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Parental Involvement Supporting Student Success: Overview and Synthesis
by

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Abstract

Improving parental involvement can lead to increased student success, yet schools struggle to engage more parents in the education process. How can schools encourage more parental involvement? How can parents best support their children, teachers, and school leaders to increase student success? This study aimed to gain insight into the understanding of parental involvement, identify perceived barriers preventing involvement, and develop recommendations for improving parental involvement in a small, rural school in Northern Alberta. Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with parents and a teacher to explore their understandings of parental involvement and barriers preventing involvement. Key ideas from the findings included the importance of building positive and collaborative relationships between school and home, making communication a focus, and making parents feel welcomed, heard, and an essential part of the education process. COVID has affected education and relationships with home, and staff and parents must work to rebuild these relationships. Staff may need further education on effectively interacting with parents, and parents may need support and encouragement to develop the skills and knowledge to support their child's success. Improving student success may be more attainable if we can better engage parents in all aspects of their children's learning.

Keywords: parental involvement, student success, home-based involvement, school-based involvement, academic socialization

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Parental Involvement Supporting Student Success: Overview and Synthesis

“Sagacious educational leaders understand that teachers alone cannot maximize student success. Both parents and school people need to work together to reach these same goals” (Jeynes, 2018, p. 161). Parental involvement in education has been a topic of educational research for many years. According to Griffin and Galassi (2010), “research has indicated that parental involvement has a positive effect on a child’s social and academic success” (p. 87). Hill and Tyson (2009) agreed “parent involvement in their children’s education has consistently been associated with higher student achievement” (as cited in Rodriguez, Collins-Parks, & Garza, 2013, p. 51). Epstein’s (1991) longitudinal study, as cited in Ates (2021), found “parental involvement has a positive effect on overall academic achievement” (p. 51). It has been my experience as a teacher and Vice Principal that parents want and expect their child(ren) to be successful, but parental involvement seems much lower than expected. Since the beginning of my career in education, it has been a query of mine why parents are not more involved in their child’s education. It is always a struggle to get parents involved, even in the simplest of ways, such as coming to meetings or helping out at events, and even more difficult to engage more parents in the education of their children. COVID-19 has further complicated the relationship between school and home. Given the positive relationship between parental involvement and student success, schools need to identify and eliminate barriers, develop strategies for engaging parents in a relationship with the school, and increase parental involvement to increase student success.

Research Questions

The research question guiding this project was:

- How can parents best support their children, teachers, and school leaders to increase student success?

The sub-questions guiding this project included:

- How do parents define parental involvement?
- How do teachers define parental involvement?
- What are the perceived barriers preventing parents from being involved?
- How has COVID affected parental involvement? How has COVID affected the student-teacher-parent relationship?
- As educators, what can we do to increase parental involvement?

For this study, a parent is defined as an adult or guardian who is in a position to support a child's education. Success is not just academic excellence; it is defined as the child accomplishing the educational goals set for them. Success can also be related to developing improved social skills, improved attendance, positive well-being, building confidence, and positive attitudes toward school and learning (Ates, 2021; Avnet et al., 2019; Barger et al., 2019; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

This basic qualitative study aimed to gain insight into the understanding of parental involvement, identify perceived barriers preventing parents from being involved in their child's education, and develop strategies for increasing parental involvement in rural Northern Alberta schools in an effort to increase student success. I am interested in developing strategies applicable to parents of students in small rural schools in the north, particularly in my school. This study's findings can benefit parents, educators, and, most importantly, students. If we can better engage parents in all aspects of their child's learning, the ultimate goal of improved student success may be more attainable.

Not all researchers agree, and it may be argued there is a lack of empirical research showing a positive relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. "Most research on parental involvement is relational and cannot explain causation" (Ates, 2021, p. 62). Another reason for discrepancies in research results may be "researchers focused on different features of parental involvement" (Ates, 2021, p. 50). Despite the

criticisms of the importance of parental involvement and the link to student success, and positive findings are only moderately strong (Ates, 2021), there is enough relational data to make this a topic worth continued study.

Educational Significance

“It is widely accepted that parents’ involvement in their children’s education and learning is of the foremost importance” (Goodall, 2013, p. 133). Findings from this study will be used to explore possible strategies for improving the quantity and quality of parental involvement and engagement in children’s education and learning. This could result in positive relationships among stakeholders and more effective collaboration toward educational goals for students. Positive relationships and collaboration among teachers, students, and parents are important in supporting students to reach their educational goals. They could also be instrumental in times of uncertainty or crisis, like COVID-19. If the foundation is there, shifts or alterations needed to deal with uncertainty or crisis might not be such a giant leap for teachers, parents and students.

Literature Review

The literature on parental involvement in education shows a positive relationship between involved parents and student success. Ozdemir (2021) recognized parents play a varied but significant role in student success as success “increases when parents spend more time in school, participate in school activities, communicate with teachers and the school principal about their children, attend parent meetings regularly and support their child’s efforts while studying at home” (p. 14). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) cited numerous sources recognizing “[parental] engagement can boost children’s self-esteem, increase motivation and engagement with learning and can lead to increased learning outcomes” (p. 401). Why is parental involvement in schools not higher if this is the case?

