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School experiences then and now: Are parents' perceptions of their own school experiences related to their perceptions of their child's middle school?

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School Experiences Then and Now: Are Parents' Perceptions of Their Own School

Experiences Related to Their Perceptions of Their Child's Middle School?

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Table of Contents

List of Tables

School Experiences Then and Now: Are Parents' Perceptions of Their Own
School Experiences Related to Their Perceptions of Their Child's Middle School?

Roxana M. Sanchez-Horn

ABSTRACT

The current study explored the relationship between parents' perceptions of their

child's middle school and parents' perceptions of their own school experiences.

Additionally, it was important to research how these relationships differed among

variables. The variables explored were (1) race, (2) parents' own educational

backgrounds (level of education), and (3) socio-economic status. Based on scales

commonly used in the study of parent involvement, a survey (i.e., Parent Perceptions of

Schooling) was developed. The survey consisted of two parts (i.e., Part I, How I Feel

About My Child's School and Part II: Parents' Own School Experiences Questionnaire)

and a demographic section (i.e., Part III: Demographic Information). The first two parts

were divided into factors or subscales (i.e., Part I: Information, Participation, and

Welcome; Part II: Teachers, Parents, Self, and School), all of which were found to have

high internal consistency and reliability. The survey was administered to parents of

middle school children at a middle school in Pasco County, Florida. Results of multiple

regression analyses indicated that none of the predictor variables significantly predicted

the dependant variables. However, significant correlations emerged between (1)

Information and Race-Other; (2) Information and Level of Education; (3) Participation

and Level of Education; (4) Teachers and Race-Hispanic; (5) Teachers and SES; (6) Self

and Level of Education; (7) School and Level of Education; and (8) School and SES.

Additionally seven significant correlations were found when taking into consideration

interaction affects of predictor, dependant, and moderator variables. Limitations to this

study and survey research in general are discussed, as well as future directions.

Chapter One

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The concept of parent involvement has been carefully investigated throughout the past decade. National goals and standards specific to the increase of parent involvement have been established in this country. For example, in 1994, the National Educational Goals Panel stated that by the year 2000, every school would promote partnerships increasing parent involvement and participation in promoting the academic, social, and emotional growth of children (Christenson, Hurley, Sheridan, & Fenstermacher, 1997). In 1997, the National PTA (Parent Teacher Association), in cooperation with educational and other professionals, developed six National Standards for Parent Involvement Programs (White, 1998). Many states also have developed laws in attempts to increase parent involvement. In 1973, Florida mandated that all school districts develop school advisory committees (SAC) that represent the community of the school, comprised of students and parents. These committees are obligated to participate in the development of the Annual Report of School progress that is sent to all parents and are evaluated yearly (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Other states such as Missouri, California, Tennessee, and Minnesota also have mandated parent involvement (Solomon, 1991).

Most of the research in the area of parent involvement has been geared towards elementary schools, elementary-aged students, and their parents. Luttrell (2002) noted that parental roles and schools' expectations for parents become less clear as students reach middle and high school. However, research also suggests that parent involvement in middle and high school is just as significant to students as it is in elementary schools

1

and increases achievement, attendance, and positive behavior (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001).

Parent involvement can most simply be defined as the dedication of resources to a child by a parent within a given domain (Grolnick, Nehjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997). According to Wehlburg (1996) and others in the literature, parent involvement can generally be classified into two categories, school-based and home-based. School-based involvement includes taking on varying roles, such as that of a volunteer, program supporter (also called the visitor role), learner, spectator, and/or decision-maker (governance and advocacy role)(Sandell, 1998). In contrast, home-based involvement includes meeting basic parental obligations (State of Iowa Department of Education, 1998); providing academic assistance (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992); communicating with the school (Epstein, 1992); providing community experiences (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993); and engaging in parent-child interactions (Christenson et al., 1992).

Parent involvement is essential in a child's life and is critical to his/her educational, social, and cognitive development. There are many beneficial outcomes associated with positive parent involvement. For example, Gettinger and Guetschow (1998) noted that positive parent involvement has been associated with increases in student achievement and attendance, as well as with lower dropout rates and improvements in student attitudes, classroom behavior, motivation, and self-esteem.

All parents want to help their children and see them succeed (Epstein 1992). Unfortunately, there are barriers that can impede the parent involvement process. Limited skills and knowledge, restricted opportunities for interaction, and psychological and

cultural barriers are just a few barriers (Moles, 1993). Grolnick et al. (1997) also noted

that lack of social support is a barrier to parent involvement. Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes,

and Joyner (1999), Chavkin and Gonzalez (1996), Petersen and Warnsby (1992), Garcia

(1990), and Schwartz (1997) found that parents' past negative school experiences was a

common barrier to parent involvement. Chavkin and Gonzalez (1996) explain that this

barrier is so prevalent that many parents are hesitant to work with schools or even enter

the school building. Comer et al. (1999) outline a program for overcoming barriers to

parent involvement. They stress that the number one barrier to parent involvement is past

negative school experiences among parents, and that this can be overcome by building

trust by listening to parents, inviting their input, pairing them with individual staff

members, calling them with positive reports, and providing their children with

recognition/rewards for academic and social behavior.

Naturally, parent involvement is difficult to measure. One of the main reasons for

this is that there are numerous ways to describe parent involvement. There also have been

questions raised as to who parent involvement includes (i.e., parents only, siblings, other

relatives, friends, etc.). Because it is a term that is difficult to operationally define, most

theorists have broken parent involvement down into categories (Hickman, 1999). This

method of defining the term also has led to a great amount of variance in the definition.

For example, Gordon and Breivogel (1976) proposed six types of involvement,

Thornburg (1981) proposed seven, and Epstein (1988) proposed five.

Researchers have employed several methods in order to attempt to measure parent

involvement. Interviews are one way that parent involvement has been measured. When

measuring parent perceptions of involvement, surveys/questionnaires have most

commonly been used. Melnick and Fiene (1989) used a survey to measure parent attitudes towards school effectiveness on six dimensions, one of which was home-school relations. Surveys can be faster, less expensive, and less obtrusive ways to gather information (Research Methods Knowledge Base, 2000). This can be beneficial when dealing with parents and matters of education since research shows that some parents feel uncomfortable in their children's schools and are reluctant to communicate with school personnel (Webster-Stratton, 1997). The use of surveys provides a confidential, non-threatening way to gain information and eliminate the stress sometimes involved with direct communication. Dauber & Epstein (1993) suggested that surveys/questionnaires can provide much useful information, including parent's attitudes towards their child's school, how frequently they are involved in their child's education and in which ways, and how well school programs and teachers inform and involve parents.

Purpose of Research Study

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' perceptions of their child's middle school. In particular, the study examined whether there are differences in parents' perceptions based on race, SES, and parents' own educational backgrounds (i.e., amount of school completed). The study included a measure of how parents' felt about their own schooling experiences; examined how this varies by race, SES, and educational background; and determined the relationship between parents' perceptions of their own educational experiences and their current perceptions of their child's middle school.

A quantitative correlational design, conceptual grouping of items (in order to develop subscales), and multiple regression analyses were utilized in order to examine the relationships between data on Parts I, II, and III (i.e., Part I, How I Feel About My

Child's School; Part II: Parents' Own School Experiences Questionnaire; and Part III:

Demographic Information) of the "Parent Perceptions of Schooling" questionnaire. A

conceptual grouping of survey items yielded the development of the following subscales:

(a) Information (i.e., questions related to how well participants feel the school

disseminates information to parents); (b) Participation (i.e., questions related to how well

participants feel the school is at including parents in the decision-making process); (c)

Welcome (i.e., questions related to how welcome school personnel make participants feel

and the accessibility and approachability of faculty and staff); (d) Teachers (i.e.,

questions related to things participants felt their teachers did and how their teachers

treated them); (e) Parents (i.e., questions related to things participants felt their own

parents did for them in reference to school); (f) Self (i.e., questions related to

participants' own personal feelings about specific aspects of school); and (g) School (i.e.,

questions related to things participants felt their school did and how well the school did

them). Multiple regression analyses were utilized in order to address these specific

research questions:

1) How much of the variance in parent's perceptions of their child's school as measured

    by the subscales INFORMATION, WELCOME, and PARTICIPATION is

    accounted for by: (a) Race, (b) Level of Education, and (c) SES?

2) How much of the variance in parent's perceptions of their own school experiences as

    measured by the subscales TEACHERS, PARENTS, SELF, and SCHOOL is

    accounted for by: (a) Race, (b) Level of Education, and (c) SES?

3) What is the relationship between parents' perceptions of their own school experiences and their perceptions of their child's school? Do these relationships differ by (a) Race, (b) SES, and (c) Level of Education?

This study adds to the literature which focuses on barriers to parent involvement on the middle school level by attempting to link parents perceptions of their own school to perceptions of their child's school. While examining this relationship, this study also examined the affects that variables such as race, level of education, and SES had on parent perceptions. In addition to providing insight on the relationships of parent perceptions, this study also provides feedback to the middle school on what they can do to better facilitate the parent involvement process, as defined by the following: making parents feel welcome, encouraging participation, and more effectively disseminating useful information.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Overview

There are many terms often heard in education. Some terms and movements come in waves. In the past decade, one of those movements has been to increase and encourage parent involvement. In fact, in 1994, the National Educational Goals Panel set a goal stating that by the year 2000, every school would promote partnerships increasing parent involvement and participation in promoting the academic, social, and emotional growth of children (Christenson, Hurley, Sheridan, & Fenstermacher, 1997). A recent reauthorization in 2001 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act mandated involvement of parents in the educational process (Cooper, 2002). The significance of parent involvement was also acknowledged in 1997 when the National PTA (Parent Teacher Association), in cooperation with other professionals, developed six National Standards for Parent Involvement Programs (White, 1998). With the growth of literature and practice in this area, and the evidence of positive outcomes, it seems that parent involvement is no longer a trend, but a common practice that is here to stay.

Up until a few years ago, research on parent involvement on the secondary level was too limited to allow for the measure of its effectiveness (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001). Although the amount of research pertaining to parent involvement in elementary schools surpasses the amount of research that has been conducted in middle schools, there has been an increase in research on parent involvement in middle schools over the past few

years. Researchers believe that parent involvement remains an important factor in promoting positive student outcomes as students advance to the secondary level.

Parent Involvement Defined

The scope of what is defined as parent involvement has become broader over time. Even the term 'parent involvement' has been expanded to the phrase 'family involvement' and includes not only parents, but also extended family members, siblings, legal guardians, neighbors, and family friends (Becker-Klein, 1999). Parent involvement can most simply be defined as the dedication of resources to a child by a parent within a given domain (Grolnick, Nehjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997).

Some parent involvement practices may be more feasible for particular families and/or schools, while other practices may result in better outcomes for students. This varies on an individual basis. Parent involvement varies between schools, communities, and families (Chavkin, 1993). There is one point, however, that is consistently stated throughout the literature in reference to parent involvement practices. Reynolds (1992) stated this point in a succinct, yet powerful manner when he said that parent involvement was considered to be a critical component in a child's educational and cognitive development. He continued to say that parent involvement activities at home, in the school, and classroom all led to positive influences on achievement and school adjustment.

