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A Multiple Case Study of Teacher Perspective on Effective Interventions Used by Family Resource Centers in Elementary Schools to Improve Parental Involvement of Students At Risk

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A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF TEACHER PERSPECTIVE ON EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS USED BY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENTS AT RISK

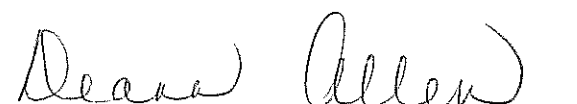
By


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INTERVENTIONS USED BY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS IN ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENTS AT RISK

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for the degree of
Doctorate of Education
May, 2012

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DEDICATION

This, the biggest dream of my life,
is dedicated to the most influential women of my life,
my Nana, my mom, my Meme, and my daughter;
each of you are my SUNSHINE!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my husband Randy and our daughter, Morgan, 11, thank you for your patience and willingness to deal with my erratic emotional state of mind when things didn't go the way I wanted. I appreciate the sacrifices you have made for me through the long years now behind us. A heart-felt thank you to my mother, Annetta King, who I argue with daily to see things my way, but fortunately she gives me the insight to think about things her way too. She has always been by my side every day of this long journey, and unconditionally continues to be there for me whenever I need her.

To my best friend, Michelle, thank you for being there with me every step of the way, and pushing me forward onto the next day. I am glad you were there for me and that you understood my many reasons for wanting to accomplish my dream. You make me smile on my darkest days and laugh in the gloomy weather. Thank you for allowing me to invade your family vacations so many times when you knew that I had to get away just to keep sane.

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critically every day for the rest of my life. Thank you for helping to make me a better person. I truly appreciate all that you have sacrificed to help me accomplish my dream.

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Without each of you this would have only been a dream.

ABSTRACT

Students not having the positive opportunities of an education, often experience negative effects throughout their lives. Educators need to do more to meet the needs of elementary students at risk, and if this can be accomplished the students will receive a 21st Century education that will help students with a global education, which is necessary to their quality of life now and in the future. This is an effort to better understand the interactions family resource centers use to intervene, helping families of students at risk, become involved in schools, and establish a framework that offers a more focused lens through which to view the interventions.

Examining what it means to be at risk may help educational stakeholders understand interventions used by family resource centers to help families of students at risk in rural Kentucky which are not achieving high levels of educational attainment to become involved in their child's school(s). The researcher examines issues that cause family resource centers to intervene in the lives of families with students who are at risk. The study is qualitative in nature and is based upon data from surveys completed by family resource coordinators, teachers, and administrators of currently enrolled elementary school aged children. In addition, data was obtained from family resource center grants, which assessed family involvement in their children at risk education.

NCLB mandates every child reach grade level status on specific subject areas by 2014. Family resource centers are providing interventions for families of students at risk and trying to get parents actively involved in the education of their children. The family resource center is one of the most useful forms of intervention to gain parent involvement and can enhance schools' parent involvement programs. When developing parent

involvement policies, schools, districts and other policy makers should be aware of the different forms of involvement. The family resource center is active in the community network that shares concern and support for individuals at-risk. Family resource centers are hubs of information for the schools and are committed to finding resources for each need of the students and their families.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Background of the Problem

The study examines the perception of teacher toward barriers encountered while attempting to establish parent involvement opportunities with families of students at risk. It examines the nature of the teachers' perceptions and seeks to determine whether the perceptions differ based on schools and according to the kinds of interventions family resource centers utilize regarding the causes of barriers. Participates are drawn from a group of teachers who teach in three different schools that house a family resource center within their building. Over fifty percent of those involved in this study are on free and reduced lunch (Kentucky Department of Education, 2009). This study provides indications of the influence family resource centers can have on students' family-school partnerships at these schools in efforts to close the achievement gap.

It is not possible to identify a single point of origin for family resource centers and the family support movement (McMahon, 2010). The wide constellation of family support efforts have sprung from many roots, each contains principles and strategies that contribute to the family support movement of today (Weissbourd, 1987). In the 1960s, parent involvement became a topic of concern, especially among low-achieving students as a way to improve academic achievement. Traditional family support is an early intervention that shows signs of influence in students at a very early age (Kagan, 1997). Researchers, educators, and parents champion the idea of reciprocal relationships between school and home, as schools push into the 21st Century.

Research conducted for over a decade indicates when schools, families, and communities work together as partners, students benefit. Partnerships between schools, families, and communities create safer school environments, strengthen parenting skills, encourage community service, improve academic skills, and achieve other desired goals that benefit students at all ages and grade levels (Epstein, 1992).

Two National Education Goals are implicit in the notion that family-school partners in prevention in educational failure of children. The two goals:

Goal 1: School readiness: "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn" (p. 8).

Goal 8: Parent participation: "By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children" (p. 36) (National Education Goals Panel, 1999).

The focus shifted to school districts after the federal government placed the certain guidelines on schools. In 1990 Kentucky's Educational Reform Act mandated all schools, where at least 20 percent of the students qualify for free meals under federal rules, establish special centers for children and families. These school-based Kentucky Family Resource and Youth Services Centers were created in an effort to promote the use of resources and give support to families to strengthen the performance and enhance the growth and development of students and their families. Focus on families and on relationship building is an effective and proven way to enhance children's ability to learn and grow.

One reason for the small amounts of research on the influence of the family resource center's ability to provide services to help families of students at risk become more involved in education, could be that Kentucky is one of the only states that provides

funding for the family resource centers to be housed in the schools, and little research has been conducted to determine the involvement of low-income families in the schools that have family resource centers which can assist them. Other states provide similar funded programs to the family resource center, but they are not located in a school setting.

Problem Statement

Today's educational leaders have a challenge on their hands in developing partnerships with families of students at risk in the educational setting. The one item educational leaders can offer students, is an education. The benefit of having students' academic needs met in the classroom and receiving an education; is that it allows students a chance to have a productive life in the future. Those students not having the positive opportunities of an education, often experience negative effects throughout their lives. All educators need to do more to meet the needs of elementary students at risk, and if this can be accomplished the students will receive a 21st Century education that will help students with a global education, which is necessary to their quality of life now and in the future.

21st Century education within the context of core knowledge and instruction are essential skills, students must learn. Critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration require development and understanding among all students for success in today's global world. This new paradigm allows educators to teach students in a rapidly changing world filled with fantastic new problems as well as exciting new possibilities. In order for students to be prepared to navigate in this global society, they must become literate in 21st century literacies. Collaborating with students from around the world in meaningful, real-life projects is a necessary tool for developing these

literacies. Students will learn through collaboration, not competition, they can work together to make the world a better place.

A global education allows young citizens to gain an awareness of the importance of developing an understanding for an open world that respects cultural diversity and is based on common values. Through transformative learning a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thoughts, feelings and actions towards a radical change of interconnectedness and creating possibilities for achieving more equality, social justice, understanding and cooperation amongst young people will begin to emerge. Educators must begin to look for ways to give learners the opportunities and competences to reflect and share their own point of view and role within a global, interconnected society, as well as to understand and discuss complex relationships of common social, ecological, political and economic issues, so as to derive new ways of thinking and acting to awaken them to a greater justice and equity for all.

Parent involvement is an important factor that positively influences a child's education. More and more school are observing the importance of positive parent involvement, and schools are encouraging parents to become involved in the education of their children. However, the problems still remain. A disconnect often remains between educators, parents, and policy makers between what is believed to make up the actual practices and those criteria which meet effective parent involvement.

It is essential to ascertain the extent to which family resource centers aim to foster productive parent involvement, and actually succeeding in fortifying teacher perceptions for partnership challenges they face. Vital is the need to pinpoint affective perceptions of

teachers to partnership problems, and to determine their ideas regarding the sources of barriers.

This study is an effort to better understand the interactions family resource centers use to intervene, helping families of students at risk, become involved in the schools, and to establish a framework that offers a more focused lens through which to view the interventions. Examining what it means to be at risk may help educational stakeholders understand interventions used by family resource centers to help families of students at risk in rural Kentucky which are not achieving high levels of educational attainment to become involved in their child's school(s). The researcher examines issues that cause family resource centers to intervene in the lives of families with students who are at risk.

Framework

Thompson's Model for Student Success is used a lens to delve deeper into the understanding of how Epstein's Parent Involvement Model works with student success. Each pillar of Thompson's Model for Student Success represents an integral part of the whole understanding of people. Cuseo, Fecas, and Thompson (2007) offer a better understanding of this framework. Each pillar represents an element needed for student success and much like a building must be present to offer support. Using this model, the four essential elements work in collaboration with one another to offer a method for success, specifically for students who are at-risk. These elements include the involvement of the student, family, school, and the community; the interrelatedness of the four is crucial. If one part of the structure becomes weakened, the other three must support more weight. If one part of this collaborative model fails, the chances for success are lessened or eliminated.

Johnson, Thompson, and Naugle (2009) suggest that this model and level of understanding can be directly related to the elements needed by teachers to reach students from a variety of backgrounds. These authors state, “how that knowledge is transmitted will be a determining factor as to how this culture is perceived by the student, the community and the family” (p. 181). They offer a lens for teachers to aid in the success of students. In order for any given student to progress academically, emotionally, socially, and physically, all the pillars or components must be understood and addressed. When one understands that if one part fails, student success is hindered and those involved with schooling may better grasp the reasons for students at-risk. The weight of one pillar does not necessarily outweigh the others but must be compensated for to ensure the success of students in this study. Thompson and Luhman (1997) remind readers that regardless of the populations of people researchers are examining, there are similarities to the needs of all people and the four broad categories used as a lens for this study are applicable and warrant an examination.

For an individual to succeed in school, they need support from family, the community itself, and from those involved with schooling—teachers, counselors, principals, and more. The individuals must understand all of these factors work together with one another and ultimately give the individuals support they need to succeed.

The family, community, school and the individual student must be able to focus attention on the changing demographics in society and develop a system where all parts of society work together for the benefit of the child. The family must teach the child that what they do in the classroom each day leads to individual success. The family must also understand that their involvement can help or hold back the process of success for the

child. Students must believe they have the ability to change the world around them. They must feel they have the power to chart the course of their destiny. The community must also believe in its own power to make services available and aid schools and families by working with them to bring positive change. The schools must realize the importance and power they have in changing the community as it stands currently as well as the future.

The four-elements model of student success (Thompson, A. & Cuseo, J. 2012) suggests that students are successful as a result of the involvement of family, community, school and individual student effort. This research relies heavily on the four elements in relation to parent involvement (Figure 1) and suggests that when these institutions operate together and not in isolation from one another, the likelihood of a student academic success significantly increases. On the other hand, the lack of or a deficiency in one of these elements increases the likelihood the student becomes at risk.

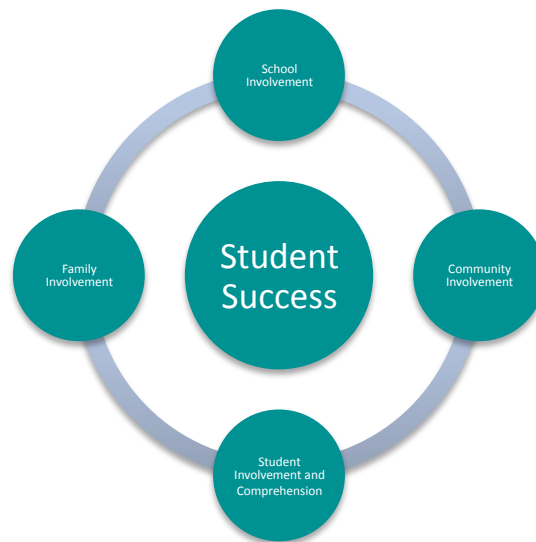


Figure 1: Four Elements of Student Success

Source: Thompson, A. & Cuseo, J. (2012). " Infusing Diversity and Cultural Competence into Teacher Education." Kendall Hunt: Dubuque, IA.

This research focuses on three rural schools in different districts in central Kentucky. One of the three schools is located in the south central Appalachian region of the state. All three schools serve a school population receiving free/reduced lunch of at least 50% or more. The ethnic make-up of each school is relatively the same with the majority of the students being white working class families. All of the schools involved in the study are elementary schools.

Familial Involvement

The first element relates to the importance of family involvement. For the purpose of this research, family is defined as a group of individuals with whom the child resides, who are responsible for the welfare of the child, and who hold “the major responsibility for teaching children about their cultural background, family values, beliefs, manners, and other important social qualities. Families are the primary sources for children to learn values, attitudes, skills, and provide academic support. Extensive research can be found regarding the role of family (Anderson & Limoncelli, 1982). The research highlights a direct correlation between family involvement and student success. This research examined the family variable and its role from the teacher perspective on students at risk. Examples of questions that this research revealed includes:

Community Involvement

The second element is related to the involvement of the community. For the purpose of this study, the community is defined as a group of people who share an environment or area with common beliefs, values, ethnicity, education and social class. Examples of communities include a church, school, learning communities, co-curricular organizations, gangs or work environments (Lyttle-Burns, 2011). Research has argued

that the community effects amount to family background and social class (Solon, Page, & Duncan, 2000). When considered in this context, the influence of family and social dynamics affect the entire community, thus its residents perform at a similar level (Fields & Smith, 1998).

School Involvement

The third element is related to the involvement of the school. Schools are traditionally known for their role in educating students however they receive more than the core content of instruction on a daily basis. Many students do not have a healthy home environment. Schools are often responsible for adding to family and community values and, for many students, replacing them with values that lead to student success (Lyttle-Burns, 2011). “Thus, for many students, the school they attend may be the strongest determining factor in their completing versus dropping out of school” (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007, p. 327).

Student Involvement

The fourth element is related to the involvement of the student. Many students have not experienced success in the academic setting. In order for students to experience success, Cuseo, Fecas and Thompson (2010) state that students should be actively involved in their learning, utilize available resources, and engage in social interaction, collaboration and self- reflection.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to examine teachers’ perceptions towards interventions used by the family resource centers in an effort to break down barriers to create parental involvement opportunities with families of students at risk to close the

achievement gap. Focus is on the attitudes of teachers from three rural schools in Kentucky that have an active family resource center located in their school building.

Kentucky is one of the only states that have turned to family resource centers as a means of intervening in families of students at risk to close the achievement gap in rural Kentucky. Parent involvement has a long-standing history and has been shown to hold myriads of benefits for rural low-income students and for students at risk (Epstein, 1991, 2001). Epstein (2001) states, for example, that parent involvement is especially vital for children from families with backgrounds that differ from that of the schools (p. 315).

Weaknesses in the conceptualization and execution of partnerships as well as misunderstanding regarding the roles and responsibilities of specific stakeholders have led to the failure of many partnerships. Recent attempts in closing the achievement gap in the United States are being made to assist families of students at risk through on-going parent involvement in which parents, school and other stakeholders establish the kind of relationship that can adequately and positively impact children's learning. Many teachers, policy makers, and stakeholders perceive the notion of parent involvement in the education of children as a preventive of educational failure for most children, especially those children at risk. Some strategies attempted to help close the achievement gap are: special education services, individualized learning plans (ILP), response to intervention programs (RtI), mentoring programs, and many others.

One such family-school partnership in Kentucky is the family resource center. The family resource center would be, as Epstein (2001) defines partnership as the, "continuous planning, support, and participation of school personnel, family, and community organizations that directly and positively affect the success of all students'

learning” (p. 317). However, little is known of the family resource center’s influence on families of students at risk, even though there is some knowledge involving families of low-income in their child’s education (Warren et al., 2009; Elish-Piper, 2009; Dearing, 2008).