Following their investigations, Barger et al. (2019) suggested parental involvement can be described in two broad forms “based on the school front and based on the home front” (p. 856). “School-based involvement” includes parents keeping direct contact with the school through “participation and governance,” including coming to events at the school, attending Parent-Teacher interviews, being a volunteer on field trips and at the school, and being a member of the “Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) or school board” (Barger et al., 2019, p. 856). “Home-based involvement” happens outside of school. It includes “encouraging children in academic endeavors,” going to the library, reading at home, assisting with homework, or having a suitable place for homework completion (Barger et al., 2019, p. 856). Hill and Tyson (2009), as cited by Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014), added “academic socialization” as an additional component of parental involvement, describing it as “the communication of parental expectations about schoolwork and the importance of education, encouragement of educational and career goals, and making plans and preparations with adolescents that support their future goals” (p. 611). Parental involvement is a “multifaceted construct” with several components. For the purposes of this study, parental involvement is defined as “parents’ interaction with school and with their children to benefit their children’s educational success” (Hill et al., 2004, as cited in Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014, p. 611) and takes into consideration the different components of parental involvement. According to Lynch (2016), as cited in Avnet et al. (2019), “when collaboration takes place between families and school, student learning and outcomes, children’s attitudes toward school, social skills and behavior all improve” (p. 477). It is worth noting, the word success in this study means more than just academic achievement, but includes the learning development of the child beyond scores on standardized assessments.

Perceived Barriers to Parental Involvement

The literature examines several perceived barriers to parental involvement. Exploring these barriers may aid educators in diminishing them and encourage and allow more parents to become involved. Several barriers mentioned were logistical, including meeting times, commitments to work, and limited time and resources (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Park, Stone, & Holloway, 2017; Povey et al., 2016). Additional perceived barriers include parents not feeling confident in their abilities (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Povey et al., 2016), negative school culture or unwelcoming school environment, poor communication between school and home, and parents lacking interest (Povey et al., 2016) or not seeming to value education (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). It is worthwhile for schools to examine barriers to parental involvement in their schools and address the issues as an avenue for encouraging more parents to become involved.

Parent Engagement Education

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggested educators should be teaching parents how to help their children, but this “requires a change of mindset on the part of many staff, a move from seeing ‘teaching’ as the sole preserve of school staff” (p. 407). Povey et al. (2016) proposed schools “may be well-placed to help build the capacity of parents by training them in aspects of the curriculum” (p. 129). According to Pushor and Amendt (2018), “before we can create strong and effective partnerships with families, we have to believe not only that it’s important but also that it can be done - and that we can do it” (p. 218). In a review of parent engagement, Goodall and Vorhaus (2015), as cited in Pushor and Amendt (2018), affirmed “staff require training and coaching to engage effectively with parents, and thus should receive parent engagement training through their initial teacher education and/or in their continuing professional development” (p. 203). Povey et al. (2016) also stated, “principals who value parent engagement may be more likely to provide training

opportunities for teaching staff to build their skills in working with parents” (p. 130) saying the majority of teachers in Australia identify this as an important professional development need. With Alberta Education’s addition of competency five: “Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Metis and Inuit,” to the Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2020, p.6), there has been a small amount of professional development available to educators in Northern Alberta concerning working with parents of Indigenous students. However, overall, this type of professional development is lacking for school leaders and teachers in Northern Alberta school districts. If educators are to support parents this way, they must have the skills to do so effectively.

Principal Influence on Parental Involvement

The influence of school leaders on parental involvement is referenced in much of the research. “School leaders play an important role in shaping the climate and facilitating parent engagement through their leadership style, communication, attitudes, and expectations” (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014, as cited in Povey et al., 2016, p. 129). As mentioned earlier, one of the barriers to parent engagement is parents feeling unwelcome at school or perceiving the school to have a negative culture, so to be effective, leaders must work to create a welcoming environment which is “family-centric” rather than “school-centric” (Pushor & Amendt, 2018). Povey et al. (2016) found “levels of parental involvement in schools increase when Principals actively embed a whole school vision which values the roles of parents in their child’s learning” (p. 130). Pushor and Amendt (2018) suggested parents and community should be involved in the building of a “shared vision and values” (p. 208). When barriers are identified and addressed and a positive school culture is built, a collaborative effort can be put towards improving student success.

COVID-19 and Education

In 2020 a global event occurred, profoundly impacting education and parental involvement. COVID-19 has affected the education of students around the world. “As of May 19, 2020, UNESCO (2020) noted that 58% of the world’s student population was out of school . . . with 135 countries facing closures, and hundreds of schools affected” (Iyengar, 2021, p. 437). Harper (2021) agreed “the impact on education was also felt around the world” (p. 1). Students have been in and out of school, learning at school, online, and at home over the past two and a half years. The far-reaching effects of COVID in education will be with us for years to come. Relationships between parents and school have been strained and warrant study on how to recover and improve these connections to support student success.

Related Education Documents

Several education documents require the encouragement of involvement by parents, making increasing and improving parental involvement a topic of significance for leaders. These include the Education Act (2019), Alberta Education’s Leadership Quality Standard (LQS 2020) and my school division’s Administrative Procedure Manual (2019).

Participation in School Council is one of the ways parents can be involved in education. School Councils have an “important advisory role linking the Board, schools and school communities throughout the Division” (Peace River School Division No. 10, 2019, p. 1). The Education Act (2019) and Peace River School Division’s (2019) Administrative Procedure Manual describe the roles, responsibilities and procedures for School Councils in detail. School Councils are one avenue parents can use to have a say in their children’s education. Although having parents attend and listen at the meetings will not, on its own, make significant contributions to their child’s achievement, “there are still emotional benefits to students whose parents are involved in school activities” (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014, p. 620).

