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Parental empowerment through involvement : presented to ...

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Parental Empowerment through Involvement

Presented to

The Faculty of the College of Professional Studies

California State University at Monterey Bay

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Anneliese Neitling

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Parental Empowerment Through Involvement

BY

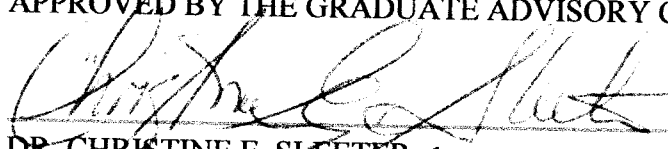
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Abstract

The purpose of my research was to investigate the effect of an adaptation of a parent involvement program model for the families and students in the middle school. By means of the parent involvement program, my goal was to assess and improve the relationship between the school and parents. During the middle school years, parents become less involved in their child's education thus leaving them to fend for themselves. This in itself presents a problem, since it remains necessary for schools to communicate with parents about their child and their education. Crossing the bridge between different cultures and closing the gap for minority-low socio economic families presents yet another challenge for schools. Therefore, increasing parent involvement can be problematic for educators and administrators who work with disadvantaged families.

Given the need for an increased amount of parent involvement, I decided to create and monitor a parent action team that would determine goals to try and implement schoolwide by April 2006. Due to language and time restrictions, the groups were separated into two: one consisting of a parent-teacher group with set goals to increase parent communication through the use of the school agenda and positive phone calls; the other was a parent action team which never made it off the ground due to complications and lack of follow through. I collected data using interviews, and interactive journals during group meetings to document and analyze the success of the parent action teams. The main finding in my research was that with increased parent communication and involvement in the student's education, student achievement drastically improved. Barriers to increased communication and parent involvement were time, school protocol and hierarchies, culture, teacher training and teacher attitudes.

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Statement of Purpose- Parental Empowerment Through Involvement

Introduction

During my first years of teaching, I noticed the best students were my Latino English language learners. Their parents were extremely supportive in terms of behavior and follow through at home, but when approached to work in the classroom or at school, my Latino parents were hesitant to help. Due to my desire to help my Latino students and parents accustom themselves to the school system and communicate with them more efficiently, I decided to leave the United States and teach in Honduras for one year to learn Spanish. My goal was to see the world from the viewpoint through which our immigrant brothers pass and the cultures they leave behind. I needed to learn how to communicate in Spanish fluently and fully understand Latino cultural norms.

Upon realizing that one year was not enough, I continued my travels and education to Queretaro, Mexico and participated in a program through San Diego State University to study Spanish and receive my Bilingual Cross-Cultural Language Acquisition and Development (BCLAD) certificate during my two month study. This opportunity exposed me to the culture of Mexico and the beauty of its people. I began to read the teachings of Paulo Freire and ate chilaquiles with Donaldo Macedo. Donaldo and his wife Lilia Bartolome taught the critical pedagogy and multicultural/ bilingual education classes where I learned the extent of racism in education and the need for advocacy. Through Lilia's teaching and Donaldo's elaboration on racism in second language learning, I grew to understand the power of my race as a white woman and the

societal privileges I have. I decided after the summer of 2004 to return to the United States and advocate for students and their families in my school.

I have learned that I cannot fight for the rights of parents and students alone, but where there are many voices, change can happen. Change will have to come through the evolution of our minds, not a revolution against the dominant white culture. I have realized the power of a community, and do not want to continue to teach and live in separate existence from my students and their parents. My goals are to use my school as a conduit to transform the minds of my colleagues, empower parents to fight for the educational rights of their children, and help alter our sense of community.

Parent involvement: Barriers and needs

Many studies have shown that when parents are involved in their children's education and have an active part in what they are learning, student performance increases (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, Dornbusch & Ritter 1988, Nichols-Solomon, 1991). Nancy Chavkin (1993) states disadvantaged parents tend to have low contact with schools. Due to their low contact, Chavkin's research suggests that many educators conclude such underprivileged parents lack interest in their children's education and speculate that these parents do not want to work within their children's schools. Chavkin proves where these assumptions not only provide minority parents with a lack in variety of opportunities for involvement in their children's education; minority parents also become intimidated by the school system.

El Sausal Middle School and East Salinas.

Problems like these continue throughout the nation, but especially in poor, working class neighborhoods. I teach ESL at El Sausal Middle School in East Salinas. According to the 2002 US Census, Salinas has the most concentrated population per square inch in the US due to high prices of real estate and availability of jobs. Salinas has a population of 151,000 people of which 64% are Latino. Latinos comprise 58% of the labor force and the per capita income for these families is \$14,495 annually (Census Bureau, 2000). Many of the students have parents who work in the nearby agricultural fields; 97% of the students in my school come from families living below the poverty level. About 95% of these students are second language learners, and struggle in school.

Their parents are virtually invisible with the exception of our monthly ELAC (English Language Advisory Committee) committee meetings that service all second language parents and inform them about school policy and expectations. These meetings are run by our school Migrant Education Coordinator and 7th Grade counselor. Parents may also contact the school through our full time school/community liaison and even participate in the three hour socials on Fridays for mothers to learn about services in the area, receive literacy education and other social assistance. These parents come to receive services, reading lessons, and a place to feel welcomed within the school. Many teachers and administrators stray away from community liaison's room, and have little contact with the parents who actually do take the time to show up at the school.

Unfortunately, ELAC and our community liaison's efforts provide the only positive parental support offered by El Sausal Middle School. These two venues merely provide consistent parent communication due to our school funding a community liaison to provide outreach to our struggling parent population and communicate with them. In

fact, teachers often submit written requests to have the community liaison to call parents at home with behavior problems or classroom concerns instead of contacting parents themselves. Moreover, negative phone calls and meetings with teachers/administrators constitute the majority of home to school contact by teachers, counselors, and school staff. From my observations, teachers have even stopped assigning after school detention and Saturday School this year because they are required by the administration to call home to report the problem to parents alerting them as to why their child will remain after school. Through staff room conversations and speaking with our campus detention center, teachers do not want to call home and find it a greater burden than asset to their teaching environments when asked to contact parents.

A possible solution to this problem is to empower these parents culturally and politically through the schools in which their children attend. This is essential not only to the families of my students, but for minority parents everywhere. Many steps need to be taken, and attended to with urgency.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of my research was to investigate an adaptation of a parent involvement program model for the families and students at El Sausal Middle School. By means of the parent involvement program, my goal was to assess and improve the relationship between the school and parents.

In this project , two related questions were presented and studied. First, I wanted to know the extent to which parent-teacher communication would increase student achievement. To this end, I organized five teachers to work together to come up with ideas

to increase student achievement through increased parent-school communication. The question simply asked was: will increased parent-teacher communication increase student achievement?

Second, I wanted to work with a Parent Action team comprised of parents who ARE actively involved in the school to find out the extent to which parental empowerment through involvement increases student achievement. By parent empowerment, I mean involving parents in the decision making proces for students abou ttheir grades in their English classroom. My hope is that these suttle beginnings will progress into situations where parents have thee confidence and power to greater influence school decisions and policy in the future.

To research these questions, I chose El Sausal Middle School as the main site for my research as a result of the network of parents I have already established in confidence. The parents I work with have duly observed the oppressive conditions that exist within the school's community of East Salinas. Most families are significantly below the poverty level, live in dilapidated housing and struggle to put food on the table for their families. I have seen neighborhoods riddled with territorial graffiti tags to mark which gang holds precedent where. Parents constantly walk their children to school for fear that they will be shot on site. East Salinas is renowned for the danger present there. Most people who live in this part of the community are of Latino decent and many only speak Spanish. For many it appears like many neighborhoods in Mexico, but for others it is the only place they can afford to live. I have been told by some they cannot wait to leave and would love to move their families to a safer place, but unfortunately with the local

economy and real estate prices ranging near the million dollar range, many will never leave.

In my experiences working with working class Latino immigrant parents, I have noted the need to help them understand the system present here in the United States. Those parents who are newcomers from Mexico tend to be unfamiliar with the schooling differences here and truly trust schools with every fiber of their being with their children and their educations. Due to this, I have seen the need for a parent action team arise through their concerns and lack of concern from my fellow staff members. My project attempted to incorporate action research with Dr. Joyce Epstein's (1997) six types of parent involvement strategies and Concha Delgado-Gaitan's (1991) research on Latino parent involvement in Cupertino, California. Through their experiences and research, I hope to answer questions about how to overcome school barriers with Latino parents, analyze the positive effects visible, increased parent involvement, and learn how to use effective strategies to create parent-teacher ownership of this action team so that it will maintain its precedence as an integral network within our school. By incorporating these two researchers' plans, my goal was to begin a Parent Action Team at El Sausal Middle School by including parents, educators, students, and community members.

This thesis explores the history of parent involvement, the theories which support it and how it has to be change to effectively work for minority and disadvantaged populations in the second chapter. Chapter Two provides the epistemological outlooks of the main researchers cited in this study and also provides synopsis of their earlier work and how it can be applied to my study. The literature surrounding this topic is extensive; however, this study was focused on Latino communities, schools, and how to empower

the parents within them. The third chapter explores how the research was conducted through action research at El Sausal Middle School and how previous parent action plans had to be adapted to fit out school's situation. Lastly, this thesis reports the results of the study, through journal entries taken at times of conferences, meetings, and interviews with parents and teachers to convey the successes and failures of the project.

Review of Related Literature

Parent Empowerment Through Involvement

Parents and students agree that adolescence is a challenging time for their relationships with each other. Students have overlapping spheres of influence from family, school, community, and friends. Young people are also caught in a maelstrom of physical, psychological, and social growth. Adolescents need stability and people they can rely on to guide them. The adults in their families and schools, acting together in partnership, must guide them in this crucial time of need.

In California, school and family partnerships were an integral component of the reform movement of the 1980's. Legislators incorporated the inclusion of parents based on research which supports an increase in student achievement when parents are active participants in their child's education (Nichols-Solomon, 1991). Research illustrates school-family-community partnerships are not as strong as they could be. Strength in parent involvement has been noted to decline as a child moves to the upper grade levels.

Parents would like to maintain their involvement during the middle school years, however, only a small percentage receive guidance from school on how to help their children (Epstein, 1985, 1994, 1997 ; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Families lack the necessary information on class requirements, choices, grading procedures, and especially for immigrant Latino parents, how to deal with school culture.

The belief that parent involvement in education is related to children's learning and school performance is supported by a growing body of research. For example, in the report *Strong Families, Strong Schools* (U.S. Department of Education 1994), the authors conclude that when parents are involved in their children's learning, children earn higher grades and test scores, and they stay in school longer. The authors also claim that when parents are involved in a variety of ways at school, the performance of all children in the school tends to improve.

The US Department of Education in 2000 reported Hispanic students have higher high school dropout rates and lower high school completion rates than White or Black students. The average student dropout rate for Hispanics is attributed to the markedly higher dropout rate among Hispanic immigrants; more than one-half of Hispanic immigrants never enrolled in a U.S. school, but are included as high school dropouts if they did not complete high school in their country of origin. The 2000 status dropout rate for Hispanics born outside the United States (44 percent) is higher than the rate for first-generation Hispanic youth (15 percent). However, among youth born in the United States, both first- and second-generation Hispanics are still more likely to drop out than their counterparts of other races/ethnicities.

Studies have shown that parent involvement in children's learning can have a positive effect on their achievement and reduce the school dropout rate (U.S. Department of Education 1996). In an effort to encourage and increase the participation of parents in their children's schooling, Congress added an eighth goal to the National Education Goals that encourages schools to adopt policies and practices that actively engage parents. These policies promote family-school partnerships to support the academic work of children at home and in shared educational decision making process at school. Goal eight of the National Education Goals specifies that schools “will actively engage parents and families in a partnership that supports the academic work of children at home and shared educational decision making at school” (National Educational Goals, 1990). However, in general, schools do not report considering parent input to a great extent in making decisions on school issues (National Educational Goals, April 1996). Schools indicated that parent input is considered to a moderate or small extent. Schools reported giving input from parents the most consideration on the issue that directly relates to parents--the development of parent involvement activities.

Educational reform historically has encouraged parent involvement as a major component for increased student achievement. In essence, historical and theoretical implications in the research provide insight into how parents are involved in schools and how to provide a more welcoming environment for them to become a part of their child's education. Moreover, scholars have provided guides to schools and districts with ways in which to implement a theoretical and research based parent involvement program for increased student and school success. Therefore, it is imperative that El Sausal Middle School in East Salinas, my school site, adopt a program to coincide with the

emancipatory trend of parent inclusion so that we empower parents to escape the historically oppressive hierarchies present in our school.