Focusing on Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence Models (2001) and operationalizing it with the framework of the four elements of student success model (Thompson, A. & Cuseo, J., 2012), this current research address this research question:

Research Question

The study aims at addressing the following question: Do teachers perceive interventions used by family resource centers effective in breaking down barriers to get parents of students at risk involved at school?

All stakeholders will be able to improve policies related to parent involvement when answers to this question are interrupted, and the answers will also allow teachers to express what teachers desire from parents.

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it attempts to understand the involvement of family resource centers in elementary schools in aiding families of students at risk and parent involvement. It is the intent of this study to assist future researchers in understanding in depth the family resource center has as a comprehensive program using interventions to help eliminate failure for children already at risk. The philosophy of such a program is focused on the whole child, a philosophy that embraces several areas. These areas include nutrition, education, social services, physical and mental health and parent involvement. Family resource centers have sustained a commendable record regarding

service to families and students at risk, but it has not been without problems. The need for the family resource center programs continues to provide an avenue to address the needs of the whole child through various components offered by the program with very little funding.

The effects of actual parent involvement have not been closely examined for families of students at risk. Future policy implications specifically relating to parent involvement must focus on the diverse roles of families for the development of successful parent training programs in the future. As seen in Epstein's model, the child remains at the center of parent practices and beliefs of the family as well as remaining in the center of the practices within the school. As a result, programs are able to successfully address the needs of families who in turn increase levels of involvement, which enhance the well being of all children.

Assumptions

The study assumes the data needed for the research is available at the schools and records are complete and easily accessible for review and data collection. The researcher did not identify the rural schools that are the focus of the study. It has been assumed the Division of Family Resource Youth Service Centers (FRYSC) for the Cabinet for Health and Family Services characterizations of these schools are correct.

Key Operational Delimitations

Definitions are based on the literature, and where appropriate, authoritative sources are referenced,

At-risk. Individual(s) that share a number of characteristics, which include low socio-economic backgrounds, diverse family make-ups, geographic characteristic

Community: Lyttle-Burns (2011) defines community as a group of people who share an environment or area with common beliefs, values, ethnicity, education and social class. Examples of communities include a church, school, learning communities, co-curricular organizations, gangs or work environments

Family: Epstein (2001) defines the family as a group of individuals with whom the child resides, who are responsible for the welfare of the child, and who hold “the major responsibility for teaching children about their cultural background, family values, beliefs, manners, and other important social qualities” (p 87).

Family-School Interaction: Family-school interaction is a complex notion that can be conceptualized and studied in different ways, depending on the focus of the research and on the perspective used. It can be analyzed as an outcome or as a predictor for outcomes. It can be studied in terms of quantity or in terms of quality, cross-sectionally or longitudinally. One way to conceptualize family-school interaction is as representing a form of social capital. Social capital is defined as investment in social networks with expected returns (Lin, 1999). Families and school form a social network with embedded resources that can be accessed and mobilized for the benefit of all actors involved, children, parents, and school. Regardless of how family-school interaction is conceptualized and operationalized, it can be an influential factor in children’s and families’ lives and it, therefore, must be granted serious attention.

Family Resource Centers (FRC): According to the law, each family resource center should be located in or accessible to an elementary school in which twenty20 percent or more of the student body is eligible for free school meals.

Each family resource center will develop a plan that promotes identification and coordination of existing resources and makes available (but is not limited to) the following components:

1. Full-time preschool childcare for children two and three years of age;
2. After-school care for children ages 4 through 12, with the childcare being full-time during the summer and on other days when school is not in session;
3. Families in training, consisting of an integrated approach to home visits, group meetings, and the monitoring of child development for new and expectant parents;
4. Parent and child education (PACE) as described in Kentucky Revised Statute 158.360;
5. Support and training for child day-care providers; and health services or referral to health services, or both (State of Kentucky, 1990, p. 13).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): a federal law passed under the George W. Bush administration. NCLB represents legislation that attempts to accomplish standards-based education reform. The law reauthorized federal programs meant to hold primary and secondary schools measurably accountable to higher standards. It also provided more opportunities to parents for school choice and placed a greater emphasis on reading in schools. NCLB is written so that it requires 100 percent of students (including special education students and those from disadvantaged background) within a school to reach the same set of state standards in math and reading by the year 2014.

Parent involvement: One who engages in the social, physical, emotional, and cognitive growth/development of a child.

Partnership: Learning to work together and valuing what each partner can bring to the relationship.

Title I: the largest federal education-funding program. It provides funding for high poverty schools to help students who are behind academically or at risk of falling behind.

Teachers' Perception: Insight or knowledge about parental involvement based on their specific experience.

Organization of the Study

The first chapter is aimed to present the rich background surrounding the efforts to establish parent involvement with families of students at risk through the family resource center and has sought to establish the relevance of this research project. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature surrounding teacher perceptions of interventions used by family resource centers to encourage family involvement of children at risk in rural elementary schools in Kentucky. Chapter three focuses on the study's design and methodology used in the study including the design of the instrument, gathering of the sample, data collection, and data analysis. Chapters four and five present the study's findings and a discussion of those findings, linked to appropriate conclusions and recommendations. Implications of the findings for relevant stakeholders and for future researchers are also presented in these chapters.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This literature review is focuses on examining teachers' perceptions about interventions used by the family resource centers in an effort to create family-school partnership opportunities with families of students at risk to close the achievement gap. It examines the nature of teachers' perceptions and explores whether perceptions differ based on schools and according to the kinds of interventions family resource centers utilize regarding the causes of barriers. It is speculated teacher perception can influence their motivation to persist in attempts to involve families of students at risk in parent involvement. Implications of perception for the sustainability of partnerships, for teacher education and teacher educators, and for policy makers and curriculum developers are explored in this study.

In addition, this chapter presents literature surrounding the issues on the creation of parent involvement with families of students at risk. It begins with a discussion of the importance of parent involvement for increasing the overall academic achievement of students at risk.

Examination of the frameworks explaining families of students at risk of parent non-participation offered in the literature. Special focus focused on Epstein's (2001a, 2001b, 2002) framework on parental involvement stressed the importance of parental involvement in all aspects of the child's education, including involvement at school at different levels of involvement.

A discussion of the implications' of professional educators' perceptions toward particular frameworks of ecological systems and conceptual theories then follow. This is counterbalanced with information from the literature on teacher perception toward families of students at risk.

Since the research adopts the family resource center as the main context of the study, the researcher then looks at partnership efforts that have been executed in rural elementary schools in Kentucky. The researcher conducts a scrutiny of various research studies that act as a testament of the myriads of explanations and reactions towards which educators tend to move toward.

National Perspective

Every student has the potential to succeed at school and in life, however not all students have the same opportunities to help them succeed. There are numerous variables to consider, many of which are beyond the school's control, in determining those students who are either potentially, or actually, at-risk. In fact, some factors can make a student more likely to fail than others. Congress defines a student at risk as one who because of limited English proficiency; poverty, race, geographic location or economic disadvantage faces a greater risk of low educational achievement (Shaw, 1999).

Walk into any elementary school in Kentucky and you are bound to find students at risk falling behind academically, socially and behaviorally in the academic setting. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC, 1990), it is important to identify students at risk at all grade levels so early intervention may take place. Groves (1998), states that in the 1980s while graduation rates generally continued to rise, the consequences of dropping out of school continued to become more profound for students

at risk. There are various reasons students at risk become disengaged from school at such an early age; low self-esteem, poor grades, and low educational aspirations, just to name a few. These problems not only affect our schools but ultimately our society. If the needs of elementary students at-risk can be addressed then combating the increase of the dropout rates among students at risk in the future is possible, and the burden financially to our society is lessened.

Our society has many problems, which affect our citizens these problems often stem from the affects of the lack of education. The problems are usually focused around the quality of education for students at risk. The lack of education affects the standard of life for the student at risk, and ultimately becomes a problem for our society. However, often the problems begin at home with the family being at fault for the continuous cycle of poverty or dropping out of school. Many students, regardless of background, become disengaged when they encounter the impersonal context of secondary schools, (Pellerin, 2005). This is why it is important to be able to identify the early indicators so the student can be helped to avoid failure.

Newmann (1989) stated that approximately 27 percent of high school students in the U.S. drop out before completing the necessary requirements for graduation. Among minority populations, the percentage is considerably higher. Regardless, the social impact of this shocking trend places a considerable strain on our educational system.

During these critical times and the concerns that face every educator, there are drastic revisions needed in response to students with at-risk behaviors in the society of the United States. The changes taking place right in front of our eyes have put the United States at or near the top of the Western countries that have multiple indicators of family

instability and disintegration. Schools are being expected to take the lead in helping to resolve a national crisis in child upbringing, however there is a virtual revolution in educational practices as schools adjust to this new reality.

Several issues are altering the face of education for students at-risk even as the schools struggle to restructure themselves to better meet the needs of all children. It is estimated 10% of school-age students have an identifiable mental health problem that interferes with their normal functions (Long et. al., 2007). Along with the increased number of students at-risk has come the awareness of the deeper and more profound nature of their personal and ecological difficulties. Therefore, schools are reaping the harvest of community poverty, neglect, and abuse. Inappropriate school programs and practices only add to the students' struggle when nurturing schools could contribute to a solution.

There is not enough time, money, resources, trained staff, nor effective programs available to help all of the students at-risk. Treating the deviancy and deficits are no longer effective concepts to help the thousands of students who come to schools around the United States every day with normal developmental problems, situational crises, and internalized chronic problems. Students need to be taught resiliency through support of adults who know how to connect with the students at-risk; creating proactive supportive school programs and develop relationships with these students and their families.

Kentucky Perspective

In Kentucky there are currently 820 Family Resource and Youth Service Centers, and of those 420 serve only elementary schools. When schools create resource centers devoted to parents' needs, they provide a signal that parents are welcome in the building.

These centers typically are places where parents can get information on parenting and school-related issues and can gather informally. In some cases, resource centers sponsor classes or workshops for parents and provide referrals to social service and child care agencies (Johnson, 1993).

Family resource centers must either provide or coordinate with other agencies to offer services such as child care and after-school programs, educational programs for parents and expectant parents, support and training for day-care providers, health and social services, youth-job programs, drug treatment, and mental-health services. Each school or cluster of schools with a center can meet those needs as it sees fit, guided by a locally selected advisory council made up of parents, school employees, students, and representatives of local agencies. The freedom from regulation gives boards the latitude to pick directors with good "people" skills rather than specific professional credentials. Many centers attract parents by sponsoring activities that range from dances and outings to award-and-incentive programs. Then they try to deepen parent involvement through classes on child rearing and by helping parents earn high-school-equivalency diplomas.

Family resource centers can be most effective when principals treat them as an integral part of the school. School leaders have had to learn that centers must be able to act quickly and spend money on things that affect overall family well-being, from diapers, heating bills, and food to a social gathering to bring isolated parents together. Much of the research literature examines the relationships between parent involvement and a child's educational success assesses parent involvement through the investigation of one particular measure, such as the number of parents that volunteer, parents attendance at meetings, or parent-teacher conferences (Baker & Soden, 1997). Other

studies use measures with a few closed-ended questions that target a particular aspect of parent involvement, but often the focus is on the number of times a parent participates in a given activity (Griffith, 1996; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). The programs for families of students at risk have embraced parent training and other family support, which provides emotional sustenance, information, and other assistance to families. The programs embedded in schools allow for families to learn and grow together through this process, and families can be involved to provide successful support to their children.

Teacher Perspective

There is a dearth of literature on a comprehensive picture of the teaching role with students at-risk (Morse, 1985). Teaching students at-risk weakens the very core of a teacher's energy and is a major contributor to professional fatigue. The new and growing practice of inclusion only increases this stress. Further, the number and severity of students at-risk continues to increase, reflecting new levels of poverty and family disintegration. Many teachers feel helpless to do anything significant for these students who have overwhelming life situations. There should be multiple community services available for students at-risk and their families, but this is clearly not the case in many schools. As a result, the teacher remains the central figure for restorative possibilities.

Parent Involvement and Student Success

The following quote by Sloane (1991) sums up the influence of families on children's learning well: "It is now well accepted that the home plays an important role in children's learning and achievement. Some children learn values, attitudes, skills, and behaviors in the home that prepare them well for the task of school (p. 161). Jones

(2001) traces the root of influence on achievement back to past interactions between family members and the school, and makes specific reference to parent immunity or hopelessness resulting from repeated cycles of failure in families.

Moles (1992) focused on attitudinal influence, such as psychological and cultural differences, and interactional influences, such as the low rate of contact, limited skills and knowledge on which to build collaborations, and restricted opportunities for meaningful dialogue.

Differences in values held by schools and families may be common. Cultural mismatches occur when values held sacred in one culture are misunderstood or invalidated in another. Taking different perspectives is important for parents and school personnel to entertain the premise that multiple, effective child management strategies exist (Delpit, 1995).

Hoover-Dempsey and her colleagues (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005) developed and tested a model for parent involvement from a psychological perspective. According to the authors, both the decision to get involved and the actual behavior (choice of parent involvement types and then the involvement itself) are influenced by three sets of factors: first, they are affected by (a) parents' motivational beliefs, represented by perceived parental role construct and perceived parental self-efficacy in helping the child succeed in school. If parents believe that they have an important role and that their actions fulfill a normal parental role, then they are more likely to be involved in their child's education. The role construct is further conceptualized as having three types: *parent-focused*, in which parents believe and act as if they are primarily responsible for their child's

education; *school focused*, in which parents believe that the school is ultimately responsible for their child's education; and *partnership focused*, where the responsibilities are truly shared (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995); second, the decisions and behaviors are influenced by (b) parents' perceptions of opportunities, invitations, and demands from the school or from their own children; and, third, (c) the parents' life context, such as time and energy. Also, the educational expectations that the parents have for their children play an important role in influencing parent involvement at school.

It is not the school practices in themselves that are the most important influence on parent involvement; rather, more significant are the parents' perceptions of school practices for stimulating parent involvement with the school (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Smith et al., 1997).

Family Support Programs

Society in America has long recognized that parents have the primary responsibility in decision making for their children. Public policy around the nation is concerned with "safeguarding family authority". These policies have lead to more specific programs to support parents. With the changing demographics of the family, there is a movement to focus on the needs of families. There is a powerful push for schools to get parents involved in the education of their children.

In rural Central Valley, California the family resource centers (FRC) offer opportunities to engage families who might not otherwise come to their sites and provide entrepreneurial models and job training opportunities to their program participants (Nock, 2008). The small community of Mecca lies in the interior desert of the Coachella Valley.

The Mecca Family and Farmworkers Service Center (FFC) were established as a result of the radical changes that settlement has had on the face of rural California. The FFC is operated by the Riverside County Department of Social Services, and has developed relationships with service providers to bring services directly to the community (Bry & Albright, 2008). United Families, a family resource center ran by Hamilton City, as received funding from the Rural Community Assistance Corporation to provide stipends to parent volunteers who teach workshops, provide peer mentoring, and contribute to building their community (Zoppi, 2008).

Another such program is the Black Ministry Council of New Jersey and the New Jersey Educators' Association have partnered together to implement a project entitled FAST (Families and Schools Together) Work for Children to increase parent involvement across all grade levels (Rich, 1987). In this model, churches in the African American community are target points for families at risk to become involved. Since churches attendance is large within African American communities, the church is the advocate for stressing the importance of these families to become involved.