Alberta Education's Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) (2020) is the Ministerial Order containing the competencies all school leaders in Alberta are expected to meet. In Competency One, Fostering Effective Relationships, leaders must create opportunities "for parents/guardians, as partners in education, to take an active role in their children's education" and also establish "relationships with First Nations, Metis and Inuit parents/guardians, Elders/knowledge keepers, local leaders and community members" (p. 3). Competency Three, Embodying Visionary Leadership, addresses parents in indicator *d* a leader will support "school community members, including school councils, in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities" (p. 3). Leading a Learning Community, Competency Four states leaders should establish "opportunities and expectations for the positive involvement of parents/guardians in supporting student learning" (p. 4). Competency Seven, Developing Leadership Capacity, leaders will promote "the engagement of parents in school council(s)" and facilitate "the constructive involvement of school council(s) in school life" (p. 4) as well as promote "team building and shared leadership among members of the school community" (p. 5). The LQS lays the parameters for various ways leaders can encourage the participation of parents in education.

When considering parental involvement, it is essential to consider the parents of students with special education codes. Ideally, the involvement of all parents is the goal, but the involvement of parents of students with special education codes is essential. Alberta Education's *Standards for Special Education Amended June 2004*, clearly states, "schools must invite meaningful involvement of parents in planning, problem solving and decision making related to their child's special education programming" (p. 1). To best meet the learning needs of students with special needs, their parents must be involved in planning their child's learning program.

The potential for improving student success through effective parental involvement is a personal belief I hold. “It is evident that strengthening the role and responsibility of the family and ensuring parents have meaningful opportunities to participate in the educational process results in greater educational gains” (Avnet et al., 2019, p. 477). Reviewed literature on parental involvement provided ideas informing my study. As a leader in my school, I must consider the importance of the contribution parents can make to education and the successes of their children. Parental involvement has several components, each contributing in varying ways and amounts to student success. Sometimes there are barriers which prevent parents from being more involved, and schools need to examine these barriers and strategies for overcoming them. Often staff are unsure how to engage parents effectively and need the support of school leaders to develop skills and strategies in this area.

Methodology

This study followed a basic qualitative research design. I wanted to determine how my respondents made “sense of their lives and their experiences” with parental involvement (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). Research was conducted with four respondents from my school and the surrounding community, and I sought clarification on the understandings and experiences of school community members around parental involvement. I used purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) when choosing respondents because, as a researcher, I wanted “to discover, understand, and gain insight” (p. 94). I felt I could learn a lot from my chosen respondents. Respondents were purposefully chosen as parents who have children who attended or are attending K-12 schools in Northern Alberta and have experience with parental involvement. Respondents' involvement varied, from attending meetings and school events to volunteering at school, helping their child(ren) with school, and becoming a School Board member.

Data Collection

Respondents were invited to participate in my study by phone call or email. After providing verbal and written consent, I met with each respondent via Google Meet to conduct the interviews. With consent, Google meet recording and the Scribbl app were used to aid in the creation of an interview transcript. Respondents took part in an interview lasting between 40-60 minutes. The semi-structured interview format allowed me to ask for specific information from the respondents using more structured questions and engaging in flexible conversation to explore the topics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I asked open-ended questions about the issue of parental involvement to get descriptive and personal answers from each respondent. I used a variety of question types and followed up answers needing more exploration with probing questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 122). I avoided including leading questions, not wanting my biases and assumptions to influence respondents' answers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 120). I reviewed each Google meet video while editing the Scribble transcripts used for data analysis. I believe my questions lead to a conversational interview making the respondents comfortable sharing their honest opinions and experiences.

Data Analysis

After transcribing each interview, I reread and highlighted the key ideas which provided information related to my interview questions. Information was coded deductively based on recurring themes, and I repeated the process after each interview. I analyzed the data using themes coordinating with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model of the parental involvement process, Level 1 (as cited in Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011, p. 341). Having categories and themes come from the transcripts and the related literature provided an analysis which was both deductive and inductive. The data collected were also used to identify potential improvements to the interview schedule before the following interview. In doing this, the collection and analysis of data happened concurrently.

Biases and Assumptions

I am the Vice Principal at a K-12 school in rural northern Alberta, and I thought it necessary to “examine my biases and assumptions about the phenomenon of interest before embarking on a study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). As a leader, Inclusive Education Coach, and teacher in my school, I am very interested in parental involvement. I believe students will experience the most success if there is a positive relationship between school and home. However, I went into my interviews with an open mind, wanting to learn and understand the lived experiences of my respondents with parental involvement, even if their opinions did not correspond with mine.

Several assumptions were made in planning and conducting my research. The chosen respondents would provide data relevant to the research question. The data collected in four interviews would be enough to offer meaningful themes. Respondents would be honest and open when sharing their experiences and opinions. Parents want to be more involved in their children’s education. The respondents would be comfortable sharing their views and experiences with me. While analyzing data, I acknowledged my biases and assumptions. I considered all data, even if it was contrary to what I felt or was expecting to find out.

Trustworthiness

Upon completion of each interview, I conducted a member check to increase credibility, for it is “the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say... as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings....” (Maxwell, 2013, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 246). A copy of the transcript was emailed to each respondent to ensure accuracy and included a summary of their shared information to verify interpretation of the data. All three respondents replied, acknowledging the accuracy of the summary. Providing rich, thick descriptions of my research context and respondents allows for transferability to

readers in a similar context. I feel a study could be replicated with similar respondents in a similar context and have alike results.

“Triangulation is typically a strategy of improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 603) and is “the process of corroborating evidence about a finding from different individuals or types of data” (Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 364). When researchers find commonalities from various sources, the data becomes more trustworthy. Many commonalities were found between my interview data and the literature. The research project had the approval of the University of Alberta Ethics Board and met all of the conditions of approval of the Peace River School Division.