As noted previously, the act of parent involvement can be defined in many ways. According to Wehlburg (1996) and others in the literature, we can generally classify parent involvement into two categories, school based and home based.

School-based parent involvement. There are many roles a parent can play within the school environment. School-based parent involvement activities provide parents the option to become involved with their child's schooling on different levels. Parents can take on varying roles, such as that of a volunteer, program supporter (also called the visitor role), learner, spectator, and/or decision-maker (governance and advocacy role) (Sandell, 1998).

Some characteristic volunteer activities include assisting the teacher in the classroom or administrators in the school building; tutoring; acting as a translator; becoming a class parent; planning school events and/or working at events (e.g., chaperoning on a school field trip or assisting at a school fundraiser). Parents who attend open house, parent-teacher conferences, and back to school night are in the supportive/visitor role, as are those who are donors or part of the booster club. Parents in the learner role attend workshops that are offered by the school in order to enhance their own education and skills. Many times, schools have events or performances, such as art festivals, sporting events, and science fairs, which give parents the opportunity to become involved as spectators. Parents can also play the role of decision-maker. This can occur through participation in parent associations such as the PTA, PTSA (Parent-Teacher-Student Association), PTC (Parent-Teacher Club), PTO (Parent Teacher Organization), PTF (Parent Teacher Fellowship), HAS (Home School Association), and other such associations. Some parents also choose to become involved as part of the individual school's board, advisory committee, and/or on the school board for the district/county, where their input and advocacy can affect and change policies and also help develop new policies/initiatives.

Home-based parent involvement. As with school-based involvement, home-based parent involvement practices provide parents the opportunity to become involved in many different ways. Some of those practices include: meeting basic parental obligations (State of Iowa Department of Education, 1998); providing academic assistance (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992); communicating with the school (Epstein, 1992); providing community experiences (Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, & Bloom, 1993); and parent-child interactions (Christenson et al., 1992).

Meeting basic parental obligations is a large part of the home-based parent involvement process. This includes providing the basic daily-living needs such as food, health care, clothing, and shelter. It can also include the establishment of a daily routine to help regulate activities such as eating, sleeping, studying, playing, and participating in leisure activities (State of Iowa Department of Education, 1998). This helps to create structure and emphasize consistency. In relation to school, parental obligations can include making sure students are prepared for school and attend on a daily basis. Discipline and setting rules/limits are also included as parental obligations, or can be viewed as part of parent-child interactions.

Providing academic assistance is often seen as the most common example of home-based parent involvement. It includes such activities as providing assistance with homework (including direct instruction), encouraging and modeling reading, structuring a working environment in the home (i.e., providing an appropriate space to work with proper lighting), furnishing necessary academic materials (e.g., books, writing utensils, etc.), and implementing a structure for learning and monitoring (Christenson et al., 1992).

10

Communicating with the school is another home-based practice that often appears in the literature on home-school collaboration. Reciprocal notes and phone calls between the parent and school, the acknowledgment of school correspondence (e.g., newsletters), and signing student products (e.g., homework, progress reports, planners, permission slips, quizzes/tests) are all ways parents can communicate with the school from home.

As another means of home-based parent involvement, parents can provide children with outside experiences and exposure to learning opportunities. These experiences can take place in the home and/or in the community and do not necessarily have a monetary cost attached. Some examples include watching television together and discussing the programs; playing games; participating in hobbies; providing exposure to different types of music and art; reading newspapers and magazines; visiting libraries, museums, fairs, zoos, parks, and historical sites; and attending cultural events (Kellaghan, et al., 1993).

An additional home-based parent involvement practice is engaging in parent-child interactions, which can be both verbal and nonverbal. This component includes many levels of involvement. Participating in conversations and sharing, whether it is at meal time, while participating in leisure activities, or in the car, are all forms of important verbal interactions. Encouragement, verbal praise, and emotional responsiveness are all part of the home affective environment, which focuses on the relationship between the parent and child. Parents who attend to the emotional needs of a child by providing support in problem solving activities along with reinforcement and the freedom to explore are helping to enhance the child's affective environment at home (Christenson et al., 1992). Another significant component of the parent involvement practice of

enhancing parent-child interactions is the clear communication of expectations and

attributions for learning and behavior. Parental modeling of expected practices of

academic tasks (e.g., reading), behavioral tasks (e.g., dealing with conflict), and daily

living skills (e.g., brushing your teeth) is seen as an example of non-verbal interactions

and is a vital component of parent involvement.

The Impact of Parent Involvement

Parent involvement yields positive results for children, parents, and teachers and

is a necessary component of an effective school community (Haynes & Comer, 1996).

Parent involvement can help bridge the gap that sometimes exists between parents and

school personnel by linking family life to schooling (Christenson, 1995). Some parents

and communities benefit by receiving information on how to best help children. They

also benefit by learning more about the functions of a school and about education

programs, which can help them to become more supportive of their child's educational

career and a better resource to others. For teachers and schools, there is a boost in morale,

and student achievement increases. Teachers are viewed more positively by parents and,

in turn, tend to view parents more positively. Teachers and schools also gain more parent

support (Department of Iowa Department of Education, 1998).

The process of parent involvement also is essential in a child's life and is critical

to his/her educational, social, and cognitive development. There is an abundance of

literature that discusses the many positive effects of positive parent involvement. For

example, Gettinger and Guetschow (1998) stated that parent involvement has been

associated with increases in student achievement and attendance, as well as with lower

12

dropout rates and improvements in student attitudes, classroom behavior, motivation, and self-esteem.

Achievement. Most of the research in the area of parent involvement discusses the high correlation that exists between parent involvement and student achievement. Wehlburg (1996) stated that parents are a vast resource for the facilitation of student learning. Christenson (1995) noted that students show improvements in grades, test scores, completion rate of homework, and participation level in the classroom as a result of parent involvement.

Attendance. As with achievement, there is research that supports the notion that parent involvement affects student attendance. This research also has been linked to lower drop-out rates (Chavkin, 1993). Christenson (1995) found as well that students whose parents are involved in schooling show improvements in attendance rates. Michael-Hiatt (2001) stated that schools' efforts to involve families increased student attendance, promoted elevated high school graduation rates, reduced retentions, and increased parents and students levels of satisfaction with school in general.

Behavior. Increases in positive behavior, which can be defined as decreases in behavior referrals and suspensions, and increases in positive attitudes and self-esteem, also have been found to be related to parent involvement (Chavkin, 1993; Christenson et al., 1997; Haynes & Comer, 1996; Michael-Hiatt, 2001; & Sandell, 1998). Behavior is most often tracked in schools through referrals and suspensions. Again, both school- and home-based parental involvement practices play a role in the increase of positive behavior for children in schools. Discipline at home, which involves establishing a set of rules and consequences, is often noted in the literature when discussing student behavior.

Other home-based and school-based parental involvement practices also are important. As previously mentioned, a study by Simon (2001) was conducted in order to measure interactions among high school, family, and community partnerships. After controlling for factors such as ethnicity/race, gender, family structure, socioeconomic status (SES), and previous achievement, analyses showed that different forms of parent involvement had a positive effect on the behavior of adolescents and school climate (e.g., coming to class prepared, study habits, attitudes, and behavior patterns).

A publication by the National Education Service (2002) stated that student behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, and antisocial behavior, decrease as parent involvement increases. The publication also states that when parents are involved in their child's education, lower rates of suspensions for disciplinary reason occur and behavior improves.

All three outcomes discussed (achievement, attendance, behavior) have shown positive relationships with parent involvement (Christenson et al., 1992; and Cotton et al., 2001). These factors also are related to one another (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). It is difficult to discuss about one without including the other. For example, it is difficult for a student to achieve well and receive high grades on assignments if he or she is frequently absent. Likewise, negative behavior can negatively affect achievement and reduce the time a student spends in the classroom. This is probably a reason why the research that directly relates one parent involvement practice to one particular outcome is very limited.

Factors Associated With Differing Levels of Parent Involvement

There are characteristics of parents/families, schools, and students/children that are associated with differing levels of parent involvement. As has been noted previously, not all parent involvement is the same. The practice of parent involvement can look very different from person to person and between different schools and communities. Outcomes for children also can vary. While some parent, school, and student characteristics are associated with higher parent involvement, other characteristics are associated with lower parent involvement. Understanding these characteristics can help educators to overcome barriers to home school collaboration that exist for some families.

Parent/family characteristics. There are many parent characteristics that determine whether or not parents will be involved in their child's education and the extent of that involvement. Most frequently discussed in the literature is the concept of family status variables (i.e., who families are) versus family process variables (i.e., the ways in which parents help support learning at home). Raffaele and Knoff (1999) described family process variables simply as 'what families do.' Research shows that family status variables such as SES, level of education, ethnicity, and marital status are often predictive of the amount and type of parent involvement and student success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1995). However, studies also show that family process variables, or what has been described in this review as home-based parent involvement practices (e.g., meeting basic parental obligations, providing academic assistance, communicating with the school, providing community experiences, and parent-child interactions) are considered to be more important in determining outcomes for children (Christenson et al., 1997). Kellaghan et al. (1993) reinforced this point. Their findings showed much higher correlations between measures of process variables and

ability/achievement than those of status variables and scholastic ability/achievement, which means that what parents do is more important than who parents are.

Another study by Grolnick et al. (1997) examined predictors of parent involvement. Participants included over 200 mothers from different ethnic backgrounds, social classes and family demographics; third, fourth, and fifth grade students (male and female) from four urban public elementary schools in the Northwest part of the United States; and their 28 teachers. In order to measure behavioral involvement at school, student, teacher, and parent questionnaires, were administered to participants. In order to measure cognitive-intellectual (i.e., exposing children to intellectually stimulating activities such as talking about current events or a trip to a museum) and personal (i.e., knowing about and keeping up with a child's status at school) involvement, students and parents completed the Child Report and Parent Report, respectively.

Several other scales were administered in order to identify and measure predictor variables (i.e., difficult context, social support, parent attitudes, teacher attitudes, and child difficulty), and a series of analyses were conducted (i.e., correlational analyses and hierarchical linear modeling) in order to examine the relationships between predictor variables and the three parent involvement indices (i.e., school, cognitive, and personal). When controlling for family SES, the hierarchical linear model (HLM) showed that parent attitudes were associated with all three types of involvement – parents expressing a greater role were more involved. It also showed that ratings of child difficulty were associated with two indices – mothers who rated their child as being more difficult were less involved personally and cognitively. Context variables yielded one effect – mothers describing a difficult context were less involved personally. Social support also yielded

one effect – mothers that were more satisfied with their levels of social support were more involved in cognitive activities as home. Main and interaction effects of predictor variables were also measured through the use of the HLM, and demographics were added to the model. It was found that higher levels of involvement at the school level were associated with higher SES and two-parent families. In this study, factors from each level (i.e., individual, contextual, and institutional) predicated parent involvement, but the effects of predictors relied on the type of involvement examined. Most importantly, the researchers found that personal involvement was not associated with SES which suggests that more affective types of involvement may occur equally at al parental occupational and educational levels.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (1997) also created a model to explain how parents decide to become involved in their children's education. They discussed three constructs that influence parents' involvement decisions – parent's role construction, parent's sense of efficacy, and parent's perceptions of opportunities and barriers to involvement. Parent's role construction is the parent's belief regarding what they are supposed to do in relation to their child's education. Parent's sense of efficacy is the belief parents have that they can benefit their child and positively influence their educational success. Parent's perceptions of opportunities and barriers to involvement include the extent to which they feel their involvement is wanted.