History of Parent Involvement and Educational Policy

Historically, a parents' relationship with and role within the school has changed (Riley, 1994). While researching the historical implications of schooling, I found that parent involvement includes: limited involvement in an organization (i.e.,PTO), the school's providence in parent education towards producing citizens, and the maintenance of delegated social and gender roles (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Riley, 1994). In her research Maria Eulina de Carvalho (2001) intelligently outlines the histories of educational perspectives in regard to policy. De Carvalho started as early as the colonial era in which the image of the common school initiated by parents demonstrated early forms of parent involvement through the hiring of teachers by. With the enlightened critiques of social exclusion, the segregation of African-Americans, as well as other low performance of other minorities of the 1960's, school reform solutions surfaced which included the need to embrace parents in the education of minority students (de Carvalho, 2001; Labaree, 1977).

De Carvalho summarized the renowned Coleman Report (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood Weinfeld, & York, 1966) which "stressed the importance of family background characteristics..." and recognized that, "the sources of inequality of educational opportunities were first in the home (de Carvalho, 2001, pg. 11). Early educational research studies suggest school reform was considered imperative and

implied that schools must support educational opportunity, “by informing and legitimating educational interventions in the realm of families in order to correct the ‘cultural deficit’ and prevent the school failure of minority and disadvantaged groups” (de Carvalho, 2001, pg. 12). This cultural deficiency perspective towards minority families and children led to a series of programs funded under Chapter 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act during the 1960’s and 1970’s. One example of such a program is Head Start (Scott-Jones, 1993). Following the implementation of such programs, many educational researchers began to look at the social hierarchies of schools and what dominant value systems created barriers to the empowerment of minority and disadvantaged parents, and contributed to the maintenance of social class (Henry, 1996).

Under the Bush administration’s No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, parents now have the right to remove children from under-performing schools. In addition, Title I funding allocated under NCLB is highly scrutinized and forces districts to prove their dissemination of funds to disadvantaged students and school improvement programs (US Department of Education, 2005). Schools have the possibility of losing their Title I monies if they do not show annual proficiency growth on statewide standardized tests. Parent involvement is crucial to this process. Disadvantaged parents, when educated about their rights, will learn to demand equal opportunities for their students and the school which they attend. The educating of parents not only may be profitable for El Sausal Middle School, but it may also increase student achievement, test scores, and student accountability through their enlightenment towards the educational needs of their children.

Socio-cultural Implications and the “Hidden Curriculum” of Schools

Parent involvement is vital to the survival of a democratic society. Theoretically, our cultural values of capitalism and freedom drive our desire to better our schools (Spring, 1994; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Unfortunately, it is hard to escape the “hidden curriculum” of middle-class administrators and teachers who transpose their cultural values onto our nation’s children (Anyon, 1980). However, as researchers study the implications of parent involvement and its reflections of capital (economic, social, and cultural), educators can learn to value our differences and teach children to think critically and emancipate themselves from their current social status (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau, 1987; Freire, 1985)

The maintenance of dominant cultural values is a major barrier to increased parent involvement in schools. As theorized by Bowles and Gintis:

We believe the available evidence indicates that the pattern of social relationships fostered in schools is hardly irrational or accidental. Rather the structure of the educational experience is admirably suited to nurturing attitudes and behavior consonant with participation in the labor force. (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, pg. 9)

To maintain middle-class white advantage, as Bowles and Gintis explained, educators continue to educate students through a meritocratic manner by which they reward and promote students into an occupational hierarchy established by social class. In addition, schools reinforce these patterns of social class which further propel students towards an eventual social standing within this set hierarchy of authority and status. Unfortunately, as students enter our school system, they are organized and educated based on their parents’ economic status. To their dismay, a capitalistic school climate like

this further oppresses students and parents of non-dominant cultures resulting in a loss of power over their education. To overcome this phenomenon Bowles and Gintis believe in the necessity for people to recreate the institution to fit their own cultural needs, teaching all varieties of cultural capital and restructuring the quality of their children's social development. With this, all children will learn equally, and the institution will not determine their success if educators help to change the hierarchy of the labor market through emancipatory educational curricula.

In Jean Anyon's (1980) article *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*, she continues to elaborate upon the theory that schools reproduce social status. Anyon's research involved five different schools, each serving a different social class orientation. Anyon discovered the presence of a "hidden curriculum" which is taught to students. This "hidden curriculum" is different for all students, because it is based on the socio-economic status of the population of students who attend a certain school. In her discussion, Anyon concluded that schools inherently place students in certain social hierarchy and working class. Within this curriculum, schools tend to value the symbolic capital of the dominant culture. "Symbolic capital can be socially legitimated skills-cognitive (e.g., analytical), linguistic, or technical skills that provide the ability to say, produce the dominant scientific, artistic, and other culture, or to manage the systems of industrial and cultural production" (Anyon, 1980, pg. 69). Parents ultimately have to be cognizant of these socially legitimated skills to enable themselves to even enter as equals into the dominant culture's ideals of school (de Carvalho, 1999).

In regard to parent involvement in these different school environments, Anyon noted in elite schools (not working class) there was:

Increased parent expenditure for school equipment over and above district or government funding, higher expectations of student ability on the part of the parents, teacher and administrators, or positive attitudes on the part of the teachers as to the probable occupational futures of the children, and increased cultural congruence between school and community. (Anyon, 1980, pg. 87)

Unfortunately due to the lack of equal educational opportunities like those of the elite students, the working-class children do not receive the education necessary to help emancipate themselves to a higher social class, nor can their parents assist them due to their inability to give them the cultural capital necessary to compete with those students schooled in the dominant culture's ideals (de Carvalho, 1999)

Many of the parents and students in East Salinas live at or below poverty level (US census, 2000). Jonathan Kozol in his book *Savage Inequalities* (1991) also addressed the issue of parents like those in East Salinas. Kozol states,

The poorest parents, often the products of inferior education, lack the information access and skills of navigation in an often hostile and intimidating situation to channel their children to better school, obtain the applications . . . (pg. 60)

It becomes necessary to give their children an education that is not determined by government drawn district lines or the exorbitant real-estate market. Unfortunately, many teachers and administrators regard this lack of knowledge about US school policy as complacency, or even more acceptable, laziness. The fact of the matter is, "the parents don't even know what's going on. . ." and those in power assume, "the parents are the problem" (Kozol, 1991).

Another theory that helps to explain the differences in parent involvement and is probably the most widely recognized is that of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural

capital. Bourdieu (1977) introduced the theory of cultural capital which states schools represent and reproduce middle or upper-class values in their concurrent forms of communication. Schools and families are subjugated by the state because neither has political power in a larger political context. Schools tend to reflect the state's interests, where the family is more influenced by the pressures of school policy and practice.

Through school policy, families have the potential to exercise power within the school. However, for parents from lower social class backgrounds, difficulties may arise when they try to enter positions of power within the school because they lack the cultural characteristics of the middle and upper class (Spring, 1994). For parents to become active participants in this dominant school culture they must acquire the cultural and social capital necessary for them to be included (Bourdieu, 1986). Situations like these "put parents at a disadvantage because they too must adapt to the dominant culture of the school to meet teacher expectations" (Feuerstein, 2001, pg. 29). Unfortunately, parents of lower socio-economic status may have to abandon, "their own cultural traditions and adopt the traditions of the dominant European-American culture in order to gain equal political and economic power" (Spring, 1994, pg. 98). Adversely, I believe for parents and students to negotiate their culture would further perpetuate a loss of cultural identity. Unfortunately, the school demands that such negotiations be made.

Abe Feuerstein (2001) compared Bourdieu's theories with those of Annette Lareau. His alignment of these theories illustrates how democratic ideology correlates with social and cultural reproduction. Feuerstein states that Lareau built on Bourdieu's cultural capital theory and related it to parent involvement. Lareau (1989) states that social class influences parent involvement in schooling. She also believes that working-

class parents believe that teachers are responsible for education; they don't seek clarification in matters of curriculum or the educational process. Due to this, students and parents are not "culturally familiar" with the social arrangements of schools. Lareau argues:

The standards of the school are not neutral; their requests for parent involvement may be laden with the cultural experiences of intellectual and economic elites. Bourdieu does not examine the question of parent involvement in schooling, but his analysis points to the importance of class and class cultures in facilitating or impeding parents' negotiation of the process of schooling. (pg.8)

Lareau states that school involvement directly correlates with one's social status. Cultural capital unfortunately creates barriers to parent involvement, but the theory of social capital also contributes to lack of parent involvement in schools. J.S. Coleman (1966) developed the idea that social capital consists of the social values, resources, and patterns of interaction within intergenerational relationships in families and communities as part a symbolic currency linked to group membership. Coleman also deduced that with a lack of social capital:

The sources of inequality of educational opportunity appear to lie first in the home itself and the cultural influences immediately surrounding the home; then they lie in the schools' ineffectiveness to free achievement from the impact of the home, and in the schools' cultural homogeneity which perpetuates the social influences of the home and its environs. (pg.73-74)

These statements are reflected in Ricardo D. Stanton-Salazar's book

Manufacturing Hope and Despair: The School and Kin Support Networks of U.S.-Mexican Youth (2001). His book is a study of Mexican immigrant adolescents and their relationships and networks in and out of school. Stanton-Salazar looks at the importance of social capital with these students and how it affects their relationships between their families, friends, and the community. Stanton-Salazar, in his chapter about parents as a

source of support for students states that adolescents speak of a “split between the world of the school and the world at home” (pg. 87). One student, Sandra Jacobo said of her parents:

They try to get involved, but I tell them, I consider it to be part of my personal life. My studies, my education. Since I was young, the really haven't had much involvement with my school work. So in a sense, I have grown accustomed to it. They are apart from my school work; they are a part from my life in general. (pg. 88)

Situations like these demonstrate the need to have parents become partners in their children's education. Many immigrant parents have low socio-economic status and low levels of education which together play a big role in the nature of parent relations. However, social status also determines parent involvement in schools. Regrettably, minority parents are unaware of this system which indoctrinates them and students do not critically reflect upon their educational experiences. On the contrary, parents may be cognizant of the oppressive nature of the dominant culture in schools (i.e., language barriers and the overwhelming presence of white-dominant ideology), but rather believe there is not much they can do to change the system. Educators need to not only educate the students, but their families alike about the U.S. educational system in which they reside. Teachers must enlighten them on the school's infrastructure of power and validate their presence within it. Furthermore, educators must incorporate minority parents in the schooling of their children and merge their “two worlds.” This can be achieved through empowerment and a collective agency that works towards a common goal; the social and political advancement of children and their families.

“Curriculum of the Home” and Latino Collectivism

“Cultural differences among minority groups may also contribute to differences in the ways parents relate to the school and how they view and appropriate levels of involvement” (Dornbusch & Ritter 1988, pg. 118). Research studies by Concha Delgado-Gaitan (1991) of Latino communities and culture conclude that a conflict between Latino immigrant students and their parents exists in U.S. schools due to different cultural belief systems (Trumbell, Rothstein-Fisch, Hernandez, 2003). For schools and administrators, “major assumption(s) are made in classroom observation stud(ies) that children are socialized in the home to learn” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1985, pg. 55). On the contrary, Mexican children are raised in collectivistic homes which differ from the individualism which is taught in US schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 1985; 1993).

“Collectivism refers to a cluster of interrelated values that reflect a particular world view and motivate a whole range of thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors” (Trumbell, Rothstein-Fisch, Hernandez, 2003, pg. 48). Aspects of collectivism for Mexican children consist of a “home curriculum,” where sharing and helping are essential, and a sense of group/family interdependence (Trumbell, Rothstein-Fisch, Hernandez, 2003; Delgado-Gaitan, 1995). In contrast, European-American culture is individualistic. Individualism “represents a set of values associated with independence, self-expression, personal autonomy and achievement” (Trumbell, Rothstein-Fisch, Hernandez, 2003, pg. 52).

Immigrant students and parents, raised in homes where collectivism is taught and revered, are forced to “transition from collectivism to an individualistic orientation” (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993). Schools must begin to alert school personnel to cultural

differences and incorporate collectivism and individualism into their classrooms to reduce the cultural barrier that is lowering student achievement (Henry, 1996). For parents to become involved, they need to feel that their children's schools legitimize their language and cultural values (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993, pg. 412). By empowering students and maximizing parent involvement through the teaching of their individual cultural experiences and values, we will begin to emulate the studies and theories of Paulo Freire (1973). Moreover, one can validly assume that:

Until schools (meaning teachers, administrators, other personnel, and school boards) understand how cultural values influence goals and practices of child-rearing views of education and ways that people interact, they will not succeed in attaining the kind of 'minority' parent involvement they claim to want or in providing the best education for 'minority' students. (Trumbell, Rothstein-Fisch, Hernandez, 2003, pg. 47)

Educational Policy and Parent Involvement Programs

As mentioned earlier, Title I is a federal commitment to the education of children who live in poverty. When it was reauthorized in 1994, Title I was redesigned to help children in poverty meet high standards, within a framework of school and district accountability to be developed by each state (US Department of Education, 1999). Title I law states each local education agency (LEA) shall have a written policy that:

“(1) gets parents involved in joint development of the LEA Title I plan; (2) provides coordination, technical assistance, and support to help schools implement and build capacity for parental involvement; (3) coordinates and integrates parental involvement strategies, including those under Head Start and Even Start; (4) annually evaluates the effectiveness of the parental involvement policy plan; and (5) if the district receives more than \$500,000 from Title I, reserves at least 1 percent of Title I funds to carry out parental involvement provisions.”

