherness at mealtimes seems to have all but disappeared in much the same way as the milkman, a relic of a bygone era. A family dinner hour is no longer honored. Since the age of the microwave, family members can zap their meal at any time. Children can come in from their sport activities, mom and dad from the office, and heat their meal. "Heat and eat" microwave dinners allow family members to prepare and eat alone at any time of the day.

The child who gazes, standing in front of a microwave eating his fried chicken, biscuits, or refried beans, won't starve, but he may suffer from an emotional hunger that would be better satisfied if only mom and dad were to yell at him for every pea he slips onto the knife. (Mattox, 1990, p. 8)

Resurrecting mealtime may be one area that can be improved upon more easily than most of the other social and society issues that impact the family. Family meals not only provide the important component of sharing time
together but studies have shown that children’s performance improves if they participate in four evening meals together as a family.

Communication in the Family

Communication is another important component to a healthy family. H. Richard McCord, Jr., in his series “On the Family” (1996), speaks of the importance of communication in the family. Children need time with their parents. “Nothing of substance can pass between parent and child nor can trust be built if everyone is always in a hurry to get somewhere else” (McCord, 1996, p.23). The fast pace of today’s family leaves little time for effective communication or active listening. Steven Covey, author of The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, (1990), has written extensively on the importance of listening in communication. If it is important to the health and success of the business organization, then it is critical to the family organization. Covey states that an emphatic listener gives the person speaking psychological air. Psychological air is next to physical survival in the needs of human beings. Aside from our physical needs we all need “to be understood, to be affirmed, to be validated, to be appreciated” (Covey, 1990, p.241). How
many times in our fast paced family life are we truly giving family members quality listening time complete with eye contact and the desire to understand? This may be another reason to resurrect the dinner hour. The dinner table can be the forum to provide this attentiveness. In our busy lives there may be no other time together in the day except when we eat.

Other important components of communication in the family include making “insults taboo” (Quayle, 1996, p. 68). Communication includes respect for each other. Profanity, sarcasm, and hurtful remarks will not make a successful family. Family members also need a place to communicate their feelings. Respect, courtesy, and friendliness are stressed in the workplace. Certainly they should be equally emphasized in the home. Parents should be sent off with a greeting and wishes for a good day in the morning. Rushing and time pressures should not eliminate this send off. The arrival home should be a ritual also. Hugs, kisses, and warm verbal greetings acknowledge a respect and care for the worth of others in the family. Attention and reassurance build self-esteem among families too.

Much has been spoken about the effects of television on children. Research by Dr. David Walsh, president of the
National Institute on Media and the Family, strongly suggests that communication aspects in family life have also been impacted by the amount of television viewing in the home. With certain children the amount of unsupervised television watching and computer playing may amount to 6 hours per day. This amount of time curtails precious communication time in the family, shortens participation in outdoor activities, eliminates valuable reading opportunities, and minimizes homework time. Parents need to know that television impacts interaction time within the home. Some children are given their own TV sets where they become further removed from family bonding time. In some homes favorite programs determine mealtimes or mealtimes are in front of the television. Limitations on electronic media need to be made so that the family has more time for discussion and learns to pursue other worthwhile endeavors.

Inherent in the discussion of communication in the family is the understanding of the role humor can play in the stressed hurried home. Humor has been called medicinal. People with a more optimistic and humorous outlook on life have indeed been classified healthier. Studies indicate that cancer patients improve if they have a happier outlook. Levels of endorphins are even higher in nursing home patients who have watched "I Love Lucy" and
"Honeymooners" reruns. "Some research shows laughter strengthens the immune system. It also causes the brain to release endorphins-chemicals that act as natural opiates in the body to relieve pain" (Durkin, 1993, p.1).

Parenting courses could, therefore, emphasize the beneficial effects of humor. A psychologist, Rosemary Poverman, was invited by a school's PTA to address parents at a school meeting (R. Poverman, personal communication, January, 2000). She spoke of the choice of outlooks that we all have. For example, we can go down the highway and be cut off by a driver and get all upset, chase him, respond in kind and then be angry the whole day. The psychologist offered another option. We can go down that highway and after being cut off, put on a clown's nose. Now just look over at him as you pass. Who then has the last laugh? The psychologist graphically depicted this clown's nose, which she says she keeps in her pocket at all times. It was an instant diffuser. The packed house surely saw her visual point. All laughed heartily as she continued the discussion in the nose disguise. The audience envisioned in their own way the surprise of the driver recipient of the nose approach. We can identify because some similar road behavior has happened to all of us. Likewise in our family, we have the choice to blow up, make
mountains out of molehills, or to choose another viewpoint and use a more humorous approach. Some families post jokes on refrigerators and doorways, pointing them out on the way to school or work to help the day start off in a more positive vein. If humor has been found to cure even seriously ill patients, couldn’t we give it a chance with our families and even our school family?

A bond of love is easy to find in an environment of joy. When we laugh together, we bypass reason and logic, as the clown does. We feel closer to one another. We speak a universal language...many a relationship has been saved by a good belly laugh (Walsh, 1989, p.7).

The Place of Traditions in the Family

Another component to successful families has been the place of rituals and traditions in the home. Traditionally, rituals and festivals have had a place in the stability of religious practice, community festivals, and national holidays. The conditions of our mobile and changing society necessitate a reexamination of the importance of tradition in the family. The Passover meal connects generations to their historical past. “Even if we manage only once a year together with friends and relatives
in celebration of one festival or occasion, this is time well spent” (Carey & Large, 1982, p.iii). Families that do have routines and traditions share quality contact and develop a rich family gospel of shared experiences. In today’s fast paced family life these traditions are even more important. Doing things together will need to become a priority. Fifteen hundred schoolchildren were asked, “What do you think makes a happy family?” Social scientists Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain (as cited in Mattox, 1990) report that children “did not list money, cars, fine homes, or televisions.” Instead, the answer most frequently offered was “doing things together” (p. 10).

The University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana may be a perfect example of the use of tradition and rituals in establishing a family spirit in a school community. Prior to a visit to the campus a few years ago, this researcher had wondered why great numbers of adult alumni would wear Notre Dame pants with leprechauns, always speak of Notre Dame in such glowing terms, keep going back and sometimes paying scalpers’ prices for football games. Notre Dame has generous donating alumni. The visit to the campus helped explain why. Students and adults on campus were all happy. A tour of the campus with a student guide revealed that students name many of the statues. These
names are passed down as part of the school history and school lore. There is a statue of Moses holding the commandments with his finger pointing skyward. On campus this statue is referred to as "First Down Moses." The mural of Jesus on the campus' 13 story library has his hands uplifted and raised toward heaven in a familiar gesture. However, this mural is referred to on campus as "Touchdown Jesus." The camaraderie was further fueled by frequent friendly greetings from unknown students and faces. People were all smiling. By the way, this was not a football weekend, which is notorious for their festive atmosphere. What was experienced was the realization that the Notre Dame community has its own family gospel, a gospel of shared stories, traditions, and rituals, which bond generations of Domers. The network they speak of is legendary. But is not that what a family is for, to have and to come back to for support? If a place is happy, nurtures good feelings, is supportive, has traditions that bond, then is it any wonder why Notre Dame people would wear Notre Dame pants with leprechauns? There are other schools also with as rich a history. We can learn from all of them. It would be a hope that our children also would return to their school happily and frequently with their families.
Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came and the winds blew and beat that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. (Matthew: 7:24-25)

Parent Education Programs

The Manasquan School District, in Monmouth County, New Jersey, implemented a Parent Education program utilizing a Video and Parent Guide called “Active Parenting Today” distributed by Active Parenting Publishers and written by Michael H. Popkin (1993). It is a program suggested for parents of 2-12 year olds. Popkin states that “the purpose of parenting is to protect and prepare our children to survive and thrive in the kind of society in which they live” (p. ii). The premise behind the program is that “many children are not developing the basic qualities necessary for thriving in our modern society: courage, responsibility, cooperation and self-esteem” (Popkin, 1993, p. 6).

The four aspects mentioned above are emphasized in the program "Active Parenting Today." This parent education program suggests that these characteristics "form the
foundation of the individual's ability to succeed in our democratic society" (Popkin, 1993, p. 117). These components again are: (a) Courage, (b) Self-esteem, (c) Responsibility, (d) Cooperation.

Discussion of the rationale for these four criteria will provide the framework and content curricula of the program "Active Parenting Today." It is within this framework that the Manasquan School District wished to model effective parenting. This model will provide the necessary foundation for students academic as well as life long success.

Courage is an important quality to help children thrive in society. "Coupled with parental guidance, a child's courage enables the child to try, fail, and try again, until she masters the challenges life poses" (Popkin, 1993, p. 17).

Courage is linked to self-esteem. "Self-esteem is a belief that we are capable, lovable human beings who will eventually succeed" (Popkin, 1993, p. 27). When we think well of ourselves, we will take more opportunities to risk and learn because we will have the confidence to act. Parents can help their children become confident and courageous by encouraging a success cycle in the home. This becomes a "critical area of parenting" (Popkin, 1993, p.31). Ways a parent can promote self-esteem are to "1) show confidence, 2) build on strengths 3) value the child and 4) stimulate independence" (Popkin, 1993, p. 35).
Focusing on positives helps the child achieve skills while simultaneously instilling in them more confidence in their abilities.

Correcting and disciplining a child may be among the greatest challenges a parent has, but, an important and necessary one. Popkin prepares parents for their role and responsibility in this area while still trying to preserve the child's self esteem in the correction of the wrongdoing. Parents are well advised by some of the suggestions.

"Many conflicts and misunderstandings can be prevented if we will take the time to discuss guidelines and expectations before the situations occur" (Popkin, 1993, p. 91). If there is clear information about expected behavior, when a problem occurs both the parent and child connect the behavior to a logical consequence. This careful pre-planning about expected behavior should lessen anger and an emotionally charged atmosphere. Children will also be learning that natural consequences will follow if family rules are violated. "When a child knows that you are disciplining out of frustration, anger and our own desire, it's difficult for the child to accept or learn the lesson we're trying to teach" (Popkin, 1993 p. 94).

Cooperation as defined by Active Parenting means "two or more people working together in a mutually supportive manner toward a common goal" (Popkin, 1993, p. 117).
Cooperation should have its roots in the family. The family that nurtures and promotes cooperation not only enjoys a happier home but provides the child with a more promising future. "The child who learns to work cooperatively with others, to be a team player, has a far greater chance of success than the one who overemphasizes competition" (Popkin, 1993, p. 117).

To build cooperation in the home that will later transfer to other life experiences, Dr. Popkin suggests holding family meetings that encourage and promote shared decision making. This should help solve problems cooperatively while promoting the philosophy "two heads are better than one" (Popkin, 1993, p. 118). This allows the brainstorming power of teamwork, which helps create more possible solutions.

Within the context of the family meeting, good communication skills are learned and emphasized. As was said before, children today interrupt frequently, talk at the same time as adults or peers, and exhibit poor listening skills both in and out of the classroom. Therefore, communication building blocks in the home can only help foster academic enhancement in the classroom. The home will encourage the communications skills also needed for classroom success. Transitioning these skills to the classroom will also provide life long learning essentials since communication education is so important.
Emphasizing essential communication components also helps to avoid communication blockers such as sarcasm, preaching, analyzing, or know it all attitude. "A communication block is any remark or attitude on the part of a listener that injures the speaker's self-esteem to the extent that communication is broken off" (Popkin, 1993, p. 120).

Dr. Popkin employs five steps to an effective communication skills model. Stephen Covey (1990) has also promoted these skills in similar ways in his highly regarded book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. These components are:

1. Active Listening—"Listen not talk" (Popkin, 1993, p. 124).

2. Listen with empathy—"Sharing another person's feelings" (Popkin, 1993, p. 125). You can let the child know you share what he is feeling by careful body language, which includes your tone of voice, your choice of feeling words and your facial expression. It has often been said that we were given two ears and one mouth so that we would listen twice as much as we would speak.

Dr. Popkin states "take time to hear your child's feelings, and your caring will open the door to communication and problem solving" (Popkin, 1993, p. 126). Certainly these skills will help a child later when he needs to decide critical choices. This is another groundwork component for future preparedness.
3. Help the child connect feeling with content. This helps the child correct situations with feelings. For example, the parent might state, "It sounds as though you are sad that Lonnie can't come over today" (Popkin, 1993, p. 126). Here the parent displays a caring attitude and at the same time is promoting self-understanding within the child.

4. Look for Alternative and Evaluate Consequences. Utilizing this communication skill helps the child seek out several solutions to problems while weighing each one’s consequence. This underscores a basic future asset in seeking answers to all of life's decisions. Parents can guide the child to determine solutions by statements such as "What do you think would happen if you did that?" (Popkin, 1993, p. 127). The child however, should be encouraged to think of the answers and potential consequences of the problem. Promoting and guiding the child's toward alternatives will help instill the important life skill of responsibility. "When a child figures out what to do, she feels a sense of self-esteem and accepts responsibility for her choices" (Popkin, 1993, p. 128).