As Epstein (1992) stated, all parents want to help their children and see them succeed. Unfortunately, the parent involvement process is not always easy. There are often barriers or obstacles that get in the way. Nicolau and Ramos (1990) found that a common barrier among parents from minority ethnicities was differences in the way roles

were interpreted. For example, Mexican-American parents saw their role as being responsible for providing basic needs for their children, along with instilling proper behavior and respect, while the school's role was to provide their child with knowledge. They felt strongly about not interfering with another person's job or role. Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes, and Joyner (1999), Chavkin and Gonzalez (1996), Petersen and Warnsby (1992), Garcia (1990), and Schwartz (1997) found that parents' past negative school experiences was another common barrier to parent involvement. Chavkin and Gonzalez (1996) explain that this barrier is so prevalent that many parents are hesitant to work with schools or even enter the school building. Garcia (1990) stated that many non-English speaking parents have likely fallen victim to linguistic and racial discrimination by schools in the past, which has intensified their discomfort with school systems. Through an analysis of a parent training program for low-income families, Webster-Stratton (1997) showed that parents who had stressful childhood experiences with schools are reluctant to become involved in school-based practices. This can be attributed to the level of discomfort they feel and/or to the uncertainty of how to best deal with school personnel in order to best support their child's education (Webster-Stratton, 1997). The parent training program was developed as the Parents and Children Videotape Series, and focused on four topics (i.e., playing with and helping children to learn, using praise and encouragement, effective limit-setting, and handling misbehavior). Over time, with feedback from extensive evaluations of the program, a prevention program that focused on school involvement was added. More recent evaluations of the program revealed reports of barriers to parent involvement. They include: stressful childhood experiences

18

with schools and/or teachers; language barriers; and not knowing what to ask teachers, how to act in the classroom, or how to develop positive relationships with teachers.

In a longitudinal study by Kaplan, Liu, and Kaplan (2000), the researchers looked at the effects of mothers' negative school experiences in junior high and the influence of parent involvement and educational level and compared them to that of their children (junior high students). The study began with 1,444 mothers who were originally surveyed through self-report in 1971, during their seventh grade year. Information was then obtained in the 1990's from their adolescent children through interviews and questionnaires measuring self-concept, psychosocial variables, deviant behavior, and interactions between individuals and their peers, families, and school personnel. The researchers found that children of mothers who reported negative school experiences were more likely to also report negative school experiences themselves. The same was found after statistically controlling for variables such as gender, race/ethnicity, and SES. Additional findings showed that mothers with negative experiences in junior high attained lower levels of achievement and participated less in parent involvement activities. In order to help parents overcome these attitude-related barriers, the researchers suggest that schools create safer, more accepting environments for parents.

Moles (1993) also discussed particular obstacles to parent involvement – limited skills and knowledge, restricted opportunities for interaction, and psychological and cultural barriers. Limited skills and knowledge can refer to many things, one of which is language. Parents who do not speak and/or read the language used at their child's school are at a considerable disadvantage. It has also been shown that parents with a higher level of education participate more in school-based parent involvement, making low levels of

education a barrier to involvement (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 1998).

Restricted opportunities for interactions refer to the discrepancy that often occurs

between the parent's availability and the organizational policies/practices of the schools.

Many times, parents' schedules (especially those of parents who work) conflict with the

schedule of events set forth by the school, meaning that parents are often left out, unable

to participate in school-based involvement (e.g., open houses, parent-teacher meetings,

school committee meetings, sporting events). Psychological and cultural barriers also

obstruct parent involvement. Most commonly, psychological barriers include

misinterpretations and misunderstandings between the goals of the parents (for the child)

and those of the teacher/school. They may also include negative expectations,

stereotypes, intimidation, and mistrust, all of which can result from previous experiences

a parent may have had. Cultural barriers can include language barriers and differences in

values, goals, methods of education, and definitions of appropriate goals.

Grolnick et al. (1997) noted that lack of social support is also seen as a barrier to

parent involvement. High levels of stress can negatively impact parent involvement,

especially home-based practices. The more socially supported parents feel, the more they

can focus their time on parent involvement.

In their resource guide, the State of Iowa Department of Education (1998) cited

the 1992 Survey on Barriers to Parent and Family Involvement that was conducted by the

National PTA. The biggest barrier listed by parents was time. Eighty nine percent of

parents surveyed reported that they do not have enough time to get involved. Other

barriers included parents feeling they had nothing to contribute (32%), parents not

understanding the system or how to become involved (32%), lack of child care (28%),

parents feeling intimidated (25%), parents not being available during times when school functions were scheduled (18%), language/cultural differences (15%), lack of transportation (11%), and not feeling welcomed at the school (9%). Parent perceptions have a strong effect on their involvement decisions, and unlike status variables, their perceptions may be influenced by characteristics of schools (Gettinger & Guetshow, 1998). Although a number of barriers exist, schools need to work to overcome them. Webster-Stratton (1997) lists some ways to overcome barriers obtained from the parent training program evaluation. One of the main suggestions includes training teachers on how to involve parents. Comer et al. (1999) outline a program full of strategies for overcoming barriers as well. The number one strategy they discuss involves building trust by listening to parents, inviting their input, pairing them with individual staff members, calling them with positive reports, and providing their children with recognition/rewards for academic and social behavior in order to overcome the barrier of past negative school experiences among parents.

     <u>School characteristics.</u> Schools play a major role in the facilitation of parent involvement. There are many things schools can do in order to increase parent involvement. School-initiated communication that is frequent and that includes positive information (e.g., a good note home) is one example. In a study by Leitch and Tangri (1988), where parent's and school's (junior high) concerns were the focus, parents said that they would like to become more involved at the school, but were never asked to help or were never informed of opportunities. This study was conducted in two urban junior high schools in Washington, DC. All 60 families who participated in the study were African American, and the sample varied across family member make-up (i.e., two-

parent nuclear families, single-parent nuclear families, single-parent extended families,

blended families, two-parent extended families, and institutional/foster homes) and

educational level. The 30 males and 30 females ranged in age from 12-17. Names of

participants were obtained from teachers and/or counselors, and the participants varied

across differing levels of school involvement. School involvement was defined in terms

of frequency of contact (face-to-face or via phone) with any school staff member,

attendance at PTSA meetings, and active efforts at home or school to support students'

academic performance and attendance. Twenty nine teachers (one of whom was male)

were African American with the exception of one (who was Asian) also served as

participants and varied by years of teaching/experience. Parents and teachers were given

surveys with structured and open ended questions. In general, a lack of mutual

understanding and planning was the biggest barrier to involvement. Henderson,

Marburger, and Ooms (1986) stated that parents' negative feelings toward parent

involvement are often reinforced when schools only communicate with parents to share

negative news about their children. Griffith (1998) reinforced these points in his study

by stating that good communication leads to parental satisfaction, which in turn leads to

increased involvement among parents. According to Epstein (1992), schools can

positively influence parent involvement levels if they promote school programs that (a)

guide parents on how to get involved on several levels, and (b) educate parents on how to

best impact their child's education. Offering support/guidance and skills to parents helps

to empower them.

Leading the way in research pertaining to family involvement, Epstein (1987)

stated that regardless of their educational background and socio-economic status (SES),

parents want their children to be successful in schools but often wait for educators to direct their involvement. Many times, schools do not make an attempt to involve parents. When schools do reach out to parents, it is usually in relation to a negative situation with their child (e.g., poor academic performance or inappropriate behaviors). Sandell (1998) pointed out that schools frequently are lacking in the area of training in relation to dealing with and including parents.

There are other characteristics of a school that can impede the practice of parent involvement. Characteristics such as the physical appearance/features of a school, the organizational structure, school climate, and attitudes of teachers and school staff all can affect involvement (Griffith, 1998). In particular, Grolnick et al. (1997) discussed the effect of teachers' attitudes on parent involvement. Frequently, teachers can be the parents' only contact with a school. Teachers who are more positive and willing to reach out to and help a student/parent will convey a better attitude. This, in turn, is likely to evoke more involvement that is advantageous for all parties involved. Some teachers, however, do not want parents involved in the curriculum. Again, the way a parent is treated and the attitude displayed by a teacher can directly affect the amount of participation in parent involvement practices, especially those that are school-based (Leitch & Tangri, 1988).

The age of a child also is related to parent involvement. Keith et al. (1993) pointed out that there is little research in the area of parent involvement in middle school. In fact, the bulk of research in the area of parent involvement is directed towards general education students in elementary school and elementary students of minority dissent or from low SES families. However, it is important not to overlook involvement at the

middle and high school levels, for parent involvement practices at those levels remain important to children's school outcomes. For example, Keith et al. (1993), whose study looked at the achievement of eighth graders and parent involvement, concluded that parent involvement had a powerful effect on achievement.

According to Gettinger et al. (1998), the amount of parent involvement declines as student move up in school. It was reported that although parents would like to remain involved, there are a number of factors that create barriers, such as the increase in difficulty of academic work, changes in parent's beliefs about their ability to help their children, and changes in children's interest (children don't want their parents to be as involved). Epstein and Dauber (1991) stated that teachers communicate less with parents in middle school than in elementary school. It also was found that middle school parents receive less information and guidance on how to become involved in what is usually a more complex school system.

Luttrell (2002), a middle school principal, noted the problems he sees with parent involvement at the middle school level. Some of those problems include feelings of reluctance among parents to become involved in their child's middle school because the parental roles are not as clear as compared to elementary school; the difficulty of communication with the increased number of teachers a student has in middle school; and their own unpleasant feelings/memories from when they were in middle school. It was noted that some parents have less time because they might go back to work once their child reaches adolescence. Also, some parents are affected by the change in their child's attitude. Some children portray signs of not wanting to be seen by a peer with their parent.

Student characteristics. Students also have an affect on whether or not parents are involved and on the level of participation. Some child characteristics that play a big role on the parent's decision to become involved are achievement, skills and knowledge, attitude, and behavior.

As mentioned earlier, it was found that a reciprocal relationship between parent involvement and achievement exists. A study by Keith et al. (1993) stated that a child's previous achievement affects parent involvement and parent involvement affects current achievement. Parents become more involved when they perceive that their efforts are resulting in positive outcomes for their child (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1997). Behavior has a similar effect on parent involvement. Good behavior might yield more positive feedback from a school to the parent, and thus, encourage parent involvement at both the school and home level.

Children can themselves be barriers to parent involvement. A child's attitude about his/her school could influence the parent's decision regarding the amount of school-based parent involvement and whether they will participate in a positive or negative way. Sometimes children do not want their parents to become involved in their education at all; therefore, the child's attitude can also discourage a parent from helping them with school work or becoming involved in school (Gettinger et al., 1998).