The 1994 Title I amendments mandated under Goals 2000, increased parents' roles as partners with the schools to support children's learning. This new approach centered on school-parent compacts, promised to help parents understand what standards are and how schools and parents can work together to enable their children to meet them (Epstein, 1995). Schools have found compacts helpful in promoting many desirable behaviors. However, compacts are used in only three-quarters of Title I schools and parents remain less involved with their children's schools than desired (Epstein, 1995).

Unfortunately, many schools do not offer the outreach and assistance that parents need to help their children succeed in school. Principals find two main challenges in strengthening parental involvement: lack of time, on the parts of both staff and parents, to work on family issues, and the level of parent education, especially in high-poverty schools. The 1999 US Department of Education Report on the State of Education named time as the greatest barrier to parent involvement (87 percent). Lack of time on the part of school staff created barriers for 56 percent of schools, and 48 percent indicated that lack of staff training to work with parents also posed a significant barrier. Furthermore, lack of parent education to help with schoolwork, cultural/ socioeconomic and language differences between parents and staff, parent and staff attitudes, and safety in the area after school hours were considered barriers in a large percentage of schools with high concentrations of poverty and minority enrollments of 50 percent or more.

To further complicate matters:

There are also challenges created by legislative overlaps among the provisions for parental involvement in so many federal programs. If family-school partnerships were easily achieved, strengthening family involvement would not be such a major concern. Principals identify the primary barriers in strengthening parental involvement as 1) lack of staff and 2) parent time to work on family issues. (Epstein, 1995, pg. 7)

Teacher's and Parental Involvement

The most common complaint from school teachers and principals is that they feel discouraged when they try to get LEP parents to visit their schools and few parents show up. Due to these unreasonable expectations, these well-meaning educators become part of those promoting the stereotype that LEP parents do not care about their children's education (Simich-Dudgeon, 1993). Although not all teachers perpetuate these stereotypes, there are many who do which cause problems within the school climate. Teachers have cited the following barriers to effective communication with parents: (1) negative stereotypes (e.g., parental apathy); 2) fear and distrust of unfamiliar individuals and lifestyles; (3) lack of an understanding of the home language; and (4) lack of formal training in dealing with parents (Bermudez, 1989; Epstein & Becker, 1982). When evaluating these barriers, "it is difficult to see how alliances, whether around a student, a school, or an issue, can be facilitated if so many teachers continue to identify parents as problems" (Miretsky, 2004, p. 816) due to the aforementioned limitations.

Joyce Epstein (1986) reports that communication from school to home is sometimes considered "parent involvement" but is usually "parent information." Schools send home information about schedules, report cards, special events, and emergency procedures. To this effect, "Most of these activities flow one way, from the school to the home, often with no encouragement for communications from parents" (pg. 281). Parent teacher communication is essential, but communication takes time and those means which require more time provide the greatest barrier to increasing parent-teacher communication of them all (Schweiker-Marra, 2000).

Both educators and disadvantaged parents suffer from limited skills and knowledge for interacting effectively with one another (Moles, 1993). Not only do

parents struggle to acculturate to today's school, but teachers receive little help in developing their skills and knowledge for collaboration with parents. Few receive training in parent involvement in their college preparation courses (Moles, 1993). As cited by Chavkin and Williams (1988) only 4 percent of teacher-training institutions in the Southwest offer a course on parent-teacher relations. Angela Shartrand (1997) concluded that "Family involvement was not a high priority in state certification. In general, state certification does not encourage teacher preparation in family involvement, and thus lags behind reform movements and school practice" (pg. 1). It is clear that teaching candidates tend to have little formal training in working with parents in these teacher preparation programs with a universal belief that an immense need exists for universities to incorporate such a component into their programs (Miretzky, 2004). From the first moment new teachers receive their first appointment; they are involved in home-school relations whether it is recognized explicitly or not. It has been noted that most teachers probably become certificated without having met many parents or learned how to deal with the efficiently in any of their teacher training (Welch, 1993). Furthermore, pre-service and in-service programs need to be designed to foster knowledge and understanding about the needs and characteristics of minority parents and thus eliminate unfounded apprehension (Bermudez, 1993).

Joyce Epstein's plan for Family, School and Community Partnerships

Dr. Joyce Epstein is an emancipatory researcher whose belief in social constructivism formulates the extent of her research and projects. Epstein has written

over one hundred publications on the effects of schooling, classroom, family and peer environments on student learning and development, with many focusing on school and family connections. Epstein's research also looks deep into the forgotten world of teachers perspectives on student learning. She uses ethnographic interviews to scrutinize the primary issue and probe the feelings of her participants. This aids in validating her participants perspectives. In addition she implicitly delves into the paradigms and social implications of American schooling and how parents tend to be the missing links in their child's education. She is an advocate and a revolutionary.

Dr. Epstein is also the Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, Principal Research Scientist and Co-Director of the School, Family, and Community Partnership Program of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR). Her research on the benefits of parent involvement originates from these centers to develop programs which emphasize their research on school integration of families to enhance student achievement and encourage family participation (Epstein, 1995; Constantino, 2003).

Moreover, Epstein has also developed an emancipatory, research-based action plan to help empower parents (Brandt, 1989; Epstein, 1985; 1997; 2001; 2001). This same plan served as a model for California's School Improvement Plan criteria for parent involvement during the 1990's (Nichols-Solomon, 1991). This plan is contained within her book *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your handbook for action*, which she co-wrote with other researchers at John's Hopkins University (Epstein, Coates, Clark, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997). Her handbook enables states, districts, and school leaders to organize and implement positive and permanent programs of school, family,

and community partnerships. It contains information, forms, and activities to help state and district leaders support, facilitate, and reward the work of their schools. Epstein offers a step by step process for all schools to work collaboratively with all participants to increase student achievement (pg. xi). However, to intertwine the values and desires of the community of East Salinas, research on Latino culture and parent perspectives on school involvement is indispensable. All aspects must be considered in order to successfully implement a parent involvement program at El Sausal Middle School (Chavkin, 1989; Paratore, 1999).

Latino Parent Involvement Models

Research on Latino and minority parent involvement presents evidence that all parents want to be involved in their children's education, but have different cultural relationships with schools (Chavkin, 1989; Chavkin, 1990; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Studies conclude that minority parents tend to take on traditional parent roles (i.e. audience, home tutor, school program supporter) and they are less willing to take on non-traditional parent roles (i.e., co-learner, advocate, and decision maker) without empowerment initiated by the school (Chavkin, 1990).

El Sausal's student population consists of 95.5% Latino students of which 86.5% are English Language Learners (California Department of Education, 2005). Research on Latino parental involvement in schooling suggests students whose parents are involved with teachers in completing classroom assignments tend to have a greater amount of academic success (Chavkin, 1993; Fleischer, 2000; Delgado-Gaitan, 2002; Paratore,

1987; Peña, 2002). Likewise, if Latino parents are part of a social network through the school, they have a higher percentage of parent involvement within the school (Delgado-Gaitan, 2002; Paratore, 1987; Sheldon, 2002

Concha Delgado-Gaitan utilized case study research to investigate how various Mexican American families view their experiences in U.S. school. Her study compared the experiences of Mexican Americans with Mexican immigrants in regard to parent involvement. She developed a ten year action research program COPLA (Comite de Padres Latinos) in the small agricultural town of Carpenteria, California. Her research data consisting of ethnographic interviews, surveys and observation documents the hardships of Latino students and parents and how schools and educators can better educate minority students by understanding their culture and experiences. Delgado-Gaitan's proposed plan for Latino parent involvement is modeled after her efforts with the COPLA parent committee. In Carpenteria, the immigrant Latino parent population was highly invisible in their school system. In her ten years of case study research, Delgado-Gaitan found:

Children's academic accomplishments are born of parent's commitment to support them in their education....A child may become empowered over time as a result of the parents' consistent intervention and support, even though the outcomes are not immediately evident (1985, pg. 11-12).

In Delgado-Gaitan's book Involving Latino Families in Schools: Raising Student Achievement through Home-School Partnerships (2004), she outlines the essential components of a productive Latino parent network. To begin, schools must adopt the following in their relationships with Latino parents:

- Clear and deliberate communication between school to home, home to school, parent to teacher, teacher to parent, etc.

- All parents and school staff must learn the other's culture. By doing this a greater understanding is met and family culture/language is valued by the school.
- The school must engage Latino parents in dialogue and identify ways they can reach out to each other.
- The school must use the home language of the students in order to open children's eyes to the world and helps them define their identity and shape their ability to make life choices. Language also conveys ethnic identity and pride as well as understanding of the family's position in the community (pg. 9)
- Parents must be educated in their personal rights in the school and community and the rights of their student.
- Latino families need to know that educators are interested in meeting their needs and are respectful of their language and cultural differences. When reaching out to the Latino community, it is a matter of building TRUST as a platform for creating sustained collaborations with parents (pg.16)
- Educators must define what parent involvement is and provide workshops for parents to strengthen the parent role in their children's education.
- Schools need to offer various levels of involvement activities.
- Finally, schools must make parents feel welcome (pg. 25)

By means of using Delgado-Gaitan's research in conjunction with Epstein's plan for family, school, and community involvement, Latino parents at El Sausal will feel valued and will be more likely to participate in their child's education for many years to come (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, 1995).

Another researcher who shares this belief in the importance of the community and culture is researcher Jeanne Paratore. Paratore (1993, 1994, 1999, 2001) conducted many studies on family literacy and language acquisition in Latino families. Her research evaluates literacy programs and how Latino parents feel towards the school's involvement in their child's education. Paratore interviews her participants to gain an ethnographic perspective on culture and studies the problems she discovers juxtaposed with literacy education. Paratore also shares a familiar epistemological perspective in conjunction with Delgado-Gaitan and Epstein in that familial, cultural and community influences play a larger part in the education of a child than those of the school. These

researchers believe that knowledge is acquired through relationships with others, social contacts among other children, and the curriculum learned at home. They stress their belief of the importance in understanding the child's learning environment and that they too have an active part in their education. In addition, Epstein, Delgado-Gaitan, and Paratore believe that students develop personally and academically if their families emphasize schooling and inform their children about the importance of education and literacy throughout the child's academic career. This correlates with Paratore's research which illustrates how children develop more from their family "home curriculum" than from teachers and administrators. Paratore epistemologically validates a child's experiences as more influential and educational than those experienced in their limited hours spent at school. She also believes that school partnerships between parents and teachers can provide greater educational opportunities for all students. Paratore states:

When collaboration grows out of mutual respect and understanding, there is greater likelihood that the ongoing discourse will be honest and responsive to the needs of all participants. As such, I believe it holds the potential to open doors, open minds, and open opportunities for learning for parents, teachers, and children (Paratore, 2001, pg.112).

In her research with the Intergeneration Literacy Project, Paratore and her colleagues (1999) evaluated family literacy programs as a bridge between home and school. The purpose of her program was to improve English literacy of parents, support literacy development and academic success, and conduct research on the program's effectiveness. Her research suggests when parents were asked to read with children at home in collaborative homework assignments (like those designed in Epstein's family, school and community involvement plan) that parent and student literacy increased by 40 percent in one school year (Paratore et.al., 1999, 2001). It also confirmed the significance

of parents modeling reading for their children which translates into higher rates of success in school. In conclusion, the children of parents involved in her study displayed an overall increase in motivation and a better attitude towards school.

Having children read at home with their parents directly links their education between home and school. It gives parents power and creates a more literate environment for the student. Paratore, like Freire, believes literacy is the key to power, and educators can facilitate an atmosphere where the student's home language is valued and allow students to see productive adult models learning along with them (Delgado-Gaitan, 1985, 1991).

Unfortunately, schools and educators view this sort of parent/student advocacy as resistance to the accepted norms of the dominant culture. Traditionally, parent advocates, despite their social status, have been shunned and rejected by the system (de Carvalho, 2001). However, by incorporating all of the above research and overt change gained by way of community organizing, my hope is to empower parents, give them the confidence to pursue self advocacy like the aforementioned groups, and help them overcome their fear of those in power (Delgado Gaitan, 2002; Paratore, 2001). Together families, schools, and communities can change lives, the school system, and the future of East Salinas.

Conclusions

Historically, parents have been an invisible ally. For parents in poverty and without sufficient education, the school culture is so indoctrinated by the dominant culture's

“hidden curriculum” that internal evolution and revolution must come to fruition.