5. Follow up. An important aspect of effective communication skills within the family is follow up. Asking the child how things turned out ensures a caring, active listening, genuinely interested parent. This assures the child that he has a parent who is approachable and affirming. Someone that Dr. Popkin refers to as the
"Askable Parent—someone whose opinion the child will ask for. Later, when it comes to critical matters such as sexuality, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, it pays to have established such an open line of communication" (Popkin, 1993, p. 121).

A supportive and encouraging environment instills cooperation in children. Family meetings, therefore, serve to instill effective and valuable communication skills and also show the family cooperating and working together. Allowing for this helps make the family a more fun and involved place.

Popkin appropriately likens this family meeting to the business organizational meeting. A business would fail if guidelines and goals were not shared and decisions to move forward supported by the majority of the members. A family should see these meetings not as frivolous but essential and they should start as soon as the child is "old enough" (Popkin, 1993, p. 142). Popkin suggests that they be held weekly, preferably on Sunday in order to start the week with goals.

Stephen Covey (1997) suggested weekly family meetings. Meeting weekly assures the family the time and forum to discuss issues, problems, business or plans important to the family or an individual family member. Weekly meetings also allow the family some planning time to create fun family activities. Family fun activities establish bonding opportunities that strengthen the family.
"The purpose of these talks is to share attitudes and values in a way that influences children to make positive decisions later on" (Popkin, 1993, p. 142). Giving children respect in allowing them to voice their opinion helps to eliminate the possibility for developing an angry or rebellious nature. Dessert or a family fun activity would be a way to end the family meeting in a pleasant way.

Another parent workshop was held in Monmouth County. The STEP program, an acronym for "Systematic Training for Effective Parenting" (Dinkmeyer, 1990) was offered on six consecutive weeks at three separate locations in Monmouth County. Howell Township and Sea Bright had the program weekly and on one Sunday an all day workshop was offered to the parents in Monmouth County who could not commit to the six consecutive weeks at the other sites. The Sunday workshop ran from nine o’clock to four o’clock. This helped accommodate the working parent who would not otherwise be available for the weekly sessions. This needs to be a consideration for setting up parent education programs. To make sessions more accessible, consideration has to be given to the status of families today. We want to reach a large number of parents. Accommodating parents with flexible scheduling is helpful. After all, our chief reason for these programs is to help as many children as possible succeed in both academic and life-long endeavors.

Similar to the Active Parenting Program in Manasquan, the key topics emphasized in STEP are building self-esteem,
improving family communication, discipline, understanding children's behavior and misbehavior and problem solving strategies. Family and Children's Service in Oakhurst, (also part of Monmouth County) New Jersey sponsored this series of workshops.

The following statement signifies the value in helping to prepare our children for future challenges. "Youngsters today will encounter many dangers and temptations—everything from family conflict to discrimination to drug and alcohol abuse. The right skills, however, can help them cope successfully with these threats" (Dennett, 1996, p. A 10).

Through the STEP program, parents gain realistic ways to handle discipline, problem solve, encourage and communicate with their children "so that all feel they are being heard and understood" (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1990, p. 3).

The STEP program is more comprehensive than Active Parenting in that it provides an additional program for the teenage years. There are increased challenges and social pressure related to the teen years and STEP/Teen is invaluable in addressing and helping parents through these years. Concepts and skills offered through STEP, help parents lead their families into a cooperative relationship. Respect, involvement and attention to each member increase independence and self worth so that teens will not be driven to validation in a negative way from
peers or other outside influences. "Teens may seek attention through any behavior that invites others to focus on them" (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1990, p. 6). Through STEP parents are instructed to avoid focusing on negative behaviors and instead emphasize and acknowledge all forms of assistance and cooperation. Give these positive behaviors increased attention. "Parents need to change their usual response to the behavior and seek to encourage in teens' cooperation and a sense of dignity" (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1990, p. 7).

Essential aspects of improving the family relationship are emphasized in STEP. They include again the important component of effective listening as well as empathetic listening, skills for developing self-expression, encouraging cooperation and employing mutual respect and seeking alternatives. Family meetings are also strongly encouraged in this program. Specific ways to enhance these areas have been enumerated in the section on Active Parenting. It is significant to note that both of these programs guide parents using the same criteria. The STEP Program also utilizes videos, audiotapes, discussion guidelines and charts.

An important point that was emphasized in this particular parent education program was the importance of knowing who your child's friends are. It is also suggested to get to know the friend's family. Your child will be spending a lot of time with his/her friends. Getting to
know the child and the family values can help you monitor the friendship. Dinkmeyer and McKay (1990) suggest, "Direct your child toward quality friendships" (p. 18). Invite your children to have their friends over. Make it comfortable, friendly and well supervised.

The people your child associates with will tell you a lot about the child's feelings of self-worth. If lacking in self-esteem, your child will tend to seek out a crowd that makes no demands, or one that supplies things your child thinks are lacking. Therefore, it is important for you to get to know your child's friends. (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1990, p. 17)

Parenting literature cites the importance of helping children find and choose healthy activities. Positive activities are a cure for inactivity, which sometimes leads to misbehavior. The STEP program highlights the benefit that parents can have if they guide their children and even share jointly in sports, camping, community activities, art activities and other healthy pursuits.

Research about the STEP program has produced some very significant findings.

"93% of the participants recommended the program for other parents. 91% agreed that STEP increased their knowledge of parenting. 76% believed that STEP improved family relationships. 80% believed that
STEP improved their communication with their children" (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1990, p.4).

These percentages give amazing support to the importance of including parent education programs in our school districts. All of these improvements directly impact the success, motivation, and self-esteem needed for children to be ready to learn. Of the programs surveyed for this research paper, the STEP Program seems to be the most comprehensive, and the format most appropriate to parent groups.

While the following parent education program is not a commercial venture as the above comprehensive STEP Plan is, it is nevertheless very relevant and a worthy endeavor to broaden parents' knowledge about their children. It offers another approach to parenting education and was being offered by the Freehold Township Board of Education another large Monmouth county district. Classes were for five evenings and ran for 2 hours. This program emphasized workshops that would help inform parents about ways to assist their children reach both academic and interpersonal success. The workshop coordinator for the program was the Staff Development Chairperson for the Freehold School District. Freehold's Parent Education Program is centered on the following themes: Learning Styles, Study and Homework Skills, Decision Making, Sibling Rivalry and Developing Responsibility.
Each topic was covered by an outside consultant and expert in the area of the theme topic for that evening. For example, for Homework and Study Skills Night, they brought in a consultant, Richard Gallagher, who gave tips on general memory, word associations, improving concentration and attention to detail techniques. The following examples were cited to emphasize paying attention to detail. "Do they have the 4th of July in England? How many animals of each species was Moses supposed to have taken on the ark?"

The mnemonic device to remember the planets in order was also reviewed.

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<th>Table 1. Mnemonic Devices</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mars</td>
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<td>Neptune</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pluto</td>
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Each word in the sentences going down begins with the first letter of the planet's name. The last column is the
updated sentence version now being used to help kids remember the planet names and order from the sun.

The philosophy behind including a study skills component in the parenting workshops is a good one. If we are helping children reach their full potential, giving parents' knowledge in supporting good study habits will make them partners in achieving their child's academic success.

"Good study habits can help you succeed. In school learning how to study can help make you a better student. In the future, many skills that make you a success in school can also help you succeed on the job" (Channing L. Bete Co, 1994, p. 2).

Also included in the Freehold Parenting Program was a session on Learning Styles. It is well known to educators, that we all learn and process information through one or a combination of three learning modalities: auditory, visual, or kinesthetic. This workshop defined these learning styles and concepts for parents. This was an exceptional addition to parent education. While the instructor was explaining that all children display a different way of learning you could sense some parents relief at finally understanding why their children are so different from each other and why even they are so different from their child. The way we learn varies from person to person. This presentation gave parents a clear explanation why children learn and work so differently. To address varied learning styles,
specific suggestions may include using multi-colored post it notes for visual learners. Helping children use webs and diagrams to help them organize their ideas. Tape recorders for auditory learners are another useful aid.

Freehold's approach to parent education was curriculum based. It was practical and gave parents everyday ways to support learning. Certainly this approach is another method for schools to support parent education.

At the Sibling Rivalry session, the presenter was a family psychologist whose format was question and answer. She used the questions from parents in the audience to present guidelines for dealing with sibling rivalry. Her guidelines support establishing rules and routines, giving responsibilities, avoiding teasing in the home, using time outs when necessary and when all else fails using lots of humor. Screaming and yelling should be avoided. The use of humor has been mentioned before in the literature and its value appears immeasurable.

Humor and establishing structure and routine in the home offers the child a sense of order and therefore security in their world. The home becomes a dependable place. Organizing the home on this premise will keep the child from looking outside the home for a false family such as gangs or negative peer relationships. Bedtime routines alone can be a relaxing and positive bonding opportunity between parent and child. Bedtime stories, soft music, quiet talk, prayer and hugs all help the child not only
look forward to bedtime but the nurturing and loving experiences that this caring home environment displays.

Another Monmouth County Parenting Program was offered on a Sunday at Monmouth University. It was entitled "Assuming the Power of Parenting" and was given by the author, columnist, and family psychologist John Rosemond. Over 600 parents were in attendance. It was an amazing number for a Sunday afternoon, but certainly some evidence to support the premise that parents are hungry for information. Rosemond's philosophy is based on what he labels a common sense approach. The child obeys, the parent leads. He states that, "Good behavior begins in the home, not at school. Not even the best teacher can discipline a child who comes from home, not already respectful of adult authority" (Rosemond, 1997, p. A 10). He also emphasizes the importance of chores at home, limiting TV watching, and raising respectful, responsible and resourceful children who will later become respectful, responsible and resourceful adults and citizens. Unlike the other parenting programs previously discussed, John Rosemond de-emphasizes self-esteem building. "Today's parents do psychological somersaults trying to make sure their children feel good about themselves, even if their sons and daughters should act like savages" (Mullen, 1997). The child needs to grow up in an environment where they clearly know that they have to obey. Rosemond feels that the role of parenting is leadership and the same precepts
that are successful at leading are successful at parenting. A good leader inspires confidence, has charisma and style and acts like he knows what he is doing. Therefore, a good leader does not have to justify his position or explain everything that he is doing. A leader presents simple principles and inspires others to follow. He advises parents to get back to the simplicity of parenting, the common sense of it, the practicality of it and tells us to leave psychology out of it. He suggests that we move back to citizenship and character development and away from psychological and self-esteem development. They are two separate ethics and the psychology one of today is not working. He says that today's parenting skills are manufactured parent babble. The emphasis has shifted away from discipline and behavior to anything that feels good. He goes on to say that parents today want to be perceived as nice and a friend to their children and he reasons that that is why they are still parenting their children at age 30. He even jokes that today's marriage vows should say "I take you to be my lawful wedded husband until CHILDREN do us apart" (J. Rosemond, personal communication, October 19, 1997).

Rosemond emphasizes that his style of parenting is not an unloving one but a practical one, a down to earth one, and that's what our job is—responsibility. Parenting does not have to be complicated by a lot of rules. One just needs to remember to seize defining moments, which are
opportunities to profit from an experience and move forward. Throughout all this oppositional theory, Rosemond's talk was humorous and very real. His anecdotes were the universal parent experiences. Rosemond's approach starts with the need for clear rules and standards. The audience welcomed his ideas and suggestions. Attendance maintained itself throughout the workshop and there were brisk if not sold out sales at the bookstore section of the workshop. If the purpose of providing parents with education in varied parenting skills, then this served a wide and very interested market.

The New Jersey Education Association also holds workshops in Monmouth County as well as the rest of the state for teachers interested in building the school family partnership. The association makes a kit available to educators that contain an assortment of guidelines for enhancing this partnership. Many of the suggestions are discussed in already mentioned parental programs, which is evidence of the universality of the issues. They are building self-esteem, homework tips, and keys to better listening and communicating. The rational for this family school involvement ties into the research premise of this paper. Increased school and family involvement through parent education benefits students. "Research shows there is a direct correlation between children's self-esteem and with successful academic performance and social and emotional development" (NJEA, 1997). Schools will benefit
from incorporating this kit into parent education programs. It will bridge a relationship between home and school through its series of family school workshops and handout informational packets. Students should gain more positive attitudes about their school, show higher achievements in their academic areas because of the increase in parents' understanding of expected school goals as a result of this program. NJEA feels that their family school involvement kit will strengthen the ties between home and school and that this will help children achieve. It is an easy and well-organized kit. Handouts, transparencies and the script for presentation to the parents are included in the contents of this parent education kit.

PTA Can Facilitate Parents

There are other ways to incorporate the importance of family in the school. PTA meetings can offer video presentations about the family. Speakers and courses on the family can be offered at night in the school. Courses in stress management can also be offered. Learning to manage time can be part of the course content. These issues are critical if the family continues on its fast paced track. There is no day of rest in "America's family time famine" (Mattox, 1990). Saturday and Sunday sports activities have all dissected and helped to eliminate family time together. Many parents are searching for help in these hurried stressed times. A healthy family
upbringing may not have been the environment of our childhood, however, "for most of us it would have been had our parents known what to do differently" (Bradshaw, 1988, p. 57). The school community can assist parents with the knowledge of parenting skills.