Similar to the three student outcomes discussed earlier in this article, the three factors associated with parent involvement (i.e., parent, school, and student characteristics) are also related to one another. It is almost impossible to discuss one without incorporating another.

SES. Although not a main focus of this literature review, it should be noted that SES is an important variable to consider when examining the realm of parent involvement. Much of the research that exists on parent involvement includes the variable of SES, since the demographics of the United States and its communities are constantly changing (Chavkin, 1993).

Contrary to popular belief, parent involvement among low socioeconomic groups does exist and can be just as important to outcomes for children as it is for other socioeconomic groups. For example, low SES parents generally have high expectations of their children. They set high, yet realistic and attainable goals for their children, use effort attributions when giving praise, and make expectations clear (Christenson, et al., 1992). It is important to remember that while educators and outsiders cannot change a families' SES or other status variables, they can have a significant and positive impact on family process variables.

It has been found that families can be discriminated against by a school because of their social status. Goldring (1993) discussed the views of some principals on families from low SES homes. The principals in her study had the tendency to listen to higher SES parents more often in decision-making and every-day school matters. Principals also stated that they did not want parental involvement from families of low SES in fear of weakening the effectiveness of the school's programs.

The lack of home-school collaboration (reciprocal, active involvement between the school and home) has been suggested to be the main reason for the gap between families of low SES (in regard to parent involvement) and schools (Chavkin, 1993). Home-school collaboration involves efforts from all stakeholders, educators, children,

parents, and community members alike, in order to help reduce the existing barriers to parent involvement on all levels.

Summary

While parent involvement is not a new concept, it has certainly been a hot topic in education over the past decade and will likely continue to be an important topic in education in the coming years. There are nationwide and statewide initiatives that have been initiated in order to help increase parent involvement practices in education. For example, in 1994, the National Educational Goals Panel set a goal stating that by the year 2000, every school would promote partnerships increasing parent involvement and participation in promoting the academic, social, and emotional growth of children (Christenson, Hurley, Sheridan, & Fenstermacher, 1997). The National PTA (2003) noted that there are currently twelve states with national standards geared towards parent involvement. At the district and school levels, policies are being written into action and improvement plans are being implemented to reinforce these initiates. Parent involvement is seen as an asset to the educational and cognitive development of our nation's children.

There are many definitions of parent involvement that currently exist. However, parent involvement can most simply be thought of as the dedication of resources to a child by a parent within a given domain (Grolnick et al., 1997). There are two main levels of parent involvement, school-based and home-based. School-based parent involvement roles involve the parent as a volunteer, program supporter, learner, spectator, and/or decision-maker (Sandell, 1998). Home-based parent involvement includes meeting basic parental obligations, providing academic assistance,

communicating with the school, providing community experiences, and parent-child interactions.

Parent involvement has proven to be significant in student-related outcomes such as achievement, attendance, and behavior. When parent involvement is strong, these outcomes tend to be more positive. Academic achievement, student attendance to school, and positive behavior increase, while behavior referrals and drop-out rates decrease. Self-esteem in students also has been noted to increase as a result of increased parental involvement (Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998). All of these outcomes also have an effect on one another.

The practice of parent involvement can look very different from person to person and between schools and communities. There are characteristics of parents/families, schools, and students/children that are associated with differing levels of parent involvement. With family/parent characteristics, it is important to remember that family process variables (i.e., what families do) are much more significant than family status variables (what they are). Family process variables have a greater effect on parent involvement, especially practices that are home-based. Because past negative school experiences can be a barrier to involvement for parents, educators must focus on improving what schools do and how they help facilitate a safer environment that welcomes and guides involvement.

Communication is one of the most important steps a school can take to increase parent involvement. Open (i.e., two-way) communication leads to parental satisfaction, which in turn leads to increased involvement among parents (Griffith, 1998).

The pursuit of increased parent involvement in secondary grades must not be forgotten either. The results of parent involvement in middle and high school are just as significant to children and increase achievement, attendance, and positive behavior (Cotton and Wikelund, 2001)

There also are student characteristics (e.g., achievement, skills and knowledge, attitude, and behavior) that have an affect on whether or not parents are involved and on their level of participation. Similar to the three student outcomes of parent involvement, the three factors associated with parent involvement (i.e., parent, school, and student characteristics) also are related to one another. It is almost impossible to discuss one without incorporating another.

The factor of SES must not be ignored when discussing parent involvement. Because of the changing face of our society, educators will at one time or another be faced with the challenge of involving parents and families from low SES homes (Chavkin, 1993). It is important that they are trained in order to do this effectively and that they realize they can affect family process variables in order to increase involvement.

Present Study

There is a lack of research in the area of parent involvement at the middle school level. There is research that shows it is important and valuable, and that parent involvement effects student outcomes. However, additional research is necessary to show how parent involvement in middle school differs from involvement in elementary school and how schools can better facilitate the process of parent involvement. Research that focuses on the cause of barriers towards the parent involvement process and how to best

29

overcome these barriers and facilitate the process of parent involvement would be

beneficial.

This study focused on measuring parent perceptions of their child' middle school

and parent perceptions of their own school experiences. It attempted to link parents' past

school experiences to how they feel their child's school facilitates involvement on

multiple levels.

Chapter III

Method

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' perceptions of their child's

middle school. In particular, the study examined whether there were differences in

parents' perceptions based on race, SES, and parents' own educational backgrounds (i.e.,

amount of school completed). Additionally, the study included a measure of how parents

felt about their own schooling experiences; examined how this varied by race, SES, and

educational background; and determined the relationship between parents' perceptions of

their own educational experiences and their current perceptions of their child's middle

school.

To address these issues, the following research questions were posed:

1) How much of the variance in parent's perceptions of their child's school as

   measured by the subscales INFORMATION, WELCOME, and

   PARTICIPATION is accounted for by: (a) Race, (b) Level of Education, and (c)

   SES?

2) How much of the variance in parent's perceptions of their own school

   experiences as measured by the subscales TEACHERS, PARENTS, SELF, and

   SCHOOL is accounted for by: (a) Race, (b) Level of Education, and (c) SES?

3) What is the relationship between parents' perceptions of their own school

   experiences and their perceptions of their child's school? Do these relationships

   differ by (a) Race, (b) SES, and (c) Level of Education?

30

Instruments

In order to measure parent perceptions, a questionnaire, "Parent Perceptions of Schooling," was developed. The questionnaire consists of three parts: (a) Part I, How I Feel About My Child's School; (b) Part II: Parents' Own School Experiences Questionnaire; and (c) Part III: Demographic Information.

Part I: How I Feel About My Child's School. The first part of the Parent Perceptions of Schooling questionnaire consists of twenty items and a 5-point scale (1 = Disagree Strongly; 2= Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 =Agree; and 5 = Agree Strongly). Respondents circled the number for each question that best corresponded with their view towards the statement. Items on this scale were developed in order to collect information about parents' feelings towards their child's middle school and the school's attempt to facilitate the process of parent involvement.

Much of the research in the area of parent involvement uses surveys to measure perceptions. Most of the items on parent involvement measures are developed from the following factors: parenting, communication, volunteerism, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 1995). Items in Part I of the Parent Perceptions of Schooling questionnaire were developed from concepts in parent involvement research/literature. Items were also adapted from various parent involvement measures (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Origins of items on Parent Perceptions of Schooling Part I: How I Feel About My Child's School*

ITEMS	ORIGIN
1. My child's school provides me with information about child development that is helpful to me.	Family Empowerment Scale; Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey

Table 1 (Continued)

2. My child's school sends home information about what is happening at school (e.g., in a school newsletter) that is helpful to me.	Family Empowerment Scale; Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey; Preferred Home-School Collaboration Activities Questionnaire
3. There is someone at my child's school whom I can turn to when I have questions about my child's education.	Family Empowerment Scale
4. Parent-teacher conferences are held at convenient times for me.	Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey
5. I feel welcome at my child's school.	Preferred Home-School Collaboration Activities Questionnaire
6. My child's teacher respects me as a parent.	Preferred Home-School Collaboration Activities Questionnaire
7. The reception staff at my child's school are friendly and helpful.	Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey
8. The teachers at my child's school are accessible and easy to talk to.	Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey
9. The principal at my child's school is accessible and easy to talk to.	Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey
10. The discipline at my child's school is fair.	Preferred Home-School Collaboration Activities Questionnaire
11. I feel welcome as a volunteer to help in my child's school.	Preferred Home-School Collaboration Activities Questionnaire
12. I have been informed of PTA meetings at my child's school.	Preferred Home-School Collaboration Activities Questionnaire
13. I have been given the opportunity to participate in school committees and/or school improvement teams at my child's school.	Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey
14. I feel my opinion is taken in consideration when it comes to school policy decisions at my child's school.	Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey
15. School staff at my child's school consider my opinion when it comes to decisions concerning my child.	Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey
16. Parents are asked to give ideas or advice on school-related issues at my child's school.	Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey
17. My child's school provides information about community organizations that support my child's learning.	Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey
18. My child's school provides information about medical care or social services for my child.	Preferred Home-School Collaboration Activities Questionnaire
19. My child's school empowers me as a parent.	Family Empowerment Scale; Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey
20. My child's school values parents.	Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey

The Family Empowerment Scale, Adapted was used in this study to help develop items for the Parent Perceptions of Schooling Part I: How I Feel About My Child's School questionnaire. The original Family Empowerment Scale is a brief questionnaire, based on a 2-dimensional conceptual framework of empowerment, used to assess empowerment in families whose children have emotional disabilities (Koren, DeChillo, & Friesen, 1992). The first dimension reflects empowerment in respect to the service system, family, larger community, and political environment. The second dimension reflects the expression of empowerment as attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge. Reliability (.87 to .88 for internal consistency and .77 to .85 for test-retest reliability) and validity analyses were based on 440 responses. The 15-item scale was adapted in 2000 by Raffaele Mendez for a study that explored the relationship between parent variables (including parent perceptions of their educational experiences, empowerment, and home-school collaboration) and children's academic achievement scores with homeless populations. Parents responded to each item by reporting how much they agreed with each statement (1 = Disagree Strongly; 2= Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 =Agree; and 5 = Agree Strongly).

The Mid-Atlantic Equity Center Parent Involvement Survey was developed by the Mid-Atlantic Equity Center. The center is part of the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium. Inc., whose specialization areas include race, gender, and national origin equity. Their mission is to assist school systems and other educational institutions in order to help create safe learning environments free of biases, so as to provide all students equal opportunities for success. The goal of the survey is to assess, plan, and evaluate current parent involvement practices. The seven-page parent involvement survey consists

of 48 items (multiple choice, checklists, and write-in formats). It is intended for parents with children from Pre-K through 12th grade and is based on Epstein's (1995) six types of involvement. Respondents are instructed to give their opinions on how well the schools have met their family's and children's needs and how they feel about the school and/or the involvement of other parents in the school.