Qualitative research makes significant contributions to educational research. Insight into the perspectives and experiences of people is essential information needed to continue to move things forward in education. Qualitative research leads to finding out what people think, but more importantly, it allows the opportunity to discover why they feel that way. Researchers can get rich description and detail other methods would not provide. “You should read reports of qualitative research to learn new knowledge about the complexity and meaning of phenomena as experienced by individuals” (Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 57). When researchers follow recommended strategies and procedures, qualitative research can be valid and reliable and be a trustworthy source of information and knowledge for the education field.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation of this study is the respondents were all females. A male perspective may have added a unique perspective to the research and given different insights into my questions. I only conducted four interviews because of time constraints and the project size, which may not be enough to reach saturation. However, I did find several similarities among the responses from my interviewees. Another limitation is I only interviewed respondents

who I believed to be active in their child's education. This did not allow me to hear the responses from parents who do not adhere to my vision of involvement.

A delimitation of my study is the inclusion of four respondents I know who are parents involved in their children's education. This was intentional, expecting respondents would be comfortable honestly sharing their opinions and experiences with me. This allowed me to hear their perceived barriers to parental involvement, but no other insights were gained beyond the ways they are involved. Interviews were limited to one hour in length, and each respondent was interviewed one time. Semi-structured interviews were held to direct discussion toward the research questions.

Findings and Discussion

Parental Involvement can be divided into three components: home-based involvement, school-based involvement (Barger et al., 2019; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), and academic socialization (Hill & Tyson, 2009, as cited in Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). The findings in my study showed my respondents also believe parental involvement is composed of these elements. This provides a foundation to build upon in pursuing the goal of increasing parental involvement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) revised theoretical model of the parental involvement process (cited in Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011, p. 341) illustrated three significant sources of motivation for parental involvement. They include:

1. Parents' motivational beliefs - how active parents think they should be in their child's education.
2. Parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from others - parents respond to specific invitations from the school, the teachers, and their child.
3. Parents' perceived life context - the skills, knowledge, time, and energy parents believe they possess.

This model provided a structure for examining my respondents' understandings of parental involvement. COVID-19 came out of the data as affecting parental involvement, so it will also be included in the discussion.

Parents' Motivational Beliefs

The first motivator in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model addresses parents' motivational beliefs (as cited in Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, (2011). This deals with the parents' beliefs about how much involvement they should have in their child's education and the degree to which they think their child will benefit from their involvement. Respondents shared their understandings of this motivator through their thoughts on parents' attitudes towards education and the importance of partnership/collaboration with the school. Dana felt parents have a big role to play in student success. She mentioned "parents play the most major part . . . they're the biggest influence . . . that's the biggest role parents will play, is in education . . . in today's world you have to be educated, so parents need to support that part more." Yosai et al. (2016) concurred, "the role of parents starts, influences, and teaches children right from the earliest days of their lives" (p. 2). Tracy also believed parents "should always be instilling the love of learning and the idea that education is the most valuable thing you can get." She felt you are going to be "the most successful in life" by learning all you can and not limiting yourself. She talked about the importance of parents exhibiting a "really good attitude about education and wanting their child to excel at it and seeing the value of it and wanting their child to go on." Jackie took a more practical approach in her response to the role parents play in student success. Parents must "have their kids ready to learn." They need to have enough sleep, eat well and have good attendance. Jackie felt parents could "make a huge difference in their student's attitude" by supporting the teacher and the school and assisting their child in meeting the expectations set out for them.

The importance of collaboration between home and school was also a common theme in the data. Rachel saw the ideal relationship as one in which “everybody’s on the same page- the teachers, the school, the school board, the parents,” everyone is focused on the student’s success. Jackie used the word respect when discussing the ideal relationship between school and home. She believed parents needed to respect the teachers, and the teacher must respect the parents and the child as this means

everybody wants the best for everybody . . . that's how you build a little relationship community with your school . . . if everybody goes in with the same amount of respect for the other person, I think the ability to listen to one another is going to increase . . . tenfold . . . communication and relationship are really important between parents and school and children to help children be successful.

As a teacher, Tracy would like parents to “work to build a good relationship with the teacher and vice versa. I think if everybody is involved and we’re all looking towards the most success we can get, that’s the ideal.” Tracy also contributed her opinion saying each parent’s “own personal ideas about school and whether they had a successful time at school or whether they really don’t appreciate education” will affect their level of involvement. “If they see no real value in it, it’s just a place to send their kid to get rid of them for the day; then they don’t really want to be involved.” When parents exude a positive attitude towards education and collaborate with the school, improved student success will be the result.

Parents’ Perceptions of Invitations for Involvement from Others

The second source of motivation from the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model is the parents’ perception of invitations for involvement (as cited in Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). This topic was addressed in the data through discussion about the culture in the school and the way parents feel welcomed and invited to participate. Iyengar (2021)

suggested bridging the gap between the school and the community as a strategy for “making children’s education more accessible to their parents” (p. 440).

As an Indigenous person, Dana provided a unique perspective on parental involvement. She explained that as the daughter of an Indian Day School survivor and the granddaughter of a Residential School survivor, school was not seen as important and schools were not respected. As a result, Dana has had to work to overcome the negativity which was passed on to her to allow her to be involved with her children’s school. Dana felt an “extra little reach out to Indigenous parents or parents that immigrated” would help make a difference. “Maybe just some phone calls . . . make it seem like you need them in the school, like the school needs you here, our kids need you here.” Parents need to feel welcomed when they come into the school. We need to “make people feel like they’re needed and wanted . . . you guys can’t function without them.” “We need to make them [parents] fall in love with the process . . . like their kids depend on it.”