Parent newsletters can be sent out either by the PTA or a special school committee. These can offer tips on strengthening the family or present timely topics on the family. One study conducted by the Committee for Building a Healthier Ocean County (1995) came up with a Family Quiz Questionnaire. This questionnaire is certainly grounds for reflection and cites areas within the family that might need to be strengthened. The PTA could send this questionnaire home with a cover letter. Scoring is for family discussions at home and an appropriate topic for the family meeting. Family problems may even be eliminated by discussion of the answers generated by this quiz.

QUIZ FOR FAMILIES

Just How Healthy is Your Family

1. Our family eats one meal together at least five times each week.

2. Our family celebrates traditions and special events, such as birthdays, holidays, and graduations.

3. Sharing, caring, and being there for one another are important in my family.
4. On a regular basis, our family discusses what is right or wrong in our family, our community, or in the world.

5. Our family spends time with relatives or other families on a regular basis.

6. Our family enjoys recreation time together, such as trips, movies, or sports.

7. We try to create an environment where learning and education are encouraged.

8. Our family attends a house of worship or prays together regularly.

9. Family routines are expected and kept.

10. Each family member has regular household chores.

Scoring:
"Give yourself one point for each yes.

Table 2. Scoring Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>Keep up the good work. Strong families lay the groundwork for transmitting the values and behaviors needed for the next generation. Continue to seek opportunities to enhance your family life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>In this busy world, you are making time for each other. Examine the practices you have not included to see if you can incorporate them into your daily lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-3</td>
<td>Look at the list for practice that you can begin. The quality of family life affects the performance of kids and the value systems they bring to their adult lives.</td>
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Stephen Covey (1996) in one of his leadership series "How to Develop a Family Mission Statement" offers audio-
tapes encouraging families to develop a mission statement. This would be an ideal program to follow as a school sponsored parent education course. Covey's philosophy is to develop a vision with the end in mind. Business organizations have a plan. He states that the family organization should also have a clear sense of where it is going. The family organization has the greatest impact of all. Covey offers his process to help people live together in a principle-centered environment for greater effectiveness. Families who follow this process write a family mission statement and try to follow it. It has helped families act more kindly to each other, speak more politely, face challenges better and have more fun together. Supervisors in the school can help implement Covey's principles by offering his series to the PTA.

As school leaders and developers of curriculum, we should be aware of Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (1990). He has used these seven habits to develop another audio series on "Building a Beautiful Family Culture" and has entitled it The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families (1995). The Covey series is suggested as a potential parent education or staff development informational resource program. Covey uses the paradigm of his original seven habits and applies them to improving the family. For example, he speaks of Habit 7, which is "Sharpen the Saw."
Effective families are continuously growing and renewing themselves by giving and getting feedback on their values and traditions. They, together and separately, continue to sharpen their own physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual saws. A beautiful family culture can deteriorate unless the batteries that give it its power are continually recharged" (Covey, 1995, p.9).

The School As Community

Besides offering courses to the parent on how to parent, the school has to become more and more an extension of the community. Several urban school districts have effectively and efficiently connected area social services to students and families by using the school building as a community center.

Schools within schools has been a concept to allow for a more intimate feeling within the school building. Not only do parents receive an opportunity to choose from a variety of instructional programs, but students do not feel anonymous in a factory-like building. Out of a school of one thousand students, dividing it into several smaller schools could provide and offer a family type community feeling to the school.

Schools can encourage more effective use of parent volunteers and bring them in to help with children's work. Involving parents in children's education shows their
interest in education and provides a time for them to bond with their child. Writing moms, computer moms, and library moms are present in many schools. Dads are welcome also. Involving parents in the school community taps a rich resource for supplemental learning. Parents also have backgrounds that can be important to classroom learning. Researchers cite parent involvement as one of the criteria for the success of Catholic schools. This involvement does not only include financial support, but encompasses the volunteer aspect of parent involvement. In addition, pupils feel part of a closer knit community in a school, which fosters more personal interactions. The Principal, Mr. Harris, of St. Albert's School in Cleveland, Ohio has a humorous slant on why her student enrollment has grown. "We provide the same thing a gang provides: family, code, color, belonging and activity" (as cited in Lacayo, 1996, p. 31).

The school as community can provide a support system for the working parents. Before and after school programs can eliminate latch key children problems. Tutors could also be available during these care hours.

Sports also have an intrinsic value for children. The school as community can offer open supervised recreation time after school and in the evenings. Organized sports can be encouraged. Sports encourage teamwork, physical development and can help give structure to a child's free
time. Importantly, too, sports help to develop a child's self-esteem and confidence.

Children are languishing from the lack of adult involvement in their lives—the kind of involvement that people other than their parents must provide. Grandparents, godparents, aunts, and uncles are important formative agents in a child's life, as are coaches, librarians, teachers, youth ministers, scout leaders, and older siblings. (McCord, 1996, p.24)

We must accept that our previous world no longer exists and that our paradigm regarding the family must shift. The family is smaller and children need to be cautious about befriending adults. Hillary Clinton's book It Takes a Village (1996) might offer additional light onto a new paradigm about children's needs and the reality of family life in America today. Her book title comes from an African proverb that is frequently quoted. "It takes a village to raise a child" requires that all adults become responsible for the welfare of children regardless of biological relationship to the child.

Mrs. Clinton mentions several ways that adults through the school community are helping families and children. One such way is through implementing character education in the curricula. A program in New Haven, Connecticut has included a social development approach into the routine of each student in his or her public school. Creative problem solving, development of social skills, and understanding
and controlling emotions like anger are emphasized. "The program appears to raise achievement scores and grades as well as improve behavior" (Clinton, 1996, p. 66).

More and more schools are integrating community service into their curriculums. This "service learning" includes projects for the homeless, community beautification projects, collecting food for needy families and other projects that help children see the importance of service to others. A youth group, Americorps, "helped to raise the reading scores of more than a third of the county's second graders in Simpson County, Kentucky" (Clinton, 1996, p. 199). "Teens who participate in at least one after school activity other than sports, use drugs less often than those who don't" (Clinton, 1966, p. 165).

The American family is in crisis. The education of our children requires a collaborative approach with the parents. Parent educational programs that improve parental skills will produce a more successful student.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

"Parenting is the hardest job in the world and we receive little or no training."

(Anonymous)

This study was designed to analyze qualitatively and quantitatively the perception of parents regarding the effectiveness of parent education programs in an affluent elementary suburban Monmouth County, New Jersey School District. The research analyzed if parents in this type of district believed that involvement in parent education programs assisted or would assist them in improving their child's academic success. The rationale underscoring this study was to determine if parents, even in a more advantaged high socioeconomic area, perceive that they are adequately prepared with sufficient information and knowledge regarding parenting and if they feel that they could benefit from parent education support from their district school.

Parents from an affluent elementary school district in Monmouth County, New Jersey were asked to respond to a survey questionnaire. Their responses were examined.
Parents included in the study had at least one child enrolled in grade 1 through 5. The school district was randomly selected from the Monmouth County school districts designated I - J districts by the State Department of Education in New Jersey.

The New Jersey Department of Education introduced the District Factor Grouping System (DFG) in 1975. This system provides a means of ranking school districts in New Jersey by their socioeconomic status (SES). The DFG was motivated by research conducted in the late 1960's and early 1970's that showed a strong relationship between socioeconomic status and educational outcomes. Because the research showed that students (i.e. what students bring to school, including socialization that takes place before they step inside the school building) are the most important determination of educational outcomes, the effectiveness of school systems cannot be sensibly judged without reference to the socioeconomic background of their students (NJ Department of Education, 2006, p. 1).

For analysis of State Test results, "Comparisons are made between districts of like SES, rather than on a geographic basis. The intent of this procedure is to
reduce the variation in reported scores which is due to factors beyond the control of local educators” (NJ Department of Education, 2006, p. 2).

Districts designated I - J districts are the district factor group or demographic grouping category given to high socioeconomic school districts in the state. The following are the I - J districts in Monmouth County: Avon, Colts Neck Township, Fair Haven, Holmdel Township, Little Silver, Marlboro Township, Millstone Township, Monmouth Beach, Rumson, Rumson Fair Haven Regional, Sea Girt, Shrewsbury and Spring Lake. Two of the above school districts were removed from the random selection list since the researcher lives in one of the districts and works in the other. The remaining schools with the I - J socioeconomic status criteria were placed in a random sample group to be targeted for possible survey. “A sample is random if, at each stage of sampling, the selection process guarantees that all remaining observations in the population have equal chances of being included in the sample” (Witte & Witte, 1997, p. 180). The sample was established using the table of random numbers (Witte & Witte, 1997, p. 557, Table G). This process determined the school district selected for this research study. The school district specified by
the random sample was: The Marlboro Township School District.

This study replicated in part a research project conducted by Douglas P. Thaman (1998) entitled "The Perceptions of Parents at an Elementary School on Parent Involvement and Parent Education as to Its Ability to Help Them Improve their Child's Academic Achievement." The population in this research, however, was different in size and type. The inclusion of five elementary schools instead of one and the selection of an affluent school district expanded and differentiated this study from Dr. Thaman's research. Further, expanding this study were questions from the survey instrument used by noted researcher, Dr. Joyce Epstein (1993). Dr. Epstein is a researcher and professor at Johns Hopkins University. She is the Director of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships and the National Network of Partnerships -2000 Schools. Dr. Epstein "has over one hundred publications on the organization and effects of school, classroom, family, and peer environments, with many focused on school, family, and community connections" (Epstein et al., 1997, p. ix). Dr. Thaman's and Dr. Epstein's research are along the same lines of measuring parent perceptions as this research paper explores.
The nature of parents' perceptions regarding parent education programs for this study was measured through a questionnaire. The questions were taken and adapted from the previous research scales used by Dr. Epstein and Dr. Thaman. These questions were modified and supplemented with additional questions pertinent for this study. Written permission was granted by Dr. Joyce Epstein and Dr. Douglas Thaman to use sections from their survey items for this research project.

This chapter examined the research design, data and data analysis techniques employed in this study.

Research Questions

The central issue addressed in this study is the perception of parents regarding parent education programs and whether parent education programs can assist their children's academic success. Answers were elicited from parents regarding the following questions:

1. What ideas do parents have for parent education programs?

2. What parent education workshop topics do parents feel will assist them with children's learning?

3. What factors do parent think improve student achievement?
4. What after-school activities describe how children spend time?

5. How do parents learn parenting skills?

6. How do parents access information on parenting?

Research Design

The study is a research project being conducted in five elementary schools in the Marlboro Township School District. Marlboro Township is one of the I-J (affluent) school districts in Monmouth County. Random sample process determined this I-J school district. The survey was selected as the method for gathering data. The type of instrument used to collect the data was in the form of a questionnaire. Other methods such as interviews of individuals or groups of parents, PTA meetings and parent focus groups were considered for obtaining data. However, a parent survey questionnaire was favored as the design structure over these options since more families could be reached by surveys and the survey data analyzed more systematically. Survey results would also be used to help create a profile or needs assessment from this demographic grouping of parents. The survey requested respondents to identify parent concerns. Gathering this information would be relevant toward establishing programs suited to the
specific needs of this population of parents. In addition, the survey questionnaire collected information from parents regarding their perspectives, descriptions, suggestions and recommendations for developing and planning parent education programs. The survey assessed parental needs so workshops could be planned accordingly. Further, the survey advantage is that the respondents can complete the survey privately and when it is convenient for them.

The survey instrument used in this research was modified from Dr. Epstein's (1993) "Questionnaires for Teachers and Parents in Elementary and Middle Grades." Dr. Epstein together with researchers from Johns Hopkins University and teachers and administrators from Maryland Schools created the above mentioned survey questionnaires to obtain information needed to plan school, family, and community partnerships. These questionnaire forms are available from the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning at Johns Hopkins. According to Epstein & Salinas (1993), "survey results should help your school develop a comprehensive program with practices that teachers and parents agree are important" (p.1). Two survey sections comprise Epstein's scale; one survey is for parents and another survey for teachers. The teacher questionnaire was not used in this study. The teacher
questionnaire, although worthwhile, was not considered for this research paper, but may be relevant for consideration in the future design and development of parent education programs for this socio-economic group. Epstein's parent questionnaire has nine sections and five open-ended questions. The sections are:

1. Parents' Attitudes about Parent Involvement
2. What Subjects Do Families Want to Know More About?
3. How Are Parents Most Involved with Their Children?
4. How Well Does the School Involve Parents Now?
5. Workshop Topics That Interest Parents.
6. How Much Has the School Involved Parents in the past?
7. Information Parents Would Like to Know About the community.
9. Student and Family Characteristics-The Background and Experience of Parents and Children.
10. Open ended questions.