In Minnesota, the Early Childhood Family Education Program began in 1975 and is operated by local school districts. The program provides a variety of programs aimed to enhance the competence of parents in nurturing the development of their children.

In 1985, Missouri began Parents as Teachers, has been in operation throughout school systems around the state. The program offers information and guidance to parents before children are born up until the child's third birthday.

Alaska Onward to Excellence & Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative is a program adopted by villages and school districts striving to create educational partnerships

between schools and the communities they served. The program integrated the indigenous knowledge system and the formal education system. The initiatives were implemented in rural low-income Alaskan communities. School districts and village schools worked closely with community stakeholders (parents, elders, other community members and students) to establish a mission and student learning outcomes.

School Involvement and Student Success

Educators and policy makers widely support the idea that parent involvement is critical in the role of child's education. Student success in schools has been directly linked to parental support. However, many states and school districts lack the support and budgets to improve current parent involvement practices. The advances made at the federal, state, and community levels on charges with helping disadvantaged families and communities succeed must capitalize on new opportunities despite budget shortfalls. It is more critical now than ever in the current economic downturn to use the information they have to improve the well-being of those children and families most in need. In Appalachia, when poor families' economic outlook improves, they often move away. Federal policy regarding rural workers and their communities has been based on the experience of Appalachian communities (Elizabeth, 2008). There appears to be a dramatic increase in parent involvement in the past decade, and continued emphasis upon family involvement from state and federal levels in early education programs for children with disabilities and those who are at-risk (Ortiz, Stile, & Brown, 1999).

Many federal programs have been developed to provide services to students at risk and their families. Another program that is a federal initiative is Chapter I of Title I, which is a family-centered education program funds local effort to improve the

educational opportunities for the nation's children and adults by integrating early childhood education and adult education for parents into a unified family-centered literacy program (Gestwicki, 2009, p. 137).

Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 is a law that requires parent participation in planning with professionals to develop an individualized education program. The 1986 Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments require a focus on the family for delivery of services. These provisions are continued in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act in 1990 and the Amendments of 1997.

Federal legislative efforts, notably the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1993, and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, highlight most of these same plans of action as important directions for schools to pursue relative to their student populations at-risk. As researchers have struggled to definitively define the construct of parent involvement, the federal government has developed a definition as a part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), this definition is included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) under the guidance of NCLB. In its 2004 publication, *Parental Involvement: Action Guide for Parents and Communities*, the federal government stated parental involvement is defined as a meaningful, two-way communication involving student academic learning and other school activities. With these guidelines in place by the federal government, the focus has shifted to local school districts. Each district and school that receives Title I money is required to develop a written parent involvement policy. As these policies have been developed, schools have searched for ways to carry out the government's wishes while building on already existing relationships within the

school and the district. For this reason, school systems and individual schools have attempted to work closely with parents to develop strong involvement policies to help improve learning in the classroom.

State-funded family support initiatives have also sprung up all over the country in many states. In an article entitled “Parent Involvement in the states: How firm is the commitment?” the legitimization of policies and guidelines regarding parent involvement is seen as the role of state level educators (Nardine & Morris, 1991). In many states, clear information regarding parent involvement initiatives remain vague and continue to center around a few activities, but state education agencies still offer little financial support for the programs.

Individual schools may be limited by their financial and staff resources in engaging parents in their programs and activities. While many states have recently passed laws on different aspects of family involvement in education, some have developed family partnership programs with schools that include small grants for new activities, home/school coordinators, family resource rooms, and other innovations (Epstein, 1991). This in turn, impacts the successful delivery of the programs due to the lack of financial support.

The Family Resource Coalition of America is a national grassroots organization that offers information, support, advice, and education to families. In Texas, AVANCE Family Support and Education Program offers parents a support program to Mexican-American families with young children. Giant Step in New York is a program offering health and educational services. Family Focus is a program in Illinois that operates a number of drop-in centers in ethnically and socioeconomically low neighborhoods.

Cities and communities have also developed various kinds of programs that offer support and education to parents in efforts to get parents involved in their child's education.

Recently, school districts are beginning to provide services to parents. The support for families as extended family just may be the newest role for educational institutions. However, problems still remain. While the government has a definition of parental involvement and educators have developed involvement policies, there often remains a disconnection between what educators and parents believe.

Rural Education Issues and Dilemmas

According to the Rural School and Community Trust, more people live in rural American now than did 1950. Even by the U.S. Census Bureau's most stringent definition of rural: open country and settlements with communities of 2,500 or few residents, almost one-third of the country's schools are in rural areas (Letters to the Next President, 2004). As stated by DeYoung (1995), "Rural American schools still educate almost 28 percent of the nation's children, but only educational historians and rural sociologists have paid much attention to issues and dynamics of such places" (p. 168). Rural school children are more likely to face failure because of crime, substance abuse, parental neglect or other factors than city or suburban kids. Mitgang (1990) suggests that the social and economic strains facing rural schoolchildren are every bit as bad, perhaps worse, as those facing city youth.

A significant difference between principals of rural schools and their urban and suburban counterparts is that the demands of life in small rural communities create unconventional circumstances for principals. The contextual differences encountered by

principals of small rural schools create either additional leadership challenges to those experienced elsewhere or challenges that are intensified in impact. The old saying, “One-size-fits-all” does not fit with the educational policies and practices, and often puts rural school districts at a disadvantage. Because each rural situation is unique, the approach cannot be a “one-size-fits-all” approach to either rural education or to the preparation of leaders for rural schools. However, consequential challenges are generating new distinctive rural leadership responses and collaboratively derived outcomes.

Rural leaders face unique challenges every day, and this paper addresses these challenges and ways school leaders can work toward breaking down these barriers leading the staff through the changes that are needed for improvement of student achievement and learning.

The Value of Parent Involvement for Families of Students At Risk

The idea of parent involvement is not a new concept. For decades paradigms have shifted with regards to involvement, and in the 21st century, active parents are considered to be a vital component of education by teachers and administrators alike. In the 1940s, attempts to involve parents focused on PTA attendance, homework monitoring, and signing homework and report cards to acknowledge the students had shown them to their parents. Parents were also called upon as fundraisers for the schools, helping to supplement government funding.

In the mid to late 1960s, policy-makers began to turn their attention to ways to improve academic achievement, and parent involvement became a topic of concern, especially among low-achieving students. As the accountability movement of the 1980s

gained strength, parents were asked to help oversee not only the progress of their children but of their school as a whole (Posnick-Goodson, 2005).

Some researchers have studied parent involvement and its positive effects on education for many years. Joyce Epstein has championed the importance of parent involvement, but she went beyond normal ideas and discussed the premise stating involvement should go beyond school and home, inviting a partnership between homes, schools, and communities. With over 100 publications, many focusing on school and family relationships, her focus have been on schools, families, and communities partnering in reciprocal ways to raise academic achievement and student success. Her research findings led her to draw four conclusions about parental involvement: student success should drive involvement, involvement should be present throughout the entirety of a child's education, involvement is a process, not a single event, and parent involvement is not a substitute for quality education programs offered by schools (Epstein, 1990).

The child's first place of contact with the world is the family, and initially the child's first teacher. Educators value family involvement, and there has been an incredible amount of research conducted over the past several decades. Over 120 studies have described the relationship between family influences and student learning by reporting significant, positive correlations (Christenson, S. & Sheridan, M., 2001). 89 percent of business executives identified lack of parent involvement as the biggest obstacle to school reform (Strong Families, Strong Schools, 1994). In a survey conducted by Connors and Epstein (1994), 50 percent of the students indicated they

wanted their parents to be more involved. The parental roles continue to impact on children's lifestyles, perhaps throughout life.

The degree of continuity across home and school is critical for the approach or specific strategies used to create a constructive family-school relationship. Epstein (1997) states that research prove over and over again that when parents are involved, not only is children's performance enhanced, but also they have more positive attitudes about school. The participation and active involvement of the parent in the school is perceived and appreciated by the child who can derive from it a sense of security besides seeing it as a model and incentive for his/her own personal growth (Spaggiari, 1998).

“Parent involvement” is an all-purpose term used to describe all manner of parent-program interactions: policy-making, parent education, fund raising, volunteering time, and even the simple exchange of information of various sorts with staff (Pettygrove & Greenman, 1984).

A growing body of research suggests that meaningful engagement of families in their children's early learning supports school readiness and later academic success (Henrich & Gadaire, 2008; Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006). Family engagement is often considered in union with children's participation in early childhood education programs. In 2005, 60 percent of children under age six spent some time in non-parental care arrangements: 62 percent of white children, 69 percent of black children, and 49 percent of Hispanic children were in such programs (Iruka & Carver, 2006). As a means to supporting family engagement and children's learning, it is crucial that programs implement strategies for developing partnerships with families (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). These strategies should be appropriate for the diverse population programs serve

and reflect a commitment to outreach (Colombo, 2006; Crawford & Zygoris-Coe, 2006).

The work of Epstein (1985, 1990, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Epstein & Connors, 1992; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein & Lee, 1995), whose comprehensive theoretical framework and research agenda have emphasized this concept: “the nation’s schools must improve education for all children, but schools cannot do this alone. More is accomplished if schools, families, and communities work together to promote successful students” (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2008). The author develops a framework of six major types of involvement that “helps educators develop more comprehensive programs of school and family partnerships and also helps researchers locate their questions and results in ways that inform and improve practices” (Epstein, 2001, p. 408).

In 2003, the U.S. Department of Education released an updated parent involvement study that yielded notable results. When asked about volunteerism, 38% of parents with children in assigned public schools indicated they had volunteered in their child’s school. This compares to volunteerism rates of 70 percent and 63 percent respectively for parents of children in church based or non-church based private schools. Involvement rates were also tied to the level of education of the parents. With regards to attendance at school meetings, 93 percent of parents who had attended college, graduate schools, or professional schools indicated they had attended school meetings while only 70 percent of parents who had completed less than high school indicated attendance at school meetings. Of high school graduates surveyed, 84 percent indicated they had attended a school meeting.

The 2003 report went on to discuss the types of involvement in which parents were involved. In kindergarten through grade twelve, 95 percent of parents responded they had assisted with homework, and 85 percent of the parents reported an adult in the household was responsible for checking homework when it was complete. As with attendance at school meetings, education levels of parents also correlated with homework practices. While 90 percent of all responses indicated they had a place set aside in their homes for homework to be completed, there was a noteworthy gap between parents with less than a high school diploma (80%) and parents with high school diplomas (90%), college degrees (89%), and graduate school degrees (92%).

Another type of parent involvement exists where the program provides some sort of assistance to the parent or other family member. These services generally include job training, counseling or support groups, medical and nutritional care, as well as providing access to community and government resources (White, Taylor & Moss, 1992).

One model of parental involvement relies on the use of a number of entry points particularly for children at risk (Heleen, 1998). This model proposes non-directional participation by using a number of entry points that are family appropriate. From the point of entry, families become involved in their children's education and involvement increases through various stages.

Creation of Parent Involvement with Families of Students At Risk

Each child comes to school with different experiences and the influences of parenting, the family and the home vary across society. Children growing up in different societal experiences live very different lives and these experiences clearly affect their

lives in school. There is evidence of students at risk experiencing low educational attainment, social and behavioral failures in the educational system.

In defining the roles of family in the educational attainment of their youth, Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey (1997) investigated three factors including stressful family changes, parents' attitudes, and parents' socialization practices. These authors suggest that these three measures "were found to influence dropouts independent of socio-demographic factors" (p. 87). These factors account for much of the difference between students who drop out and those who do not.

Regarding parents' attitudes, Caspi (2000) makes a powerful statement in the title of an article, "The Child is the Father of the Man." The discussion surrounding this profound statement is related to the detrimental impact of parents who dropped out of school and their efforts to raise children. This issue becomes even more daunting in rural areas where family and culture historically involve low levels of educational attainment (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009). As families pass along values and attitudes, many youth confess to experiencing a psychosocial disengagement process. This development occurs during the beginning years of school and continues as an individual begins to evolve into the environment (Sameroff & Fiese, 1990). Specific to rural areas, where a sense of place trumps leaving to further one's education, this attitude can be directly related to high dropout rates. Rather than leave home, some families encourage their offspring to stay in the area, signaling a low value of educational attainment.

Moll (1992) suggests that in order for an optimal relationship to occur between home and school, these two settings must be connected and effective as these are the two

places in which youngsters spend their time. School curriculum and practices need to be more culturally responsive to the learners, linking family and school together via the individual. Family involvement is crucial and should be reciprocated by the school in order to encourage school success. Often that link is broken, encouraging high school dropouts (Cairney, 2000). Cairney also states that, “there is a fine line between acknowledging a community’s diversity and seeking to make its families conform to school expectations for learning” (p. 5).

Families remain the central element of contemporary life. According to the 2000 Census report, more than 30 percent of children in the United States live in families headed by single parents, divorced, widowed, or never married. Family remains to have the greatest impact on the academics, behavior and social development and future of children.

Students at risk living in non-traditional family structures exhibit poor adjustment, as indicated by aggressive and antisocial behavior, conduct disorders, communication difficulties, adjustment problems, poor self-concept, high school dropout rates, sexual activity, drug abuse and alcoholism (Elbedour et. all, 2002). Students at risk have poor school attendance and tardiness. Students growing up without their own married parents are at higher rates of risk of stress, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem and can significantly reduce their ability to focus and achieve in school. The number of children in non-traditional family structures continues to rise, despite the higher risk of behavioral problems associated with nontraditional family structures.

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in non-traditional family structures continue to rise, despite the higher risk of behavioral problems associated with nontraditional family structures.

Parent Involvement: Increasing Academic Achievement of Students At Risk

Past research shows school-related parent involvement, including parent involvement at school, can have positive outcomes for children, especially in the academic realm, children whose parents are involved in their education do better in school. The trend in today's public discourse is toward a partnership type of relationship between school and family, in which the school and the family share an equal responsibility for academic education of the children. Parental involvement in education is encouraged, but should not be considered as the key factor for school success.

Fan and Chen (2001) performed a meta-analysis of the quantitative literature available on parental involvement. Their study found a meaningful relationship between parent involvement and academic achievement, but they found the strongest relationship existed between parental expectations and achievement. The study mirrored others (Fan, 2001; Trivette & Anderson, 1995) that have shown parental aspirations and expectations have a stronger relationship with achievement than other indicators normally associated with parental involvement such as supervision at home.

When parents have high expectations, children do better. This relationship holds up even when factors such as socioeconomic status are taken into consideration. When families expect their children to do well in school, they are usually not left disappointed (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996). Research has also shown the most accurate predictor of a child's academic achievement is the extent to which the child's family creates an

environment where learning is encouraged, communicates high, but reasonable expectations, and becomes involved in the school and the community (Ngeow, 1999).

Frameworks for Non-Participating Families

The current frameworks for parent involvement no longer assume that schools are the sole components in a child's education. Through collaboration of schools and families with mediating agencies (family resource centers) there is a sense of shared responsibility in the education of all children. Recently, researchers have tended to focus on ecological perspectives regarding discontinuities between home and school spheres (deCarvalho, 2001).