Jackie stressed the importance of parents feeling like they are heard to encourage parents to be involved. “It’s really important that when a parent does go into the school that it’s important that they feel listened to . . . concerns are addressed . . . that when a parent does come into a school that they’re made to feel welcome there.” She also shared her opinion, saying

sometimes parents are intimidated about coming to meetings . . . [parents] don’t feel that they maybe have the adequate skills to participate . . . don’t know what to expect . . . some of the intimidation that some parents might feel, they may have had a poor past educational experience themselves.

As a strategy to overcome this, Jackie suggested inviting parents to do specific things. “Quite a few parents would help you if you phone them . . . they just had to be almost specifically

invited and specifically invited to help.” The message from the data and literature is parents need to feel welcomed and needed to encourage more involvement.

Communication also emerged as an important part of keeping parents informed and making them feel invited to be involved. Dana saw effective communication as an essential part of the relationship between home and school. “The ideal relationship would just be one where a parent feels comfortable emailing, texting, calling . . . an open relationship.” She also believed teachers need to make a conscious effort to reach out to all parents. Contact parents if there is a concern, but also with good news. Dana remembered a letter she received from the school about something great her son had accomplished, and she appreciated the acknowledgement from the school. Dana shared her opinion that building relationships with our students and parents is necessary, “we need to encourage them, and they will open up little by little.” Jackie also spoke to parents needing to be informed as an essential part of parental involvement. “Being informed makes it more like a partnership. Everybody's going the same way . . . also too, by being informed, you can also try to see where you might be able to help the teacher out a bit.”

Parents’ Perceived Life Context

The third component of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s model (2005) (as cited in Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011) is parents’ perceived life context, including their confidence in their skills and knowledge to be successfully involved and the time and energy they have to commit to parental involvement.

Rachel felt parents say they don’t have time but believed “you don’t see a lot of parents prioritizing their kids these days.” Parents are putting up their own barriers preventing them from being more involved. “They need to realize that for their kids to succeed after they leave home, they need all the help they can get while they are at home. They need to prioritize their kids . . . [and] see that it’s going to benefit their kids in the long run.” During

our interview, Rachel shared many times how she had decided to be involved and made it happen, overcoming any barriers. She felt this is what all parents need to choose to do.

Tracy felt parents today are less involved than when she began teaching over twenty years ago. A parent's perception these days is they're too busy "they aren't taking as active of an interest." Tracy expressed, as a teacher, it is frustrating trying to get more parents involved. "People being busy or thinking they're too busy is a barrier."

Dana responded differently as she reflected on her experiences as a young mother. "Parental involvement is really hard when you're financially not stable . . . we really just couldn't because we had to work." It was not necessarily Dana did not want to be involved but often felt financial pressures and work prevented her from being involved. Dana also offered parents may be apprehensive about getting involved because of "a lack of education on the part of the parents . . . going to school is intimidating for them . . . not understanding education and how it works."

Jackie said when her children were younger, there seemed to be more parents involved in things like School Council. She attributed this difference to several barriers, including people believing they are busier now and have work schedules which do not align with opportunities for involvement, whether at home or school. She also added, "sometimes parents are intimidated by meetings" or perhaps "think they don't have anything to contribute." Jackie mentioned differing culture or language and socio-economic reasons also playing a role in lacking parental involvement. Rennie Centre for Education (2021) added "family participation may look different for individuals from different cultural backgrounds" (p. 13). Jackie also felt some parents might feel they don't have the skills to participate and be involvement. This perceived lack of ability may contribute to parental apprehension.

Effects of COVID on Education and Parental Involvement

The COVID-19 pandemic has forever changed our world and has affected many aspects of our lives, including parental involvement in education. With the move to learning from home, “parents [became] co-facilitators in their children’s learning process more than ever before” (Iyengar, 2021, p. 438). This experience was not the same for all parents. It was my experience some parents willingly stepped right in and supported their child, doing everything they could to assist the learning process, while other parents felt “abandoned . . . struggling to manage the increased responsibilities” (Harper, 2021, p. 17). As a result, it will continue to be a challenge for parents, teachers, and students as we work to close the gaps being in and out of school has created. “In the post-COVID-19 world, learning gaps are expected to rise” (Azevedo et al., 2020, as cited in Iyengar, 2021, p. 441). This was corroborated by Tracy, a teacher of young students, who felt “COVID was really bad . . . it was very detrimental . . . there’s definitely going to be gaps there that we’re going to be filling for a while.” When reflecting on at-home learning and school closures, Rachel worried, “I don’t think kids are learning . . . as much as they should be . . . they aren’t in classrooms, they are not getting that experience . . . whether they’re learning at all is sometimes what I question . . . they’re not accountable to anybody.”

Parents were expected to support their children during at-home learning, and contact and communication with the school and teachers were necessary.

Many networks were established and many new connections were formed. This nonlinear educational model needs to have a place in the post-COVID-19 world.

Parents, online resources, and technology-based communication media need to find a place in education. Education cannot go back to being only school based. (Iyengar, 2021, p. 445)

“Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, parents and caregivers have gained new insights into students’ day-to-day learning. This has provided an opportunity for educators and school personnel to deepen relationships with both students and the adults in their lives” (Rennie Center Education Research & Policy, 2021, p. 23). My respondents, however, did not feel the same way. According to my respondents, COVID-19 has made parents feel more disconnected from the school. They felt it would take significant time and effort to build these relationships again. Jackie felt apps like Zoom allowed for more communication with school for some, but mostly COVID “made people shy away from the school even more.” Dana shared, “I think teachers are gonna have to work extra hard . . . on building relationships again because a lot of people feel pushed out of school, like they weren’t allowed in school for so long, there was no place for them. We’re gonna have to work hard to make everybody feel welcome again because we’ve lost some steps.” Tracy shared, “I think not only did it put a real standstill to how much we could get parents involved, I think it's going to be tricky to get them back involved again. Jackie felt, “everybody in our community has to really band together to try to put this all back together. I really hope that there's parental involvement in helping the teachers try to make everything come back together. I think it was, to be honest, overwhelmingly negative for K to 12 and post-secondary.” Dana agreed, “COVID has just been a mess for everybody- for the students, for the teachers” in terms of school. Moving forward, Iyengar (2021) suggested in post-COVID-19, “schools should build on the momentum and make schools more community resourced” (p. 438) As educators, we need to work with parents and the community to support students’ learning as we move forward from COVID restrictions and closures.