Epstein & Salinas give permission to users of her survey to modify as needed. "The form is a guide, it is alterable. You can adapt or change it to fit your data and interests" (Epstein & Salinas, 1993, p. 3). The survey
instrument for this study was a shorter version of Epstein's parent questionnaire. This present research included questions that are of particular interest in addressing the specific issues of the parent population included in this study. The format and content of this survey was also shortened from Epstein's version. Questions were added or removed to adapt the survey to the group of parents selected for this study. The survey for this research paper was devised to help educators understand the needs of more affluent parents. "If family involvement and encouragement is important, how can we help more families at all grade levels become involved in ways that help their children succeed in school?" (Epstein et al., 1997, p.178) As suggested by Joyce Epstein, "You may want to add a few questions of your own to cover issues that are particularly important locally" (Epstein & Salinas, 1993, p.2).

Douglas Thaman, (1998) has also created and implemented a survey instrument to obtain information from parents regarding their perceptions of parent education and parent involvement programs. According to Thaman, "The development of parent education programs as part of an effective elementary school appears to be growing as a method of improving the educational success of students by
strengthening their support base" (p. 42). One of Thaman's conclusions is particularly significant and relevant to this study. Thaman found that "Parents believe parent education programs should a) be based on what are parent's interests, b) focus on children's learning, c) increase their skill in working with their child, and d) involve the parents and children working together." Thaman further suggests that school administrators can assist parents "by making parents feel capable and appreciated" (Thaman, 1998, p. 98).

As noted, the selection of the questions for this study were chosen and adapted from Dr. Epstein's and Dr. Thaman's scaled instruments. The intent combined the work of both of these researchers and then added a few specifically designed questions to complete the survey measure for this population group. Parent measures in this study were divided into five categories of questions. Each survey category included a different component for understanding parent needs and practices. The survey was designed to take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Participants determined how much time they spent on the four open-ended questions. The survey addressed a variety of relevant issues that might effect or impact both school and the home. Parents through their response to the survey
indicated their beliefs toward parent education programs, the importance of family dinners and then contributed their thoughts and suggestions about what practices they would like for workshops.

The categories in this study's parent survey are described as follows: In the first section of the survey, participants were asked to circle the one choice for each item that best represents their perception. This opening section to the survey instrument prepared the participants for the topic under study. A Likert Scale in this section provided a base of understanding for parents about the research topic. The Likert scale contained four response categories: strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The questions progressed from the importance of parent education programs to how having dinner as a family might help protect children from stress and/or help them perform better in school.

Parents of the elementary school students were asked to rate the level of their agreement or disagreement with different options relative to specific parent and school practices. As previously indicated, ratings were made on a four point scale indicating level of agreement or disagreement of perceived effectiveness. The scales ranges were from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The data
information from this section focused on areas of parent perceptions. Parent perceptions and beliefs about the importance of parent education programs were assessed with choices such as (a) Schools should sponsor parent education programs for parents (b) I would attend parent education programs, if they were offered (c) Parent education programs would enhance my abilities to help my children succeed in school and (d) Schools should have a parents' room, family bookshelf or family resource center in order to lend families learning games, books and tapes on parenting and compact discs of parent workshops. Common themes and patterns were identified from the parent responses to this survey section. A plan to include a family resource center concept might provide guidelines for supporting and reaching parents through alternative methods. This opening section to the survey instrument prepared the participants for the topic under study.

The transition sentence leading into the next category requests that parents check any of the following topics that should be considered for parent education workshops. The purpose in section two is to gather input from parents regarding the perception of relevant parent education workshops. Twenty topics were offered as possible suggestions for parent education workshops and space was
provided to indicate other choices not mentioned. Parents were thus offered an opportunity to suggest their own ideas that might not have been included in the list. Some of the topics suggested include: Child Development, Child Health and Nutrition, Creating Home Conditions to Support Learning, Understanding Children at each grade level, Technology, Communication Skills, Homework Help, Learning Styles, Bullying, Discipline, Study Skills, Promoting Family Literacy. The topics listed are current issues pertinent to children's success in school. The intent or vision of the workshop ideas was to stimulate and increase parenting knowledge. Parenting education classes should increase parent knowledge and this will hopefully affect and improve learning for children. The data collected here determined if parents' perceived workshop programs as helpful. Titles of the parent education programs that were suggested were collected to design future meaningful educational workshops. Parents' responses to this question provided raw data on how the school could develop parent education programs. This information offered a specific profile about what parents perceive to be potential practices and programs for parent education workshops. Parent input regarding the topics they thought should be considered for parent education workshops was also
valuable. Therefore, schools should provide parents with the information parents' need to implement best practices and improve their child's academic success.

In Part 3 of the survey, parents were asked to estimate how often and how many hours their child participates in certain after school activities. Gathering this information gave an understanding of children's involvement in general. Parents were requested to "Please indicate the average number of hours per week that your child spends on certain children's activities". The suggestions listed covered a wide variety of extracurricular possibilities. Some of the examples of how children spend their time included the following: television, homework, computer not homework related, sports, video games, sitting together at meals, discussing school, religious instruction, attending place of worship, tutoring, talking to parent, playing outside, reading with parent, reading for fun, free time. Space was provided so that other possibilities might be listed. The widespread evidence of time constraints on busy families was a key factor in the selection of this section. The purpose of Part 3 is to discern and capture children's daily activities. The data collected records activities of children in order to detect possible obstacles that may
prevent, curtail or inhibit participation in parent programs. More possibilities and advantages might be available to the group under study. Therefore, parents might have less time available if children are involved in numerous activities. Factors such as time constraints might contribute to scheduling difficulties. To ease the difficulty of scheduling, consider the following quote, "With appropriate information, families can establish home conditions that help students balance studying, homework, part-time jobs, and home chores" (Epstein et al., 1997, p. 180).

A brief description of relevant background information was the final component of the survey instrument. This section asked the parent to reflect on how they learned their parenting skills. This too, holds potential for designing programs by creating a snapshot of information regarding these families' needs. In order to determine how parents learned their parenting skills the respondents were asked to check all that apply from the following categories. Choices given were:

1. ____ My own parents,
2. ____ Trial and Error (on the job training),
3. ____ Books on parenting,
4. ____ School Courses (name of courses, if known),
6. ____ Professional career (please name career), and
7. ____ Other (Please Specify)

The perception of parents was further assessed through four open-ended questions. This served to provide important feedback about what parents think. Responses were an effective method for gathering information about the needs, knowledge and preparedness of parents in parenting skills. Detailed reports and views from parents accurately reflected parent perceptions under study. The perceptions of parents were revealed through these open ended questions. The open ended questions were designed to direct important feedback by allowing parents to include information regarding their own experiences and concerns. Responders were given complete freedom of response in the open ended questions. Answers to the open ended questions offered opportunities to detect commonalities and patterns that were organized and categorized for additional analysis. Data from the parent comments helped increase the level of understanding about the needs of this group of parents and provides important feedback about creating new ways to help.

The selection, context, and format of the questions for this study were given much research and thought. In addition to the questions adapted from prior research, a
jury of experts further tested the validity of the questions. The survey instrument was sent out to a jury of experts for articulation, suggestions, and to assess the survey measurement. The jury of experts consisted of a committee of five individuals. Four of the experts held doctoral degrees and one was a doctoral candidate. Their selection as experts was based on their own research expertise as well as their professional knowledge of children and parents. To help ensure the validity of the survey questions, the jury of experts reviewed the survey questionnaire for clarity, specificity, appropriateness and logical sequencing. They made valuable suggestions that were added to construct, improve and complete the survey instrument.

A pre-test questionnaire that incorporated the major comments and changes based on the recommendations from the jury of expert review was distributed to a parent sample of 25 parents from the Colts Neck School District. Colts Neck is in Monmouth County and is an I-J district according to the state’s socio-economic classification system. The parents volunteered to participate in completing the survey questionnaire whose purpose focused on areas of parent perceptions. This pretest questionnaire was distributed to a pilot study group of parents, a representative group of
parents similar to the potential respondents. Parents voluntarily participated in the pilot study. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured. The questionnaires were returned and reviewed. Twenty-one surveys out of 25 were returned. The return rate for the parent questionnaires was 84%. The data was entered in SPSS and checked for reliability.

Instrumentation Reliability

Correlations were computed among all parent responses. The purpose was to examine the relationship of parent perception and beliefs regarding the effectiveness and importance of parent education programs. An analysis of the questionnaire indicated that initial reliability was below the recommended number with all ten questions in the calculations. Based on this analysis, revisions were made to the survey instrument after the field test results. Questions number two and three were eliminated since they poorly correlated. After their removal from the survey instrument, the resulting reliability coefficient was .6994.
Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data was collected. A Likert-type scale was used to indicate to what degree parents perceive parent education programs as supportive of their needs in helping their children succeed. The survey methodology asked parents to check their level of agreement or disagreement with statements regarding parent programs. The scale was constructed to allow parents to evaluate on a 4-point scale. The range varied from a "strongly agree" response to a "strongly disagree" response. This was analyzed using SPSS. Every parent in the designated population was offered the opportunity to participate in the survey.

Data collection focused on capturing parent perceptions. Analysis of the data attempted to discover categories, collect specific details and interrelationships, and analyze data regarding parent attitude towards parent education programs. A narrative description of the open-ended questions documented the parent responses. The information from the survey was used to guide school leaders towards shaping a parent education program for this type of school community.
Data Gathering Instrument

The survey instrument (See Appendix) will be the instrument parents are asked to complete.

Procedure for Data Gathering

The following strategies to gather data were employed. Parents of all children in the elementary schools with first through fifth graders were surveyed. Participants were mailed a survey. All potential respondents were provided with an opportunity to participate through completion of the survey. However, participation in the survey was voluntary. A cover letter was sent to potential respondents of the mail survey explaining the purpose of the survey with an expression of gratitude. The study’s importance to parents, schools, and children was highlighted in this letter. Parents were encouraged to return the survey with an enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope. A copy of the survey was mailed to each parent in the school who qualified for the population under study. Prior to the survey mailing, the researcher received the permission of the participating school’s superintendent. Through a cover letter from the Superintendent, parents were given advance notice and the authorization approval of
the Superintendent. There were no expenses incurred by the school district.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the perception of parents in an affluent school district regarding the significance of and need for parent education programs. The study sought to determine whether parents in this type of district felt that schools can assist them in supporting their family needs and thus help them support their child’s preparedness to learn. Using this information, the researcher aims to establish ideas that school administrators can use to guide or design parent education programs.

To accomplish this task, a qualitative and quantitative survey was sent to parents of children in the Marlboro, New Jersey School District. The survey contained a likert-type scale as well as open-ended questions. The open-ended questions sought comments from parents regarding significant parent perceptions and insights relevant to the topic under study. The Marlboro School District, selected by random sample as discussed in Chapter III, was the focus of this research paper and case study. The Marlboro School District is considered an affluent school district based
upon the State of New Jersey's demographic grouping factors. Schools in this grouping factor are called I-J districts. The category of I-J districts is given to high socioeconomic school districts in this State.

Since this research was conducted in an affluent district, a profile of this type of district is also included. There are numerous descriptives and visuals in research regarding low socio-economic district profiles. However, the portrait of a town with an I-J classification may not be as familiar or vivid to the reader. Therefore, an effort was made to provide a clearer picture of this demographic classification. A framework of this affluent category was considered relevant and essential to the study. It is also a distinguishing factor of this research project. The following is a description of the environment surrounding the parents who responded to this survey and provided their perceptions. The setting and surroundings of both the town and type of schools are discussed.

Town History

The Marlboro Township K-8 School District is located in Monmouth County, New Jersey. The town's history dates back to 1685. During the American Revolutionary war, Marlboro was the scene of numerous encounters with British
troops including the area's famous Battle of Monmouth in 1778. The origin of the town's name comes from the discovery in 1768 of a large prevalence of marl, a material primarily used as fertilizer. The township was formed in 1848. Marlboro remained mostly a rural farming area up to and through World War II (Marlboro Township History, n.d.).

In the 1970's, Marlboro's population grew dramatically and by the 1980 census the population was over 18,000. During the 1980's, Marlboro saw a considerable increase of residents moving, many from Brooklyn and Staten Island, New York and by 1990 had grown to 28,000 residents. (Marlboro Township History, n.d.). They moved into predominantly four and five bedroom homes. Today Marlboro is the home of many estate-type homes now commonly referred to as "McMansions" (Marlboro, NJ Real Estate, n.d.). In March of 2001, "Marlboro became the first municipality in New Jersey, and one of the first areas in the United states, to ban cell phone use while driving" (James, 2001).

On September 11, 2001, eight of Marlboro's residents lost their lives. There is a memorial in the township to honor them.
Demographics of the Township

Marlboro is now primarily a residential and suburban community. It does not have a town center. The town consists of approximately 30 square miles. The estimated 2007 population is 41,535. In 2000 census, 32% of the residents were under 19. Of those residents, approximately 50.4% of the 11,478 households include children under the age of 18 who live in the household. Married couples living together make up 81.3% of the population. While female heads of household without husbands was 5.6%. The non-family percentage equaled 11.4%. The racial demographics of the township are: 83.8% White, 14.2% Asian, 2.9% Hispanic or Latino, and 2.1% African American. (Marlboro, NJ Real Estate, n.d.) The median income for a household in the township was $101,322 and the median income for a family was $107,894. About 2.4% of families and 3.5% of the population were below the poverty line. (U.S, Census, 2000). Since the last decennial census, the population has increased almost 9.5%.