Ecological Systems Theory

The ecological view is the encompassing theoretical framework for this study. Numerous authors have routinely used it for studying the family-school interaction, either referenced directly or just implied as an unspoken assumption. The main characteristic of an ecological model is that it is composed of a series of systems existing at different levels of organization and complexity that interact with each other: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). In our studies, the systems that interact are the child, the family, and the school (FRC). The interactions are family-child, family-school, and school child. If the model is centered on the child, as it should be given that the child is the main beneficiary of the both the schooling (FRC) and the family-school interaction, these systemic interactions represent, at minimum, two microsystems and one mesosystem. The child resides in two microsystems, the family and the school, whereas the interaction between the child's family and the school represents the mesosystem.

Using an ecological approach for studying family-school interaction is justifiable theoretically. One can study the family-school interaction purely from an ecological perspective. It sets the stage for understanding a phenomenon but does not explain the details. This position is rightly so, for Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is a large, encompassing theory that can be applied to a great number of particular situations. The particulars of each situation, though, need to be addressed with more specific theoretical approaches. The ecological model speaks of interactions among the systems, family and family resource centers in this case, but it does not specify what type of interactions happen and when, how they happen and why, or what are the particular factors influencing these interactions. In order to better understand the intricacies of the interaction between the family and the family resource centers, this research builds on a set of theories of capital.

Cultural capital explanations examine the harmony or lack thereof between the two spheres and suggest that the operations of schools are at variance with the lifestyles and dispositions of low-income families and the school operations, in fact, privilege the already privileged (Lareau & Weininger, 2003).

Capital Theories

The term capital has been used for some time, described, conceptualized, investigated, and applied in different fields. Capital is defined, however, not only in a strictly economic sense but also in a larger, social sense, as an asset that requires an investment of resources in order to be created and which, in turn, can be used to accrue benefits.

Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the preconditions for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as *economic capital*, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and can be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; as *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and as *social capital*, made up of social obligations (“connections”) (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 244)

In other words, capital is something that one has to invest and that can be used to obtain benefits. In a short and comprehensive definition, capital is investable, convertible resources.

The theories of capital have already been used by other scholars through study of the child and the family in the educational context (Dumais, 2005; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lareau & Shumar, 1996; Lee, 2006; McNeal, 1999; Reay, 1999, 2000, 2004). The theories of capital can explain the inequalities in the inputs, interactions, and outcomes of the educational system related both to children at risk and their peers.

Epstein developed the most widespread concept of parent involvement in education (Epstein, 1985, 1990, 2001a, 2001b, 2002; Epstein & Connors, 1992; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Epstein & Lee, 1995). It is composed of six categories of involvement that are not hierarchical in nature but, nevertheless, represent multiple levels, overlapping, locus and intensity of involvement. Epstein (1995) identified six areas of parental involvement in their children’s academic activities: (a) parenting, (b)

communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision-making, and (f) collaborating with the community. Epstein (1997) discussed how children learn and grow through three overlapping spheres of influence: family, school and community. These three spheres must perform partnerships to best meet the needs of the child.

Epstein's Framework: Parental Involvement

It seems important to study parent involvement from the perspective of capital theory embedded in ecological theory because parent involvement has strong support from the educational policy and literature. Numerous studies have found that parental involvement in the child's education at school, for a number of outcomes, especially for academic achievement (Barnard, 2004; Christenson, 2004; Epstein, 2001c; K. Hoover-Dempsey & Sander, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Jeynes, 2003, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005).

Epstein's (2001a, 2001b, 2002) framework on parental involvement stressed the importance of parental involvement in all aspects of the child's education, including involvement at school at different levels of involvement. Epstein recommended detailed strategies that educators can use for helping parents to become more involved with their school. A comprehensive literature review conducted by Henderson and Mapp (2002) yielded a similar conclusion, noting that one of the important factors in predicting school success is parent involvement at school: "The evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not only in school, but also throughout life (Henderson & Berla, 1994, p. 1). Educational policies follow this trend, strongly encouraging parent involvement in school (National Educational Goals, 2000; No Child Left Behind, 2001).

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence External Model is one model which integrates these influences throughout a child's life, can be found in Figure 2.

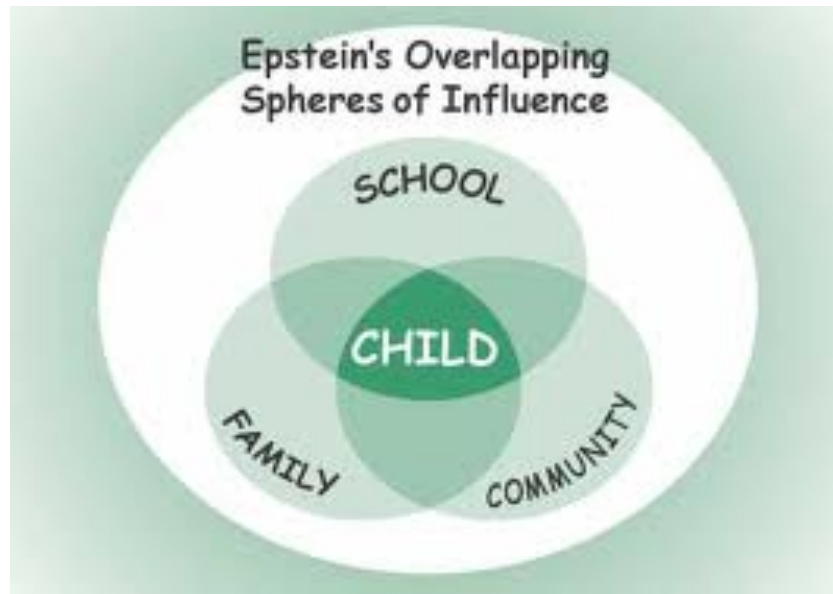


Figure 2: Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence External Model

Source: Epstein, J.L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

This model is based upon community, family and school partnerships, and each of these components overlap when a child is attending school, living at home, and engaging in some type of community service (Epstein, 2001). The model reflects a constant partnership responding to the types of parent involvement throughout the stages of a child's education. The model demonstrates the greatest overlap with family and school, especially during the elementary years. Stronger parent involvement usually occurs during the early years of education when the parents are involved in interacting continuously with the schools.

Epstein's External Model keeps the focus around the student and the partnerships that will help the student become successful in school. Often times there is a strong disconnect with the family, therefore, the Family Resource Center can be used as a bridge by helping the student (child) have a voice as to the needs in the partnership. The student should be able to come to the Family Resource Center to ask for help, and the Family Resource Center should be able to come to the student to offer help.

The internal model of Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Internal Model represents the relationships and influences separately existing with the family and formal organizations of the school, see Figure 3.

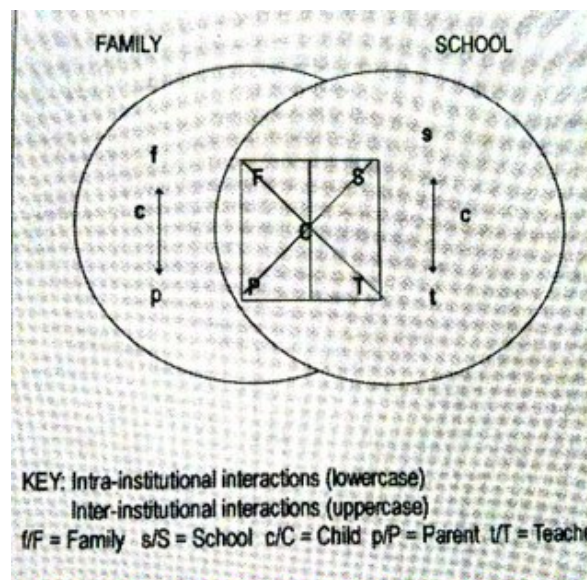


Figure 3: Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Internal Model

Source: Kaminski, R.W. (2011). Increasing parent involvement via the school, family, and community partnership model. Analysis of Teaching and Learning, Class Lecture, University of Oregon.

The intra-institutional relationships exist between the parent and child within the force of the family, and the relationships/influences within the school occur between

teacher and child. In contrast to these relationships are the inter-institutional relationships involving interactions between school and family as well as parent, teachers, and children.

Despite its wide acceptance, Epstein’s model does have limitations. Some (Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000) have pointed out Epstein’s model places the onus on school-initiated behaviors rather than parent-initiated behaviors, however, Epstein’s work is highly regarded and cited throughout the sea of literature on parental involvement. Her Framework for Six Types of Parental Involvement (Figure 4) have become gospel in many school systems across the country, and it is important to understand what these types of involvement are and the challenges that possibly stymie their implementation.

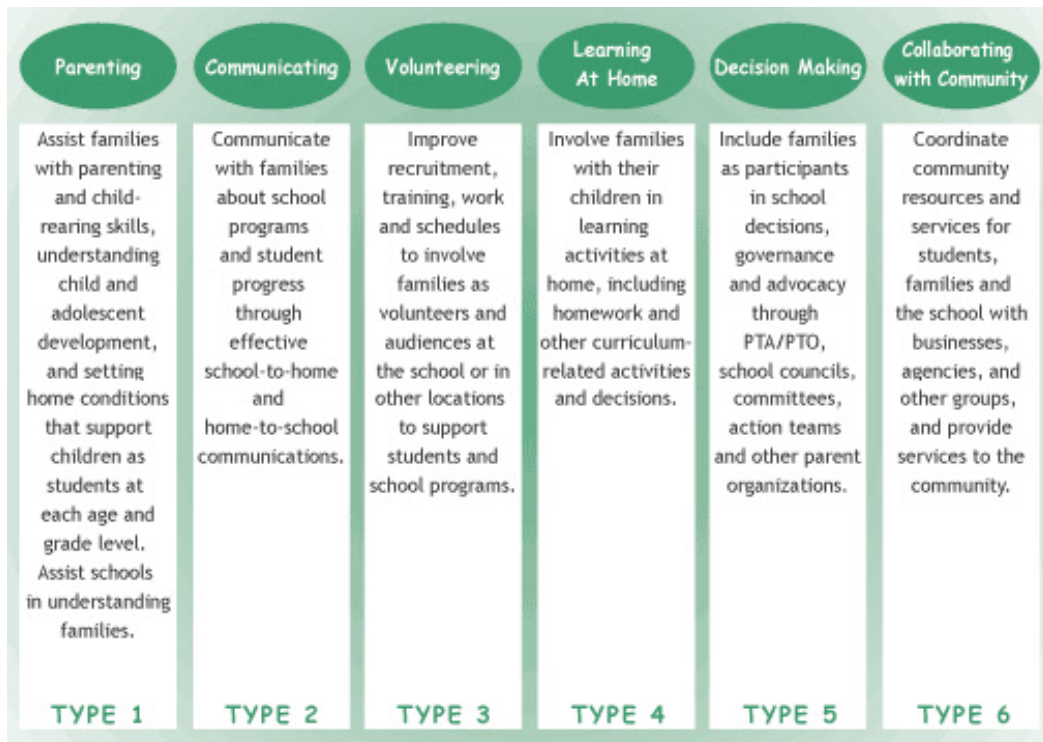


Figure 4: Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement

Source: Epstein, J.L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Teacher Perceptions of Families of Students At Risk

The use of Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence Model is an appropriate model when examining the involvement/partnerships between schools, which provide services to children at risk and their families. Specifically, as it relates to family resource centers, the use of Epstein's Model reinforces the relationships, influences, and types of practices, which result from the involvement of services of family resource centers, schools, and children at risk and their families. Furthermore, this model allows for the examination of the types of influences and practices, which occur between family resource centers, schools, and children at risk and their families.

Teacher Perception of Parent Involvement

More than 80 percent of new teachers say in order to be effective, they must be able to work well with parents. However, they also indicate communicating with and involving parents is typically the greatest challenge they face (Jacobson, 2005).

Traditional Beliefs Affect Perceptions

Teachers, much like parents, often have their beliefs about parent involvement shaped by their past and present experiences. Many teachers fall into the trap of complacently using the historical, teacher-dominant family involvement paradigm where the teacher is in control of decisions being made instead of fostering a partnership with parents (Comer, 2001). The school culture also impacts teacher beliefs on involvement. If a school operates with a sense of isolationism, teachers may adopt this idea and operate on an island, avoiding parental contact. As parents respond by not being involved, a vicious cycle can ensue in which neither parents nor teachers take an active communication role (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). In some cases, teacher perceptions

of involvement are also affected by ongoing experiences. Negative experiences can foster a stereotype of what parent involvement is, and this can lead to teachers being less enthusiastic about including parents in the educational process.

Researchers argue the traditional, teacher-dominated paradigm needs to change (Comer, 2001; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). The traditional belief does not account for differences in parents and family contexts. A new belief system should be adopted which recognizes cultural differences existing within many communities, and as school populations become more diverse, more attention must be given to ways in which involvement strategies can become more individualized to allow for more parents to be involved. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) believe “employing a traditional definition of parent involvement serves to promote prejudices and further marginalize children and families as a whole” (p. 189). They also argue for several key elements of empowerment: focusing on family and child strengths, valuing different forms of involvement, and trust building through collaborative home and school relationships.

Research on Teacher Perceptions of Parent Involvement

Barge and Loges (2003) found teacher responses tended to fall into one of four themes: “communication with teachers, participation in the child’s school and the child’s life in general, normal parenting duties including supervision of the child, and discipline, particularly support for punishment administered by the school” (p. 153). Teachers characterized the theme of communication as parents initiating contact with teachers and keeping an open line of communication with their child. Teachers also believe communication leads to higher expectations, further enhancing the involvement of the parents. Participation similar to that of communication, but the teachers defined

participation as being more about action, not just communication. Teachers saw this as an area where teachers discussed activities such as monitoring homework and academic progress.

Baker (1997) conducted a similar qualitative study involving 87 teachers within 14 focus groups. Her findings indicated teachers were most concerned with support, communication, parental insight, homework help, and expectations. Baker reported, “At the most general level teachers wanted parents to support them in their efforts to educate their children. They spoke very strongly about how they asked parents to support them as professionals who have their child’s best interest at heart” (p. 157). The teachers felt strongly in their belief the children and the children's education should be central to any involvement. For the teachers who were surveyed, homework help was the most popular form of requested involvement. Teachers often mention open communication as an important aspect of parental involvement.

In a longitudinal study conducted over two years, Reynolds (1992) collected data from parents, teachers, and students regarding perceptions of parental involvement, primarily focusing on students from low-income or minority families. He found teacher perceptions of parental involvement had the highest correlation with student achievement while parent and student perceptions were also correlated with achievement.

A 1995 study (Pryor) teachers demonstrated similar findings. Interestingly, over half of the teachers surveyed focused on what schools and teachers could do to better involve parents. Some feel more administrative support is needed to improve involvement. Ideas such as more time for communication, and improved leadership are mentioned as ways administrators could help increase positive parental involvement. The

teachers also indicate parents should be more concerned about the after school activities, not just schoolwork. Pryor summarized by stating, “Teachers are eager for greater involvement, but feel frustrated by the effects of divorce on families and overwhelmed by the expectation that schools should initiate activities to solve students’ problems with motivation and achievement” (p. 418).

Implications of Teacher Perceptions

According to Molnar (1998), barriers to parental involvement in schools may be grouped into three main categories. *Human barriers* refer to barriers that arise when a party envisions “threats to one’s self esteem, such as the fear of criticism, fear of failure or of each other’s differences” (p. 3). *Communication barriers* encompass cultural dissonance as well as conflicts in values emanating from language and cultural differences between families and schools. *External forces*, like the value expressive function, refer to lifestyles problems, employment conflicts, personal problems, childcare issues, lack of time, administrative policies, and unclear roles” (Molnar, 1998:3). These barriers are created by teachers and parents, and over the last few years many theories have been advanced regarding possible reasons for these barriers and how best to break them down.