Key Findings

Respondents' replies conveyed the understanding parental involvement may consist of many activities with home and school components. Key findings are summarized below

using the three categories from Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (2005) model of the parental involvement process, Level 1 (as cited in Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011, p. 341).

Parents' Motivational Beliefs

Respondents believe parents play a significant role in student success. They are a child's first teacher and continue to be necessary even after the child begins school. It is the responsibility of parents to have their children ready to learn, beginning by ensuring they have food, appropriate rest, and attend school regularly. Parents influence student attitude towards school and learning and must instill a love of learning and a positive attitude towards education. Respect, communication, and collaboration are essential components of home and school relationships.

Parents' Perceptions of Invitations for Involvement from Others

Schools need to make parents feel needed and wanted. Parents need to feel they are being heard and their contributions are valued. Communication is a crucial component. Parents want to know what is going on with their child, not just the difficulties but the successes too. Parents need and want personal and specific invitations to participate. Indigenous families may require extra effort from school to make them feel welcomed and comfortable as the lasting effects of residential schools and day schools still influence their feelings toward school and education.

Parents' Perceived Life Context

Life is busy, and parents often use this as an excuse to avoid being more involved. Some parents are not prioritizing their children and choosing to be more engaged in their child's education. Some parents feel intimidated, do not have confidence in their abilities, or do not feel they have anything to contribute. Involvement is problematic when a family is not financially stable, and work schedules take away from opportunities to be more involved. Leaders must consider parents' opportunities and abilities to be involved may be limited by

parents' life context and keep this in mind when strategizing and planning opportunities for parental involvement.

Effects of COVID on Education and Parental Involvement

Respondents were clear in their responses; they felt COVID has been detrimental to student learning. They believe being in and out of school and having online learning has left gaps in student learning. Relationships between home and school have suffered and have even gone backwards, and it is going to take extra effort by schools and parents to get back to where we were before COVID and move forward.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings derived from the data collected provided answers to the questions leading this research, and insight into parental involvement in small, rural Northern Alberta schools and led to the following conclusions. Parents and teachers see parental involvement as necessary in achieving student success. Student success is more than academic scores and involves the growth and development of the whole child. It is needed to ensure a common understanding of parental involvement and its components, including home involvement, school involvement, and academic socialization. When parents and staff have a similar understanding, a focus on improvement can begin. Parents and school staff have a role to play in improving parental involvement. School staff need to know how to engage parents in the education process effectively, and parents need to feel comfortable and confident as partners in education. The necessary knowledge and skills must be accessible to all parties. Building effective and trusting relationships is necessary and contributes to authentic collaboration. Consideration must be given to parents who legitimately do not have the time or resources to be more involved as to ways schools can support and accommodate their circumstances. The damage COVID has done to parent-school relationships needs to be addressed. My findings lead me to believe it is possible to increase and improve parental

involvement in my school, and doing so will lead to improved student success. The conclusions suggest several recommendations for schools and parents to improve and increase parental involvement.

Recommendations for Schools

The conclusions in this study lead to several recommendations for school leaders and teachers. First and foremost, a shared understanding of what parental involvement means and can look like is necessary. There are various ways parents can become involved, and parents need to be aware of them and the importance of their contributions to the school and students. This could be accomplished through promotion and communication. Although not an exhaustive list, this communication might be written material sent home, articles in the school newsletter, a bulletin board in the school highlighting opportunities for involvement, using social media platforms, and conversations with parents. Parents must understand the expectations of a task, and staff offer to help and support them if they feel they are not adequately prepared. Parents may not feel confident in their skills and knowledge, especially in aspects of the curriculum. Schools must support parents to build their knowledge, skills, and confidence.

Another recommendation from my research is the importance of creating a welcoming school environment for everyone, including parents. COVID shut parents out of the school, making them feel detached from the school community. We need to work to build trust and respect, which may be suffering or missing. Staff need to work to welcome parents back and rebuild relationships which may have deteriorated. This could be sending personal invitations for involvement to parents, organizing events for parents, students, and staff to attend, and ensuring communication lines are open, to name a few. During the last few years, many events have been dropped or cancelled, and staff need to make a concerted effort to bring back opportunities to make parents feel welcomed again. It is recommended schools

plan a variety of opportunities and events which accommodate most parents. This might mean varying the time of day, location, or delivery method.

Additional consideration may need to be given to Indigenous families or families with different cultural backgrounds or languages. One of my respondents is the granddaughter of a Residential School survivor and the daughter of an Indian Day School survivor. She has felt the effects of their experiences with the negativity towards school, which was passed down to her. Reaching out to these families will be necessary for encouraging involvement. Some families may want to be involved but life circumstances make it difficult. Getting to know families and where they are coming from will be helpful when exploring opportunities for involvement. These strategies can be based on the availability and interests of families.