There are two Jewish Day Schools in Marlboro. A Chinese School which fosters Chinese culture and provides Chinese language instruction is also in the district.

Marlboro is conveniently located within commuting distance to New York City. Marlboro continues to preserve
green and wooded areas. Recently, Marlboro Township was
cited by both CNN and Money Magazine (2007) as one of the
top 10 safest places to live and one of the top 100 places
to live in the country. (Ashford, et al., 2007)

The School District

The large population growth has lead to the need for
more schools. This has contributed to large increases in
property taxes. Presently the school district includes
eight schools. There are 5 elementary schools which serve
grades 1 through 5. An Early Learning Center, which opened
in 2002, houses all pre-school special education programs
as well as all kindergarten classrooms. Two middle schools
serve students in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades
(Marlboro, NJ Statistics, 2006).

"Students in grades nine through twelve attend the
Freehold Regional High School District, which is comprised
of eight towns (Colts Neck, Englishtown, Farmingdale,
Freehold Boro, Freehold Township, Howell, Manalapan, and
Marlboro) that send students to six high schools within the
regional system." (NJ.US School, 2008)

Students in the district performed above national and
state norms on standardized tests. A 2007 message from the
Superintendent of Schools, Dr. David Abbot, as reported in the Report Card Narratives from the New Jersey Department of Education reads: "As evidenced in the NJ ASK data contained herein, our students performed extremely well in the proficient and advanced proficient areas of language arts and math. And our eighth graders continue to score very well on the GEPA exam as compared to state average" (Abbott, 2007, paragraph 3).

The educational objectives, philosophy and goals of the Marlboro K-8 school district are described on the school’s web site. It states: "The board accepts the responsibility for coordinating the available resources of home, school and community in a mutual effort to guide every pupil's growth towards becoming a self-respecting individual who can effectively function politically, economically, and socially in a democratic society" (Marlboro District Philosophy, 2007).

Another important goal and objective listed by the district is relevant to this research. It concerns the district's philosophy regarding parent education programs. "Parent education programs shall be designed and implemented by the district to assist parents in providing readiness experiences for their preschool children" (Marlboro District Philosophy, 2007).
Description of Schools in the Survey

The district's five elementary schools include first through fifth grades and have a total enrollment of over 2400 students. The elementary school Asher Holmes is named after a prominent Revolutionary War hero. The Report Card Narrative from the New Jersey Department of Education opens with this description of Asher Holmes School. "A banner on the outside of the school, donated by the PTA, reads 'A caring and Learning Community.' At Asher Holmes, we continue to foster academic excellence in a nurturing environment. Through the interaction of parents, teachers, students, and staff, a positive sense of community exists. This community is committed to high achievement, safe surroundings, and positive growth" (Crader, n.d., paragraph one).

The remaining elementary schools are the Frank Defino Central School, Frank J. Dugan School, Marlboro Elementary School and the Robertsville School. "According to a ranking done by New Jersey Monthly magazine in its September 2001 issue, Robertsville Elementary School was recognized as one of 31 great schools in New Jersey" (Robertsville Elementary School, n.d.).
This portrait of the Marlboro School District is the framework surrounding this research study.

The Survey Results

The survey questionnaire instrument (See Appendix A) used in this research study was distributed by mail to the over 2400 parents of students in the five Marlboro Township elementary schools: Asher Holmes Elementary, Frank Defino Central School, Frank J. Dugan Elementary, Marlboro Elementary School and the Robertsville Elementary School.

The data from the surveys was analyzed and their findings reported herein. A discussion of the parents' responses to the specific open-ended questions is also considered. The data is analyzed under four subheadings: descriptive data, qualitative patterns, inferential statistics and a chapter Summary. The survey (see Appendix A) is analyzed in the order the questions were posed to parents. As previously discussed, the survey was validated and met acceptable reliability measurements (Cronbach's Alpha).

Summary of Descriptive Data

Each of the survey questions were analyzed for descriptive data including frequencies and associated percentages. For descriptive purposes the major tendency
for each question was reported. Appropriate figures were added for most questions, with the qualitative data being primarily captured with patterns or categories and the related frequencies.

*Question 1:* I consider a partnership between home and school a very high priority.

Overwhelmingly, 98% of the responding parents strongly agreed or agreed with the importance of home and school partnerships. Less than 2% of the respondents disagreed with the importance of home-school partnerships. As a group they were closest to "strongly agree" with 615 out of 759 responding parents strongly agreeing with the importance of home and school connectedness. Other responses indicated that 135 parents agreed, 7 parents disagreed and only 2 parents strongly disagreed with the importance of school and home connections (see Figure 1).

Parents who responded to this question definitely perceive the home-school relationship as a very high priority. This is indicated by the high level of positive responses. This large majority of favorable support to this question reinforces an underlying basic belief that when parents and schools work together student achievement increases. Research strongly suggests establishing links
between the school and the family. In particular, Epstein (1997), references this connection of home, school and community as an overlapping sphere of influence affecting children’s learning achievement and development. This concept of partnership appears to be strongly desired by parents from this district and recognized as beneficial for their children.

Figure 1. Question 1: I consider a partnership between the home and school a very high priority.

Question 2: Schools should sponsor parent education programs for parents.

The answer to this survey question indicated that 85% of the parents who responded strongly agreed or agreed that
schools should sponsor parent education programs. In comparison, 14% of the parents reported their disagreement with the concept.

Unlike the first survey question where 615 responding parents strongly agreed with the concept of home-school partnerships, 240 parents responded in the strongly agree column and 398 agreeing to the concept of school sponsored parent education programs. However, when the group of strongly agreed is combined with parents in the agree category the total is 638 out of 750 respondents or 85% of parents that are in accord with the idea of school sponsored parent education programs (see Figure 2).

There may be an interesting explanation to account for the clearly different response rate in the strongly agree category between the first two questions. Parents were not asked to give explanations regarding their responses in this likert section of the survey. However, several parents wrote in comments to elaborate about possible concerns they had with the concept (idea) of school sponsored parent education programs. Even though comments were not solicited, parents added remarks to the survey that suggested why they would not be in favor of school sponsored programs. Some concerns referenced by the parents about school sponsored parent education programs
were: cost to taxpayers, source of funding for programs and thus, the perceived impact on taxes. From the perspective of some parents, funding for parent programs was definitely a concern.

It is well documented in the literature that family involvement in school will help strengthen and promote student achievement. Parent education programs are a method to increase family involvement in schools. This survey question was administered in order to calculate and assess this group of parents' perceptions about the need for parent education programs. Their responses clearly indicate that parents from this school district perceive a need for school sponsored parent education programs. It can reasonably be inferred that even those parents responding negatively would favor the proposal if there was minimal impact on the school budget and taxes since the comments in opposition were based on cost.
Figure 2. Question 2: Schools should sponsor parent education programs for parents.

Question 3: I would attend parent education programs if they were offered.

The pattern of response to this question is similar to the previous question. As in Question 2, 85% of parents responded strongly agreed or agreed. In question 2, 85% of parent reflected their support of parent education programs. In this question, 85% of parents indicated that they would actually attend parent education programs if offered.

Specifically, 431 agreed and 215 strongly agreed for a total of 646 out of 751 parents responding that they would
attend parent education programs. The survey indicated that 91 disagreed and 21 strongly disagreed (see Figure 3).

As in question 2, parents remarked that they had concerns about the funding of parent education programs. Although comments were unsolicited, several parents again chose to mention reasons why they would not participate. "Who pays?" "What are the costs of these interventions?" They again expressed concern about how the funding of these programs would be generated. "Would it be paid by the taxpayers?" "Budgets already have a hard time getting passed!" Again, it can reasonably inferred that even those parents responding negatively would favor the proposal if there was minimal impact on the school budget and taxes.

It seems evident from the majority of responses that parents perceive a need for parent education programs and would attend them if offered by the school district. Parents' favorable response illustrates a main focus and purpose of this study. Parents, even in a high-socioeconomic district, agree with, support the need for and would attend school sponsored parent education programs.
Figure 3. Question 3: I would attend parent education programs, if they were offered.

Question 4: Parent Education Programs would enhance my abilities to help my child succeed in school.

This statement was met by a favorable response as 85% of parents agreed or strongly agreed with the above. Out of 748 parents responding to this question 651 agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, with 401 agreeing and 250 strongly agreeing. A minority of 76 parents selected disagreed and 21 parents chose strongly disagree with the question (see Figure 4).

The responses to this question show that parents even in high socio-economic areas perceive that parent education
programs are important components to student achievement. The level of their favorable responses to this question underscores the view that parents identify parent education programs as a key feature in assisting them in promoting their child's school success. This result supports the idea of a school district sponsored parent education program.

Figure 4. Question 4: Parent education would enhance my abilities to help my child succeed in school.

Question 5: Schools should have a parents' room, family bookshelf or family resource center in order to lend families learning games, books and tapes on parenting and videotapes of parent workshops.
The survey indicated that 350 parents agreed with this statement, 170 strongly agreed. A total of 520 out of 745 chose the agreed or strongly agreed categories. However, the greatest number of parent disagreement occurred in response to this question. The percentage of parents who disagreed with this statement was 30%. Specifically, 225 parents out of 745 respondents disagreed with schools offering a parents' room. This included 25% or 188 parents who disagreed and 4.9% or 37 parents who strongly disagreed with a school sponsored parents' education room (see Figure 5).

Certainly, 68% is still a good majority of parents who believe that this type of parent resource would be helpful. One pertinent comment was that a public library should serve this purpose and provide this information. The results indicate that an additional exchange of ideas regarding a parent resource center in the schools might need further exploration. Providing more specificity about parents needs might be beneficial if the concept of a parent resource center is to be successful. For example, a parent resource center that included computer classes about children's learning might foster increased parent interest and support parent needs.
Figure 5. Question 5: Schools should have a parents' room, family bookshelf or family resources center in order to lend families learning games, books and tapes on parenting and videotapes of parent workshops.

Question 6: Having dinner together as a family may help protect children from stress and/or help them perform better in school.

A huge majority or 96% of parents who responded agreed or strongly agreed with this premise. Seventy (70%) of parents responded in the strongly agree category. The combined results in the strongly agree and agree categories were 728 out of 756 parents in agreement for a combined total of 95%. Parents clearly expressed their support of
the importance of having dinner together as a family (see Figure 6).

The parent responses reinforced the positive view of most parents about the importance of family dinners. Their favorable responses to this question echo the findings from research. The importance and benefits of family meals has been increasingly highlighted in literature. One major message from a study at the University of Michigan (Lenart, 1999) specifies that gathering for family meals provides the "single strongest predictor of better achievement score and fewer behavior problems" (p. 1). The familial and educational benefits of sharing meals together are recognized by almost all parents responding to this question.
Figure 6. Question 6: Having dinner together as a family may help protect children from stress and/or help them perform better in school.

Question 7: I frequently talk to my child about what he or she is learning in school.

The response to this statement was almost unanimous. In fact, 99% of parents responded that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The responses were: 629 parents out of 759 parents strongly agreed, 127 parents agreed, and only 3 out of 759 parents disagreed. No one selected strongly disagree (see Figure 7).

The parents from this school district are almost unanimously interested in communicating with their child
about their education. The results reflect a consensus that communication between parent and child is not only important but widely practiced by this group of parents.

This communication practice is the foundation for student academic success. Parent-child discussions about school strongly suggest to children that school is important. It conveys that parents exhibit a strong desire to be involved. Talking to children about what they are learning in school, is an important yet simple practice to implement.

Figure 7. Question 7: I frequently talk to my child about what he or she is learning at school.
Question 8: Balancing time between family and other responsibilities is very stressful.

Not surprisingly, 83% of the responding parents agreed or strongly agreed with the question. The findings revealed that 632 out of 758 responded in the agreement categories. Conversely, 111 parents or 14.6% disagreed. A smaller percentage, 2% (15 parents) strongly disagreed with the question (see Figure 8).

This is an interesting response. Clearly, from the point of view of parents, it is difficult to create a balance between family needs and other responsibilities. School sponsored parent education programs requiring parent attendance might add to family stress by imposing upon the parents' precious time. Schools should be aware of these time constraints and devise programs that could help parents access parenting information in other ways. Links to parenting information from the district website is one way that parents could receive information without leaving their home. District and administrative support would need to be engaged in order to establish this parent information link.
Figure 8. Question 8: Balancing time between family and other responsibilities is very stressful.

Summary of Qualitative Patterns

Several questions were used to collect qualitative data. Groups and categories of data emerged regarding parenting. The highest frequencies are presented first. These qualitative patterns are synthesized to organize the information.