The <u>Preferred Home-School Collaboration Activities Questionnaire</u> was developed by Raffaele Mendez (2000) for a study that explored the relationship between parent variables (including parent perceptions of their educational experiences, empowerment, and home-school collaboration) and children's academic achievement scores with homeless populations. The 17-item questionnaire consists of statements about home-school connections. Parents responded to each item by reporting how much they agreed with each statement (1 = Disagree Strongly; 2= Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 =Agree; and 5 = Agree Strongly). Content validity for this scale was established by a panel of five experts.

<u>Part II: Parents' Own School Experiences Questionnaire.</u> The second part of the Parent Perceptions of Schooling Questionnaire consists of twenty-two items and a 5-point scale (1 = Disagree Strongly; 2= Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 =Agree; and 5 = Agree Strongly). Respondents circled the number for each question that best corresponded with their view towards the statement. Items on this scale were developed in order to collect information about parents' feelings towards their own school experiences (grades K-12).

When attempting to measure perceptions, surveys are commonly used. Items in Part II of the Parent Perceptions of Schooling questionnaire were taken directly from the Educational Experiences Inventory.

The Educational Experiences Inventory was developed by Raffaele Mendez (2000) in order to assess parent's feelings about their own school experiences and their parents' involvement in their education. The scale consists of 22 items which parents respond to by reporting how much they agreed with each statement (1 = Disagree Strongly; 2= Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 =Agree; and 5 = Agree Strongly). Content validity was established by a panel of six experts and reliability was assessed with Cronbach's alpha in order to obtain internal consistency data.

Part III: Demographic Information. The third part of the Parent Perceptions of Schooling questionnaire consists of four items. Respondents were asked to check off one response per item from a list of possibilities. Questions served the purpose of collecting demographic and descriptive data. The questions asked on this survey are typical of demographic information asked on any survey and were chosen from points made in the review of literature on parent involvement.

Participants

This study was conducted at a middle school in Zephyrhills, FL, which is one of ten middle schools in Pasco County. Participants include one parent per student from this school. Presently, (i.e., 2004-2005 school year) the school is made up of 1002 middle school students who attend the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grades. There are currently 333 students enrolled in the 6th grade, 323 students enrolled in the 7th grade, and 342 students enrolled in the 8th grade. There are also 4 Trainable Mentally Handicapped (TMH) 9th grade students enrolled at this school. The school has basic education students, co-teach Exceptional Student Education (ESE) students, and students in self-contained ESE classrooms. Many exceptionalities (e.g., 2 visually impaired students, 1 profound

mentally handicapped student) are represented for a total of 300 ESE students, including gifted. There were 12,814 total ESE students in Pasco County as of Fall 2003 for all grades. The ethnic breakdown for the school is as follows: 420 "majority" male students, 70 "minority" male students, 429 "majority" female students, and 83 "minority" female students. The ethnic breakdown of the respondents to this survey was as follows: Caucasian = 72.3%; African American = 4.5%; Hispanic = 7.3%; and Other = 15.9%. As of Fall 2003, the ethnic breakdown of middle school students in Pasco County was as follows: White Non-Hispanic = 11,419; Black Non-Hispanic = 629; Hispanic = 1259; Asian/Pacific Islander = 173; American Indian/Alaskan Native = 37; Multiracial = 215; Total Female = 6,675; Total Male = 7,127; and Total Middle School Membership = 13,802.

Procedure

The school was selected as the site where research would be conducted for this study for three reasons: (1) the researcher's familiarity with the school having previously worked there; (2) the large number of students provide a good sample size; and (3) the principal's receptiveness to the idea and willingness to work with the researcher. Once the site was selected and permission was obtained from the principal to conduct the study, an application for permission to conduct research was submitted to Pasco County Schools.

Upon approval for this study, the researcher recorded a piece about the study on the morning news program at the beginning of the week to announce the study, reward (i.e., the last period class that returned the highest percentage of returned surveys won a pizza party), and due date to the students. That day in 6th period, all students present

received a cover letter and survey to take home to a parent/guardian. The surveys were given out during last period on a Tuesday (there was no school that Monday) and due back on the Friday at the end of the week. Student peers who work at the school as aides during 6th period separated and distributed the surveys to each 6th period class. Originally, the peers were to collect the surveys each day during 6th period; however, this process was not feasible, and the peers collected the surveys in their totality on Friday. Also, it was planned and teachers were directed via email, the news program, and peer helpers that absent students were to receive the survey on the day they returned to school during the week the survey was being administered/collected. However, this procedure was not followed by all of the teachers. Additionally, teachers were to keep track of which students returned completed surveys by highlighting their name on a class list that was given to them on Tuesday. The class list was to be kept confidential and separate from the surveys so that names could not be tracked to the surveys. This process was developed in order to facilitate the process of re-administering the survey a second time if the initial return rate was low. Having the names of those who initially returned the survey would help avoid re-administering the survey to those who participated. While confidentiality was maintained, only about half of the teachers followed the correct procedure. The lists have since been destroyed.

Once the surveys were collected, the winner of the pizza party was determined (class with highest percentage of return) and announced on the news. The winning class was the only class to have a 100% return rate (22/22). The researcher facilitated the pizza party with the help of the school and classroom teacher. The total number of surveys administered after accounting for absenteeism and withdrawals, was 882. The number of

completed surveys collected was 291, yielding a return rate of 33%. The school received

a thank you email. The results have been shared with the principal of the school and will

also be shared with the district.

Research Design

An analysis using survey data was conducted in order to answer the research questions

posed. A quantitative correlational design was utilized to analyze the data. In

experimental research, variables are manipulated, and the effects of the manipulation are

then measured. Although correlational research is empirical, it is different from

experimental research. In correlational research, variables are not manipulated; instead,

variables are measured and relations (correlations) are investigated.

Correlation is a measure of the relationship between two or more variables.

Correlation coefficients (*r*) can range from –1.00 (i.e., as the value of one variable

increases, the value of the other tends to decrease) to +1.00 (i.e., perfect correlation; as

the value of one variable increases, the value of other also tends to increase). The value of

0.00 represents a lack of correlation (StatSoft Inc., 1984).

Because the variables in this study cannot be manipulated, a correlational research

design was used to determine the relationship between parent perceptions of their own

past school experiences and parent perceptions of their child's middle school and the

school's efforts to facilitate parent involvement.

Data Analysis

The data for this analysis included descriptive and inferential statistics within a

correlational design. The following methods of analysis were used to answer the research

questions that were posed:

Research Questions 1 & 2: (1) How much of the variance in parent's perceptions of their child's school as measured by the subscales INFORMATION, WELCOME, and PARTICIPATION is accounted for by: (a) Race, (b) Level of Education, and (c) SES? and (2)How much of the variance in parent's perceptions of their own school experiences as measured by the subscales TEACHERS, PARENTS, SELF, and SCHOOL is accounted for by: (a) Race, (b) Level of Education, and (c) SES?

Multiple regression analyses (R^2, Beta weights, and P-Values to determine statistical significance) were conducted in order to answer these questions, however, before multiple regression analyses could be conducted, the items on each of the scales were conceptually grouped into factors or subscales (see Table 2). This was done based on the literature and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) for the subscales was obtained along with descriptive statistics (Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness, and Kurtosis). Frequency values were obtained for the predictor variables and a correlation matrix measuring the relationships among the subscales was developed.

Table 2. *Development of Subscales*

Part I – How I Feel About My Child's School	
INFORMATION	
	1. My child's school provides me with information about child development that is helpful to me.
	2. My child's school sends home information about what is happening at school (e.g., in a school newsletter) that is helpful to me.
	17. My child's school provides information about community organizations that support my child's learning.
	18. My child's school provides information about medical care or social services for my child.
PARTICIPATION	
	12. I have been informed of PTA meetings at my child's school.
	13. I have been given the opportunity to participate in school committees and/or school improvement teams at my child's school.
	14. I feel my opinion is taken in consideration when it comes to school policy decisions at my child's school.
	15. School staff at my child's school consider my opinion when it comes to decisions concerning my child.
	16. Parents are asked to give ideas or advice on school-related issues at my child's school.
WELCOME	
	3. There is someone at my child's school whom I can turn to when I have questions about my child's education.

Table 2 (Continued)

	4. Parent-teacher conferences are held at convenient times for me.
	5. I feel welcome at my child's school.
	6. My child's teacher respects me as a parent.
	7. The reception staff at my child's school are friendly and helpful.
	8. The teachers at my child's school are accessible and easy to talk to.
	9. The principal at my child's school is accessible and easy to talk to.
	19. My child's school empowers me as a parent.
	20. My child's school values parents.
Part II – Parents' Own School Experiences	
TEACHERS	
	22. My teachers had my best interests at heart
	24. My teachers wanted me to be successful.
	26. My teachers listened to what I had to say.
	27. My teachers cared about me.
	28. My teachers had respect for my parents.
	29. My teachers had respect for me.
	30. My teachers made me feel good about myself.
	31. My teachers helped me to do my best.
	32. My teachers helped me when I needed help.
	33. My teachers understood my culture and background.
	34. My teachers were fair in grading my work.
PARENTS	
	37. My parent(s) helped me with my homework.
	38. My parent(s) and teachers had a good working relationship.
	39. My parent(s) kept track of my progress in school.
SELF	
	25. I enjoyed going to school.
	35. I was a valued member of my school community.
	36. The material presented in school was interesting to me.
	40. I am proud of what I accomplished in school.
SCHOOL	
	21. My school experiences prepared me to be successful in life.
	23. The schools I attended were safe and clean.
	41. The rules at my schools were fair.
	42. My schools provided me the opportunity to get involved (e.g., teams, clubs).
Part III – Demographic Information	
RACE	43. What is your race?
GRADE	44. What is the highest grade you completed in school?
FREE	45. Does your child qualify for free or reduced price lunch at school?

Research Question 3: (3) What is the relationship between parents' perceptions of their own school experiences and their perceptions of their child's school? Do these relationships differ by (a) Race, (b) SES, and (c) Level of Education?

In order to answer research question 3, a multiple regression analysis with an interaction effect was conducted.

Contributions to the Literature

Despite the limitations that every study encounters, the information provided by this study will be unique and valuable to the literature in this area. It is a study which can be replicated yearly, used in all middle schools, and researched on a longitudinal basis. The study also focused on a population (middle school) that is not often mentioned in the literature. However, it is an age where difficulties in academics, behavior, and attendance, eventually leading to drop-out, often occur. Research in how to improve school environments and the parent involvement process can lead to increased parent involvement, which results in positive outcomes for students. Results of this study can be generalized to similar populations in other districts in Florida and throughout the nation.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter provides a description of the results from the statistical analyses used in this study. More specifically, internal consistency, descriptive statistics, and a correlation matrix of the measure are reported. Additionally, results of the multiple regression analyses, which address the research questions, are provided.

Preliminary Analyses

Internal consistency of the scales. The measure (survey) used in this study was separated into three parts (scales). Parts I and II were made up of three and four subscales, respectively (see Table 2, Section III and Table 3). In order to compute a measure of internal consistency for each part of the survey, Cronbach's alpha was calculated (see Table 3). Each subscale showed relatively strong reliability coefficients (>.7). Because item number 10 ("The discipline at my child's school is fair.") on Part I of the survey did not seem to fall into any of the subscales, it was eliminated from the analyses completely.