Educating students and parents through critical analysis of these systems will empower them to fight those who continue to oppress them. As educators, if all parties are included in a child’s education, then a communal partnership will renovate our schools and classrooms. Joyce Epstein has given us the tools to start this partnership. Delgado-Gaitan provides the cultural anecdotes to manipulate it. Paratore adds the element of literacy for parents to truly access power. This requires a community, all participants, working mutually towards a common goal. In essence, we need to become a school-wide community and advocate for each other’s welfare and the “common good.” Audre Lorde (1984) in her book *Sister Outsider* said it best:

We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community...Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own. (pg. 112)

Research Methodology

Project Design

I used action research in my thesis. My focus is parent involvement in the middle school environment at El Sausal Middle School where I teach English, and English as a Second Language (ESL). Given the need for an increased amount of parent involvement (as written in the school improvement plan for 2005-2006), I decided to create and monitor two forms of parent involvement. I collected data using interviews, and interactive journals during group meetings to document and analyze the success of the parent action teams.

One team would consist of five teachers, eight students, and their parents. The teacher-parent group focused on the following question: Will increased parent-teacher communication increase student achievement? Teachers agreed to meet biweekly to discuss ways to increase parent communication through the school homework agenda and to make two positive phone calls a week: one call to a student in the study and another positive call to a student outside the study.

The second team consisted of parents who participate in our “Parent Patrol” programs organized by our school community liaison. These eight parents volunteered to meet on Fridays to discuss how to increase parent involvement in the school. They would decide goals to try and implement schoolwide by April 2006. This team would answer the question: Will parent empowerment increase student achievement?

Setting: El Sausal Middle School

In the 2000 census, Salinas had a total population of 151,060. Salinas' economy is largely based upon agriculture and is known as the Salad Bowl of the World (80 percent of the United States' lettuce is grown in Salinas). Located in one of California's richest farming regions, the area produces a variety of fruits and vegetables, including lettuce, strawberry, watermelons, broccoli, carrots, cabbages, and spinach. Currently the financial state of the local government is poor. According to Wikipedia (2006)

Funding levels are so low that Salinas almost became the first city in the United States to completely close down its library system. Donations were raised through Rally Salinas!, a grassroots fundraising organization launched by the city's mayor, to keep the libraries open through 2005. Many other city programs, such as Graffiti Abatement, have been cut as well. Volunteers have taken to the streets

with donated paint supplies from local businesses to fight the constant barrage of gang graffiti.

Not only does Salinas' economic plight affect its youth and their families, a greater problem plagues their daily lives and neighborhoods as well. One of the city's most serious problems is violent crime. The problem has become a large priority for the Salinas police. "Salinas' violent crime rate is relatively high. In 2004, there were 11.4 murders per 100,000 residents, more than twice the national average of 5.5. However, historic trends suggest improvement. The number of aggravated assaults fell from 844 in 1993 to 661 in 1998" (Wikipedia, 2006).

Gang activity is responsible for a substantial portion of violent crime in Salinas. "In 1998, local police estimated that 17% of all violent crimes -- and 71% of the city's homicides -- were gang related. Partners for Peace, a local gang prevention and youth welfare group, cites the city's low literacy rate and high population density due to lack of affordable housing as aggravating factors." (Wikipedia, 2006)

El Sausal Middle School resides amidst gang violence and poverty in the eastern portion of Salinas. El Sausal struggles against gangs fighting for territory with "tagging" its white walls and students are forced to wear uniforms to deter from identifying between gangs. The school is under lock and key during the day and has over 6 campus supervisors who roam the grounds to make sure the children are safe and no one comes onto the campus to harm them.

According to the School Accountability report of 2004-2005, El Sausal has 45 teachers to serving 844 students. Fifty-nine percent of the school's students are English

Learners. Of these students, 497 reported that their parents do not speak English at home. Additionally, 90 percent of El Sausal's population is low income and the student body is 97 percent Hispanic or Latino. The school is in good standing with its Academic Performance Index (API) currently at 632 points, but is duly pressured due to the increased pressures set forth by the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Further, the district in which El Sausal is located- Salinas Union High School District- is under Project Improvement due to the lack of academic improvement in special education students on the California State Test (CST).

Due to an overwhelming emphasis on these tests and student achievement as a second year teacher of English at El Sausal, I thought that great gains could be attained if we started to involve parents. Currently, parents are contacted throughout the year for events like signing contracts for graduation from eighth grade, our monthly English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC), and weekly meetings with parents and our community liaison. We also have a Migrant Education Teacher who works with our migrant students and their parents. However, as a whole, many parents are rarely contacted until it is too late and their students already have received disciplinary action from the administration or are failing their classes.

With all of these programs in mind, I decided it was time to solve our parent involvement problem and bring parents, students, teachers, administrators, and community members together to problem solve and raise the academic achievement of our students together.

Participants

I attempted to recruit parents, students, and teachers to become part of an action team to explore ways to increase student achievement through parent involvement. But as I began to formulate the action team, many challenges surfaced. The first and foremost was the lack of willingness of teachers to participate. I did not think many teachers would choose not to participate in a project where they could increase communication with the parents of students in their classes; however, to my amazement, getting them to participate was harder than I initially thought. The second challenge was the language barrier. Of the 5 teachers who said they would participate, most spoke little or no Spanish. The parents who volunteered to work in this group do not speak English and therefore the communication between the two appeared almost impossible. Because of these problems, I had to serve as an intermediary and create two separate groups. I will return to these concerns in subsequent chapters.

Parent-Teacher Team

The first group was the parent-teacher team. In this group there were eight sets of students and their parents, and five participating teachers who share the same eight participating students. The teachers are from each of the following content areas: Social Studies, AVID (A program to expose kids to college), Science, and READ 180 (A remedial reading program). Of the content areas, Math and PE were not represented due to lack of interest from teachers.

Eight sets of eighth grade students and their parents were part of this group. To recruit parents, I held a Project Presentation Night early in the first quarter. Here students

presented PowerPoint presentations about their daily lives outside of school. After the meeting, eight parents signed up to be active participants in the study.

Eight initial students were recruited to do the project but opted out of the study. The reasons for their leaving will be discussed in the subsequent chapter. The remaining student participants are as follows:

Table 1

	English Level	Parents who attend meetings	Beginning grades (Eng., S.S., Math, Sci., P.E., elect.)	Benchmark Scores before study
Eddie	Mainstream	Mother Father	C-, B-, A+, A, A, A	Pro, B, Pro, B
Lisette	Mainstream	Mother	F, B, B, miss., F, D	B, FBB, FBB, B
Catalina	ESL 3B	Father Mother	B-, C+, A-, B, B+ (180)	BB, B, BB, n/a
Pamela	ESL 3B	Mother	F, C-, A, A, A- (180)	BB, B, Pro., n/a
Miriam	Mainstream	Mother	C, D, B+, D, F, C	BB, Pro, FBB, B
Berenize	Mainstream	Mother	D, C-, D+, miss., C-, cr.	Pro, BB, FBB, B

¹ English Level is determined by fluency in English. Mainstream is regular English instruction, ESL 3B receives sheltered instruction in English with extra language support.

² 180= READ 180, a remedial reading class that lasts for two periods and the students do not have science.

³ Benchmark scores from lowest to highest: FBB- Far Below Basic, BB- Below Basic, B- Basic, PRO- Proficient, ADV- Advanced. Each level has its own percentages and it depends on subject area as well.

Parent Action Team

The second group was the parent action team which is comprised of parents from our community liason's weekly Friday luncheons. On February 1st, my school had its 22nd annual Career Day where community members all come to present their careers and how they arrived to them. On this day, I was chosen to sit at the Parent Patrol tables and recruited

six parents to join a second team of parents. I had six parents in total to serve on a parent/community action team to work with myself and the community liaison to assist with the language barrier.

Chapter 4

Results

The data that were generated from this study provided an understanding of the perspectives of the participants: students, teachers and parents. Comparisons were made between parents, teachers and students in closing interviews and the reflective journal written throughout the project. Other data compared were students' final third quarter grades and benchmark scores to document improvement after increased parent teacher communication.

Interviews

Parents

Parent-Teacher Participants

This group initially started with 8 participating parents. Two parents opted to drop the program without notifying me or their child. In one case, the parent was contacted 3 times to come to the school and speak with three different teachers about their student because of recurring behavior problems and three consequent failing grades in those classes. The mother responded that she did not have time to go to the school and asked if the teachers could come to her house. After I replied that her suggestion was not a

possibility because teachers have lives beyond school, the mother then replied, “Well, can the teachers wait at the school until 6:30PM.” I simply replied “No” and no further contact was made with the mother. Her son consequently received two F’s in his English class, a D in Social Studies, and a D in Math.

The second parent who dropped from the study is a business owner. One meeting did take place at their home which was quite upscale, unlike most houses in which reside the majority of my students. Multiple phone calls were made to this father to meet. A special meeting was even made when his daughter was caught cheating on a math test and discovered to be failing the class. The meeting was scheduled and the math teacher and I waited for 30 minutes for the student’s father to show up. He never attended the meeting, did not make a phone call of apology with explanation to myself nor to the math teacher, and his daughter completed the semester with a D- in Math.

The remaining six parents and students participated in all meetings, were given weekly reports on their child’s progress and ended the quarter with a closing interview. Responses to their questions are noted below.

When asked if parent-teacher partnerships are important to middle school students, 100% of parents said yes. Some reasons were: “Because we learn how to help them do better and help their grades. When things are going well, I also know how to help my child and the teachers at home,” “Yes, because we are a team. If we work alone then the child will not do as well. For them to do well, we all need to work together as a team,” and “I think it is important to have communication between the parents and the

school. I think parents get more out of communicating with the school. It is important that parents have that to help the student.”

When asked what changes in their student they noticed after they began communicating weekly with the teachers, 6 out of 6 parents noticed changes ranging from higher grades, more responsibility, focus at home, and desire to do homework. Responses included: “She’s more responsible with her homework. She knows that if she does not complete something that I am going to know about it. It has made her more responsible,” and “They are putting forth more effort into their studies. They now come home and say, ‘I have a lot of homework.’ Since we have started we notice that they are more responsible than before.” (Translated from Spanish) An increase in responsibility was reported by 3 out of the 6 parents interviewed.

When asked about challenges due to increased involvement, parents reported a variety. The challenge most consistently stated by 5 out of 6 parents was the desire to speak with ALL teachers. Replies to this question were: “I wish I would have heard more from some of the teachers. We never got comments back from them. I haven’t and I need to get in contact,” and “I have been able to communicate more, but I have some teachers who do not communicate with me and I wish they would. I have some worries but I had to hear about them from other teachers, not the actual teacher. It made me come to school because I wanted answers... and I still never received them.” Other responses were increase stress in the student to reach their goals set by their parents, and time.

When asked how they would like to see teachers become more involved with parents, 5 out of 6 parents said they would like to receive more phone calls from the

teachers. Reasons for wanting the phone calls consisted of: "I want them to call me. I do not get upset. I want to know. CALL ME. If teachers call, GOOD. I want them to. I like it when the teachers call home, it shows they care," "If teachers would contact the parents that would make parents accountable too. Many just wait until the end of the quarter. They need to hear from them every week," "Many teachers do not call. The calls would help us know about their grades; many are very worried about the grades of their students." One of the parents commented (translated from Spanish), "Teachers are doing all that they can with the students. What's missing is the parents needing to come and communicate with the teachers about their kids. Teachers cannot do everything. They too have responsibilities, but not like we do as parents. I think that if a parent is not interested in what their student is doing in their classes, the teachers can help parents understand, but that is not enough," "Parents are the first teachers of the student," and "Teachers put forth a lot of effort at school, it is our job to support them from home."

When asked to describe a successful program of partnership between parents and the school 3 out of 6 said communication between the parents and the school; 2 out of 6 said increased parent initiative to become part of the school and their child's education, and one parent said giving parents a better orientation of the school, what is required of both parents and students, and introduce the school decision making process. Responses were: "Parent communication is #1. I think students need to be a part of it. Parents need to be informed if students aren't making it," "Communication with the parents, school and students is key. The main thing must be that the child succeeds; the partnership needs to have that as the main focus. This would help because the child would do better, the standardized test scores would be better, because there would be an improvement in the

child's work and there should be a greater partnership between the school and parents for the test and that alone will help the school," "a good program could give parents classes and orient us more to the school and how we can help as a parent at home to help the students." (Translated from Spanish) Additional comments about parent interest were: "Parents have to want to do it. This is a school. Many parents leave their students outside and they never enter inside the school. They then come and pick them up; few come in and enter inside the school. The school wants to help, but few parents come in and do their part." (Translated from Spanish) One parent did add that a barrier to a successful program is time. She stated, "There just is not a lot of time for parents to be here either because they work a lot. Many work in the fields and when they get home they are tired and do not want to deal with the troubles of school."