Question 9: Please check any of the following topics that you think should be considered for parent education workshops.
A list of potential workshops was presented to parents in a checklist format. Parents could choose more than one workshop. Parents also had the option of writing in their own workshop selection if it did not appear on the prepared list. Under this circumstance, they would write in their choice next to the selection Other.

Workshop selections encompassed social, emotional, health and academic areas of child development. This agenda correlates to the literature. In particular, James Comer (1997) in his article Building Schools As Community states: "It is a child's overall development—not simply cognitive or intellectual development—that makes academic learning possible" (p.2). Parents selected their choice of workshops in this order.

Rank of workshop selections from choices made by parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>Number of Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Study Skills</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Understanding Children at each Grade Level</td>
<td>484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Teen Development</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Stress Reducing Skills</td>
<td>415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Homework Help</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Bullying/Teasing</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Learning Styles</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Substance Abuse/Alcohol/Drugs</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Creating Home Conditions to Support Learning</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Child Development and Nutrition</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Internet Use/Abuse</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Math and Science Refresher Course for Adults</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Anger Management</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Information on Required Skills in All Subjects</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Child Health and Nutrition</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Understanding Cultures</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Promoting Family Literacy (Read Aloud Programs)</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were 51 parents who chose the opportunity to suggest their own ideas for a workshop selection. Some of the suggestions parents list next to the category "other" included:

Table 4. Other Workshops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping with Peer Pressure</th>
<th>Childhood Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Cliks</td>
<td>Auditory Processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling Relationships</td>
<td>Sensory Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Parent Information</td>
<td>Gifted and Talented Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Sex Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>Moral Issues teaching respect, patience, self-control, be kind, helpful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(see Figure 9)

It is clear from these varied responses that there are numerous interesting and helpful topics that parents believe could be included in parent education workshops. Providing the parents with a workshop survey, creates program agendas that meet the specific needs of that particular group of parents. Evidence collected from
literature suggests that educators identify recommendations by collaboration with families. The ideas generated from parents can then be developed into informative and meaningful parent programs.

Figure 9. Parent Education Workshops

Question 10: Please indicate the average number of hours per week that your child spends on each of the following:
In question 10, parents were asked to indicate the time and type of activities their child was engaged in over the course of a week. An important reminder is that parents of students in grades 1 through 5 were the participants in this survey.
Table 5. Children’s Weekly Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Hours/Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitting together for family meals</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing outside</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting friends</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading for fun</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer not homework related</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This question provides us with a glimpse into how children in grades 1 through 5, from this demographic area, spend their weekly time. The intent was to focus on activities of children during the school year and not including the summer months. The findings confirm that children today are involved in numerous and varied activities. Watching TV (10 hours) was the most frequent response (Mode). The second most frequent choice was Free Time. The next choice selected was Sitting together for family meals. Homework and Playing outside were other top choices.

Activities rated in the middle were Visiting friends, Sports games, Sports practices, Reading for fun, Discussing school, and Talking to parents.

Rounding out the bottom of the list of time spent on activities were Attending places of worship, Religious instruction, Tutoring, Lessons. Reading with a parent and Visiting the town library.
Out of 760 parents completing the survey 80 parents selected the Choice of Other. Included in this choice were varied selections encompassing clubs such as boy scouts, girl scouts, cub scouts, or book clubs. Other selections were chores (such as taking care of pets), Chinese school, Greek lessons, math/language learning, art class, horseback riding, craft, dance, dirt bike, gymnastics, piano practice, violin and rollerblading (see Figure 10).

Results from this group of parents may be related to their demographic characteristics. Interpretation of the survey information should reflect parents' characteristics. For example, increased education among parents affects the time spent and choice of activities.

It is easy to see from the parent responses that time constraints are a factor on families from this school district. Any successful school sponsored parent education program must recognize and consider the time pressures on parents before developing their parenting education programs.
Figure 10. Children's Weekly Activities

Question 11: I learned my parenting skills from:

Parents were asked to report from what source they learned their parenting skills. They could check any or all statements that applied. As expected, parents have no formal training in learning parenting skills. Parents reported overwhelmingly that they learned their parenting skills from their own parents. Statistically, 86.2% or 655 out of 758 reported that their parenting skills came from their own parents.

A large percentage, 83.2% or 632 out of 760, reported that their parenting skills were obtained from trial and
error or on the job training. Almost half of parents responding, 339 out of 760 or 44.6%, chose books on parenting as a source for learning parenting skills. Interestingly, only 42 out of 760 or 5.5% of parents checked that school courses assisted them in learning parenting skills. Among those school courses listed were various psychology courses. Child development and child psychology courses were key factors in selection. Only 1 out of 760 listed a specific course in parenting which was called, "Step Parenting."

Almost 1 in 5 parents or 147 out of 759 (19.3%) referenced that their professional career helped them learn their parenting skills. Among the careers primarily listed were elementary school teacher, educator, nurse, physician, psychologist, social worker. The "other" category was selected by 20.6% or 156 out of 757 parents. Among the variety of sources that parents indicated helped them learn their parenting skills were: friends, friends' experience and friends with similar situations, listening to other parents and friends' experience, observations of other parents, internet research and internet search, magazines and, more specifically, parenting magazines (see Figure 11).
Figure 11. Parenting Skills

Research on family is unique because the issue is of broad social, economic, political and religious significance. Parenting skill courses should be strongly considered in curriculum reform.

Question 12: How and where do I most frequently access information on parenting?

Table 6. Information on Parenting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number of Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Parents</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines, mostly parenting</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Parents</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Sense, Trial and Error, Experience</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Pediatrician</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible, Church, Pastor, Temple</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-workers</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers/School</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Table 5, the answers to this question listed the most diverse sources. Clearly, many parents access friends for parenting information. The internet was also very popular and books were listed almost as much as the internet. Since most parents gave multiple responses, it is difficult to determine what percentage of parents used each resource. Of great significance is that only 9 respondents mentioned teachers or schools as a source for parenting information.

**Question 13:** What do you consider the most difficult aspects of Parenting?

Several patterns emerged from the parents comments. These patterns appeared to fall into approximately five categories. The comments under each category capture more specifically the difficulties that the parents are experiencing. Parents note difficulty in the following areas:
Table 7. Difficult Aspects of Parenting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balance between work and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance between siblings and their different needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance between homework, after-school activities and daily life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance between discipline and nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance between own needs and needs of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance between what you think is right for your child vs. what everyone else is letting their child do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The long hours. The inability to “turn it off and call it a day.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication without fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills, clearly explaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and understanding their view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and making sure that you have the same “vocabulary” as your child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and getting with the times. “Things that were completely unacceptable when I was a child are now the norm in most American families.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peer Pressure/Outside Influences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being able to control outside influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping child with values deal with the children around them that possess none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping child safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure my children stay polite and well mannered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping them away from bad influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressures from other children, drugs and other pressures from friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying no when other parents are saying yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching children the basics of being children and not getting caught up in the clothes, the activities and the other stuff kids possess today</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistent discipline, patience, leading by example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline in today’s society, too much TV and what’s on TV, amount of info, children are exposed to and required to know in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline, keeping my children on the strait and narrow, drug free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Enforcing rules
Keeping to a schedule
Maintaining control, organization
Keeping cool when I want to throw them against the wall!
Sticking to punishments
Leaving other things on the back burner as parenting is the highest priority

Values
Trying to have your child keep the values that we as parents are instilling in them when we are not around
Trying to keep the kids grounded in a neighborhood of excess
Teaching the kids what’s right and wrong
Giving them strong values in a “give, give me” society
Trying to teach them not to compare with what other children have
The most difficult aspects are keeping my children close to the family unit and not allowing them to follow their peers. For example not allowing them on the internet, sleepovers and having TV’s in their rooms
How to make a child behave properly without threats, etc. Just making them good people and understanding morals and ethical behavior
Teaching them right from wrong and hoping they respect themselves and others.

The parents’ responses for this question were overwhelmingly sincere and honest. They were specific straightforward and often humorous. It would be worthwhile to report them all. They also reflect the heartwarming and sincere interest most parents from this school district have in being successful parents. It reminds one of the quote from Nancy Reagan: “It’s too bad that the most important job we have in life- is the one we have no training for” (Reagan, 1989).
Question 14: Please list any factors that you think impact student achievement?

Parent's responses centered around 4 themes:

1. Teacher enthusiasm, interest, creativity, caring spirit
2. Parent Involvement
3. Home Life-quality home life
4. Health issues including adequate rest/sleep, nutrition

These comments indicated the interaction of varied relationships in a child’s life that must be balanced and considered to help the child succeed. The school, parent, home and health environments are components that must be included in assisting the whole child.

Question 15: What is your greatest concern as a parent?

The pattern of parent’s responses centered on the following concerns. Parents once again are concerned with:

1. Raising happy, confident, well-adjusted children who can be successful contributors to society
2. Being able to protect their children
3. Not having enough time to spend with the children
4. Child' health, including physical, social, emotional and even spiritual health and safety
5. Outside influences such as alcohol, drugs, sex, bullying and peer pressure
The responses indicate that parents have broad-based concerns with respect to the health, safety and welfare of their children from a child's inner well-being to the external societal influences that affect children.

**Question 16:** What category best describes your highest education background?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8. Educational Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate/Professional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the responding parents reported their highest degree as a Bachelor’s Degree, 326 out of 753. This was 43%. The next highest degree was the Master’s Degree with 209 out of 753. This was 28% of the parents. Sixty-six parents held Professional or Doctorate degrees. Eighty percent of the responding parents had a Bachelor’s Degree or higher (see Figure 12).

It is apparent that parents from this school district are very well educated. It is an anomaly that despite their high educational level they express strong needs
regarding parenting issues and practices.

![Pie chart showing educational backgrounds](image)

**Figure 12. Parent's Educational Background**

**Question 17: My Gender:**

From the 751 parents responding to this question 646 were female. Thus, 85% of respondents were female. The remaining 105 respondents were male or 14%. The overwhelming number of persons completing the survey was females.

This is a potential area to be addressed by a successful school sponsored parent education program. There should be a concerted effort to include fathers and
encourage their participation in parent education/workshop programs.

Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics using the independent t-test was used to analyze gender differences in the first eight questions of the survey that were based on a Likert-type scale. A four-point interval scale was used for all eight questions: 1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Agree, and 4 - Strongly Agree. The resulting SPSS output is presented and analyzed in this section. A few respondents failed to respond to every question and minor differences in the total number of respondents for each question are evident.

Question 1: I consider a partnership between home and school a very high priority.

In this question both men and women were leaning toward the Strongly Agree = 4, selection with males attaining a mean of 3.65 and females had 3.82 for a mean difference of -.074. In this instance, equal variances could not be assumed as Levene's Test revealed an $F = 41.286$ and $p = .000$. This statistically significant result requires the Equal variances not assumed SPSS results to be used (bottom line on the output). The associated $t = -3.086$ and $p = .003$ is also statistically significant and
negative, inferring male respondents as a group were considerably lower than their female counterparts (see Table 9).

Table 9. Question 1 Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>q17</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Std. Error Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1 Male</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>.554</td>
<td>.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Independent Samples Test | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|--------|
| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | |
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Q1 Equal variances assumed | 41.286 | .000 | -3.845 | 748 | .000 | -.174 | .045 |
| Equal variances not assumed | -3.086 | 122.865 | .003 | | -.174 | .056 |

Question 2: Schools should sponsor parent education programs for parents.

The data findings to this question indicate both men and women were gravitating to the Agree = 3, selection with males attaining a mean of 2.72 and females had 3.21 for a mean difference of -.496. In this instance, equal variances could not be assumed as Levene's Test revealed an F = 5.785 and p = .016. This statistically significant result requires the equal variances not assumed SPSS results to be used (bottom line on the output). The associated
t = -5.886 and p = .003 is also statistically significant and negative, inferring male respondents as a group were considerably lower than their female counterparts (see Table 10).

Table 10. Question 2 Statistics

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Statistics</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>q17</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
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<th>Independent Samples Test</th>
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<td>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q2 Equal variances assumed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Question 3:** I would attend parent education programs if they were offered.

Once again the responses of both men and women were converging to the Agree = 3, selection with males attaining a mean of 2.77 and females had 3.18 for a mean difference of -.404. In this instance, equal variances could be assumed as Levene’s Test revealed an F = 1.162 and p = .281. This is not a statistically significant result and allows the Equal variances assumed SPSS results to be used
(top line on the output). The associated \( t = -5.592 \) and \( p = .000 \) is also statistically significant and negative, inferring male respondents as a group were considerably lower than their female counterparts (see Table 11).

Table 11. Question 3 statistics

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<thead>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Q3 Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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Independent Samples Test

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
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<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>1.162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-5.348</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Question 4: Parent Education Programs would enhance my abilities to help my child succeed in school.

Similarly, in question 4 both men and women were closest to the Agree = 3, selection with males attaining a mean of 2.86 and females had 3.23 for a mean difference of -.374. In this instance, equal variances could be assumed as Levene's Test revealed an \( F = .853 \) and \( p = .356 \). This is not a statistically significant result and allows the Equal variances assumed SPSS results to be used (top line on the
output). The associated $t = -5.023$ and $p = .000$ is also statistically significant and negative, inferring male respondents as a group were considerably lower than their female counterparts (see Table 12).