The importance of communication also came through in the research findings. Parents want to be well informed and need to feel heard by staff. Effective communication is essential, by whichever method works best for parents, whether by phone, email, texting, written communication, or in-person conversation. An important component of this is making sure parents know how they can bring up concerns or give feedback. This will ensure they feel they are being heard. A limitation of this may be when you open various methods of communication; staff cannot be on call 24 hours a day. Reasonable parameters need to be set by the staff and parents in this situation.

Recommendations for Parents

My study also provided insights and conclusions which led to recommendations for parents regarding parental involvement. First, parents must ensure their child is ready to learn each day. This includes ensuring their child gets to school well rested and fed, for learning is difficult when our basic needs have not been met.

Another recommendation which emerged from respondent data is the importance of parents instilling a love for learning in their children. Often this can be accomplished through

modelling and encouragement from the parents, but when parents have had terrible experiences with school and do not have a love for learning this could be a challenge; however, I would recommend parents begin by showing interest in what their child is learning. Ask them questions, encourage them to pursue their interests, and have parents share their passions with students. A love of learning does not only include school-related learning but encompasses many aspects of learning.

Parents need to understand they play an important role in their child's education. Schools could share educational research study findings on the benefits of parental involvement in various forms such as a written or digital pamphlet, an informational workshop, bulletin board display, or online or in-person presentations. Parents could then be supported in exploring their understanding of parental involvement and the role they could play in supporting their children's education. This would need to be followed by parents knowing what opportunities are available for involvement and what would be involved in the task. A mentor suggested providing parents with a list of opportunities for involvement at the beginning of the school year and inviting them to sign up for what they are interested in. This list may contain mostly opportunities for volunteering in the school, helping with special events, or attending meetings, which may not directly impact student success. Still, it can be looked at as a first step, a way to get parents involved at a basic level, and then you can build from there.

Parents need to communicate with the school using the agreed upon methods. This could be as simple as reading and signing their child's daily agenda or attending parent-teacher conferences. Once the lines of communication have been established, parents will feel more comfortable communicating with staff regarding more pertinent topics or issues.

Collaboration with the school to ensure the needs of their children are being met is a final recommendation for parents. Parents know their children best. They are their first

teacher and have insights the school may not have. Parents need to share their expectations for school and work collaboratively with the school to set goals for their children. This is important for every child but becomes essential for students with special learning needs. With our ultimate goal being success for every student, collaboration with parents is necessary.

COVID has been detrimental to the relationship between home and school, making improving parental involvement a continued relevant topic for research. Although some of the above recommendations may not be new, I believe schools, including my own, need to look at where they are with regard to parental involvement and work together to increase and improve the contributions by parents. By focusing on the above recommendations, schools and parents can place a renewed emphasis on improving and increasing parental involvement with the goal of student success, not just academic success, but the learning and growth of the whole child.

Future Research

My study examined parental involvement as a general topic rather than its identified components. Future research on the most effective form of parental involvement would be beneficial. As most of the studies reviewed are from more highly populated areas, a future focus should be examining the barriers to parental involvement and applying strategies to decrease these barriers in small, rural areas. Future consideration could be given to reviewing the similarities and differences in parental involvement and engagement among elementary, middle-school, junior-high school, and senior-high school. Continued effort should also be given to the best way to educate teachers in building effective relationships with parents, which, in turn, should assist in increasing parental involvement and engagement.

Personal Reflections

The first assignment we wrote in our first course in this Master's program involved writing our mission statement. As I looked back on the mission statement I created for myself, "Engaging the team. Supporting Student Success," I realized it is accurate and holds true to what I believe. Cranston (2018) stated, "as school communities become increasingly diverse, school leaders need to have a vision of success for all of their students and must be skillful in communication, collaboration, and community building to ensure their visions will come to fruition" (p. 3). The team also includes parents, and to ensure student success I need to ensure staff are working with parents to support their children.

A recurring theme throughout my graduate program has been the importance of building effective relationships. As a leader in my school, I am responsible for assisting in this process. Preston and Barnes (2017) shared, "successful school rural leadership is founded on the healthy establishment and maintenance of relationships. More specifically, strong leadership is about nurturing interpersonal relationships with/among staff members, parents, students, and community stakeholders" (p. 8). As a part of our elective course, we learned about and discussed the importance of effective relationships. It is no coincidence the first competency in the Leadership Quality Standards (LQS) is "Fostering Effective Relationships," the expectation being "a leader builds positive working relationships with members of the school community and local community" (Alberta Government, 2020, p. 3). I have come to realize without effective relationships, there is little to no trust, no productive partnerships, less collaboration and virtually no chance for positive growth and change. "Leadership is about the people - Leaders have a responsibility to develop relationships within the school community that are based on trust, empathy, and respect" (Canales et al., 2008 & Winn et al., 2009, as cited in Ashton & Duncan, 2013, Common Themes section, para. 1). A significant amount of administration time in our school is spent building

relationships with staff, students, parents, and the community. Educators also need to remember the importance of relationships with parents and the contributions they can make to education.

When discussing parental involvement, specific considerations must be given to Indigenous parents. Indigenous students, families and communities still feel the adverse effects of residential schools for “residential schools had a devastating impact on Aboriginal culture and family structures which in turn harmed countless generations and their trust of education as a whole (Gunn et al., 2011, p. 327). Their mistrust of the education system is not surprising (Crooks et al., 2015). The rebuilding of this trust will be essential for progress to be made. "The negative impact that residential schools left on First Nations throughout Canada is indisputable, but changing the future will require a concerted effort by all parties” (Steinhauer, 2019, p. 119). As an educator, I have a role to play in changing the future of education for Indigenous students in my school and community. Stockdale et al. (2013) say, “there is a legacy of residential schools to overcome...schools must create an educational experience in which parents trust and believe” (p. 108). Negative past school experiences may prevent Indigenous parents from actively participating in their child's education (Goulet & Goulet, 2014). “When teachers, students, and families strengthen their ties as We, a sense of belonging is developed, and this underlies success” (Moon & Berger, 2016, p. 8). It is essential schools work to build relationships with Indigenous families to overcome these significant barriers.