Descriptive statistics. Table 3 shows each of the seven subscales along with descriptive statistics such as the number of items per subscale, Cronbach's alpha, the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis of the subscale distribution. The number of items on each of the seven subscales ranged from three items (Parents) to eleven items (Teachers). All subscales had relatively strong reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) with values ranging from .76 (School) to .96 (Teachers). This shows that the inter-item correlation is high, providing evidence that the items in each subscale are measuring the same underlying construct. Mean values for the subscales ranged from

42

3.37 (Participation) to 3.90 (School) while standard deviations ranged from .69 (School) to 1.02 (Parents). Skewness values were close to zero and showed that the distribution was skewed slightly to the left. Kurtosis values also were close to zero, with the exception of the subscale Welcome (1.45). These values showed a relatively peaked distribution, with the exception of the Parents subscale which had a negative value (-.33).

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics for Subscales*

SCALE	NUMBER OF ITEMS ON SCALE	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	SKEWNESS	KURTOSIS
I-INFORMATION N=286	4	.82	3.61	.80	-.58	.43
I-PARTICIPATION N=276	5	.89	3.37	.87	-.40	.13
I-WELCOME N=280	9	.91	3.77	.71	-.68	1.45
II-TEACHERS N=266	11	.96	3.72	.75	-.62	.49
II-PARENTS N=281	3	.87	3.59	1.02	-.58	-.33
II-SELF N=280	4	.84	3.74	.83	-.66	.12
II-SCHOOL N=282	4	.76	3.90	.69	-.64	.64

Table 4 contains frequency values for the three predictor variables (Race, SES, and level of education) taken from Part III of the measure. For the question, "What is your race?" participants were given seven options to choose from. The four most common responses were Caucasian (72%), African American (4.5%), Hispanic (7.3%) and Other (11.4%). For the purpose of these analyses, the remainder of the choices (Native American, Pacific Islander, and Multiracial) were combined into the "Other" category. Also, because the majority of the parents who completed the survey were Caucasian, the category Caucasian was used as a constant and the categories of African

American, Hispanic, and Other were used to make up the predictor variable "race."

Responses to the question, "What is the highest grade you completed in school?" formed

the predictor variable "grade," which provides information about participants' level of

education. Only 16.2% of the participants who completed the survey did not have a high

school diploma. To obtain the predictor variable "free," which pertains to the SES of the

participant, the question "Does your child receive free or reduced price lunch at school?"

was posited. Because the majority of the participants responded "No" (75.4%) to the

question, the choice of "Yes" (indicating participants who had lower incomes) was used

to define the predictor variable "free" (SES).

Table 4. *Frequency Values for Predictor Variables*

Predictor Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
RACE			
	Caucasian	209	72.3
	African American	13	4.5
	Hispanic	21	7.3
	Native American	5	1.7
	Pacific Islander	2	.7
	Multiracial	6	2.1
	Other	33	11.4
N	TOTAL	289	100.0
GRADE			
	8th grade or less	14	4.8
	Some high school	33	11.4
	Graduated high school	76	26.3
	Some college	65	22.5
	Associate's degree/graduated technical school	54	18.7
	Bachelor's degree	24	8.3
	Some graduate school	11	3.8
	Graduate degree	12	4.2
N	TOTAL	289	100.0
FREE			
	Yes	166	57.8
	No	121	42.2
N	TOTAL	287	100.0

Correlation matrix. In order to provide additional information about the

relationships among the subscales, a correlation matrix was developed (see Table 4). All

seven subscales (Information, Participation, and Welcome from Part I of the survey and

44

Teachers, Parents, Self, and School from Part II of the survey) are included in the matrix along with the Pearson correlations (r). Correlations of subscales are higher within Parts I and II as compared to between the two sections. More specifically, the correlation values of the subscales from Part I ranged from .76 - .78 and values of the subscales from Part II ranged from .44 - .79, while correlation values between Parts I and II of the survey ranged from .19 - .40. The most highly correlated subscales from Part I of the survey were the Participation and Welcome subscales (r=.78), while the Participation and Information subscales yielded the lowest correlation within Part I of the measure (r=.76). The most highly correlated subscales from Part II of the survey were the Teachers and School subscales (r=.79), while the School and Parents subscales yielded the lowest correlation within Part II of the measure (r=.44). The most highly correlated subscales between Parts I and II of the measure were the Information and Teachers (r=.40) subscales, while the Participation and School subscales yielded the weakest correlation (r=.19).

Table 5. *Correlation Matrix*

Sample sizes for correlations vary; N = range of 284-291

	I-INFORMATION	I-PARTICIPATION	I-WELCOME	II-TEACHERS	II-PARENTS	II-SELF	II-SCHOOL
I-INFORMATION	1.00						
I-PARTICIPATION	.76	1.0					
I-WELCOME	.77	.78	1.0				
II-TEACHERS	.40	.29	.39	1.0			
II-PARENTS	.38	.29	.27	.56	1.0		
II-SELF	.31	.22	.29	.76	.52	1.0	
II-SCHOOL	.28	.19	.29	.79	.44	.77	1.0

Research Questions

In order to address the research questions, a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted. These analyses helped to determine the extent to which the predictor variables (race, SES, and level of education) predicted the dependent variables (a) parent's perceptions of their child's school as defined by the Information, Participation, and Welcome subscales and (b) parent's perceptions of their own school experiences as defined by the Teachers, Parents, Self, and School subscales. Additionally, multiple regression analyses, which took into account interaction affects, were conducted to ascertain the relationships of the predictor variables (Teachers, Parents, Self, and School), dependant variables (Information, Participation, and Welcome), and moderator variables (race, level of education, and SES).

To address research question one, "How much of the variance in parent's perceptions of their child's school as measured by the subscales Information, Welcome, and Participation is accounted for by: (a) Race, (b) Level of Education, and (c) SES?" a multiple regression analysis was conducted (see Table 6). Results showed that 4.3% of the variance of the subscale Information was explained by the three predictor variables. The Beta weights for Race–Other (β=.13, p<.05) and Grade (β=-.12, p<.05) were significant (P=.03 and P=.04, respectively). The correlation between Information and Race-Other was positive, while the correlation between Information and Grade was found to be negative. Additionally, 4.2% of the variance of the subscale Participation was explained by the three predictor variables. The Beta weight for Grade (β=-.15, p<.05) was significant (P=.02). The three predictor variables explained only 2.7% of the variance in

the subscale Welcome. The correlation between Participation and Grade was found to be negative.

Table 6. *Regression Analyses for Parents' Perceptions of Their Child's School*

	Predictor Variables	R2	Beta	P-Value
INFORMATION N=283		.04		
	RACE – African American		.02	.76
	RACE – Hispanic		.11	.06
	RACE – Other		.13	.03*
	GRADE		-.12	.04*
	FREE – Yes		-.12	.90
PARTICIPATION N=285		.04		
	RACE – African American		-.04	.51
	RACE – Hispanic		.06	.34
	RACE – Other		.11	.06
	GRADE		-.15	.02*
	FREE – Yes		.04	.55
WELCOME N=286		.03		
	RACE – African American		-.06	.30
	RACE – Hispanic		.08	.20
	RACE – Other		.06	.35
	GRADE		-.10	.08
	FREE – Yes		.03	.67

*Significant at .05
** Significant at .01

To address research question two, "How much of the variance in parent's perceptions of their own school experiences as measured by the subscales Teachers, Parents, Self, and School is accounted for by: (a) Race, (b) Level of Education, and (c) SES," a multiple regression analysis was conducted (see Table 7). Results showed that 6.0% of the variance of the subscale School was explained by the three predictor variables. The beta weights for Grade (β=.03, p<.01) and Free-Yes (β=.16, p<.01) were significant (P=.001 and P=.01, respectively). The correlation between School and Grade and between School and Free-Yes were found to be positive. Additionally, 5.1% of the variance of the subscale Self was explained by the three predictor variables. The Beta weight for Grade (β=.19, p<.01) is significant (P=.001). The correlation between Self and Grade was found to be positive. Additionally, 4.7% of the variance of the subscale

48

Teachers was explained by the three predictor variables. The Beta weights for Race–

Hispanic (β=.16, p<.01) and Free-Yes (β=.14, p<.05) are significant (P=.01 and P=.03,

respectively). The three predictor variables explained 4.7% of the variance in the subscale

Parents. The correlation between Teachers and Race-Hispanic and between Teachers and

Free-Yes were both found to be positive.

Table 7. *Regression Analyses for Parents' Perceptions of Their Own School Experiences*

	Predictor Variables	R2	Beta	P-Value
TEACHERS N=282		.05		
	RACE – African American		-.03	.63
	RACE – Hispanic		.16	.01**
	RACE – Other		.02	.77
	GRADE		.05	.38
	FREE – Yes		.14	.03*
PARENTS N=270		.05		
	RACE – African American		.12	.06
	RACE – Hispanic		.12	.06
	RACE – Other		.11	.08
	GRADE		-.04	.48
	FREE – Yes		.07	.25
SELF N=282		.05		
	RACE – African American		.02	.75
	RACE – Hispanic		.11	.08
	RACE – Other		-.02	.73
	GRADE		.19	.001**
	FREE – Yes		.09	.15
SCHOOL N=282		.06		
	RACE – African American		.20	.39
	RACE – Hispanic		.16	.17
	RACE – Other		.11	.47
	GRADE		.03	.001**
	FREE – Yes		.16	.01**

*Significant at .05
** Significant at .01

To address research question three, "What is the relationship between parents'

perceptions of their own school experiences and their perceptions of child's school? Do

these relationships differ by (a) Race, (b) SES, and (c) Level of Education?" multiple

regression analyses, which took into account interaction effects of the variables, were

conducted. Results of these analyses, listed in Table 8, found seven significant

relationships among the predictor (Self, Teachers, School, and Parents), dependant

(Participation and Welcome), and moderator variables (SES, Race, and Level of Education).

The interaction between the variables Self, Participation, and SES showed that 7.0% of the variance was explained, as compared 6.0% (a difference of 1.4%) when the interaction was not taken into consideration. This was significant (p=.04) at a p<.05 significance level. The interaction between the variables Self, Welcome, and Race showed that 13.0% of the variance was explained, as compared 10.0% (a difference of 2.9%) when the interaction was not taken into consideration. This was significant (p=.03) at a p<.05 significance level. The interaction between the variables Teachers, Welcome, and Race showed that 19.0% of the variance was explained, as compared 16.0% (a difference of 3.2%) when the interaction was not taken into consideration. This was significant (p=.01) at a p<.01 significance level. The interaction between the variables Teachers, Welcome, and Level of Education showed that 18.0% of the variance was explained, as compared 16.0% (a difference of 1.3%) when the interaction was not taken into consideration. This was significant (p=.04) at a p<.05 significance level. The interaction between the variables School, Welcome, and Race showed that 13.0% of the variance was explained, as compared 10.0% (a difference of 3.7%) when the interaction was not taken into consideration. This was significant (p=.01) at a p<.01 significance level. The interaction between the variables School, Participation, and Race showed that 9.0% of the variance was explained, as compared 5.0% (a difference of 3.7%) when the interaction was not taken into consideration. This was significant (p=.01) at a p<.01 significance level. The interaction between the variables Parents, Welcome, and Level of Education showed that 10.0% of the variance was explained, as compared 8.0% (a

difference of 1.5%) when the interaction was not taken into consideration. This was

significant (p=.03) at a p<.05 significance level.