When asked which differences the parents noticed in regard to student achievement 6 out of 6 parents noticed a drastic difference in their student's grades, all of which are higher. In some students there was an improvement in their benchmark scores as well, while others remained the same.

Overall, parents noticed that once consistent communication was established with the school, their student's achievement, focus, attitude and relationship improved. On the other hand, parents also noticed barriers to communication with the school were time, teacher willingness, the Latino culture, their unwillingness to enter the school, and their lack of knowledge of about school protocol and hierarchies.

Parent Action Team

To the misfortune of this study and El Sausal Middle School, this group did not get off the ground. Three solid attempts were made after the initial recruitment happened during our Career Day, where I got parents to sign up the following Friday. The next week, I showed up at the community liaison's family reception center and the doors were locked! I went up to the office, looking for Ms. Ortiz and she was sitting in her desk answering her many emails. I asked her where everyone was. She simply replied that all the mothers must have forgotten, but that they would be there at 9:00 AM. I told her I was unable to attend at 9:00 AM because I have to teach my classes, which was why we agreed to meet at 8:30 since they were going to be present at the school site anyway. My second attempt was meet the following Monday. Again, I arrived at the community liaison room at 8:30 AM and the door was locked. No parents were to be seen. When I finally found Ms. Ortiz she said, "Oh, it must be because of the rain that they are not here." I simply concurred and stated that I understood and rescheduled for the Friday of that same week. To my misfortune, Friday came, and for the third time, no parents were present. At was at this time I decided that obviously the "buy in" was not there and the group was not going to happen. No comment to the reasons why has been brought to my attention, nor a reason for lack of commitment by neither the community liaison or the parents who are present at our school, every single day, patrolling the streets to ensure the safety of our students as they walk to school.

Student Interviews

Students were asked their opinions in regard to the importance of the school communicating with their parents. All 6 of the participating students said it was important to talk to their parents. Some responses were: “Yes, because it will help us do better in school,” “Yes, because I now have a better bond with my parents. We are closer because I do not have much to hide from them so I can talk to them,” “It is important because it allows the parents to know what the student is doing at school. For instance, the parents will know if their student is doing drugs and if they are involved they will know.”

When asked what changes they noticed in their parents, 5 out of 6 of them said their parents were angrier and pushed them to raise their grades. Of that 5 out of 6, over half of them were grounded more often as a form of punishment in response to what the teachers would report to the parents on the weekly check off sheet. Student responses were: “My parents got more moody. They were not as happy as before because they would get bad reports and they would get mad. I didn’t like it but it helped me a lot. Before if it were not there, things would be the same,” “I got grounded more. My parents were mad because I got bad grades and punished me. It made me want to make my grades go up so I would not be grounded,” “They would make me do my homework and pressure me. They told me to raise my grades. They were stricter.”

When asked what challenges they faced having their parents know everything that was happening with them at school, 4 out of 6 the students said a variety. The following responses explain them best: “I got mad a lot. I tried to make my grades go up. I felt like I got in trouble for everything and got frustrated,” “Because my parents were finding out everything, they would tell me to stop talking and pay attention to the teacher. My free

time was for talking, not during class time. I do this because my parents as me to”and, “Their attitudes changed. I got grounded a lot. It made me change my way of being toward school.” The other 2 of the 6 students did not see any noticeable change in their parents nor in their attitudes after communication began.

When asked where they saw differences in their achievement, 5 out of 6 noticed an increase in their grades, 3 out of 6 of them noticed a difference in their benchmark scores, 2 out of 6 noticed an improvement in their reading comprehension, 2 of the 6 noticed an increase in their writing ability, and only one noticed an increase in focus and attention to their studies. Student responses include: “I am more into class. I pay attention more, I am more on task. I do what the teachers ask and I turn in my assignments on time,” and “My grades went up, my behavior really didn’t change, my benchmarks went up and my reading is better... I understand it more.”

When asked if they liked having their parents in this study, 5 of the 6 students said yes. One student did not because they got in more trouble and feel more stressed out due to the pressure of their parents and school. Questions then focused on whether or not the students wanted their parents to be involved in school like this next year when they go to high school, 5 of the 6 students said yes, with only one “no” because, “I think it will mess up my high school year. I will feel like... they want everything perfect... it is like hard... It is hard when your parents are on you... you get frustrated. I feel that if I don’t do things the way they want they will get mad.” Other positive responses include: “They push me to do my homework and I used to not do it. If they help next year we can see if I have bad grades and I can fix them before the end of the quarter,” “My parents would be

pushing me. It would help me because they would be on me all the time. If they didn't push me, I would do it if they didn't tell me to do it. Heck no! They could help me with my homework and projects and all that. I want them to talk about all my weaknesses that I can improve on with all my teachers next year...not just one."

Clearly, most of the participating students enjoy having their parents involved in their education with hopes that it will continue in high school. Many of them noted improvement in their grades, benchmark scores and focus on school. Some, however, did not like how their parents' attitudes changed because they became more regulatory and punitive if the students did not perform to their expectations. Nevertheless, by increasing communication with their parents, most students feel successful because they are succeeding in school.

Teacher Interviews

Of the five participating teachers, only three would yield an interview. Appointments were made with the other two participating teachers and their either declined to respond or did not show up to their appointments. Of the remaining three interviews, responses to the questions were compared and analyzed for recurring themes.

When asked about their opinions about the importance of family school partnerships, all teachers stated they are important for middle school students. Responses include: "I think it is important to middle school students, but also for all students even through high school. So the family knows what is going on in the school and to better the relationship between the family and the school. The more involved a family can be in the

school and the education of the student, the better it will be on the student's end academically or behaviorally," and "one can make that connection between home and school because we spend so much time with them during the day that things kinda get lost when they get home. So making those partnerships between the school and the parents I think really helps."

When asked what they hoped to accomplish through the teacher group most teachers wanted to increase parent awareness in regard to learning and to make sure they take an active role in the lives of their students.

When asked what changes they noticed in their classroom after they began communicating with parents, 2 out of 3 said they noticed a change in behavior, and all teachers noticed a positive change in their grades. One comical response from a teacher in regard to behavior was, "my kids would do something they knew they were not supposed to do and they would say, 'You better not do that or she's going to call your mom.' And I would and they kids really liked that. I also noticed once I started making positive phone calls home the kids would say 'My mom really liked that and she let me stay up an hour later because of it.' I noticed a huge change in their behavior."

When asked what challenges they faced with increasing parent involvement 3 out of 3 teachers said TIME was the greatest factor. One teacher said language was also a factor, but she could always find someone to translate for her. One teacher's response was, "Finding time to contact the parents was a challenge. It would have been nice to do it then and there during the class, but it would not be fair to take away time for instruction from the rest of the class. Each call would take a good 10-15 minutes or so."

When asked to describe what a successful program of partnerships looks like and how it would benefit our school 3 out of 3 teachers said the main component is COMMUNICATION. One teacher said, “I think the kids would be a little more committed if there were that connection between the parents and teachers. I think that a lot of times they really do not know what is going on. It needs to not just stop here at school. Especially with this age group, they just don’t see or hear as much as we do,” while a rebuttal from another was, “ I would meet parents at back to school night and they would say, ‘If you ever have a problem with my child, give me a call.’ It really seemed parents were washing their hands of the whole issue. They were really putting the ball in my court in terms of their education. I mean, I have 150 students, they have one. So my focus on what I think would be successful and more empowering to the parents puts the ball back into their court and let them contact me,” and “I do not know what a program would look like. It is hard to say because there are so many teachers who just wouldn’t do it. They wouldn’t call or really do anything. I think there are a lot of teachers that just don’t care.”

When asked what improvements they saw in their students, 2 out of 3 teachers said they saw an increase in grades, reading at home for Accelerated Reader (a school adopted reading program), and behavior. Teacher responses were: (with those students contacted), “They seem more confident and do more in class. They also participate more.”

When asked which goal of the team was most successful this year, it was an even split between agendas or positive phone calls. Teacher comments were: “Parent

communication by far. The agenda... kids would write it down... but it would be more effective if parents knew about it and how to use it,” and “The agenda...because it is easier and it takes less time.”

When asked if they regarded the team as a success or a failure 100% said it was a failure. Their reasons were: “It seemed to kinda fall apart. I felt like it got too complicated, for whatever reason. We had a really hard time focusing and getting everything set. It seemed that during the meeting we weren’t accomplishing a lot,” and “I didn’t understand the focus. Maybe because you (researcher) were being too nice about it and suggested it, not demanding a focus.”

When asked what improvements you see necessary for the upcoming year for the parent action team, each teacher had different opinions. One teacher said, “We need to adopt something school wide and make agreements. The teachers need to make sure we get the parents the information and tools to assist.” While another teacher responded, “Start with what we have now. Keep the agenda and get it under control. I mean even if we could write notes back and forth to parents through the agenda we would get a huge pay back,” and lastly, “figure out a way to do more communication with parents. I also think the agenda could be a good thing if the parents knew how to use it and if ALL the staff were using it.”

When asked about what were the greatest areas of improvement in regard to students, an overwhelming unanimous response for academic achievement. One teacher summed it up for the rest: “Academic achievement, their grades, and their homework. It

is like phenomenal, and if I make a note in the agenda, their missing work comes in the next day,”

When the discussion opened to comments or questions teachers had a variety of issues arose through the project. Two of our participants were new teachers, one of whom attended a local state university. She reported that she wished her credential program would have incorporated parent involvement strategies into her training. Her desires for development included, “how to communicate with parents in various ways, conferences, email, letters, maybe little things like that would help open communication with parents. I think there are so many ways that I learned from teacher and working with teachers, but that they need to incorporate into the teaching program.” When addressed with another new teacher in the study who went to a different state university stated, “We didn’t necessarily have a class on it, but this is something about the program that I really liked actually. We had to focus on diverse learners, motivation and involve stuff with the family. We did mock phone calls home, mock conferences with role-play, phone calls home and if they do not speak English, how to deal with that.” Finally, the last teacher said, “Well, I think this is an issue that needs to come up, and it needs to come up in the spring so we can work on it. You definitely have found where we have a hole in our program and hopefully we can fill it.”

In summary, of those teachers interviewed, the importance of parent involvement was indispensable in the success of middle school students. All agreed that communication between the home and school was imperative while the greatest barrier to that communication was 1) time and 2) lack of knowledge of Spanish. Once positive

communication was established, teachers noticed drastic changes in student achievement, behavior, benchmark scores, focus, and overall interest in school. All said this project failed due to lack of group focus and administrative support.

Student Achievement

Overall student achievement was measured by student grades and performance on the district benchmark assessments. Two students are not included in this chart because they dropped out of the study. The following is a chart of their progress:

Table 2.

	English Level	Ending Grades	Beginning grades (Eng., S.S., Math, Sci., P.E., elect.)	Benchmark Scores After study (only English was available)	Benchmark Scores before
Eleo	Mainstream	B, A, A, A+, A, A	C-, B-, A+, A, A, A	Basic	Pro, B, Pro, B
Lucy	Mainstream	C+, B, B-, B, D-, cr.	F, B, B, miss., F, D	Basic	B, FBB, FBB, B
Carolina	ESL 3B	A+, A, B, B, B (180)	B-, C+, A-, B, B+ (180)	Below Basic	BB, B, BB, n/a
Paz	ESL 3B	B-, A-, C, B, A (180)	F, C-, A, A, A- (180)	Basic	BB, B, Pro., n/a
Maria	Mainstream	A-, B, C-, A-, C+, C+	C, D, B+, D, F, C	Below Basic	BB, Pro, FBB, B
Barbara	Mainstream	B-, B, C-, A-, C+, C+	D, C-, D+, miss., C-, cr.	Proficient	Pro, BB, FBB, B

* English Level is determined by fluency in English. Mainstream is regular English instruction, ESL 3B receives sheltered instruction in English with extra language support.

* 180= READ 180, a remedial reading class that lasts for two periods and the students do not have science.

* Benchmark scores from lowest to highest: FBB- Far Below Basic, BB- Below Basic, B-Basic, PRO- Proficient, ADV- Advanced. Each level has its own percentages and it depends on subject area as well.

In regard to grades, each student ended with an increase in the range of 0.3-1.4 academic points on the quarterly grade point average (GPA). Two students improved on the final English Benchmark scores, while three other students were reported as drastically improving on the 3rd benchmark scores in relation to their 2nd benchmark scores. All students felt more successful and are noticeably participating more in class and in other school activities.

Other areas of improvement in students were reading comprehension, writing, effort, and sense of responsibility.

Journal Entries

A total of 23 journal entries were taken during the study noting interactions with participants, meetings with the parent-teacher team, and meetings with parents and their students. In these journals the main themes noted were: increased parent communication correlated with student achievement and a betterment of parent relationships. Recurring barriers to involvement were time, teacher attitudes, and conflicts with school system.