I particularly enjoyed our First Nation, Metis and Inuit Issues for School Leaders class. It allowed me to examine my prejudices, assumptions, and biases. I have a lot of learning to do in this area. This course also shed light on building relationships with Indigenous parents. It is impossible to completely comprehend residential and Indian Day schools' residual effects on Indigenous families. As a leader and educator, I need to work to

understand where they are coming from and focus on building positive relationships with the families so they are more comfortable and willing to become involved with the school and the education of their children.

One critical lesson I have learned over the years is the importance of collaboration. As a young educator, I believed my job was to teach my class of students. During my 25-year career in education, there has been a shift from teachers working in isolation and being responsible for their class to collective responsibility for all students. In the last couple of years, our school division, and school, have been working together with Kurtis Hewson from Jigsaw Learning, implementing Collaborative Response in our schools. Collaborative Response is a framework which allows staff to work collaboratively to ensure students' individual needs are met. During our class on evolving concepts in educational administration and leadership, I had the opportunity to explore the topic of collective responsibility and supporting staff in making a conceptual shift. A similar idea could be considered when thinking about the involvement of parents in education. When staff and parents see the benefits of collaboration and collective responsibility, we can work together to support student success.

I was not sure what to expect when I was accepted into the Master of Education program in Educational Leadership. It had been a long time since I took any university courses, and my confidence level was not high. I remember driving home after our first class filled with self-doubt, not sure if this was the program for me or if I was going to be able to be successful. However, with encouragement from those close to me, I decided to take on the challenge of the Master's program, and I am so glad I did! I was comfortable in my role as Vice Principal at a small, rural K-12 school in Northern Alberta. The principal and I were working together to build our team of educators, and we are always looking for ways we can improve and do better for our students. My intention in participating in the Master's program

was to help me improve as a leader, as a Vice Principal and as an Inclusive Education Coach. The process has transformed my thinking and how I look at many aspects of leadership.

When I began this journey three years ago, I was told taking my Master's would change how I think, and it did! The process has allowed me to grow as a person and expand my leadership skills. I look forward to applying what I have learned to improve various aspects of my school, including improved parental involvement.

The role of a leader is very complex and has many aspects I had not considered before. This experience has given me a lot to ponder, and I have many ideas and plans I want to work on and implement moving forward. I appreciated being a part of the Peace River Cohort. I enjoyed collaborating with others, and the experience allowed me to get to know some colleagues I did not know well before. I have learned how to read and write research papers more effectively and enjoyed the opportunity to conduct our small-scale research. The opportunity to read, discuss, and write about educational research and topics of interest has allowed me to build my critical reading, thinking, and writing skills. I feel more comfortable and confident I can continue to do this moving forward to enhance my leadership skills. I end this part of my educational journey with a better sense of what it means to be an effective leader, and I continue to strive to improve my leadership skills.

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Appendix A

Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler Model of Parental Involvement Level 1

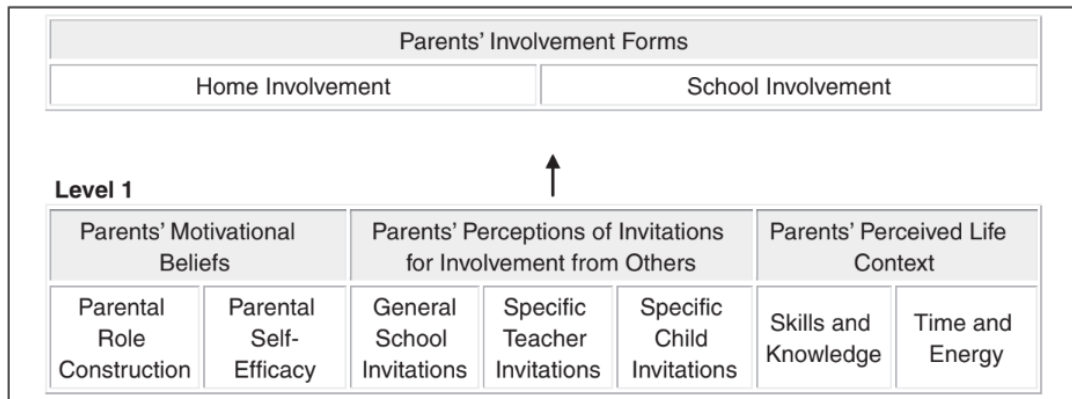


Figure 1. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's revised theoretical model of the parental involvement process, Level 1

Source: Adapted from Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) and Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, and Hoover-Dempsey (2005).

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Appendix B

Interview Schedule

Janice Charchuk
EDPS 509 Interview Schedule

Research Question:

How can parents best support their children, teachers, and school leaders to improve student success?

Interview questions:

1. How would you define student success at school?
2. Can you tell me what parental involvement in education means to you?
3. What has been your experience with parental involvement?
4. In your opinion, what role should parents play in their child's school and education?
5. Tell me about any barriers you believe are preventing parents from being involved in their child's education.
 - a. Can you share ideas about how schools can encourage more parents to become involved with their child's education?
6. From your perspective, how has COVID affected education?
 - b. How has COVID affected the relationship between home (parents) and school?
7. Would you describe what you feel would be the ideal relationship between home and school?
8. Can you describe the ideal relationship between parents and their children to support their learning at home and school?
9. What role do you believe parents play in student success at school?