Given a list of concerns that might impede parent involvement in schools, the barrier named by the highest percentage of schools is lack of time on the part of parents (87 percent). Lack of time on the part of school staff creates barriers for 56 percent of schools, and 48 percent indicate that lack of staff training in working with parents was a significant barrier. 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 are considered barriers in a higher percentage of schools with poverty concentrations and minority enrollments of 50 percent or more than in schools low on these characteristics (US Department of Education, 1998).

Summary

This literature review explores the theoretical foundations and research on parent involvement and identifies and discusses studies that examine parent involvement of students at-risk. The effect of parental involvement and how it contributes to the academic achievement gap of students is undeniable. Research suggests that the broad definition of parent involvement includes multiple dimensions including emotional, social, and school-related learning activities. Parents' ability to be involved is further influenced by social-contextual factors, such as economic hardship. Consequently, the assets or lack of assets their parents provide affects the levels of support children receive. The importance of effective and collaborative partnerships between parents, teachers and administrators is the key.

Epstein's (1987) theory of overlapping spheres of influence emphasizes the importance of schools, families, and communities working together to meet the needs of children. The theory integrates educational, sociological, and psychological perspectives, as well as research on the effects of family, school, and community environments on educational outcomes. The relative relationship between these institutions is determined by the attitudes and practices of individuals within each context. Social networks are strengthened and social capital is increased when partnership activities are implemented that enable families, educators, and community members to work cooperatively around children's growth and development (Epstein & Sanders, 1996).

Future research on parental involvement needs to incorporate a number of areas. Researchers must acquire an understanding of family involvement in elementary school that is authentic and parent-generated. The literature demonstrates that it is important that teachers reach beyond the parents who always volunteer and are easily accessible (Epstein, 2001).

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology of the study. The study is qualitative in nature and is based upon data from surveys completed by family resource coordinators, teachers, and administrators of currently enrolled elementary school aged children. In addition, data was obtained from family resource center grants, which assessed family involvement in their children at risk education.

It is the intent of the research to help leaders develop initiatives, which improves the level of parent involvement of children at risk allowing for greater achievement in schools. Specifically, this research allows family resource centers and schools to develop partnerships, which increases involvement of families of children at risk and help these students to be academically successful.

The research provides information, data, and other documents that support ways in which educational leaders can increase parental involvement. The results of the research are based on the perceptions of teachers, administrators, and family resource coordinators who service families of children at risk currently enrolled in an elementary school in rural Kentucky, related literature, and related involvement studies. The goal of this multiple case study is to document empirical evidence of teacher perception towards interventions used by the family resource centers in an effort to create parental involvement opportunities with families of students at risk to close the achievement gap.

Research Question

The study is guided by the following question: Do teachers perceive interventions used by family resource centers effective in breaking down barriers to get parents of students at risk involved at school?

By using a multiple case study to investigate elementary teachers' perception toward the barriers they encounter in attempting to establish parent involvement opportunities with the families of students at risk. It seeks to ascertain the nature of such perceptions and to determine whether such perceptions differ based on schools and according to the kinds of interventions family resource centers utilize regarding the causes of barriers, and allowed me to construct an understanding of what teachers' experience.

Problem

The study examines the perception of teachers toward barriers encountered while attempting to establish parent involvement opportunities with families of students at risk. It examines the nature of the teachers' perceptions and seeks to determine whether the perceptions differ based on schools and according to the kinds of interventions family resource centers utilize regarding the causes of barriers. Over fifty percent of those involved in this study are on free and reduced lunch (Kentucky Department of Education, 2009). This study provides some indication of the influence family resource centers can have on students' family-school partnership at these schools in an effort to close the achievement gap.

Elements of the family support concept have been present in other fields and disciplines for many years, sometimes appearing as innovations in good practice,

sometimes representing alternative or reactive strategies designed to reframe or reform a traditional service. Traditional family support is an early intervention that shows signs of influence in students at a very early age (Kagan, 1997).

In 1990 Kentucky's Educational Reform Act mandated that all schools, where at least 20 percent of the students qualify for free meals under federal rules, establish special centers for children and families. These school-based Kentucky Family Resource and Youth Services Centers were created in an effort to promote the use of resources and give support to families to strengthen the performance and enhance the growth and development of students and their families. Focusing on families and on relationship building is an effective and proven way to enhance children's ability to learn and grow.

While the state continues to support these programs through grants, the money to provide services to these students and their families is being cut each year. The centers called family-resource centers in elementary schools and youth-services centers in middle and high schools are much more modestly financed than many other models that have drawn national acclaim. Early data suggests these centers were making headway in helping families, brightening children's attitudes, and lightening the burdens of teachers (Cohen, 1994).

One reason for the small amounts of research on the influence of the family resource center's ability to provide services to help families of students at risk become more involved in education, could be that Kentucky is one of the only states that provides funding for the family resource centers to be housed in the schools, and little research has been conducted to determine the involvement of low-income families in the schools that

have family resource centers which can assist them. Other states provide similar funded programs to the family resource center, but they are not located in a school setting.

Parent involvement has been shown to be an important factor that positively influences a child's education. More and more schools are observing the importance of positive parent involvement, and schools are encouraging parents to become involved in the education of their children.

It is essential to ascertain the extent to which family resource centers, originally aimed at achieving by fostering productive parent involvement, actually succeed in fortifying teacher perceptions for partnership challenges they face. Vital is also the need to pinpoint the affective perception of teachers to partnership problems, and to determine their ideas regarding the source of barriers. This study is an effort to better understand the interactions family resource centers use to intervene, helping families of students at risk, become involved in the schools, and to establish a framework that can offer a more focused lens through which to view the interventions. Examining what it means to be at risk may help educational stakeholders understand the interventions used by family resource centers to help families with students who are at risk in rural Kentucky which are not achieving high levels of educational attainment to become involved in their child's school(s).

Site Selections

The study uses a multiple case study approach (Prestine, 1993). This allows the researcher to explore in depth the program and collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2003). Three elementary schools in different districts participated in this

multiple case research study. The research is designed to examine teachers' perceptions towards interventions used by the family resource centers in an effort to create parental involvement opportunities with families of students at risk to close the achievement gap.

Several variables are thought to be important and are considered in selecting the school sites such as; all schools are elementary schools, different geographical locations, number of families at risk identified through the percentage of free/reduced lunch counts at each school, and similar school population in size (Table 1). One school, services approximately 550 of families at-risk each year, with 54 percent of the school population receiving free/reduced lunch, and is a small urban school located right outside of a major urban city. Another school services approximately 440 families at-risk each year, with 50 percent of the school population receiving free/reduced lunch, and is located in a suburban setting, but serves children in a rural area of the county. A third site, services approximately 618 of families at-risk each year, with 51 percent of the school population receiving free/reduced lunch, and is located in a rural southeast Kentucky region of Appalachia.

Table 1

Overview of the Schools in the Study

School	Number of Students Served	Percentage of Free/Reduced Lunch	Location
School 1	550	54%	Rural
School 2	440	50%	Rural
School 3	618	51%	Rural Appalachia

Data Collection

For this research I gathered multiple forms of data: interviews, observations, field notes, and documents, rather than relying on one single data source. These three methods of data collection provided triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It is the contention of Marshall and Rossman (1995) that when interviews are combined with observation it allows the researcher the opportunity to understand the meaning people hold for their everyday activities. The data collection commenced in the beginning of April 2010 after receiving approval from the Eastern Kentucky University the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). Then I reviewed all the data to make sense of the information collected, and organize the information into thematic categories that emerge from all of the data sources (Creswell, 2003).

Interviews

One of the most common and powerful ways used to try to understand the human perspective while conducting research is through interviewing. The primary means of data collection in this research is open-ended interviews with follow-up interviews at each school that researcher conducted alone at each school over the period of time. The researcher obtained permission from the administrator at each school before beginning the interview process by sending a letter (Appendix B) to each administrator. The number of interviews varied by site, ranging from five to seven, and included a school administrator, a family resource coordinator, and classroom teacher(s). Gubrium and Holstein (2002) consider interviews to be the way to tell the story through a collaboration of the researcher and the respondent. In other words, the researcher sought to capture and describe a participant experience in a manner informed by past research; while giving a

voice to participants and acknowledging potential conflict between the expected reality of the researcher and the experienced realities of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Open-ended interviews of the subjects were conducted for this study using a general interview guide approach (Patton, 2002). This approach involves developing an outline prior to the interviews, which includes a set of issues to explore with each participant. The guide allows for free conversation within a topic area while ensuring all questions are adequately covered in the interview process. The interview outline for this study is based on the research question.

The interview was selected as the primary method for data collection in this research because it has the potential to give the most perception of the effectiveness of family resource centers to secure family involvement in assisting with students at risk. Interviews give the researcher the opportunity to ask more questions and find out their perceptive and experience with students' at risk participation rates of familial involvement based on the race and ethnicity.

In qualitative research, an interview is the basic instrument used in an attempt to understand the point of view of those subjects the researcher is interviewing, and to find out what they have experienced. When interviews are conducted we assume that the subjects have meaningful information to share with us. Using interviews as a way of collecting data is a way to capture the meaning of their perceptive and experience using their own words. Interviews have certain strengths, but there are also weaknesses associated with including interviews as part of the research. I designed the three main research questions as a guide to investigate the case and also constructed the interview questions (Appendix C) to provide an answer for one general research question:

Do teachers perceive interventions used by family resource centers effective in breaking down barriers to get parents of students at risk involved at school?

Field Notes

As an observer, I collected field notes of formal and informal meetings with the participants. These field notes were taken during meetings, visits, and interviews. I jotted down notes as I visited or interacted with the participants; and at the end of each visit I was able to type the notes using word processing software. For several months, I was able to observe the schools and take field notes. According to Stake (1995), as observations are made and time passes, knowledge is constructed. Through the researcher's field notes (reflections), there is a greater opportunity to learn about the types of interventions used by the family resource centers teachers perceive as being important, documenting the impacts and their views on how this transfers to the involvement of parents of students at risk.

Observations

Each participating school was observed, twice, for three or six hours each visit; the school observation protocol (Appendix D) was used. I conducted a total of six visits. Through using the observational strategy, I was able to assess interventions used by the family resource centers. I was able to observe each of the schools during different times of the day and week. These observations were with the family resource center Coordinator; at the end of each visit I would leave the room without interrupting the class. The overall goal for using school observations was to see if the interventions used by the family resource centers transferred to the classroom or the school. While in the

school, the researcher recorded as many descriptive and reflective notes as possible to establish a substantial database for analysis.

Document Collection

Another form of gathering data is through the collection of documents and archives. By collecting documents and archival records the researcher developed written evidence of the language and words of the participants. Several forms of documentary and archival evidence were collected and examined; copies of grants and the services the grants provide were collected, the job description of each family resource coordinator were collected, and agenda items and meeting minutes were gathered.

Data Analysis

A qualitative thematic strategy of data analysis is used to organize the data in a systematic manner. This allows important themes to emerge from the data across the three schools according to grounded theory (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982; Miles and Humberman, 1984; Prestine, 1993). The analysis allows for anonymity of the participants and schools. Multiple measures of the same phenomenon through triangulation of data identified any potential problems of validity and reliability (Rist, 1982). The use of multiple data-collection methods and triangulation are critical in attempting to obtain an in-depth understanding of the effect in this study. This study adds rigor, breadth, and depth to the study and provides corroborative evidence of the data obtained (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Therefore, this study employs a number of different data-collection methods, including interview and collection of documents.

The challenge throughout the collection of data was to identify the patterns of the significant information being collected. The researcher read each transcript closely and made notes. Data was coded based on themes, identifying key words and phrases. This was accomplished by conducting a search for both words and phrases through reading the transcripts and highlighting themes. The researcher began to identify themes and develop a research-based conclusion about teacher perception of interventions used by family resource centers to break down barriers to parent involvement of students at risk in elementary schools.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

According to Merriam (1998), the researcher must be sensitive to biases inherent in a case study. I paid particular attention to documenting the decisions and actions, as a researcher, in order to meet the criteria of conformability and dependability. Merriam also noted that because the primary instrument in a qualitative case study is human; all observations and analyses are filtered through one's own worldview, affected by one's own values and perspectives. There was prolonged engagement and observation throughout the study. This study requires substantial involvement with the teachers. After each transcription, the teachers were given an opportunity to review the transcripts and verify the accuracy of the transcription. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe this process as the most critical test for verifying data and interpretation. My aim for this research was to accurately represent the participants' realities and perceptions.

Attention was given to all guidelines put forth by the IRB at Eastern Kentucky University. With that in mind, there were several steps taken to make certain that the privacy of study participants was protected (Locke, Spriduso, & Silverman, 2000). A

protocol of informed consent was followed to make sure that participants were protected. This included getting permission from the IRB to collect data. Educational leaders who were invited to take part were notified orally and in writing about the goals of the study as well as the data collection, analysis, and storage methods that were used in the study.

As in any research, ethical issues of protecting the participants are a huge concern. As a researcher I have the responsibility to inform and protect the respondents. The research process involves voluntary cooperation, and it was my responsibility to inform the participants about the study's purpose. I respected the information the participant gave in the interview and protected that information. It is anticipated that no ethical threats were posed to any of the participants, this study made sure various safeguards were in place to ensure the protection of the participants' rights.

Limitations of the Study

My study does not assume to predict what may happen in the future, nor generalize, but rather seek to expose the nature of a particular case at a time. It seeks to communicate the participants' perceptions of interventions used by the family resource centers in an effort to create parental involvement opportunities with families of students at risk to close the achievement gap.

Several sampling and conceptualization issues limit the generalizability of the study. Only a cluster sample of elementary teachers, administrators, family resource center coordinators, and three of 819 family resource center schools is targeted in this sample. Only one educational region of Kentucky is represented, the uniformed nature of the study might limit the generalizability of the results beyond the 1,160 schools. For reasons of feasibility only elementary level teachers, administrators, and family resource

center coordinator perceptions were surveyed. Again, the study represents only a fractional attempt to explore a rather crucial issue while at the same time attempting to bring about an interest in the area. It only lays the framework for more in-depth confirmatory future project.

Flyvbjerg (2006) acknowledges that others question qualitative research, but he responds to and discusses five statements that “non-believers” often use as reasons for not relying on qualitative research. The statements are: (a) theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge, (b) one cannot generalize from a single case, (c) the case study is most useful for generating hypotheses, (d) the case study contains a bias toward verification, and (e) it is often difficult to summarize specific case studies. Merriam (2001) stated that a case be selected because it is intrinsically interesting. Merriam also explains three special features that can characterize qualitative case studies: particularistic, descriptive and heuristic.

Education is a process and school is a lived experience, and understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes knowledge (Merriam, 1998). In addition, the researcher uses a variety of methods to collect data. Throughout the study, the researcher made decisions regarding what constitutes the case, how and what data to collect, how best to deal with the data as it is collected, and the overall process.

Researcher Bias

The direct involvement of the researcher in the data collection and analysis is one of the key challenges of qualitative research (Creswell, 2003), so steps are taken to limit the impact. The purpose of analyzing data in qualitative research is to divide information into as many categories as is appropriate (Jacob, 1987). The objective of this process is to

identify themes from the frame of reference of the study participant and then to attempt to explain these patterns (Creswell, 2003) or understand the essence of their experience (Creswell, 1998). In order to accomplish these goals, the method of data analysis implemented in this research involved the use of coding.