Table 12. Question 4 Statistics

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 Equal variances assumed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Question 5: Schools should have a parents' room, family bookshelf or family resource center in order to lend families learning games, books and tapes on parenting and videotapes of parent workshops.

The perceptions of both men and women regarding question 5 were also closely aligned to the Agree = 3, selection with males attaining a mean of 2.60 and females had 2.92 for a mean difference of -.321. In this instance, equal variances could not be assumed as Levene's Test
revealed an $F = 7.116$ and $p = .008$. This statistically significant result requires the Equal variances not assumed SPSS results to be used (bottom line on the output). The associated $t = -3.563$ and $p = .001$ is also statistically significant and negative, inferring male respondents as a group were considerably lower than their female counterparts (see Table 13).

Table 13. Question 5 Statistics

<table>
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<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
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<td>103</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>.856</td>
<td>.064</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>.794</td>
<td>.032</td>
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<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>7.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>7.116</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Question 6: Having dinner together as a family may help protect children from stress and /or help them perform better in school.

The response analysis to question 5 indicates both men and women were close to the Strongly Agree = 4, selection with males attaining a mean of 3.64 and females had 3.67
for a mean difference of -.036. In this instance, equal variances could be assumed as Levene's Test revealed an $F = .680$ and $p = .410$. This is not a statistically significant result and allows the Equal variances assumed SPSS results to be used (top line on the output). Although negative, the associated $t = -.628$ and $p = .530$ is not statistically significant and, inferring male and female respondents as groups were approximately the same on this question (see Table 14).

Table 14. Question 6 Statistics

<table>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>.557</td>
<td>.054</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>642</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>.549</td>
<td>.022</td>
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<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F$, Sig.</td>
<td>$t$, $df$</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.680, .410</td>
<td>-.628, 745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
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Question 7: I frequently talk to my child about what he or she is learning in school.

For this question the analysis revealed that both men and women were again leaning toward the Strongly Agree = 4,
selection with males attaining a mean of 3.73 and females had 3.84 for a mean difference of -.104. In this instance, equal variances could not be assumed as Levene's Test revealed an F = 20.436 and p = .000. This statistically significant result requires the Equal variances not assumed SPSS results to be used (bottom line on the output). The associated t = -2.173 and p = .032 is also statistically significant and negative, inferring male respondents as a group were considerably lower than their female counterparts (see Table 15).

Table 15. Question 7 Statistics

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<td>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
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Question 8: Balancing time between family and other responsibilities is very stressful.
Question 8 data revealed that both men and women were hovering around the Agree = 3, selection with males attaining a mean of 3.13 and females had 3.25 for a mean difference of -.125. In this instance, equal variances could be assumed as Levene's Test revealed an $F = 1.436$ and $p = .231$. This is not a statistically significant result and allows the Equal variances assumed SPSS results to be used (top line on the output). Although negative, the associated $t = -1.547$ and $p = .122$ is not statistically significant and, inferring male and female respondents as groups were approximately the same on this question (see Table 16).

Table 16. Question 8 Statistics

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<td>q17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
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</table>
Summary of the Descriptives

It is quite evident that the overwhelming majority of parents from this school district perceive the home-school relationship as a very high priority. This favorable support for home-school partnerships reinforces an underlying belief that when parents and schools work together student achievement increases.

The responses from parents also clearly indicate that the parents even from this high socio-economic school district perceive a need for school sponsored parent education programs to assist them in preparing their children to learn. Most of the comments in opposition to parent education programs were based on a projected cost to the taxpayer. Therefore, it can reasonably be inferred that even those parents responding negatively would favor the parent education programs if there was minimal impact on school budgets and taxes.

Responses also illustrate that parents from this type of school district would utilize school provided parent education programs. The majority not only perceived a need for these programs but would attend parent education programs if offered by the school district. Parents' favorable response illustrates a main focus and purpose of
this study. Parents even in a high-socioeconomic district, agree with, support the need for, and would attend school sponsored parent education programs.

Regarding the need for parent resource rooms there was a mixed response. Certainly, 70% favorable is still a good majority of parents who believe that a parent resource room containing parenting videos, parenting books, and a reading room for parents would be helpful. One pertinent comment was that a public library should serve this purpose and provide this information. A parent resource center that included computer classes about children's learning might foster increased parent interest and support more relevant parent needs.

The parents' response to sharing family meals indicates that they overwhelmingly agree that having family dinners enhances children's ability to do well in school. Their favorable responses to this question echo the findings from research.

The parents from this school district are almost unanimously interested and involved in communicating with their child about their education. Parent-child discussions about school strongly suggest to children that school is important.
The question about balancing time between family and other responsibilities, creates an interesting dilemma. Parents reported that stress was a factor in most families. Clearly, school sponsored parent education programs requiring parent attendance might add to family stress by imposing upon the parents' precious time. Schools should be mindful of this issue. Programs that would help parents access parenting information in other ways could be devised. Links to parenting information from the district website is one way that parents could receive information without leaving their home. District and administrative support would need to be engaged in order to establish this parent education link.

Summary of the Qualitative Patterns

It is clear from these varied responses that there are numerous interesting and helpful topics that the parents believe could be the subjects of many successful school nights. These great ideas from parents could be developed into informative and helpful parent programs.

It is easy to see from these responses that the time constraints on families from this type of school district are great. Any successful school sponsored parent
education program must recognize this and be as concise and time conscious as possible.

Research on family is unique because the issue is of broad social, economic, political, and religious significance. The plethora of parent magazines, books, and newspaper articles that have emerged primarily in the last two decades, points to the magnitude, scope and significance of parenting resource needs. The genre of literature would be incomplete without recognizing the abundance of everyday parenting issues that newspapers, magazines and books explore. Even the parent survey responses indicated that this is in large part how they access parenting information.

The responses indicate a myriad number of potential resources that a well-planned school sponsored parent education could use. These are potential areas to be addressed by a successful school sponsored parent education program. Some very important findings discovered in this study was that parents have little formal training in parenting skills. Therefore parenting skill courses should be strongly considered as part of all school districts’ curriculum. A second important finding was that parenting information was largely accessed by parents from internet sources. For this reason, strong consideration should be
given to creating site links or site information on the school district’s website. This would help link parents to instruction and information regarding Best Practices and Parenting Ideas. A concerted effort should also be made to include and foster the participation of fathers in any parent education skills program.

The parent’s responses were overwhelmingly sincere and honest. They were specific straightforward and often humorous. It would be worthwhile to report them all. They also reflect the heartwarming and sincere interest most parents from this school district have in being successful parents.

These comments indicated the interaction of varied relationships in a child’s life. It is apparent that parents from this school district are very well educated. It is an anomaly that despite their high educational level they express needs in their ability to successfully parent their children. It evokes the quote, “It’s too bad that the most important job we have in life— is the one we have no training for” (Reagan, 1989).
Inferential Statistics Summary

The inferential statistics disclosed that six of the eight questions were statistically significant with regard to gender. Specifically, the female respondents were more positive than their male counterparts on six questions:

Question 1: I consider a partnership between home and school a very high priority.

Question 2: Schools should sponsor parent education programs for parents.

Question 3: I would attend parent education programs if they were offered.

Question 4: Parent Education Programs would enhance my abilities to help my child succeed in school.

Question 5: Schools should have a parents' room, family bookshelf or family resource center in order to lend families learning games, books and tapes on parenting and videotapes of parent workshops.

Question 7: I frequently talk to my child about what he or she is learning in school.

Mathematically, 75% of these questions were rated higher by the females suggesting that women are more nurturing than men. Questions 6 and 8 were not significant, indicating the female and male respondents in this study were approximately the same. Conclusions and
connections to the literature of this analysis are completed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"Our children may be only 20% of our population but they are 100% of our future" (Riley, 1995, p. 2).

Summary

This study was conducted to determine the perceptions of parents in more affluent school districts regarding the significance of and need for parent education programs. The rationale underscoring this study was to determine if parents, even in more advantaged high socioeconomic areas, perceive that they are adequately prepared with sufficient information and knowledge regarding parenting. The study also sought to determine if parents feel that they could benefit from parent education support from their district school.

The first chapter discussed the profound metamorphosis that has occurred in the American family. During this period of change in the family, alarming increases in problems affecting children occurred. The social forces and issues affecting families and youth today create more children at risk to learning.
Parents are stressed and have less time to balance family with other responsibilities. Offering parent education skills in every school community, even affluent districts, will help meet the current needs of parents, children, and the family. Parents who understand ways to nurture bonds within the family will help make children secure, confidant, and ready to learn.

The focus in most of the educational literature has targeted and addressed the poor or low socio-economic districts in promoting parent education programs. All school districts should consider promoting parent education programs.

Chapter II provides a review of the legislation and literature. The third chapter describes the methodology for collecting the data; chapter IV presents the findings from the parents' responses to the survey questions. The fifth chapter presents the conclusion and establishes ideas that school administrators can use to guide or design parent education programs. Recommendations for further research are also discussed in this chapter.

Conclusions

The survey data collected and analyzed in this study resulted in the following conclusions.
Research Question 1

1. What are the perceptions of parents regarding school sponsored parent education programs?

This survey question indicated that 85% of the parents who responded, strongly agreed or agreed that schools should sponsor parent education programs. This survey question was administered in order to calculate and assess this group of parents’ perception about the need for parent education programs. Their responses clearly indicate that parents from this school district perceive a need for school sponsored parent education programs.

The second question relating to parent education programs inquired of parents if they would attend the parent education programs if offered. Again, 85% of parents responded and referenced that they would attend parent education programs if offered. Parents’ favorable response illustrates a main focus and purpose of this study. Parents even in a high-socioeconomic district, agree with, support the need for, and would attend school sponsored parent education programs.

The third and final question regarding parent education programs asked if parents thought that parent education programs would enhance their abilities to help their child succeed in school. This statement, also, was
met by favorable responses since 85% of parents agreed or strongly agreed with the above.

The responses to this research question show that parents even in high socio-economic areas perceive that parent education programs are important components to student success. Results support the idea of school district sponsored parent education programs.

Research Question 2

2. What are the perceptions of parents regarding the best topics for parent education workshops?

The workshop topics selected by the parents encompassed social, emotional, health, and academic areas of child development. Parents selected the following topics as their top five choices for parent education workshops: Study Skills, Understanding Children at each grade level, Teen Development, Stress Reducing Skills, and Homework Help.

A workshop survey is a good way to create program agendas that meet the specific needs of a group of parents. The ideas generated from the parents can then be developed into informative and meaningful parent education programs.
Research Question 3

3. How did parents learn to parent?

Parents were asked to report from what source/sources they learned their parenting skills. As expected, parents reported that they had no formal training in learning to parent. Parents reported overwhelmingly that they learned their parenting skills from their own parents. A large percentage reported that their parenting skills were obtained from trial and error or on the job training.

Interestingly, only 42 out of 760 or 5.5% of parents checked that school courses assisted them in learning parenting skills. Only 1 out of 760 listed a specific course in parenting which was called "Step Parenting."

Research Question 4

4. How and where do parents access information on parenting?

Many parents access friends for parenting information. The internet was also a very popular choice and books were listed as the third most popular method for accessing parenting information. It is significant that only 9 respondents mentioned teachers or schools as a source for parenting information.
Research Question 5

5. What are the most difficult aspects of parenting?

Several patterns emerged from the parents comments. These patterns revolved around five categories.

a) balance such as balance between work and family; balance between siblings and their different needs; balance between own needs and needs of children.

b) Communication without fighting. Communication and getting with the times. “Things that were completely unacceptable when I was a child are now the norm in most American families” (parent response from survey).

c) Peer Pressure- not being able to control outside influences.

d) Discipline-consistent discipline, patience, leading by example. Discipline in today’s society, too much TV and what’s on TV, amount of information children are exposed to and required to know in school.

e) Values-trying to keep the kids grounded in a neighborhood of excess.

The parents’ responses to this question were overwhelmingly sincere and honest. Their answers reflect the heartwarming and tremendous efforts they expend in trying to be good parents. It is an anomaly that despite
the high education level of parents surveyed, they still express strong concerns regarding parenting their children.

Research Question 6

6. What factors improve student achievement?

Parent’s responses centered around these themes: teacher enthusiasm and caring spirit; parent involvement; homelife-quality home life; health issues including adequate rest/sleep and nutrition.

These comments indicated the interaction of varied relationships in a child’s life that must be balanced and considered to help the child succeed. The school, parent, home, and health environments are components that must be included in assisting the whole child. These findings correlate to Dr. Epstein’s theory that “the family, school and community are overlapping spheres of influence on children’s learning” (Epstein, 1997, p. 72).

Research Question 7

7. What are the perceived greatest concerns of a parent?

The responses indicated that parents have broad-based concerns with respect to the health, safety and welfare of
their children from a child's inner well-being to the external societal influences that affect children.