Table 8. *Regression Analyses for the Significant Relationships Found Between Parents'*
Perceptions of Their Own School Experiences and *Their Perceptions of Their*
Child's School as Moderated by the Following Variables: (a) Race; (b) Level of
Education; and (c) SES.

Predictor Variables	Dependant Variables	Moderator Variables	R2 Model 1	R2 Model 2	R2 Change	Significance Level
SELF						
	Participation	SES	.06	.07	.014	.04*
	Welcome	Race	.10	.13	.029	.03*
TEACHERS						
	Welcome	Race	.16	.19	.032	.01**
	Welcome	Level Ed	.16	.18	.013	.04*
SCHOOL						
	Welcome	Race	.10	.13	.037	.01**
	Participation	Race	.05	.09	.037	.01**
PARENTS						
	Welcome	Level Ed	.08	.10	.015	.03*

Sample sizes vary; N = range of 280-285
*Significant at .05
** Significant at .01

Chapter V

Discussion

This study examined the predictive relationship between parents' perceptions of their own school experiences and perceptions of their child's school. More specifically, the study examined parents' perceptions of their child's school and to what extent these perceptions were affected by the demographic variables of race, educational level, and SES. The research sample consisted of 291 parents of middle school students from one middle school in Zephyrhills, Florida. The multiple regression analyses used to address the research questions did not yield significant findings; however, significant correlations among some of the demographic variables were found and provide useful information about some factors that affect the school's facilitation of parent involvement. This chapter will discuss the results of the data analysis, with a focus on limitations of the study and significant findings that may be important for future research and practice.

Parents' Overall Perceptions of Their Child's School as Predicted by Race, Level of Education, and SES

Multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to attempt to ascertain the relationship between race, parents' level of education, and SES, and parent's perceptions of their child's middle school (see Table 6 in Section IV). The multiple regression analyses did not reveal any significant findings. Although the items on all three subscales in Part I of the survey seemed to measure how parents perceive the effectiveness of their child's school, it appeared as though the predictor variables, race, level of education, and SES did not have a large impact on how parents responded. One reason for this may be that many of the participants responded with the "Neutral" choice on items that made up

50

the three subscales (see Table 3 in Section IV), not showing much variability of responses; choices also were most often positive. The mean responses for these scales were: M = 3.6, SD = .80 (Information); M = 3.4, SD = .87 (Participation); and M = 3.8, SD = .71 (Welcome), with higher scores (those closer to 5) indicating stronger satisfaction, lower scores (those closer to 1) indicating lower satisfaction, and scores at or around 3 indicating a neutral feeling towards the child's school. Respondents may have felt the obligation to avoid responding negatively about their child's school (one limitation of using surveys) for risk of getting their school in trouble and/or for their responses reflecting negatively on their child or themselves, regardless of the anonymity of the study. Respondents also may have avoided responding negatively as to keep these feelings about their child's school from their child in case their child read the survey responses. Lastly, since completing and returning a survey can be viewed as a parent involvement activity, it could be hypothesized that parents who more likely to respond to a school survey and turn it in are more often satisfied with the school and involved in parent involvement activities. This can also be seen as a limitation of the study because it restricts and potentially biases the sample.

Specific Aspects of Parents' Perceptions of Their Child's School and Their Relationship to Race, Level of Education, and SES

Although race, level of education, and SES did not significantly predict parents' overall perceptions of their child's school, some significant correlations were found between race, level of education, SES, and particular aspects of parents' perceptions of their child's school (i.e., subscales on How I Feel About My Child's School). On the Information subscale, the variables Race–Other (β=.13, p=.03) and Grade (β=-.12, p=.04)

were found to be significant at a p<.05 significance level. The correlation between Information and Race-Other was positive, indicating that parents of "other" ethnicities were often more satisfied with the school's efforts to disseminate information and found it to be valuable. The correlation between Information and Grade, however, was found to be negative. This indicates that parents who have achieved higher levels of education were not as satisfied with the school's efforts to disseminate information and/or did not find it as valuable. This could be explained by the fact that those who are more educated often have higher expectations and also know what to expect. If they are not receiving this standard of quality, their satisfaction with the school may decrease.

On the Participation subscale, the variable Grade (β=-.15, P=.02) was significant at a p<.05 significance level. The correlation between Participation and Grade was found to be negative. This indicates that parents who have achieved higher levels of education were not as satisfied with the school's efforts to include them in the decision making process at the school. This finding is supported by the literature on parent involvement. Parents with higher educational levels are often more aware of how to become involved at their child's school and have input to offer. Again, they tend to have higher expectations and will have feelings of dissatisfaction with the school if those expectations are not being met. On the other hand, parents who have had stressful childhood experiences with school are reluctant to proceed to higher grade levels or to even stay in school. Webster-Stratton (1997) addressed these points in her study and found that parents with stressful childhood schooling experiences were often reluctant to become involved in school-based practices and felt a level of discomfort. Many of these parents may not know that these opportunities exist and therefore do not expect this of the school.

Parents' Overall Perceptions of Their Own School Experiences as Predicted by Race,

Level of Education, and SES

Multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to attempt to predict the

relationship between race, parents' level of education, SES and parents' perceptions of

their own school experiences. The multiple regression analyses did not reveal any

significant findings. Although the items on all four subscales in Part II of the survey

seemed to measure how parents perceived their own school experiences, it appeared as

though the predictor variables, race, level of education, and SES did not create a large

impact on how the parents responded. Again, this may be explained by the lack of

variability in participants' responses. Many participants responded with the "Neutral"

choice on items that made up the four subscales (see Table 3 in Section IV); choices also

were most often positive. The mean responses for these scales were: $M = 3.7$, $SD = .75$

(Teachers); $M = 3.6$, $SD = 1.0$ (Parents); $M = 3.7$, $SD = .83$ (Self); and $M = 3.9$, $SD = .69$

(School), with higher scores (those closer to 5) indicating stronger satisfaction, lower

scores (those closer to 1) indicating lower satisfaction, and scores at or around 3

indicating a neutral feeling towards the child's school. Respondents may have felt the

obligation to avoid responding negatively about their own school experiences (one

limitation of using surveys) for fear of how they might be viewed, despite the

confidentiality of the study. Also, they may not have wanted to reveal past negative

experiences to their child in case their child read the survey. In the literature addressing

barriers to parent involvement (e.g., Webster-Stratton, 1997; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1996;

and Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2000), it often has been stated that parents who had negative

childhood experiences in relation to school are less likely to become involved with their

child's school. This can be a contributing factor as to why responses were generally neutral or positive. This again would mean that the sample was restricted/biased.

Specific Aspects of Parents' Perceptions of Their Own School Experiences and Their Relationship to Race, Level of Education, and SES

Again, although race, level of education, and SES did not significantly predict parents' perceptions of their own schooling experiences, some significant correlations were found between these variables and specific aspects of parents' perceptions of their own schooling (i.e., subscales on Parents' Own School Experiences Questionnaire). On the School subscale, the variables Grade (β=.03, P=.001) and Free-Yes (β=.16, P=.01) were found to be significant at a p<.01 significance level. The correlations between School and Grade and School and Free-Yes were both found to be positive. This means that parents who achieved higher levels of education and parents of lower SES felt that their own schools did what they were supposed to do for them and did these things well. It makes sense that the level of support provided by a participant's school (measured by the School subscale) is correlated with the predictor variable "Grade,' which pertains to the parent's level of education. Typically, persons who have more social support and opportunities in their past are more successful in life. This correlational relationship shows that the more supported a participant was in school, the further they took their education.

On the Self subscale, the variable Grade (β=.19, P<.001) was found to be significant at a p<.01 significance level. The correlation between Self and Grade was found to be positive, meaning that parents who have achieved higher levels of education were more satisfied with certain aspects of their schools. Once again, this finding also

54

makes sense. Those who enjoyed school and were proud of their accomplishments stayed in school longer.

On the Teachers subscale, the variables Race–Hispanic (β=.16, P=.01) and Free-Yes (β=.14, P=.03) were found to be significant at the p<.01 and p<.05 significance level, respectively. The correlations among Teachers and Race-Hispanic and Teachers and Free-Yes were both found to be positive. This means that parents of Hispanic ethnicity and those of lower SES were more satisfied with how their teachers treated them and the things that their teachers did.

Parents' Perceptions of Their Child's School as Predicted By Parents' Perceptions of Their Own School Experiences and Moderated by the Variables Race, Level of Education, and SES

Multiple regression analyses, which took into account interaction effects between predictor, dependent, and moderator variables were conducted as well. The predictor variables (Teachers, Parents, Self, and School), taken from the subscales from Part II of the survey, represented how parents felt about their own schooling experiences. The dependant variables (Information, Participation, and Welcome), taken from Part I of the survey, represented how parents felt about their child's middle school and the school's efforts to facilitate the process of parent involvement. The moderator variables (Race, Level of Education, and SES), taken from Part III of the survey, represented demographic variables of the sample. Because the concepts of parents' perceptions of their child's school and parents' perceptions of their own school experiences were made up of several factors (three and four, respectively), each factor or subscale had to be considered

individually while taking into consideration each of the three demographic variables, which yielded several regression analyses.

The multiple regression analyses yielded several significant findings. The interaction between the predictor variable Self, the dependant variable Participation, and the moderator variable SES was found to be significant ($p=.04$) at a $p<.05$ significance level. The interaction of these three variables explained 1.4% more of the variance than did the predictor and moderator variables alone. Therefore, SES has an effect on the relationship between Self and Participation. This indicates that a parent's view of their own performance in school is related to their tendency to get involved at their child's school and the parent's SES affects this relationship.

The interaction between the predictor variable Self, the dependant variable Welcome, and the moderator variable Race was found to be significant ($p=.03$) at a $p<.05$ significance level. The interaction of these three variables explained 2.9% more of the variance than did the predictor and moderator variables alone. Therefore, Race has an effect on the relationship between Self and Welcome. A parent's view of their performance in school is related to how welcome they typically feel at their child's school, and the parent's Race affects this relationship.

The interaction between the predictor variable Teachers, the dependant variable Welcome, and the moderator variable Race was found to be significant ($p=.01$) at a $p<.01$ significance level. The interaction of these three variables explained 3.2% more of the variance than did the predictor and moderator variables alone. Therefore, Race has an affect on the relationship between Teachers and Welcome. A parents' opinion of their

teachers is related to how welcome they typically feel at their child's school and the parent's Race affects this relationship.