Summary

The implementation of a qualitative approach is appropriate for this research because it allows for stories to be told and gives the ability to generate an understanding of the meaning of an experience (Patton, 2002). This research is an attempt to study human behavior and behavior changes which cannot be captured through quantitative research. Using a systematic process approach allows the data to develop patterns or themes, which are useful in gathering and analyzing exploratory data in looking for explanations to support the research study. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to more fully describe the study in a more meaningful perspective.

Chapter IV

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The purpose of this chapter is to present the multiple analyses of the data.

Following a review of research questions the results of the investigation are organized into two sections: (a) school descriptive data, and (b) analyses related to the research question.

As the researcher used quantitative data to guide the qualitative inquiry, the following table gave pertinent information regarded to the likenesses and differences of the three elementary schools. See Table 2. This information helped guide the researcher prior to entering the schools for fieldwork and assisted the researcher when key themes were determined as the data was coded.

Table 2

Elementary School Demographic Data 2007-2010

Schools	1	2	3	Grand Mean
School Enrollment				
2007-2008	541	498	539	526
2008-2009	552	483	559	531
2009-2010	524	500	539	521
	539	494	546	526
Met AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress)				
2007-2008	N	Y	Y	N/A
2008-2009	N	Y	N	
2009-2010	Y	Y	Y	

Table 2 (continued).

Schools	1	2	3	Grand Mean
Free/Reduced Lunch Percent				
2007-2008	48	37	54	46.33
2008-2009	50	57	44	50.33
2009-2010	48	61	45	51.33
	48.67	51.67	47.67	49.33
Volunteer Hours				
2007-2008	1729	696	1300	1242
2008-2009	1600	954	293	949
2009-2010	1856	897	389	1047
	1728	849	660	1079
Per Student Spending				
2007-2008	7179	6663	6174	6672
2008-2009	7803	5799	6515	6706
2009-2010	7524	6099	6795	6806
Schools	1	2	3	Grand Mean
Average Daily Attendance				
2007-2008	94.0	96.0	95.0	95.00
2008-2009	94.2	95.5	94.5	94.73
2009-2010	94.6	96.3	93.6	94.70
Average Number of Years Teaching Experience				
2007-2008	12.0	8.5	11.6	10.7
2008-2009	11.4	9.6	9.8	10.3
2009-2010	12.2	10.3	10.8	11.1
	11.8	9.5	10.7	10.7
Ethnicity Membership Percent				
2007-2008	8.13	5.77	3.89	5.93
2008-2009	9.23	12.25	4.08	8.52
2009-2010	9.86	12.59	4.33	8.93
	9.07	10.20	4.1	7.79

Table 2 (continued).

Schools	1	2	3	Grand Mean
Family Resource Center Funding				
2007-2008	21157.50	20750.50	21054.50	20987.50
2008-2009	26599.50	24622.50	25879.50	25700.50
2009-2010	26599.50	24622.50	25879.50	25700.50
	24785.50	23331.83	24271.67	24129.50

Three Elementary Schools and Their Family Resource Centers

The findings as shown on Table 2 represent three rural schools located in three counties in central and eastern Kentucky. One of the three counties is located in the central Appalachian region. As represented in the table, the Schools numbered 1 and 2 are rural counties not located in the central Appalachian region; the School numbered 3 is a rural county located in the central Appalachian region. These findings were completed in accordance with the Kentucky Department of Education School Report Card information.

Elementary school one is a wonderful place to learn and work. They are proud of the reputation they have built by being a whole-child centered school. Their staff strives to make sure all students are treated as individuals and each child's strengths and gifts are respected, nurtured, and celebrated. Their vision is for our students to become educated, respectful, and responsible citizens who are capable of fulfilling their goals and dreams. They value their students as the future of their community. They are very proud of the academic gains that they have made and look forward to future success as well. They continue to work very hard to meet their academic goals and to provide the opportunity for all students to be successful.

This elementary school opened its doors in 1992, and sits in the heart of central Kentucky on 20 rural acres. The school was built to accommodate the growing population moving into the county from the much larger urban areas nearby. At present approximately 600 students attend this elementary school in grades first through fifth. The faculty includes one principal, one assistant principal, two guidance counselors, twenty-six classroom teachers, seven special education teachers, a literacy program made up of two full time reading teachers and one part time reading teacher, eight instructional assistants, one gifted education teacher, and enrichment teachers in the areas of visual arts, music, technology, physical education, and library media.

The family resource center at this elementary school is tasked with removing “non-cognitive barriers” to students’ education. Often, this translates into clothing drives for students, family literacy services, referrals to mental health counseling, and coordinating “backpack” programs that provide food for students over the weekends.

Elementary school two wants to ensure that 100 percent of their students are actively engaged in learning 100 percent of the time. They pride themselves on being a community of self-motivated, ambitious, life long learners. They feel that a partnership between a dedicated professional staff, supportive families and responsible students is essential in achieving their mission. They are currently in their eighth year of operation as a new school and are very proud of all the accomplishments they have achieved at this point to include reaching proficiency.

This elementary school opened its doors in August of 2004. Built on 20 scenic rural acres in rural Kentucky, the school was established to meet the growing population of the county. In an effort to consolidate and upgrade the educational environment for

their students, the county selected students from three nearby elementary schools to attend. Because of this, the school boasts a diverse student body. At present approximately 450 students attend this Pre-school through 5th grade elementary school. The faculty includes a principal, counselor, twenty classroom teachers, five special education teachers, a literacy program made up of a reading recovery teacher, reading mastery teacher, and five instruction aides all trained in reading education, enrichment teachers for art, library media, music, and physical education.

The family resource center at this elementary school is a safe, comfortable, school-based setting for children and families of this school community. It is an entry point for families to access an array of supports from the school and community, from parenting and communication classes, to health and child care services, to job and education training, to recreation activities. This family resource center is a place where parents can increase their competencies and reduce their sense of isolation. Children can access social, well being opportunities, and interact with adults who care about their needs and their futures.

Elementary School Three sets their priority on providing an environment in which all students reach their full potential, serving them not only today but also throughout their lives. Their curriculum focuses on the Kentucky mandated standards with continuous assessment/instruction for student proficiency. They benefit from a wonderful support network of staff, parents and volunteers. Their family resource center and Parent Teacher Organization are a vital link from their school to community. They are proud of their students, confident of their professional and caring staff, and take great satisfaction from their relationships with families and the County community.

This elementary school is located in the central Appalachian region of Kentucky opened in 2003; the building has spacious classrooms, well-equipped media center, multipurpose gymnasium, state of the art computer lab and cafeteria. The school accommodates approximately 530 students in grades Pre-K through 5th grade. The staff includes teachers for regular classrooms, collaborative teachers (special education), elective arts programs, principal, paraeducators in each grade level, trained reading intervention teachers, and several support staff that provide additional services for students with specific needs.

The family resource center at elementary school three is dedicated to ensuring that their students and families are given equal opportunity to succeed. The family resource center serves hundreds of students and families. Their office is located down the right hall immediately after the main entrance to the school to the school. They want their students and families to feel comfortable interacting with the school regardless of gender, race, creed, or socioeconomic status. It is their goal to support all students and families with meeting their needs including health services, basic needs, educational support, childcare, and family training.

Three elementary schools are in the population sample; their demographic information for a three-year trend follows in Table 2 a description and analysis of the data follows the table.

When examining the grand mean of the total school enrollment for a three-year period of time was 526 students for the three schools selected. The means for the three schools (539, 494, 536) for the three-year period were so close signifying there is a close representation of the school populations chosen for the study.

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) is the measure by which schools, districts, and states are held accountable for student performance under Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the current version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Under NCLB, AYP is used to determine if schools are successfully educating their students. The law requires states to use a single accountability system for public schools to determine whether all students, as well as individual subgroups of students, are making progress toward meeting state academic content standards. The goal is to have all students reaching proficient levels in reading and math by 2014 as measured by performance on state tests. Progress on those standards must be tested yearly in grades 3 through 8 and in one grade in high school. The results are then compared to prior years, and, based on state-determined AYP standards, used to determine if the school has made adequate progress towards the proficiency goal (Department of Education, 2001).

Adequate Yearly Progress data was collected on the three schools for the three-year period of time. Only School 2 met AYP all three years. School 1, met AYP only once during the three-year period of time, and School 3, met AYP all but once during the three-year period of time.

The United States Department of Agriculture annually makes adjustments to the Income Eligibility Guidelines, to be used in determining eligibility for free and reduced price meals or free milk. These guidelines are used by schools, institutions, and facilities participating in the National School Lunch Program (and Commodity School Program), School Breakfast Program, Milk Program for Children, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and Summer Food Service Program. The annual adjustments are required by section 9 of the National School Lunch Act, and are effective from July 1 through June

30 every year. Students on free or reduced lunch accounted for a total grand mean of 49.33 of the student enrollment. School 3, is located in the central Appalachian region, and shows a smaller percentage over a three period of students that qualify for free or reduced lunch with a mean of 47.67. The mean for the three schools (48.67, 51.67, 47.67) for the three-year period were so close signifying there is a close representation of the school populations chosen for the study.

Data represented number of volunteer hours, which showed a grand mean of 1079 hours volunteering was indicated by totaling the grand mean of each of the three schools over the three years. All schools except for one have similar means when compared to the grand mean. School 3 was the exception; it showed a lower mean total (660) for all three years. School 1 showed the highest mean total (1728) for all three years.

Among the many states that had their public school financing systems invalidated by court rulings, the changes required of the Kentucky system by the courts as a result of *Rose v. Council* (1989) were among the most radical. Not only did the Kentucky Supreme Court find the financing of schools in the state to be unconstitutional, but it also ruled that the "entire system of common schools is unconstitutional" and required the legislature to "recreate, re-establish" the entire system of public education. In a remarkably brief interlude, the Kentucky General Assembly, in response to the court decision, passed the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990. The focus of KERA was to reduce these disparities in educational funding. To do so, a new funding program called Support Educational Excellence in Kentucky (SEEK) was established. Under this program, districts are to receive a guaranteed level of revenue per student. This base is adjusted (increased) for at-risk children (measured by participation in federal school lunch

programs), transportation, and exceptional students. The highest mean for per student spending was found in School 1, with a mean of \$7524; which was significantly higher than the grand mean (\$6806) of all three schools over the three years. School 2 (\$6099) was significantly lower than the grand mean. School 3 (\$6795) showed a mean relatively close to the grand mean of all three schools over the three years.

In determining the cost of the program to support education excellence in each Kentucky school, the statewide guaranteed base funding level, as defined in KRS 157.320, shall be computed by dividing the amount appropriated for this purpose by the prior year's statewide average daily attendance. Each district shall receive an amount equal to the base funding level for each pupil in average daily attendance in the district in the previous year. Average Daily Attendance is the total number of days of student attendance divided by the total number of days in the regular school year. A student attending every day would equal one ADA. ADA is not the same as enrollment, which is the number of students enrolled in each school and district. (Counting students on a given day in October determines enrollment.) ADA usually is lower than enrollment due to factors such as students moving, dropping out, or staying home due to illness. The state uses a school district's ADA to determine its general purpose (revenue limit) and some other funding. Average Daily Attendance (ADA) Rate was the highest with a mean of (96.3) for School 2. The other two schools had means lower than the grand mean were School 1 (94.6) and School 3 (93.6). The grand mean for the three schools over the three-year period was (94.7).

The odds that a child will be taught by a new teacher have increased dramatically over the past two decades all around the United States. In 1987-1988, the most common

level of experience among the nation's three million K-12 public school teachers was 14 years in the classroom. By 2007-2008, students were most likely to encounter a teacher with just one or two years of experience. Kentucky has a four-year probationary period for new teachers before they are granted tenure. Kentucky also requires that teachers begin working on their Master's Degree within 5 years of becoming certified to teach. When examining the grand mean (10.7) of the average years teaching for all three schools remained constant over three years show an average high of 12.2 and an average low of 8.5 years. School 1 had the highest mean 11.8 years. School 2 had the lowest mean (9.5) number of years teaching. This trend data shows that the three schools in the study are proficient in retaining experienced teachers in their schools.

As the United States becomes a more culturally and ethnically diverse nation, public schools are becoming more diverse, too. The Census Bureau (2010) projects that by the year 2100 the U.S. minority population will become the majority with non-Hispanic whites making up only 40% of the U.S. population. No doubt students will need to learn how to interact in a diverse environment. A 2007 study by Public Agenda and the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality found that 76% of new teachers say they were trained to teach an ethnically diverse student body but fewer than 4 in 10 say their training helps them deal with the challenges they face. The federal No Child Left Behind law has put pressure on schools to see that all students succeed, regardless of their ethnic or language background. Schools are required to meet state "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) goals for their total student populations and for specified demographic subgroups, including major ethnic/racial groups, economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient (LEP) students, and students with disabilities. Ethnic

Membership of each school was found on the Kentucky Department of Education Superintendent's Annual Attendance Report Enrollment spreadsheet for each of the school years represented in Table 2. This report provides the head count and ethnicity of students enrolled on the last day of school each school year. The grand mean for the ethnic membership of the three schools over a three-year period of time was (7.79). School 3 had the lowest mean (4.1) for the three-year period of time. School 2 had the highest ethnic membership mean (10.2).

Most family resource centers depend on from the state and additional donations that are used in two ways. One kind of funding supports "core" operations; these funds are flexible dollars that support whatever the FRC needs to do to pursue its family support strategy. In addition to this funding, there are special program funds that support particular projects, such as parent involvement funds that come from individual school funds. Family resource centers around the state depend on individuals from the community to give additional support for food and clothing. Family resource coordinators piece these funds together in a variety of ways; a given center may have a single, formal funding source, or dozens of large and small funding sources that fluctuate almost daily. Data represented of Family Resource Funding showed a grand mean of \$24129.50 for the three schools over a three-year period. School 1 had the highest average mean of \$24785.50. School 2 had the lowest average mean of \$23337.83.

Research Question

The analyses addressing each the specific question in this study is presented. The question is divided according to the specific reoccurring themes from interviews. Do

teachers perceive interventions used by family resource centers effective in breaking down barriers to get parents of students at risk involved at school?

The teachers, family resource coordinators, and administrators recognize the importance of parental involvement in children's education, but they know they are unsuccessful in this aspect of their teaching. The teachers think the lack of family involvement in school is an increasing problem. They sense that parents have become more resigned and removed. They believe many parents feel the schools are unresponsive to their children's learning needs. They feel there is a general deterioration in family involvement as children progressed through school.

Analysis of interview data reveal that parent involvement activities in these three elementary schools generally fall within the typology set forth by Epstein. When interviewees were asked about **Type 1** activities, *basic obligations of families*, reports by interviewees included, *"I think it is most important to have the parents who are involved in the way that their kids need them to be involved...for some kids, seeing their parents in school is really special and important and some kids are immature and maybe it isn't best for them."* Another teacher said, *"We have trouble getting them to conferences... They are always working."* An administrator said, *"Maybe the difference is that in my school's community the families are transitional. Parents are new to the community and many of them move in and out of it (over the course of the school year)..."*

However, while Epstein's framework emphasizes the basic obligations of families to provide their children with basic needs such as health and safety, one third of the study schools played this role, offering, "wrap around" services to students and their families.