Research Question 8

8. What after-school activities describe how children spend time?

This question provides us with a glimpse into how children in grades 1 through 5 from this demographic area spend their weekly time. The intent was to focus on activities of children during the school year and not the summer months. The findings confirm that children today are involved in numerous and varied activities. Watching TV 10 hours was the most frequent response. The second most frequent choice was Free Time. The next choice selected was Sitting together for family meals. Results from this group of parents may be related to their demographic characteristics. It is easy to see from the parent responses that time constraints are a factor on families from this school district. Any successful school sponsored parent education program must recognize and consider the time pressures on parents before developing their parenting education programs.

Education literature and now legislation have addressed the importance of parent involvement and parent
education programs. Research (Epstein, 1992) has also linked the more involved, informed, parent to an increase in children’s school success. Parent education programs are a method to increase family involvement in schools.

The problems influencing our youth are all-encompassing affecting all racial, economic, and cultural groups. The perception of parents in high-socio economic school districts is relevant. Rapid changes in family structure and increased social and economic pressures affect all families.


Without question, we’ve had a breakdown in the sense of community. In the past, we tended to overlook how important community is. It provided social and emotional support for children, but we didn’t see how that related to academic learning. This is not widely understood. Now we’re experiencing a breakdown in our communities, and we still need to help student attain high levels of academic achievement. The solution is to restore a sense of community. And that is what our program has always been about: restoring community, and doing it within the school (O’Neil, 1997, p. 10).
Recommendations

As a result of the data analysis and conclusion presented in this study, recommendations are made below in terms of policy, practice, and future research. These recommendations are directly linked to the Significance of the Study initially presented in Chapter I.

The ideas presented in this paper are generated in an effort to heighten the awareness and role of school leaders to affect change and bring more and more parent education program and skills to parents in our schools.

"The beginning of social change is to name a problem that has had no name, and to say that it doesn't have to be this way" (Doherty, 2004).

1. The need for a strong family support system has never been more apparent or more essential. The very important finding uncovered in this study was that parents have little formal training in parenting skills. Therefore, parenting skills courses should be strongly considered as part of all school districts' curriculum.

2. As of September 2007, schools in New Jersey must now abide by new nutrition based guidelines in order to
address the growing obesity problems of children. If this problem can be addressed through legislation and mandatory guidelines, why not offer a more permanent solution to the problem, parent skills training to middle school and high school students and parent education programs for current parents?

Past precedent has been set by the inclusion of other programs into the school day as a result of social and cultural forces. Breakfast programs, drug education programs, teenage suicide prevention curriculum, bullying policy, driver education programs, full day kindergarten, after school care programs, and preschool programs have all become additions to our schools as a result of the changing needs of society.

Given these precedents, the widespread issues of the family, and the increasing neediness of children, society may now more than ever be ready to support parent skills training programs in school.

3. Parent education should be integrated into and throughout the curriculum. The driving force is to prepare children to become good parents and family members in the future.

4. Schools may need to address these phenomena more specifically in order to safeguard our youth and to provide
our country with its future capital. Our schools must produce sufficient leaders for our country in 20 to 30 years who possess the qualities of integrity and moral character necessary for responsible citizenship.

Policy

If the transformational school leader is charged with emphasizing vision, then school leaders should be promoting policies and practices that strive to strengthen and support the family, recognizing that a healthy family, however configured, is fundamental to society. Ameliorating the issues detrimentally affecting our youth should be paramount to school leaders and must be addressed in policy, leadership, and equity in all school communities.

Widespread parent education should be a vision of a new paradigm not just for the poorer school districts but in high-socioeconomic ones as well.

1. School district policy should include provisions for parent education and support programs. Parent education and support programs are a link to student learning and could positively alter the lives of children and families. This could benefit the common good.
2. All school districts should have a web link to significant and informative parent education information. A second important finding from this study was that parents largely access their parent information from internet sources. Links to parenting information from the district website is one way that parents could receive information without leaving their home.

District and administrative support would need to be engaged in order to establish this parent education link. Designated school personnel could monitor and update the links. Investigation into grant money for funding should also be strongly considered.

Many parents reported difficulty with balancing time and other responsibilities. Providing parents this easy method to access parent education information would be an important way to assist them in developing and improving their parenting skills.

3. The perception of parents provides important guidelines in determining the relevancy of parent skills programs. Districts should survey parents’ specific needs and issues regarding workshops. Family-School connections are better when schools and parents share in the planning of parent education programs. Dr. Joyce Epstein’s Program
for Family and School Involvement from the John Hopkins Center is an excellent model for schools to follow.

Assistant Superintendents In Charge of Curriculum

1. Implement a school curriculum to address the combined needs of home, family life, and child development. Include a social-emotional component to the curriculum. Provide and promote a parent skills curriculum to High School juniors and seniors. Middle school students and when appropriate even earlier.

2. Use a whole school concept and approach to promote the social and emotional health of students. James Comer, child psychologist at Yale Child Center (1997), speaks of the importance of designing schools that combine academic learning with social learning. Comer integrates social skill development into regular academics. Integrating social emotional learning throughout classes will eliminate placing more demands on teachers and help them from feeling overwhelmed. Elias et. al (1997) also believe that social-emotional learning curriculums positively influence and protect children.

3. Incorporate social emotional aspects to parenting education programs. Parents' reported in their survey responses that they were concerned not only about their
child's academics but overwhelmingly concerned with the social and emotional well-being of their children.

4. Implement Character Education programs.

5. Strengthen Character Education programs already in place.


7. Expand anti-bullying programs. The kids targeted are usually the children most at risk for school problems and failure.

**Principals**

1. Increase adjustments in school calendar (Night conferences, night programs) to accommodate the working family.

2. Monitor the quality of after-school programs and personnel. Are personnel trained in the issues of the family? Are they hired with the thought that they need to be caring, supportive caregivers to latch-key children? These programs should provide a nurturing and family-like community atmosphere for children who may not experience the important nurturing effects of family.
3. A concerted effort should also be made to include and foster the participation of fathers in any parent education skills program.

Vice-Principals, Discuss Discipline

1. Send information to parents regarding the abuse of the internet and its contribution to student behavior problems. This information should start at the lowest grades appropriate before video addictions begin. That is adopt a prevention policy.

Comer (1997) also speaks of the changes in society that have lessened the sense of community. Children and family move more often. This diminishes stability. He sees that as a major loss for children since children most benefit from continuity. To reestablish this link to continuity and stability, Comer looks toward the school as the critical link to supporting social and emotional roots. Neighborhoods are not natural communities anymore. And with the growth of mass communications and computers, children are being bombarded with more information than ever before. For the first time in the history of the world, information goes directly to children rather than through important adults who can filter it. What we've got to do is reestablish or
create a tighter fabric of support for children's development. To even have a chance to counter the negative aspects of these new developments, you have to connect home and school (O'Neil, 1997, p. 10).

School Counselors

1. Continue to provide bullying information

2. Implement a relatively simple idea and encourage families to have more meals together. Family meals increase social discourse opportunities. Mealtime discussions support social skills, conversation and other important pragmatic speaking skills.

Future Research Recommendations

1. Increase scientific research and knowledge on the best practices in parenting. Broaden this knowledge by collaborating with other interdisciplinary social scientists.

Collectively, we need to expand and improve our efforts to provide parents with useful, reliable information to guide their choices and the ways in which they promote their children's well-being. Lest we forget, those glorious moments at the start of a child's life are not just a promissory note for children or a dream for parents: the inherent
reciprocity in parent-child relationships means that parents' own well-being also can be enhanced (or diminished) to a considerable extent by their children's outcomes and ultimately, the strength of a community and society. The art of parenting will also be an uncertain and individual endeavor to some degree; what science can do is further parents' knowledge and confidence and the effectiveness of how we invest in our children and their future (Borkowski, et al, 2002, p.68).

2. Determine the perception of teachers regarding the results of this survey study. Inform teachers of the impact of social forces on the family. Many teachers did not receive courses in the specifics of family and parenting issues or provided with the training to know their impact on children's learning.


4. Survey parents' perceptions in schools of middle income families such as DE districts if using the New Jersey District Factor Grouping System. Determine schools in that category.
5. Share information with other educators, parents and caregivers through courses, in-services days, and continuing education programs.

6. Explore the impact of the increased isolation of children due to lack of extended family, loss of neighborhood, and increasing technology that limits the amount of social interaction that children have today. Has this contributed to the need for more elementary school counselors who have to incorporate social skills groups to the school’s children? Or bullying prevention?

7. Encourage higher places of learning colleges and universities to incorporate parenting and family courses to help prepare future teachers to understand families.

"The old paradigm held an ideal of reason freed of the pull of emotion. The new paradigm urges us to harmonize head and heart" (Goleman, 1997, p. 29).

The words to the timeless ballad "The Times They are A Changin’" beckon us to dedicate our efforts so that together we can help our children, families and thereby the future capital of our country.
Come senators, congressmen
Please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway
Don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt
Will be he who has stalled
The battle outside is ragin'.
It'll soon shake your windows
And rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'.

Come mothers and fathers throughout the land,
And don't criticize what you can't understand;
Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command
Your old road is rapidly fadin'.
Please get out a new one if you can't lend your hand
Because the times they are a-changin'.

(Dylan, 1963)
REFERENCES
REFERENCE


*New Jersey Education Association Review. Together, we can.* (1997, March).
No Child Left Behind Act, 20 USC 6301 (2002).


APPENDIX A
Please CIRCLE the one choice for each item that best represents your perceptions(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I consider a partnership between home and school a very high priority.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Schools should sponsor parent education programs for parents.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I would attend parent education programs, if they were offered.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Parent education programs would enhance my abilities to help my child succeed in school.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Schools should have a parents' room, family bookshelf or family resource center in order to lend families learning games, books and tapes on parenting and videotapes of parent workshops.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Having dinner together as a family may help protect children from stress and/or help them perform better in school.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I frequently talk to my child about what he or she is learning in school.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Balancing time between family and other responsibilities is very stressful.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Please check any of the following topics that you think should be considered for parent education workshops.

- Child Development and Nutrition
- Teen Development
- Understanding children at each grade level
- Creating home conditions to support learning
- Substance Abuse/Alcohol/Drugs
- Promoting Family Literacy (read aloud programs)
- Understanding Cultures
- Math and science refresher courses for adults
- Information on required skills in all subjects
- Child Health and Nutrition
- Discipline
- Study Skills
- Communication Skills
- Homework Help
- Anger Management
- Relationships
- Bullying/Teasing
- Stress Reducing Skills
- Learning Styles
- Internet Use/Abuse
- Other
- Other
APPENDIX B
July 31, 2006

Dear Elementary School Parent:

Enclosed please find a questionnaire prepared by Ms. Kathleen M. Briscoe, a doctoral student at Seton Hall University, College of Education, Department of Educational Leadership. As Superintendent of the Marlboro Township School District, I have approved its distribution to each registered student’s parent(s) in the five elementary school attendance areas. Whether you choose to complete the questionnaire or not is totally up to you. The purpose of any such study is to add to the knowledge base of a particular discipline and both the Seton Hall Instructional Review Board and I have deemed this instrument worthy of your attention/completion.

Please know that no district funds or materials have been used in conducting this private study. All costs of making and distributing this instrument, including the collection and analyzing of the results have been and will be borne by Ms. Briscoe.

Thank you in advance for taking time out of your busy summer schedule to respond to these 17 questions and return the one page questionnaire, both sides, in the enclosed stamped-addressed envelope.

Sincerely,

David C. Abbott, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools
APPENDIX C
Dear Parent,

I am currently enrolled in doctoral study at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership.

The topic of my dissertation for this program is to determine the perception of parents in Monmouth County School Districts regarding the significance of and need for parent education and support programs provided by the school. The purpose of the study is to provide feedback that could be valuable toward implementing and designing effective parent education programs.

An essential component of the research is the feedback from participating parents. Your responses to the survey questionnaire enclosed will provide information to the researcher regarding parents’ perceptions about the need for parent education programs provided by the school. You have been randomly selected to receive the questionnaire. Answering the survey questions will take approximately fifteen minutes. It is very important to the success of the study that as many parents as possible complete this survey questionnaire. It will be greatly appreciated if you could take a few minutes to give us your valuable responses.

Your participation is voluntary. All responses are completely confidential and anonymous. There will be no way of tracking who answered the survey questions. All the anonymous responses will be safely secured in a locked filing cabinet during the research period.

Consent to participate is indicated by returning the enclosed survey questionnaire to the researcher in the attached addressed stamped envelope. Please complete and return the survey by mail. Receiving your response to the survey by August 15, 2006 would be greatly appreciated. If you are unable to participate in this study, just discard this letter and survey.

Please accept my sincere thanks for helping me in this important part of my doctoral dissertation. If there are any questions about this research, please contact Kathleen M. Briscoe, researcher; or Office of Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, Presidents Hall, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, New Jersey 07079. The telephone number is Tel. 973-313-6314.

Sincerely yours,

Kathleen M. Briscoe, Ed.S

Seton Hall University
Institutional Review Board

College of Education and Human Services
Office of the Associate Dean
Tel. 973.761.9668

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