Parent Communication in relation to student achievement and relationships

After the first meeting I had with parents, teachers were coming to me left and right constantly explaining the differences they saw in their students after the parent meetings. One student in particular, Maria, made drastic changes. Her teachers noted that she came in numerous times to figure out how she could improve her grades, while her behavior and focus had radically changed within a week's time. Other teachers told me that they were now focusing more on the students in the study because they knew they

had to report to the parents each week about their progress. One teacher even had to look up one of my participating students in her seating chart and grade book because she didn't even know who she was. Not only did the student want to do better because her teacher was checking in with her, but the teacher also put forth a greater effort to ensure the success of the child in her class due to her parent's involvement in the study.

For many of the first meetings I watched parents chastise their children for not performing up to the standards they held for them, but as the study wore on, many were elated with their final results and the students felt a great feeling of success and support from the school.

The betterment of relationship between parents and their students

Middle school students can be challenging when it comes to the maelstrom of emotions they encounter each day and their attitudes are sometimes unbearable for teachers and parents alike. Two examples of this were two female student participants, I who came into their first meetings with unacceptable and disrespectful attitudes. Their mothers seemed to absorb the verbal discord from their daughters with very little word of punishment; however, it only took two more weeks of bad reports to change the mother's tone in the meetings. These girls came to school with new attitudes towards their teachers, their work was turned in on time, and when told to remain on task, they were now respectful. After the eight week study was over, the girls were no longer disrespectful to their mothers but answered their questions, and only hints of their previous attitudes were noticeable. One pair had increasingly grown closer together as mother and daughter, and it was heartening to see their mutual support.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

Time

Time was the greatest barrier of all. In regard to parent-teacher group meetings, only one meeting was conducted with all members present, and that was because I offered pizza. After that two was the highest number in attendance. Because many of the participating teachers were not calling the students' parents, I had to develop a Parent-Teacher contact sheet for all teachers to report the student's weekly progress. My hope was to save time for the teachers and to show parents exactly what was happening in the classroom since they were not receiving phone calls nor were teachers attending the weekly meetings I had with these eight parents.

Parents also had time constraints. Many of them showed up late, but if a meeting had to be rescheduled, most of them would call and notify me two to three days in advance. If I had to cancel a meeting, they were always very accommodating and worked around my schedule as well.

Teacher Attitudes

It was most difficult to retrieve data from the teachers. After the creation of the Parent-Teacher Contact form was in place, I would receive complaints that it took a long time for them to fill out the forms. Most teachers only had one or two forms to fill out in total, but still found it to be difficult to do so.

Teachers were also contacted to attend meetings and would not show up. One time a parent wanted to thank his son's teachers for the education they were providing him with homemade tamales for each of them. The parents brought 35 tamales and not one additional teacher attended the meeting. Unsure what to do and overwhelmed with guilt, I bought the tamales from them and told them I would remind the teachers three times instead of two the next time I had a meeting with those parents.

School System

It was not until I conducted this study that I truly understood what barriers to parent involvement truly existed. In two cases, parents contacted the school and they were maltreated and did not feel supported by the school. One incident was with a student of mine who was suspended for cheating on a test. The school did not contact the student's mother. It was to both of our surprise that not one school official called home to tell her the reason for the suspension. The mother not only felt secluded from this important decision, but deceived because the school had not consulted her before making the decision to suspend her daughter.

A second incident was with a student in my class who I wanted to promote to the next English level. Currently, she is in an English class for second language learners although she tests much higher than the students in that class. I wanted to transfer her to the Transitional English class so she would advance with students at her same English level. Students are generally moved based on the CELDT (California English Language Development Test) test, reading level, writing ability, and teacher recommendation. I had recommended to the parents that this student be moved; however, when the request for

class change was brought to the school counselor, he insulted the parent and told him no. His reason for not moving her was that there was no room in any of the classes for her. As a result, she would have to stay in my class at an English level which is too easy for her. The parent was furious and went to the principal the following day to talk about how he had been treated and request that his daughter be moved. Hoping she would change the class and override the decision of the counselor, and he was appalled when he received the same complacent attitude and lack of response from the principal. Due to the lack of cordial behavior and respect from the school's administrators, the parent left agitated, frustrated and upset with the school. It is interesting to see how both of these incidents show how once parents feel empowered enough to confront the school on issues concerning the welfare of their child; they continue to be treated unprofessionally.

Chapter 4

Results

The data that were generated from this study provided an understanding of the perspectives of the participants: students, teachers and parents. Comparisons were made between parents, teachers and students on closing interviews and the reflective journal written throughout the project. Other data compared were student final third quarter grades and benchmark scores to document improvement after increased parent-teacher communication.

Interviews

Parents*Parent-Teacher Participants*

This group initially started with 8 participating parents. Two parents opted to drop the program without any notification to myself or their student. In one case, the parent was contacted 3 times to come to the school and speak with three different teachers about their student because they had recurring behavior problems and three consequent failing grades in those classes. The mother retorted that she did not have time to go to the school and asked if the teachers could come to her house. After I replied that her suggestion was not a possibility because teachers have lives beyond the school, the mother then replied, "Well, can the teachers wait around at the school until 6:30PM." I simply replied no and no further contact was made with the mother. Her son consequently received to F's in his English class, a D in Social Studies, and a D in Math.

The second parent who dropped from the study is a business owner. One meeting did take place at their home which was very nice, unlike most houses this researcher has seen reside the majority of her students. However, multiple phone calls were made to the father of this student to meet. A special meeting was even made when his daughter was caught cheating on a Math test and was consequently failing her math class. The meeting was scheduled and the math teacher and I waited for 30 minutes for the student's father to show. He never attended the meeting, did not make a phone call of apology with explanation to myself nor the math teacher, and his daughter completed the semester with a D- in Math.

The remaining six parents and students participated in all meetings, were given weekly reports on their child's progress and ended the quarter with a closing interview. Responses to their questions are noted below.

When asked if parent-teacher partnerships are important to middle school students, 100% of parents said yes. Some reasons were: "Because we learn how to help them do better and help their grades. When things are going well, I also know how to help my child and the teachers at home," "Yes because we are a team. If we work alone then the child will not do as well, for them to do well, we all need to work together as a team," and "I think it is important to have communication between the parents and the school. I think parents get more out of communicating with the school. It is important that parents have that to help the student."

When asked what changes in their student they noticed after they began communicating weekly with the teachers, 6 out of 6 parents noticed changes ranging from increased grades, more responsibility, focus at home, and desire to do homework. Responses included: "She's more responsible with her homework. She knows that if she does not complete something that I am going to know about it. It has made her more responsible," and "They are putting forth more effort into their studies. They now come home and say, 'I have a lot of homework.' Since we have started we notice that they are more responsible than before." (Translated from Spanish) An increase in responsibility was reported by 3 out of the 6 parents interviewed.

When asked about challenges due to increased involvement, parents reported a variety of challenges. The challenge most consistently stated by 5 out of 6 parents was

the desire to speak with ALL teachers. Replies to this question were: "I wish I would have heard more from some of the teachers. We never got comments back from them. I haven't and I need to get in contact," and "I have been able to communicate more, but I have some teachers who do not communicate with me and I wish they would. I have some worries but I had to hear about them from other teachers, not the actual teacher. It made me come to school because I wanted answers... and I still never received them." Other responses were increase stress in the student to reach their goals set by their parents and time.

When asked how they would like to see teachers become more involved with parents, 5 out of 6 parents said they would like to receive more phone calls from the teachers. Reasons for the phone calls consisted of: "I want them to call me. I do not get upset. I want to know. CALL ME. If teachers call, GOOD. I want them to. I like it when the teachers call home, it shows they care," "If teachers would contact the parents that would make parents accountable too. Many just wait until the end of the quarter. They need to hear from them every week," "Many teachers do not call. The calls would help us know about their grades; many are very worried about the grades of their students." One of the parents commented (translated from Spanish): "teachers are doing all that they can with the students. What's missing is the parents needing to come and communicate with the teachers about their kids. Teachers cannot do everything. They too have responsibilities, but not like we do as parents. I think that if a parent is not interested in what their student is doing in their classes, the teachers can help parents understand, but that is not enough," " Parents are the first teachers of the student," and " Teachers put forth a lot of effort at school, it is our job to support them from home."

When asked to describe a successful program of partnership between parents and the school 3 out of 6 said communication between the parents and the school; 2 out of 6 said increased parent initiative to become part of the school and their child's education and one said giving parents a better orientation of the school, what is required of both parents and students, and introduce the school decision making process. Responses were: "Parent communication is #1. I think students need to be a part of it. Parents need to be informed if students aren't making it," "Communication with the parents, school and students is key. The Main thing must be that the child succeeds. The partnership needs to have that as the main focus. This would contribute because the child will do better, the standardized test scores will be better, because there will be an improvement in the child's work and their should be a greater partnership between the school and parents for the test and that alone will help the school," "a good program could give parents classes and orient us more to the school and how we can help as a parent at home to help the students."(Translated from Spanish) Additional comments about parent interest were: "Parents have to want to do it. This is a school. Many parents leave their students outside and they never enter inside the school. They then come and pick them up; few come in and enter inside the school. The school wants to help, but few parents come in and do their part." (Translated from Spanish) One parent did add that a barrier to a successful program is that of time. She stated, "There just is not a lot of time for parents to be here either because they work a lot. Many work in the fields and when they get home they are tired and do not want to deal with the troubles of school."

When asked which differences the parents noticed in regard to student achievement 6 out of 6 parents noticed a drastic difference in their student's grades, all of

which are higher. In some students there was an improvement in their benchmark scores as well, others remained the same.

Overall, parents noticed once consistent communication was established with the school that their student's achievement, focus, attitude and relationship improved. On the other hand, parents also noticed barriers to increasing communication with the school were time, teacher willingness to communicate with them, the Latino culture and their unwillingness to enter the school and their lack of knowledge of about school protocols and hierarchies.

Parent Action Team

To the misfortune of this study and El Sausal Middle School, this group did not get off the ground. Three solid attempts were made after the initial recruitment happened during the annual Career Day where I got parents to sign up the following Friday. The next week, I showed up at the community liaison's family reception center and the doors were locked! I went up to the office, looking for Ms. Ortiz and she was sitting in her desk answering her many emails. I asked her where everyone was. She simply replied that all the mothers must have forgotten, but that they would be there at 9:00 AM. I told her I was unable to attend at 9:00 AM because I have to teach my classes and that was why we agreed to meet at 8:30 since they were going to be present at the school site anyway. My second attempt at a meeting was that we were going to meet the following Monday to discuss goals of the group. Again, I was at the community liaison room at 8:30 AM and the door was locked. No parents were to be seen. When I finally found Ms. Ortiz she said, "Oh, it must be because of the rain that they are not here." I simply concurred and

stated that I understood and rescheduled for the Friday of that same week. To my misfortune, Friday came and for the third time no parents were present. At was at this time I decided that obviously the buy in was not there and the group was not going to happen. No comment to the reasons why has been brought to my attention nor a reason for lack of commitment by neither the community liaison nor the parents who are present at our school, every single day patrolling the streets to ensure the safety of our students as they walk to school.

Student Interviews

Students were asked their opinions in regard to the importance of the school talking to their parents. All 6 of the participating students said it was important to talk to their parents. Some responses were: “Yes, because it will help us do better in school,” “Yes, because I now have a better bond with my parents. We are closer because I do not have much to hide from them so I can talk to them,” “It is important because it allows the parents to know what the student is doing at school. For instance, the parents will know if their student is doing drugs and if they are involved they will know.”

When asked what changes they noticed in their parents 5 out of 6 of them said their parents were angrier and pushed them to raise their grades. Of that 5 out of 6, over half of them were grounded more often as a form of punishment in response to what the teachers would report to the parents on the weekly check off sheet. Student responses were: “My parents got more moody. They were not as happy as before because they

would get bad reports and they would get mad. I didn't like it but it helped me a lot. Before if it were not there, things would be the same," "I got grounded more. My parents were mad because I got bad grades and punished me. It made me want to make my grades go up so I would not be grounded," "They would make me do my homework and pressure me. They told me to raise my grades. They were stricter."

When asked what challenges they faced having their parents know everything that was happening with them at school 4 out of 6 the students said it presented a variety of challenges. The following responses explain them best: "I got mad a lot. I tried to make my grades go up. I felt like I got in trouble for everything and got frustrated," "Because my parents were finding out everything, they would tell me to stop talking and pay attention to the teacher. My free time was for talking, not during class time. I do this because my parents ask me to," and, "Their attitudes changed. I got grounded a lot. It made me change my way of being toward school." The other 2 of the 6 students did not have any noticeable change in their parents nor did their attitudes after communication began.

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As one can see, most of the participating students enjoy having their parents involved in their education with hopes that it will continue in high school. Many of them noted improvement in their grades, benchmark scores and focus on school. Many however did not like how their parents' attitudes changed because they became more regulatory and punitive if the students did not perform to their expectations. All this

aside, by increasing communication with their parents the students feel successful because they are succeeding in school.