“If families have housing needs or food needs, we provide them with resources to help them get these materials,” said the family resource coordinator of one elementary school.

When asked, **Type 2** activities, *basic obligation of the school*, were common across all three schools. In addition to sending home report cards and holding parent-teacher conferences, several teachers mentioned the use of home visits to ensure communication between the school and family. One teacher noted, *“I see the child as part of all these different spheres, home, school, out of school time, and I want to make sure that in my role as a teacher, I am able to connect with all those other spheres to really promote those other spheres for the child. And that is so important because if you are not aware of what is going on in those other spheres what you are doing can only reach so far and if you really have a connection between all the spheres, I think you can do more and I think that really shapes my pedagogy and shapes my teaching.”* Another common technique, to decrease barriers, is to provide free food and childcare for school meetings at the schools. As one family resource coordinator reported, *“We use any and all interventions that we can possibly use to help our families.”*

When asked, **interviewees at each school also reported Type 3 activities, involvement at school**. Parents commonly helped out in classrooms, served on committees, attended field trips and special events held at the school, helped out in the classrooms, and participated in school projects. *“Helps families to feel secure in feeling welcome in our schools. Makes sure that children have what they need to be successful. Helps parents with better about themselves when they need help with getting necessities paid. Overall [Family Resource Center] is a very Big part of our school in getting the parents here to the school and becoming involved.”* Another teacher stated, *“In first*

grade, more parents are actively involved ... they are still clinging to their children.... but in a few years they have bought into the system and they have accepted their children's problems and accepted the system [for good and bad]. "

Interviewees from each school, when asked, described a range of **Type 4** activities, *involvement in learning activities at home*. In many cases, this involved encouraging parent to help their children with their homework. One interviewee stated, *"I think that ultimately you have to respect and appreciate whatever the family can do...if the parents are doing whatever they can do...they are equally as valuable because you need them to be there for their child most importantly, you can get people to go on field trips, they don't have to be relatives, but you need the parent to be there for the child, that is most important thing."* Another teacher stated, *"Well, the only involvement I have with parents is getting their support to make sure that their kids' lessons were done and that they get here...their attendance."*

When asked, *involvement in decision-making, governance, and advocacy (Type 5)* is found in all three schools studied. In one case, the school utilizes a parent survey to gauge satisfaction and plan new activities. In addition, all schools include parents on the school's governing board. One interviewee said, *"Our SBDM and PTO provide a diversity of involvement options to involve the parents in activities that would connect them with their child's classroom and school."*

When asked, *Collaboration and exchanges with community organizations (Type 6)* also were utilized by all of the study schools. Every school's family resource center offers a community based partners program. They're pretty well connected within the community, and they help coordinate this program of volunteers. Several reported that

community-based organizations and/or faith-based organizations partnered with the school to hold parent classes, trainings, or food for weekends. One family resource coordinator said, *“Getting community partners involved in our schools is reducing barriers to learning because they are providing many of these students with additional resources that might not be available to them at home.”*

Sample

Overall, the researcher sampled a total of 32 individuals (N=32) of those interviewed, 3 consisted of school administrators (N=3), 3 consisted of Family Resource Coordinators (N=3), 1 consisted of the Regional Family Resource Coordinator (N=1), and 25 consisted of teachers (N=25). Each of these groups represented different sectors of the institutional population. The findings suggested variance between groups on many target questions but some commonalities were apparent.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2008) the United States indicated that the largest mean 33.6 percent of all teachers had been in the profession for 3 to 9 years and the least was 13.4 percent for 3 years or less. This is showing a trend of decline in the overall teaching profession around the United States. In Kentucky those in the profession for 3-9 years was 35.5% and less than 3 years was 10.2%. The three schools studied show a better trend line than the United States and Kentucky (Table 3). When asked about their number years of teaching 27.3% interviewed had taught 11-15 years and less than 5 years was 22.7%.

Table 3

Number of Years Teaching

Number of Years Teaching	Percentage
1-5	22.7
6-10	22.7
11-15	27.3
16-20	9.1
21-25	9.1
26 or more	9.1

To earn your Kentucky teaching credential you have to complete the appropriate amount of undergraduate coursework and standardized tests, as well as an accredited certification program. Kentucky issues three levels of certification. Rank III is the provisional certificate issued to new teachers with a Bachelor’s degree. Rank II requires completing a Master’s degree or at least 32 semester hours of graduate credit. Sixty semester hours of graduate credits are required for a Rank I, which may include the Master’s degree. Teachers must also be certified for the grade level and/or subject areas in which they plan to teach. All states require at least a Bachelor’s degree to teach. Certification to teach Elementary School (Grades 1-6) requires coursework in all subject areas taught in Elementary School. Kentucky also requires a period of supervised student teaching. It is no longer enough to just have years of experience for teaching.

After No Child Left Behind and other academic quantification measures, the careers of teachers increasingly depend on their results in the classroom. A Master’s in Teaching gives you more educational theory and classroom skills, as well as more hands-on student teaching experience with a mentor. After a Master’s program, one achieves better results in the classroom and has more job security and higher pay. According to the

National Center for Educational Statistics (2008) the United States showed 47.4% of teachers with a Bachelor’s Degree and 44.5% with a Master’s Degree. In Kentucky 20.9% held a Bachelor’s Degree and 57.5% held a Master’s Degree. A Master’s degree is held by 63.6% of those interviewed (Table 4).

Table 4

Educational Level of Teachers in the Study

Highest Educational Level	Percentage
High School Graduate	
Associates Degree	4.5
Bachelor’s Degree	9.1
Master’s Degree	63.6
Doctoral Degree	4.5
Other	18.2

Twenty-five interviews were conducted with elementary teachers focused on their perceptions as to whether or not the family resource center provided interventions to help families become more involved in the school setting. The recurring themes found by the researchers related to the four pillars of success (individual, family, school, and community) were similar to those, which emerged in interviews with other stakeholders. Four of the pillars were referenced in the teacher interviews as influential factors as to the parent involvement in the school setting based on interventions provided from the family resource center. These four pillars acknowledged in the teacher interviews were – individual, family, community, and school.

Based on the interviews with family resource coordinators it appeared these family resource coordinators had a good grasp of their school’s policies surrounding the issue of parent involvement. Family resource coordinators shared, they dealt with a wide

range of parents, many of whom were living in poverty and had no income to support their family. Many of the family resource coordinators interviewed revealed a degree of understanding of the issues their parents were grappling with when making the decision to become involved in the schools.

The researcher presents qualitative data findings from the perception of the teachers interviewed. The researcher offers data that revealed the support expressed by the participants in the study. The data is representative of the information shared and displayed during the interviews with the teachers.

Institutional Support

The three schools in this study, most teacher participants initially seem satisfied with the existing school-controlled involvement where educators request assistance and parents oblige or parents offer and teachers direct. Teacher interviewees see themselves as experts and believe that parents trust what they are doing. This school or teacher-controlled involvement indicates who manages the classroom. Many teachers want parents to have increased involvement in school, in addition to willingly providing enrichment opportunities, supervision and transportation for classrooms, teachers desire parents to have additional responsibilities and communication with schools.

Teachers in this study indicate they are not prepared for a significant change in parent roles in decision-making. Research participants identified family resource centers, administrative support, and formal training necessary for successful implementation and maintenance of increased parent involvement in local schools. A teacher in this study mentions, *“We learn from our mistakes. I gained my comfort in dealing with parents through experience.”*

The teachers in the study had mixed feelings about the influence their school administrations had on their practices or perspectives on parent involvement. Most felt that having a supportive administration or principal helped them achieve their goals, but if the administration or principal had negative attitudes towards parents, teachers said they do what they feel is positive and productive despite the leadership's attitudes. Though school leadership may have some impact on teachers' actions regarding parent involvement, interviews with teachers suggest that they assumed the freedom to act according to their own values. Many teachers also felt that some principals talked about having positive relationships with parents, but that many in actuality did not have those positive experiences. Interviews with teachers suggest that modeling from principals helped teachers learn what to do. Being open to talk with staff about parent involvement helped teachers feel supported.

Community Support

Several teacher interviewees appeared to be unaware of the involvement of their communities. Teachers did not mention community agencies, support groups, or leadership from community groups, which would ultimately provide an intervention to potential parents who would be willing to volunteer in the school. The community did appear to offer interventions to parents through responses of the family resource coordinators. The researcher feels the wide variety of responses from participants suggests the term community is viewed in many, varied ways which is a significant observation within itself. The thought, education offers a broader horizon for people, may offer an explanation as to parents of students at risk lack the understanding or knowledge as to what a community may be able to offer them.

When coding the responses, the interviewees did reference community agencies, community support groups, and community leadership as interventions utilized to help parents of students at risk.

Overall, this study revealed support by the community, and uncovered community resources, which might promote successful partnerships between school, parents, and teachers to enhance parent involvement. Family resource coordinators tended to mention services in the community more than other groups interviewed.

Familial Support

Regardless of the reasons that parents do not visit the school, teachers may interpret their lack of involvement as a general lack of interest in their children's education. Given the high levels of association between parent involvement at school and children's academic achievement observed in this study and previous work and the importance of close home-school relationships in general for children's academic achievement (Epstein, 1992), less involvement at school on the part of some parents may represent a significant disadvantage to their children.

Summary

NCLB mandates every child reach grade level status on specific subject areas by 2014. The policy also includes the necessity of increasing parental involvement during a time when many families are either single parent homes or working several jobs just to get the necessities to survive. Teachers are finding it difficult to get parents involved at the school level. Teachers are turning to resources within the school and community to help break the barriers down. Family resource centers are providing interventions for

families of students at risk and trying to get parents actively involved in the education of their children.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the research study and offer specific recommendations for schools to improve the interventions used by family resource centers to get more parental involvement in the schools. It also provides policies and research suggestions.

Chapter V

Summary of Findings, Discussions and Recommendations

The preceding chapter presented and analyzed data. This chapter is divided into four sections. Section one provides an overview of the study and major findings. Section two presents possible interpretations of the findings of this study and its relationship to selective literature on the topic. Section three identifies several implications of the research and offers possible recommendations for policy and practice. Section four makes recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

This chapter begins with a summary of the purpose and structure of the study. The themes represented in the chapter are poverty, barriers, parent involvement, and interventions. In addition, the major quantitative and qualitative findings of the study and conclusions from the findings as they relate to the four elements model of student success (Thompson, A. & Cuseo, J., 2012) are presented. The general intent of this study is to explore teacher perceptions of family resource interventions barriers influencing parent involvement of students at risk in three central Kentucky elementary schools. Specifically the study employed a sequential mixed methods design (Creswell, 2003) to examine and discuss the issues facing the educational institution and to make recommendations for strategies that can be utilized to increase the opportunity for parent involvement to enhance student success within the schools.

The four elements model of student success (Thompson, A. & Cuseo, J., 2012) was used as a theoretical lens framework for this research. The model suggests that

student success results from the involvement of family, community, school and individual student effort.

Epstein (1991) describes the parent-teacher relationship as a partnership, which implies equality. This approach is fixed and does not focus on how teachers manage their relationships with parents. In some instances teachers bring more resources to the process than do parents. These resources could include content knowledge, knowledge of pedagogy or general knowledge about the students in the classroom and the school in general.

Major Findings

When we begin to look at the theoretical model (Figure 2) on which this study was developed around, we begin to see that there is a sphere missing. The student! The student plays a major contributing role in their education. The student is the missing element that contributes to their well-being. The students are able to make decisions to help themselves make decisions that will contribute to their success in school.

Research Question: Do teachers perceive interventions used by family resource centers effective in breaking down barriers to get parents of students at risk involved at school?

As we look at the research question posed we find that all four elements are present to contribute to student success. A closer examination of Thompson's Four Elements of Success Model (Figure 1) will help the policy makers and stakeholders understand that one element cannot stand alone to aid in the success of the student. Combining all four elements provides the strongest support for student success, and when one of those elements is missing then another needs to step in to help make the supports

stronger. Family Resource Centers provide this extra layer of support for students at risk and their families.

Interpretations and Discussion

Participants in the study provided a significant amount of information about their perceptions or their ability to recognize the elements that affect parental involvement in schools.

A significant factor in teacher perception of parents' involvement in active involvement at school was based upon how strong the leadership in school was seen. Administrators of the buildings who had a clear mission were demonstrated daily in working with the staff and the family resource coordinators. Therefore, the school is an environment that feels safe and sensitive to parents' needs if the administrator is visibly seen and available to parents and staff. This creates an effective teaching and learning environment. The teachers and family resource center are able to bring parents in and calm their fears, thereby increasing the potential for learning. Teachers feel that the family resource centers are willing to help families understand concepts that they might not be familiar with so that when they are at home they can share these resources with their children.

According to the teachers, if family resource centers were able to provide better for their families, the families could fulfill their personal self-improvement plans. The teachers explained how learning skills helped parents built their self-esteem and taught them how to help their children.

Implications for Practice

Other schools could use the findings from this study to increase parental

involvement. If parental involvement is seen as a priority, then the district, as well as the school, should include it in their school mission. Parents, in general, could benefit from school officials that make parental involvement one of their priorities in their schools. Parental involvement programs should educate parents who, in turn, can educate students at home. This is a very strong reason for increasing the parental involvement of parents for students at risk in schools by offering meaningful programs.

This is not a comprehensive enough data set to create policy recommendations, and I cannot make claims based on only 25 interviewees, I can say that more research is needed on parent involvement in order to effect policy. I also can say that this study can have implications for future research and for practice.

There are also differences between teachers that are not explored in depth in this study. These differences include variations between teachers who teach in private versus public schools. There may also be important differences between teachers of different grade levels that I did not explore in this study. Despite these possible variations, this study provides an important conceptual contribution to the field of parent involvement and makes the case for further research.

The outcomes of this study have implications at the policy level in light of the No Child left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (Office of the Press Secretary, 2002), which is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The NCLB demands that all children in spite of ethnicity and background obtain an equal opportunity and a quality education. The main goals of the NCLB are: (a) more choices for parents and students, (b) greater flexibility for states and school district, (c) stronger accountability for results, and (d) use of research-based instructional methods (USDE, 2007). Districts

must now evaluate and implement programs that comply with the demands. Parental involvement is essential if educators want to attain greater student success in schools. The more advantages educators can provide, the greater student success there can be in schools.

The family resource center is one of the most useful forms of intervention to gain parent involvement and can enhance schools' parent involvement programs. Although central to many school programs, the fundraising programs, holiday celebrations, book fairs, and school carnivals, it is easy for educators and parents to lose sight of the point that teacher's value. Schools can make an effort to encourage the kinds of involvement that really affects classroom teaching, through the family resource center's intervention programs. This is especially reassuring to parents who work or who are not available to interact with the school community during school hours.

When developing parent involvement policies, schools, districts and other policy makers should be aware of the different forms of involvement as in Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement. There is a human resources aspect to encouraging parent involvement that schools and districts should consider when staffing and planning for the year. By increasing the amounts of the types of involvement that teachers perceive as useful to them could enhance their teaching and their relationships with parents.