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When asked what challenges they faced with increasing parent involvement 3 out of 3 teachers said TIME was the greatest factor. One teacher said language was also a factor but she could always find someone to translate for her. One teacher’s response was, “Finding time to contact the parents was a challenge. It would have been nice to do it then and there during the class, but it would not be fair to take away time for instruction from the rest of the class. Each call would take a good 10-15 minutes or so.”

When asked to describe what a successful program of partnerships looks like and how it would benefit our school 3 out of 3 teachers said the main component is COMMUNICATION. One teacher said, “I think the kids would be a little more committed if there was that connection between the parents and teachers. I think that a lot of times they really do not know what is going on. It needs to not just stop ere at school. Especially with this age group, they just don’t see or hear as much as we do,” while a rebuttal from another was, “ I would meet parents at back to school night and they would say, ‘If you ever have a problem with my child, give me a call.’ It really

seemed parents were washing their hands of the whole issue. They were really putting the ball in my court in terms of their education. I mean, I have 150 students, they have one. So my focus on what I think would be successful and more empowering to the parents puts the ball back into their court and let them contact me,” and “I do not know what a program would look like. It is hard to say because there are so many teachers who just wouldn’t do it. They wouldn’t call or really do anything. I think there are a lot of teachers that just don’t care.”

When asked what improvements they saw in their students, 2 out of 3 teachers said they saw an increase in grades, reading in the home for Accelerated Reader (a school adopted reading program), and behavior. Teacher responses are: with those students contacted, “They seem more confident and do more in class. They also participate more.”

When asked what goal of the team (agenda or positive phone calls home) was most successful this year, it was an even split. This may be due to the following: “Parent communication by far. The agenda... kids would write it down... but it would be more effective if parents knew about it and how to use it,” and “The agenda...because it is easier and it takes less time.”

When asked if they regarded the team as a success or a failure 100% said it was a failure. Their reasons were: “It seemed to kinda fall apart. I felt like it got too complicated, for whatever reason. We had a really hard time focusing and getting everything set. It seemed that during the meeting we weren’t accomplishing a lot,” and “I didn’t understand the focus. Maybe because you (researcher) were being too nice about it and suggested it, not demanding a focus.”

When asked what improvements you see necessary for the upcoming year for the parent action team, each teacher had different opinions. One teacher said, “We need to adopt something school wide and make agreements. The teachers need to make sure we get the parents the information and tools to assist.” While another teacher responded, “Start with what we have now. Keep the agenda and get it under control. I mean even if we could write notes back and forth to parents through the agenda we would get a huge pay back,” and lastly, “figure out a way to do more communication with parents. I also think the agenda could be a good thing if the parents knew how to use it and if ALL the staff were using it.”

When asked about what they noticed to be the greatest areas of improvement in regard to students was an overwhelming unanimous response for academic achievement. One teacher summed it up for the rest: “Academic achievement, their grades, and their homework. It is like phenomenal, and if I make a note in the agenda, their missing work comes in the next day,”

When the discussion opened to comments or questions teachers had a variety of issues that they too came to realize through the project. Two of our participants were new teachers, one of which attended CSU Monterey Bay. She reported that she wished her credential program would have incorporated parent involvement strategies into her training. Her desires for development entailed, “how to communicate with parents in various ways, conferences, email, letters, maybe little things like that would help open communication with parents. I think there are so many ways that I learned from teacher and working with teachers, but that they need to incorporate into the teaching program.”

When addressed with another new teacher in the study who went to UC Davis she stated, “We didn’t necessarily have a class on it, but this is something about the program that I really liked actually. We had to focus on diverse learners, motivation and involve stuff with the family. We did mock phone calls home, mock conferences with role-play, phone calls home and if they do not speak English, how to deal with that.” Finally, with the last teacher he closed with, “Well, I think this is an issue that needs to come up, and it needs to come up in the spring so we can work on it. You definitely have found where we have a hole in our program and hopefully we can fill it.”

In summary, of those teachers interviewed, the importance of parent involvement weighed heavily in the success of middle school students. All said communication between the home and school was imperative while the greatest barrier to that communication was time with lack of knowledge in the home language as second. Once increased and positive communication was established, teacher noticed drastic changes in student achievement, behavior, benchmark scores, focus, and overall interest in school. All said this project failed due to lack of focus of the group and lack of administrative support.

Student Achievement

Overall student achievement was measure by student grades and performance on the district benchmark assessments. Two students are not included in this chart because they decided to drop out of the study. The following is a chart of their progress:

Table 2.

	English Level	Ending Grades	Beginning grades (Eng., S.S., Math, Sci., P.E., elect.)	Benchmark Scores After study (only English was available)	Benchmark Scores before
Eleo	Mainstream	B, A, A, A+, A, A	C-, B-, A+, A, A, A	Basic	Pro, B, Pro, B
Lucy	Mainstream	C+, B, B-, B, D-, cr.	F, B, B, miss., F, D	Basic	B, FBB, FBB, B
Carolina	ESL 3B	A+, A, B, B, B (180)	B-, C+, A-, B, B+ (180)	Below Basic	BB, B, BB, n/a
Paz	ESL 3B	B-, A-, C, B, A (180)	F, C-, A, A, A- (180)	Basic	BB, B, Pro., n/a
Maria	Mainstream	A-, B, C-, A-, C+, C+	C, D, B+, D, F, C	Below Basic	BB, Pro, FBB, B
Barbara	Mainstream	B-, B, C-, A-, C+, C+	D, C-, D+, miss., C-, cr.	Proficient	Pro, BB, FBB, B

* English Level is determined by fluency in English. Mainstream is regular English instruction, ESL 3B receives sheltered instruction in English with extra language support.

* 180= READ 180, a remedial reading class that lasts for two periods and the students do not have science.

* Benchmark scores from lowest to highest: FBB- Far Below Basic, BB- Below Basic, B- Basic, PRO- Proficient, ADV- Advanced. Each level has its own percentages and it depends on subject area as well.

In regard to the students' grades, each student ended with an improvement in the range of 0.3-1.4 academic points on the quarterly grade point average (GPA). Two students improved on the final English Benchmark scores, while three other students were reported as drastically improving on the 3rd benchmark scores in relation to their 2nd benchmark scores. All students felt more successful and are noticeable participating more in class and in other school activities.

Other areas of improvement in students were reading comprehension, writing, greater effort, and increased sense of responsibility.

Journal Entries

A total of 23 journal entries were taken during the study noting interactions with participants, meetings with the parent-teacher team, and meetings with parents and their students. In these journals the main themes noted were: with increase parent

communication exponential to student achievement and a betterment of parent relationships with increased communication with the school. Recurring barriers to involvement were time, teacher attitudes, and clashes with school system.

Parent Communication in relation to student achievement and relationships

Achievement

After the first meeting I had with parents, teachers were coming to me left and right explaining the differences they saw in their students after the parent meetings. One student in particular, Maria, made drastic changes. Her teachers noted that she came in numerous times to figure out how she could improve her grades, while her behavior and focus had radically changed within a week's time. Other teachers told me that they were now focusing more on the students in the study because they knew they had to report to the parents each week about their progress. One teacher even had to look up one of my participating students in her seating chart and grade book because she didn't even know who she was. Not only did the student want to do better because her teacher was checking in with her, but the teacher also put forth a greater effort to ensure the success of the child in her class due to her parent's involvement in the study.

For many of the first meetings I watched parents chastise their children for not performing up to the standards they held for them, but as the study wore on, many were elated with their final results and the students felt a great feeling of success and support from the school

The betterment of Relationship between parents and their students

Middle school students can be challenging when it comes to the maelstrom of emotions they encounter each day, but also their attitudes are sometimes unbearable. Two examples of this were with two female student participants. These girls came into their first meetings with insupportable attitudes. Their mothers seemed absorb the verbal discord from their daughters with very little word of punishment; however, it only took two more weeks of bad reports to change the tune of these mothers and their meetings. These girls came to school with new attitudes towards their teachers, their work was turned in on time, and when told to remain on task, they were now quite respectful. After the eight week study was over, the girls were no longer disrespectful to their mothers but answered their questions and only hints of their attitudes were noticeable. One pair had increasingly grown closer together as mother and daughter and it was nice to see the support they felt from one another.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

Time

Time was the greatest barrier of all. In regard to parent-teacher group meetings, only one meeting was conducted with all members present, and that was because I bought pizza to thank them for their participation. After that two was the highest number in attendance. Because many of the participating were not calling the students' parents who were in the study, I had to develop a Parent-Teacher contact sheet for all teachers to report the student's weekly progress to parents when they came to their weekly meetings with me. My hope was to save time for the teachers and to show parents exactly what was

happening in the classroom since they were not receiving phone calls nor were teachers attending the weekly meetings I had with these eight parents.

Parents also had time constraints. Many of them showed up late, but if a meeting had to be rescheduled; most of them would call and notify me two to three days in advance. If I had to cancel a meeting, they were always very accommodating and worked around my schedule as well.

Teacher Attitudes

Teachers were the hardest to get data from. After the initial goal of calling parent was not achieved and the creation of the Parent-Teacher Contact form was in place, I would receive complaints that it took a long time for them to fill out those forms for the parents. Most teachers only had one or two forms to fill out in total, but still found it to be difficult to do.

Teachers were also contacted to attend meetings and would never show up. One time a parent wanted to thank his son's teachers for the education they are providing him with homemade tamales for each of them. The parents brought 35 tamales and not one additional teacher attended the meeting. Unsure what to do and overwhelmed with guilt, I bought the tamales from them and told them I would remind the teachers three times instead of two the next time I had a meeting with those parents.

School System

It was not until I conducted this study that I truly understood what barriers to parent involvement truly existed. In two cases, parents contacted the school and they were maltreated and did not feel supported by the school. One incident was with a student of mine who was suspended for cheating on a test. The student had been suspended and no contact was made by the school with the student's mother. It was to both of our surprise that not one school official called home to tell her what her daughter was being suspended for. The mother not only felt secluded from this important decision, but deceived because did not have her permission to suspend her daughter nor gave her notice about the allocations against her daughter.

A second incident was with a student in my class whom I wanted to promote to the next English level. Currently she is in an English class for second language learners and tests much higher than the students in that class. I wanted to transfer her to the Transitional English class so she would advance with students at her same English level. Students are generally moved based on CELDT (California English Language Development Test) test, reading level, writing ability and above all else, teacher recommendation. I had recommended to the parents that my student be moved; however, when the request for class change was brought to the school counselor, he not only insulted the parent and told him no, but his reason for not moving her was that there was no room in any of the classes for her. Therefore, she would need to stay in my class at an English level that is too easy for her. My participating parent was furious and went the next day to the principal to talk about how he was treated and request his daughter to be moved. Hoping she would change the class and override the counselor and he was appalled when he received the same complacent attitude and lack of response from the head principal. Due

to the lack of cordial behavior and respect received from the school's administrators, the parents left agitated, frustrated and upset with the school. It is interesting to see how both of these incidents show how once parents did feel empowered enough to confront the school on issues concerning the welfare of their child; they continue to be treated unprofessionally.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter, I will discuss how the findings in this study related to the original research question: will student achievement increase with parent involvement. Then I will list and consider the implications for further action and make a recommendation for my school site.

Discussion

The original questions in this study addressed student achievement relative to increased parent involvement for two separate groups: a parent-teacher group and a parent action team comprised of parents already involved in the school on a daily basis. The perceptions of students, parents and teachers were investigated to see how parent involvement was connected to student achievement. Pre and post study achievement scores were collected and recorded (Tables 1 and 2) and this study also explored how the creation for a parent-teacher action team would increase parent involvement in the middle school environment.

Parent Perceptions

Parent's of the participating students

Parent participants in the study noted that once they began communicating with the school on a consistent basis their children performed better. With weekly reports from teachers, parents were able to support the teachers and the school's efforts at home with their children. Many parents noticed their relationship with their children improving in this study as well, because the lines of communication were now open between the student's school life and life at home. All parents enjoyed being involved in this study and the increased sense of responsibility and independence that it gave their children.

Parents noted the following barriers to their involvement: time, culture, school barriers, and teacher attitudes. Parents overwhelmingly said that many parents do not have much time to come to the school to check on their students. It was interesting how many of them criticized other parents in regard to their lack of action and insisted it is their duty as parents to check on their children. In Dauber and Epstein's (1993) research, many parents work full time and cannot come to the school during the day.; others report that they have not been asked by the school to become volunteers and they would like to be. In my study, parents did say they would like to be involved in other activities affiliated with the school, but time prevented them from doing so.

Some parents did encounter problems with school administrators when challenging decisions in regard to disciplinary action or the class schedule of a student. Upon entering the office, parents were ignored and given empty answers which further

frustrated them. These parents were empowered by a teacher stating that what the school did was wrong and the administration needed to deal with it accordingly (in regard to the suspension of Barbara and the need to change Carolina to a harder English class) and once willing to confront the issues head on, they were shot down and treated as if they were ignorant. Reasons like these help to explain the deficit of parent involvement in our school, “because of how (parents) may still feel about schools and schools by in large, do not have the strategies nor the people in place to work with minority parents” (Chavkin, 1993).

Lastly, participating parents felt teachers also were hard to contact. Many parents reported wanting to hear from all of the teachers instead of only hearing from one. Many teachers, even those participating in the study, only contacted the parent one time throughout the entire study. This may be due to the fact that both educators and disadvantaged, minority parents suffer from limited skills and knowledge for interacting with each other effectively. Middle school teachers also have approximately 150 students to adhere to making it difficult to maintain contact with all parents equally. Parents felt that teachers who did call cared more about their children. They considered teachers who do not call simply do not care; however the parent did not take the initiative to contact them either.

Parent action team members

Ultimately, this was one of the larger failures of the project. When the parents of our Parent Patrol were recruited to be part of the parent action team, they seemed excited know that they were going to help increase parent communication with the school.

However, due to inclement weather and lack of effective communication with those parents, the meetings never happened. I cannot assume that their interest was not there because during our initial discussions they all seemed excited to participate. However, parents seem to be more comfortable in traditional roles as caregiver, emotional supporter and aid (Nichols-Solomon, 2001) than assuming a leadership role and create true change. This is where time also played a role, due to the lack of release time so I could meet with the parents when they were with our community liaison, since I teach during the time of day in question. In addition, parents seemed to not have ideas as to what to change in order to better the school, besides receiving more calls home from teachers.

Student Interviews

Overall, all students participating in the study noticed an increase in their academic achievement once their parents started to become more involved in their education. Joyce Epstein's (1982, 1985, 1997, 2000) research studies on parent involvement all show that just about all students at all levels-elementary, middle school, and high school- want their parents to be active participants in their schooling; however, the students need to learn how to deal with these partnerships and how they can conduct important exchanges between school activities, homework, and school decisions. Of the students in my study, only one did not like having her parents involved in the study because she got in more trouble at home. Due to her parents follow through on the reports given by the teachers, this empowering knowledge helped them support the teachers' efforts at home. All participants, except the aforementioned student, said they wanted their parents to be involved like this during their high school years so that they

could stay focus and remain on track throughout the year. Students would like all their teachers to talk to their parents so they can do better in school. Constantino's (2003) research suggests:

Students often find that their parents' encouragement and goals for the future assist them in focusing on their own school engagement. Parents who share their dreams, goals, and desires with their children and who continuously reaffirm the importance of education are often a prime force in the engagement of many students (p. 136).

Therefore, if this type of parent involvement were to continue with the child throughout their high school careers, one can assume a greater amount of student achievement and success.

Revelations like these support evidence that with increased parent contact student achievement rises. All students' grades improved over the allotted time frame of the study. Over 50% of the students scored at the proficient level on the district benchmark tests which educators later use to determine their ability to graduate from high school. In addition, behavior in all their classes changed and the students became more focused. In two cases students reported a better relationship with their parents due to the involvement they now have in their education. Constantino (2003) states:

Families who feel connected to their children's schools also feel more connected to their children. Having a positive connection with their children's schools helps families to support not only a relationship with that school but also the relationships with their own children.

For the most part, the students enjoyed having this interaction with their parents and the school and their overwhelming feeling of success is evident.

Teacher Interviews

Teachers, on the other hand, were the greatest challenge. The group initially started with 5 teachers. Two teacher participants dropped out due to differing opinions in regard to students outside of the study. These issues dealt with handling of missed class time when one teacher was out sick and the other teacher took a student out of their class to do extraneous work instead of being present to do work for the class he was supposed to be in. Due to lack of communication and feelings of animosity, these two group members ceased their involvement with the parent-teacher group. Of the three teachers interviewed two of them are new to the teaching profession. The other remaining teachers, did not participate in the group for the majority of the time nor follow through with the group's established goals. Overall, in my opinion the main reason parent involvement fails is because of teachers.

All teachers agreed that parent involvement is important to the middle school environment. The one other teacher (besides me) who actively participated in the study reported differences in their student's achievement and behavior once they increased parent communication at home. The main barrier to their involvement was TIME. Teachers are required to maintain contact through parents but it must be done on their free time, prep periods, lunch break, or at night- time for which they do not get paid. If they have a meeting, it is during their personal time. This is where the biggest challenge resides; when is there time and how do teachers get compensated for it?

Of those teachers interviewed, all noticed an increase in student achievement once parents were involved. Each of them gave copious examples as to where they noticed a difference in student grades, reading ability, writing ability, and behavior. All participants said they would like to see some sort of parent involvement program

continue in one form or another, but that it would have to be mandated. All participants and myself believe that due to the lack of administrative support this project failed. My fellow teachers agreed that for programs like this to work, they must be decided upon school wide. One participant said it best, "Well, I think this is an issue that needs to come up, and it needs to come up in the spring so we can work on it. You definitely have found where we have a hole in our program and hopefully we can fill it."

Implications

The implications from this study, consistent with the previous research that validates the need for parental involvement, are in the following areas: 1) the need for teacher education/ staff development in parent involvement, 2) parent education for parents to give them tools for helping their child at home and to support the school 3) a mandate from school administration to increase parent involvement, 4) more opportunities for increased parent involvement and communication between the school and Latino families.

Teacher Education

Increased teacher training would be an effective tool to expand teacher awareness of cultural differences and help to implement new strategies for communicating with parents. The U.S. Department of Education (1996) stated:

Teachers must also learn new ways to involve parents in the learning process. Thirty years of research tells us that the starting point of putting children on the road to excellence is parental involvement in their children's education (p.1)

Several major barriers to parent involvement exist in public schools. Teachers need concrete skills and knowledge about family involvement in order to carry it out effectively (Burton, 1992; Edwards & Jones Young, 1992; Davies, 1991). Surveys have shown that teachers feel that they need more instruction in how to work with parents (McAfee, 1987). Teachers need to have an increased knowledge about their students and their situations at home. This increased knowledge could mend the break down in communication between families and teachers. Using culture as a segue to increased parent communication, teachers must also receive training on how to deal with parents from diverse cultures, be given ample time when parents can meet with them, and be compensated for doing so (Delgado-Gaitan, 1985, 1991).

Teacher education in family involvement is one of the most potentially effective methods of reducing almost all the barriers mentioned above to establish strong home-school partnerships (Chavkin, 1991). Of the teacher participants in my study, one had mock conferences, phone calls and parent interaction in her teacher preparation program. The other recent local university graduate was only instructed in how to make a parent newsletter which she felt did not prepare her for what was necessary to effectively communicate with parents. Most tenured teachers, including myself, never received any parent communication training thus collectively reinforcing existent reasons as to why parent involvement is so low in the middle school environment.

Parent Education

Parenting is a challenging job in itself; parenting a teenager is difficult. Educators cannot expect parents to know how to help them with everything in regard to school and

in raising a teenager without training. Moreover, many of our students' parents attended school in Mexico where they were exposed to an entirely different school system. If our school would offer simple classes for parents how to assist with their child's education at home, parent involvement and student achievement would increase.

According to the Harvard Family Research Project author Elliot Levine (1999) the following would greatly help parents and their students:

In regard to what parents can do at home...

- Children learn better when they are healthy and well rested.
- Children need a good learning environment.
- Children need a positive attitude towards school.
- Share your expectations.

In regard to helping at school...

- Use translators
- Build trust
- Get to know your child's teachers
- Attend parent-teacher conferences
- Ask questions
- Remember you are the expert on your own child!
- Learn about school rules and school programs.

In regard to the event of having a problem at school . . .

- Keep trying to make contact with the teachers, administrators, counselors, etc.
- Set up a special meeting
- If you do not agree, you can appeal.

- Talk with parents and advocates outside the school

Providing parents with tools like these will not only empower them in communicating with the school, but it will also build a rapport with their child at home where they feel supported and secure. Research has concluded that children whose families participate actively do better in school than those parents who do not (Epstein, 1987).

Administrative Involvement

Developing a policy is the first step to ensure that any program designed to create strong parent involvement and partnerships with schools (Constantino, 2003). Unfortunately, most changes in a school must come from its leadership, not its teachers. Through this project, I realized some teachers can make a monumental effort to work and communicate with parents, but for it to cause true change within the community of the school; parent-teacher communication must be a priority for all teachers and administrators. Administrators need to look at their policies and incorporate parents into the learning of the students. “Educators pledge at the onset of each school year to improve their efforts in contacting families with positive news and information, but the reality of the job all but prohibits teachers from fitting this goal into their daily rituals” (Constantino, 2003, p. 96). For true change to happen, administrators must offer teachers a consistent, allocated time frame dedicated to contact parents and for which they are paid. The time cannot be outside of school or a requirement that will make communicating with parents a hassle of any sort. This change has to come within the structure of the school and the administrative body must intend to forgo some of its

power entrusting it with parents and teachers alike. The mission of any school must include families.

Opportunities for Increased Parent Involvement and Communication

"Cultural differences among minority groups may contribute to differences in the ways parents relate to the school and how parents view appropriate levels of school involvement" (Dornbusch & Ritter 1988, pg. 118). Concha Delgado-Gaitan's (2004) research on Latino families as discussed in related literature, clearly outlines what adoptions schools must make to incorporate Latino families into the school. Each of her suggestions will be addressed with how El Sausal Middle School can attribute her findings into school policy. These ideas and the study will be presented during the May school site council meeting with hopes to address these issues during a school staff meeting and to develop a committee for the following year.

- Clear and deliberate communication between school to home, home to school, parent to teacher, teacher to parent, etc.
Communication will be initiated from the school (i.e. teachers and counselors) to open paths of communication with parents at the beginning of the school year.
- All parents and school staff must learn the other's culture. By doing this a greater understanding is met and family culture/language is valued by the school.
Already involved parents or Latino staff members will hold staff development opportunities for teachers to learn about the students' culture and ways to relate to parents to help open communication.
- The school must engage Latino parents in dialogue and identify ways they can reach out to each other.
At school ELAC committee meetings, parents will be given more time to voice questions and opinions that will be addressed at school staff

meetings. There is also a huge need to start a Parent Teacher Organization at El Sausal Middle School (PTO).

- The school must use the home language of the students in order to open children's eyes to the world and helps them define their identity and shape their ability to make life choices. Language also conveys ethnic identity and pride as well as understanding of the family's position in the community (pg. 9)
Teachers will be encouraged to learn Spanish to open communication or translators will be readily available for parents to use in meetings or in phone calls home.
- Parents must be educated in their personal rights in the school and community and the rights of their student.
Parents will be given classes on school policy, student-parent rights and be provided with mock conferences and meetings to learn the skills necessary for effective advocacy.
- Latino families need to know that educators are interested in meeting their needs and are respectful of their language and cultural differences. When reaching out to the Latino community, it is a matter of building TRUST as a platform for creating sustained collaborations with parents (pg.16)
The school will reach out to parents with parent-teacher nights, school socials, parties, cultural awareness days and include parents in the planning and orchestrating of each activity.
- Educators must define what parent involvement is and provide workshops for parents to strengthen the parent role in their children's education.
The aforementioned workshops will be offered as discussed in the parent education portion earlier in this chapter.
- Schools need to offer various levels of involvement activities.
Activities will be organized by the school community liaison.
- Finally, schools must make parents feel welcome (pg. 25)
Ways to make them feel welcomed are secure all entrances as welcoming to families, parking available and well lit, quick removal of graffiti, school interior kept well maintained, safety, well marked family center, approachable administration and staff, available translation services.

Conclusions

It is important for schools to honor parents as an integral part of their child's education. With increasing pressures due to testing and the pressure incurred by the

government teachers and parents must work together as a team to ensure the academic successes of the children we share. Obviously, student achievement is increased with greater communication and involvement in the school. Educators must make a concerted effort to include parents in their child's education and learn the culture and languages of those families they serve. Through this we can begin to integrate them into the classroom environment and build a bridge between home and school. Schools must make parents an integral part of its success to truly change the lives of our students and the communities in which we teach. Teachers must be trained how to effectively communicate and include parents in the student's education. School administrators must also provide teachers with compensated TIME to build these relationships with parents and communicate with the home. Lastly, teachers need to understand the culture in which they learned and its differences from the school culture of their students, especially those who are challenged socio-economically and a minority. By building on the strength of family involvement and opening lines of communication between schools and parents, together we can create a partnership that enhances student achievement thus opening a world of knowledge and success.

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Appendix A

Parent Teacher Contact Form-English

Name of Student _____	
Current Grade _____	Citizenship grade _____
Current Areas of Study:	
Needs for Improvement:	
Student Strengths:	
Questions and comments from parents to teacher:	