Specific Recommendations

Family involvement is multi-faceted and complex. There are many types of family involvement in education. In developing a family involvement program, educators need to consider the cultural, linguistic, and economic factors that are relevant to the unique needs of students and families at risk. Home, school, and community are three

major spheres of influence on students. All three major spheres of influence should be considered in efforts to promote family involvement in education. Some barriers to participation, such as lack of time and knowledge about how to become involved, cut across all families. Other barriers, such as language differences and distrust of schools, are important to consider. Family involvement in each school may have some unique barriers. For example, religious and cultural priorities of the community may often affect the level of family participation in school functions. Barriers that result from the community's culture raise special challenges for educators when soliciting family involvement at the school.

The family resource center is active in the community network that shares concern and support for individuals at-risk. Family resource centers are hubs of information for the schools and are committed to finding resources for each need of the students and their families.

Recommendation 1: School Administration Plays a Key Role

Administrator approachability appears to be the key to successful parent involvement in schools. Are all administrators aware of the influence they have? Are principals concerned about the welcoming atmosphere in their schools? Insider/outsider tension may be reduced with a welcoming school environment: parent bulletin boards, special coffee room, computer accessibility, resource materials, and invitations to participate in educational activities. The administrator's role is to create a welcoming climate and become more open to the community and parents, by being physically visible and available in the school during special events.

Administrators who work with the Family Resource Center can help develop a clear mission not only within the school, but also with the Family Resource Center. There is more to the Family Resource Center than just existing within the same building as the school, and the administrators who make these centers part of their schools have a greater showing of parent support and outreach to others within in the school.

Recommendation 2: **Effective Communication**

Improved communication between the home and school through an open door policy, surveys, dialogues and meetings should become a priority. Authentic parent involvement is based on mutual trust and respect. New teachers learn how to involve and manage from experienced teachers and administration. Principals are considered strong role models for their staffs and they must be aware of the messages they send out. School administration must creatively find time to allow teachers to meet and telephone parents. There may also be financial implications in school budgets to supplement the limited access of the family resource centers presently in schools.

Individual family resource centers need to look at their community needs to develop their plan for success. Epstein (1995) has outlined six types of parent involvement and administrators should encourage parents to be as involved as they can and accept whatever that may be. It will be the way individual schools communicate and perform that will determine involvement in local schools.

Recommendations include the use of networking, newsletters, and web pages. A parent contacting other parents to invite them to participate in various school projects, serve on school committees, and accept leadership positions is a use of networking that could include more parents in their children's education. Similarly, the use of newsletters can

keep families informed and included in their children's education. Both parents and teachers require time together to build trust, effective communication patterns, and mutual respect. New power structures need to be carefully outlined and communicated to all.

Individual schools need to look at their community needs to develop their plan for success. Epstein (1995) has outlined six types of parent involvement and administrators should encourage parents to be as involved as they can and accept whatever that may be. Increased involvement will not occur because of legislation. The way individual schools communicate and perform will determine involvement of parents.

Recommendation 3: **Expand Funding**

Family resource centers are constantly struggling against a pervasive mismatch between the philosophy of family support and the restrictions of categorical programs. If family resource centers are expected to continue to serve the most vulnerable populations they will need more support. Several types of needed activities may be especially hard to fund, including the collaboration and coordination necessary to help families. The short-term nature of most funding sources forces family resource coordinators to spend a great deal of time on looking for contributions to their programs. If their funding efforts are not successful, good services may disappear after start-up funds end.

Recommendation 4: **Break Down Barriers**

Schools need to identify relevant barriers to family involvement that pertain to their own circumstances. A good way to begin involving parents in education is to engage them in discussions on the barriers presented in this publication. School

administrators may present concerns at community forums and solicit the support of local community members, PTO, and family resource coordinators.

After identifying barriers, the schools may then seek culturally appropriate solutions. Again, parents and community members are valuable resources for identifying and implementing solutions.

Recommendation 5: Professional Development on Parent Involvement

Throughout the state, teachers are seeking to further their professional development. Effective communication skills are essential in partnerships of parents and teachers. Therefore, there is a need for professional development to give teachers the hope of improving these communication skills. The curriculum for teacher training programs should include learning opportunities directed towards increasing family involvement. These learning opportunities should provide not only the necessary awareness and knowledge, but also the skills needed to engage family participation in education.

Recommendation 6: Build Trusting Relationship

Perhaps policy is not the most appropriate way to engage parents and teachers. As Pushor and Murphy (2004) and Ruitenberg and Pushor (2005) argue, relationship building is central to establishing effective parent-teacher relationships. The goal of parent involvement has increasingly become part of accountability tactics. Much of the research focuses on the effectiveness of or barriers to parent involvement, resulting in lists of strategies or typologies of parent engagement. Less research has honed in on whether or how educators and parents can build relationships based on sometimes, contradictory aims and assumptions.

Recommendation 7: Increase Awareness in the Community

It takes a village to raise a child, is a popular proverb with a clear message: the whole community has an essential role to play in the growth and development of its young people. In addition to the vital role that parents and family members play in a child's education, the broader community too has a responsibility to assure high-quality education for all students.

Schools are increasingly relying on collaborative efforts with partners such as local businesses, higher education, foundations, and other community-based agencies. Building better connections to meet the needs of children and further the goals of school reform starts with effective school and community partnerships.

Often community members are not aware of the positive things happening in a school, so schools will want to help community partners understand the value of school/community partnerships through improved communication within the community. With the support of their communities, schools can accomplish their goals, which in turn, can result in more community support for increased school funding.

Recommendation 8: Family Resource Centers Physically within the Schools

The family resource center is designed by the school and community as an intervention to teach parents how to resolve problems. School attendance is key to student success yet the student without sufficient clothing, the student without proper glasses, the student kept awake by family conflict, the student without sufficient food, or the student experiencing the multitude of problems of a dysfunctional home is unlikely to attend classes regularly and to gain the basic life skills and academic skills necessary for independent adulthood. The family resource centers make use of available community

services and creative ingenuity to resolve these problems and to help parents learn problem-solving skills.

Because each family resource is physically located within the schools researched that it serves, it provides a unique and vital role, not only within the school, but also for the community-wide human service provision network. Bringing services into the school not only eliminates tangible barriers to participation, but also demonstrates a willingness to meet parents and families “half way”. The family resource center has become an essential partner for many schools.

The uniqueness of the family resource center in the school structure enables the center to work with at-risk families in a one-to-one approach that leverages the support and expertise of many agencies in the community. While many programs have proven approaches to work with a particular problem, the family resource center tailors its approach for each family situation in the school to work with sets of problems that combine to overwhelm parents and thus put the students at-risk.

Many schools have begun to remodel their existing school buildings and are creating a designated place for the family resource center because it has become such an integral part of the schools. The family resource centers create an environment where parents feel welcomed in the schools.

Implications for Policy

"Parents will always be a child's first and most important teacher," stated Arne Duncan, US Secretary of Education (2010). "And parenting is the most important job that every parent takes on." Policy and practice focus on the “what” of student achievement, without considering that the dynamics of parent-teacher relationships contribute

intricately to the “how.” In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act stated that parents and schools must jointly develop and distribute a written parent involvement policy each and every year.

A critical dimension of effective schooling is parent involvement. Research has shown conclusively that parent involvement at home in their children's education improves student achievement. The state education agency must monitor the school districts' Title I programs to make sure that each district carries out the law and to determine if the policies meet the requirements set forth by the federal government.

Consistent with the parent involvement goals of Title I, Part A of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), the Board of Education for each school district should develop and implement programs to encourage and support parents of students who are and are not eligible for Title I services to participate in all aspects of their child's education. The goal is to ensure that all families within the district are provided the same opportunities for involvement in their child's education.

Parents impact their child's educational successes by being involved in a variety of ways. Two of the most important things you can do are communicate with your student's teacher and school on a regular basis and support your student's learning at home. Under Title I schools are required to provide assistance to parents to help them understand the National Education Goals and the standards and assessments, which is used to determine their child's progress. Schools must develop a compact that outlines how parents, the school staff, and students share the responsibility for improved academic achievement. The compact should state how the school and parents would build a partnership. Annual meetings should be held at each school to inform parents of their

school's participation in and the requirements of Title I and the right of parents to be involved. It should be communicated through the school of all meetings being offered at various dates and time to encourage and invite parents to attend and become a part of the meetings.

Family resource centers should help coordinate and implement parent involvement along the Title I staff and district staff. Resource materials should be made available through the family resource centers to assist parents with school to home instruction. The family resource centers should assist school staff in making contacts within the home environment, implementing home to school programs to reinforce classroom performance, and coordinating parent activities at the school. Schools need to get the community involved in the school. Using the school facility as a central meeting place helps make the various service organizations, and their associated needs, more real to students and parents.

Implications for Future Research

The present study contributes to the growing interest in parent involvement in policy, research and practice. By discovering how teachers perceive parent involvement and exploring how the use of family resource center interventions, I was able to unpack different aspects of parent involvement and contribute a more nuanced approach to examining parent involvement in all its forms. This research illustrates the integral role that researchers can have in continuing to explore parent involvement from multiple perspectives and that they can have in expanding the current literature on the subject.

The Appalachian school in this study showed significant differences from the other two schools. This research suggests a need to continue to research the parent

involvement in the schools of Appalachia. The particular school in this study was also in a rural part of central Appalachia; so one could go even further to begin research into the parent involvement in rural communities. As a researcher getting to know the Appalachian community there is more pride in being present in the school and helping out in the community in which one lives in. The school is the central part of the community in many rural Appalachian areas, and families depend on the schools to provide them entertainment, resources, and an education.

One significant observation made from this study was the location of the Family Resource Centers. Those centers located within the building had a stronger support system and allowed for families to use the center with autonomy. More research needs to be explored on the placement of the Family Resource Centers, paying particular close attention to the traits that make the Family Resource Centers a successful part of the school community.

This study has opened the door for meaningful future research to take place on the topic of parent involvement. We can speculate some aspects of parent involvement influences teaching practice more than others, and a change in teacher practice is what theoretically affects student learning.

Education is a social service which equitable distribution can benefit the poor and those most at risk. If schools are to achieve equity, comparable opportunities to participate in and benefit from educational services must be afforded to all families. Educational initiatives must reach all families (Imber, 2001).

Both teachers and parents are crucial variables in determining the quality and extent of educational benefits students reap from the educational process (Epstein, 2001;

Pugh, 1985). When the family decides services, students at risk accrue greater benefits from school services (Epstein, 2001; Riehl, 2000).

Children are the center of the family that acts as a buffer, liaison, and advocate for children, “protecting and advancing their children’s rights to participate in school programs” (Epstein, 2001, 87). The aim of the family-school partnership should be to neutralize the effect of home advantage by proffering compensatory services and opportunities to the economically and socially disadvantaged (deCarvalho, 2001).

Parents as well as school personnel must be empowered if productive, sustainable partnerships are to be realized. Socially aware teachers, empowered through training, understand the life experiences of families of students at risk as well as the difficulties they face in fulfilling partnerships (Tortello, 2004). Teachers’ perceptions and leadership in partnership efforts are crucial in determining partnership success (McAnuff-Gumbs, 2008).

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APPENDIX A
EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



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NOTICE OF IRB EXEMPTION STATUS

Protocol Number: 11-124

Institutional Review Board IRB00002836, DHHS FWA00003332

Principal Investigator: **April C. Wood** Faculty Advisor: **Dr. Norman Powell**
Project Title: **Parental Involvement in Rural Elementary Schools of Students at Risk**
Exemption Date: **4/11/2011**
Approved by: **Dr. Steffen Wilson, IRB Member**

This document confirms that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has granted exempt status for the above referenced research project as outlined in the application submitted for IRB review with an immediate effective date. Exempt status means that your research is exempt from further review for a period of three years from the original notification date if no changes are made to the original protocol. If you plan to continue the project beyond three years, you are required to reapply for exemption.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities: It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to ensure that all investigators and staff associated with this study meet the training requirements for conducting research involving human subjects and follow the approved protocol.

Adverse Events: Any adverse or unexpected events that occur in conjunction with this study must be reported to the IRB within ten calendar days of the occurrence.

Changes to Approved Research Protocol: If changes to the approved research protocol become necessary, a description of those changes must be submitted for IRB review and approval prior to implementation. If the changes result in a change in your project's exempt status, you will be required to submit an application for expedited or full IRB review. Changes include, but are not limited to, those involving study personnel, subjects, and procedures.

Other Provisions of Approval, if applicable: None

Please contact Sponsored Programs at 859-622-3636 or send email to gus.benson@eku.edu or tiffany.hamblin@eku.edu with questions.



APPENDIX B
LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Principal:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Eastern Kentucky University working on a research project for my dissertation, Dr. Aaron Thompson is my Committee Chairperson, and other Committee Members are: Dr. Robert Biggin, Dr. Norman Powell, and Dr. Deann Allen. I am exploring the impact of Family Resource Centers on family involvement of students at-risk within rural schools. I understand the partnership between schools and Eastern Kentucky University will increase the probability of student success within your community. I am asking your permission to interview your elementary Family Resource Coordinator, the administrative team, and teachers in your school through an interview process. This confidential interview measures teachers' perceptions towards interventions used by the Family Resource Centers in an effort to create parental involvement opportunities with families of students at risk to close the achievement gap, from an educator's perspective using Dr. Epstein's (2001) Framework for Six Types of Parental Involvement and Dr. Thompson's 4-Pillar of Success Model.

Your educators' participation and honest feedback is critical to my analysis process. To ensure the confidentiality of their responses, I will not be given any information that would enable me to trace data back to any one individual. I appreciate your consideration to interview your elementary Family Resource Coordinator, the administrative team, teachers, and parents.

Please reply via e-mail of your consent to interview to april_wood14@eku.edu. Should you have any questions, you may contact April Wood via email or by phone at 859-885-6670 ext 4307, or my Committee Chairperson, Dr. Aaron Thompson via e-mail at aaron.thompson@eku.edu.

Sincerely,

April C. Wood, Doctoral Student

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Dr. Aaron Thompson, Committee Chair

aaron.thompson@ky.gov

APPENDIX C
GENERAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

Background Information of Teachers:

How many years have you been teaching?

How many years have you been at this school?

What is your degree level?

Background Information of Administrators:

How many years have you been an administrator?

How many years have you been at this school?

Background Information of Family Resource Coordinator:

How long have you been at this school?

Questions

Is the Family Resource Center able to help students when they need assistance?

What services does the Family Resource Center provide to help students and their families?

Teachers and administrators work closely with the Family Resource Center throughout the year?

Does this school do a good job of letting parents know about ways they can help out in school?

Are parent activities are scheduled at this school so parents can attend?

Does this school let parents know about meetings and special school events?

Do parents get involved in their child's education because they want him/her to do well in school?

APPENDIX D
OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Field Observation

Date:	Time In:	Time Out:
Name of Observer:		
Setting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Classroom<input type="radio"/> Administrative Office<input type="radio"/> Family Resource Center<input type="radio"/> Other _____		
Participant:		
Description of Participant: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Age:<input type="radio"/> Ethnicity:<input type="radio"/> Gender:<input type="radio"/> Job Held in Building:<input type="radio"/> Years of Experience:		
Description of Events (chronology):		

VITA

April C. Wood received her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Grade Education from University of Kentucky in 1998, and her Master of Arts in Elementary Grade Education from Georgetown College in 2005, and her Master of Arts in School Leadership from Eastern Kentucky University in 2007. She has been employed in the Jessamine County Public Schools system since 2009 and has served as Assistant Principal at Rosenwald Dunbar Elementary during that time period. Before coming to Jessamine County she served in Garrard County as an elementary school teacher for eight years.