The interaction between the predictor variable Teachers, the dependant variable Welcome, and the moderator variable Level of Education was found to be significant (p=.04) at a p<.05 significance level. The interaction of these three variables explained 1.3% more of the variance than did the predictor and moderator variables alone. Therefore, Level of Education has an affect on the relationship between Teachers and Welcome. A parents' opinion of their teachers is related to how welcome they typically feel at their child's school and the parent's level of education affects this relationship.

The interaction between the predictor variable School, the dependant variable Welcome, and the moderator variable Race was found to be significant (p=.01) at a p<.01 significance level. The interaction of these three variables explained 3.7 % more of the variance than did the predictor and moderator variables alone. Therefore, Race has an effect on the relationship between School and Welcome. A parent's view of what their school did/provided is related to how welcome they typically feel at their child's school and the parent's race affects this relationship.

The interaction between the predictor variable School, the dependant variable Participation, and the moderator variable Race was found to be significant (p=.01) at a p<.01 significance level. The interaction of these three variables explained 3.7% more of the variance than did the predictor and moderator variables alone. Therefore, Race has an affect on the relationship between School and Participation. A parents' view of what their school did/provided is related to their tendency to get involved at their child's school and the parent's race affects this relationship.

The interaction between the predictor variable Parents, the dependant variable Welcome, and the moderator variable Level of Education was found to be significant (p=.03) at a p<.05 significance level. The interaction of these three variables explained 1.5% more of the variance than did the predictor and moderator variables alone. Therefore, Level of Education has an affect on the relationship between Parents and Welcome. A parent's view what their parents did is related to how welcome they typically feel at their child's school and the parent's level of education affects this relationship.

Practical Implementations of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' perceptions of their child's middle school and their own past school experiences to attempt to learn whether or not there were differences in parents' perceptions based on race, parents' level of education, or SES. This study also examined the relationship parents' past experiences had on parents' perceptions of their child's middle school when taking into account the variables of race, level of education, and SES. Though the analyses used to address the research questions did not yield significant findings, fifteen total correlations were found to be significant. Based on the significant correlations found, it would be beneficial to conduct further research in this area, paying specific attention to some of the individual variables, such as level of education and race, which most often yielded significant correlations. It also would also be helpful to examine other variables that possibly predict parents' perceptions of their child's school and own school experiences, for example, the grade the child is in, how well the parent did in school academically, how well the child does in

school academically, how involved the parent was in school, and the number of behavior referrals the child has received.

When considering the results of this study (e.g., significant correlations and response rates to the survey), there are many implications for professional practices that can be implemented by the school to improve school climate. Communication, which can include the dissemination of information, how welcoming and accessible faculty and staff are, and the active involvement of parents by the school in the decision-making processes, should be the key focus. A parent involvement program or parent involvement goals should make communication a priority. It is important to sensitize school personnel to the fact that parents will come in with prior issues and feelings about schools. Ensuring that the school takes the first step in this process with all parents also is important because many parents have no communication with the school unless there is a problem with their child. Communication should be attempted in several different formats since children do not always bring correspondence home and/or give it to their parents. It also is important for schools to take the first step in order to help those parents who have had negative school experiences overcome the negative feelings they might carry with them. As has been seen in the literature, many parents do not know how and/or to what capacity to become involved, especially when their child reaches middle school. Some parents may not have the time or may perceive that they do not have the means to become involved. Schools need to create different ways for which every parent can become involved.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are limitations to every study and research design. Research involving the use of surveys is susceptible to some constraints. Respondents to surveys may respond favorably to items rather than being completely truthful because they feel that is the expectation or they fear appearing "bad" or wrong. Another limitation of an anonymous survey is that the researcher cannot ask the respondent why they answered in a certain manner or explain the meaning of a particular question. It is left up to the researcher to infer meaning to the response and to the respondent to infer the meaning of the question. In this study, it was impossible to match parent responses directly with how much parent involvement the parent has actually engaged in. Therefore, a sample of parents' perceptions was used to predict relationships and outcomes. Also worth mentioning is the fact that the action of responding to the survey may be viewed as an involvement activity. The sample of respondents is not completely random in this sense. The sample could be viewed as restricted/biased. The use of interviews (qualitative research) along with surveys would be a more thorough way of conducting this type of research. , Interviews would help provide explanations as to what parents' expectations of their child's school are as well as yield richer descriptions of their past experiences.

Additionally, external validity is reduced because this study was only conducted at one school. Results may only be generalizable to parents of middle school students with similar demographics. The relatively low response rate (33%) also limited the size of the sample, which reduced power and limited the variability of responses to items.

There are also a few limitations in using a correlational design. Primarily, quantitative correlation designs tend to be associated with low internal validity. Also,

correlation does not imply causality. Therefore, it cannot say that one variable is caused by another.

The predictor variables race, level of education, and SES are only a few variables that can be used to predict parents' perceptions of their past school experiences and parents' perceptions of their child's school. Additionally, the items on each subscale are not the only ways to measure parents' perceptions of their past school experiences and perceptions of their child's school. Some subscales were made up of nine items while others were only made up of three. While the reliability of the scales was adequate, increasing the number of items on most subscales could have helped increase the reliability and possibly affected the range of responses on the scales.

Lastly, parent perceptions of past school experiences is only one factor influencing parents' perceptions of their child's school, and perceptions of schools is only one way to predict parent involvement. There are other factors that may be involved. For example, parents may recall past school experiences in different ways. One person may have had a negative experience with another child's school, which may influence how they look at any school.

Summary

This study attempted to measure parents' perceptions of their past school experiences and their child's school and link them with the predictor variables of race, level of education, and SES. The primary analyses did not yield significant findings. However, some significant correlations were found. A parent's level of education yielded the most significant correlations. It would be beneficial to research these concepts along with this variable further. Although the study did not find that parent's perceptions of

their own school experiences had a strong impact on how parent's viewed their child's school, it does leave future research to develop hypotheses as to which variables do affect parent perceptions. Also, the variables used in the study may relate to other concepts having to do with parent perceptions, and on a larger scale, parent involvement. Parent involvement programs and goals focused on improving communication and providing additional resources to parents (e.g., ways to further their education) would be beneficial to schools, parents, and districts. Expanding this study to measure perceptions of elementary, high, and other middle school parents would also be beneficial and add to the research in this area.

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Appendices

Appendix A: **PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOLING**

Part I: How I Feel About My Child's School

<u>Directions</u>: Please think about your child's current school and tell me how much you agree with each statement. For each statement, circle the number that best matches how you feel about the statement.

Please circle one number for each statement.	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree Strongly
1. My child's school provides me with information about child development that is helpful to me.	1	2	3	4	5
2. My child's school sends home information about what is happening at school (e.g., in a school newsletter) that is helpful to me.	1	2	3	4	5
3. There is someone at my child's school whom I can turn to when I have questions about my child's education.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Parent-teacher conferences are held at convenient times for me.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel welcome at my child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My child's teacher respects me as a parent.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The reception staff at my child's school are friendly and helpful.	1	2	3	4	5
8. The teachers at my child's school are accessible and easy to talk to.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The principal at my child's school is accessible and easy to talk to.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The discipline at my child's school is fair.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I feel welcome as a volunteer to help in my child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I have been informed of PTA meetings at my child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I have been given the opportunity to participate in school committees and/or school improvement teams at my child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I feel my opinion is taken in consideration when it comes to school policy decisions at my child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
15. School staff at my child's school consider my opinion when it comes to decisions concerning my child.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Parents are asked to give ideas or advice on school-related issues at my child's school.	1	2	3	4	5
17. My child's school provides information about community organizations that support my child's learning.	1	2	3	4	5
18. My child's school provides information about medical care or social services for my child.	1	2	3	4	5
19. My child's school empowers me as a parent.	1	2	3	4	5
20. My child's school values parents.	1	2	3	4	5

Please complete the back side of this page, too. Thank you!

Appendix B: **PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOLING**

Part II: Parents' Own School Experiences Questionnaire

Directions: Please think back to your own experiences in school (that is, grades K-12) and tell me how much you agree with each statement. For each statement, circle the number that best matches how you feel about the statement.

Please circle one number for each statement.	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Agree Strongly
21. My school experiences prepared me to be successful in life.	1	2	3	4	5
22. My teachers had my best interests at heart	1	2	3	4	5
23. The schools I attended were safe and clean.	1	2	3	4	5
24. My teachers wanted me to be successful.	1	2	3	4	5
25. I enjoyed going to school.	1	2	3	4	5
26. My teachers listened to what I had to say.	1	2	3	4	5
27. My teachers cared about me.	1	2	3	4	5
28. My teachers had respect for my parents.	1	2	3	4	5
29. My teachers had respect for me.	1	2	3	4	5
30. My teachers made me feel good about myself.	1	2	3	4	5
31. My teachers helped me to do my best.	1	2	3	4	5
32. My teachers helped me when I needed help.	1	2	3	4	5
33. My teachers understood my culture and background.	1	2	3	4	5
34. My teachers were fair in grading my work.	1	2	3	4	5
35. I was a valued member of my school community.	1	2	3	4	5
36. The material presented in school was interesting to me.	1	2	3	4	5
37. My parent(s) helped me with my homework.	1	2	3	4	5
38. My parent(s) and teachers had a good working relationship.	1	2	3	4	5
39. My parent(s) kept track of my progress in school.	1	2	3	4	5
40. I am proud of what I accomplished in school.	1	2	3	4	5
41. The rules at my schools were fair.	1	2	3	4	5
42. My schools provided me the opportunity to get involved (e.g., teams, clubs).	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C: **PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOLING**

Part III: Demographic Information

Directions: So that we can know more about the demographic characteristics of parents completing this survey, please answer the following 4 questions. For each item, please check one response.

43. What is your race?

   _____1.   Caucasian
   _____2.   African American
   _____3.   Hispanic
   _____4.   Native American
   _____5.   Pacific Islander
   _____6.   Multiracial
   _____7.   Other

45. Does your child qualify for free or reduced price lunch at school?
   _____ 1.   Yes
   _____ 2.   No

46. Does your child receive Exceptional Student Education services?
   _____ 1.   yes
   _____ 2.   no

44. What is the highest grade you completed in school?
   _____ 1.   8th grade or less
   _____ 2.   Some high school
   _____ 3.   Graduated high school
   _____ 4.   Some college (took college classes but never earned a degree)
   _____ 5.   Associate's (2 year, junior or community college) degree or graduated
           from technical school
   _____ 6.   Bachelor's (4 year college or university) degree
   _____ 7.   Some graduate school (took graduate classes but never earned a degree)
   _____ 8.   Graduate (e.g., M.A., M.B.A., Ph.D., J.D.) degree

Thanks for your participation!!!!

Appendix D: **Cover Letter**

24429 Painter Dr. Land O' Lakes, Fl 34639
813-794-0017-W; 813-909-9062-FAX; rmsanche@pasco.k12.fl.us

Padres que hablan Espanol: Esta encuesta contiene preguntas acerca de sus experiencias en la escuela y con la escuela de su nino(s). Si usted le gustaria recibir una copia en Espanol, por favor llame a Roxana Sanchez-Horn al (813) 794-0017. Su participacion es completamente volotario. Gracias.

July 27, 2005

Dear Parent or Caregiver,

My name is Roxana Sanchez-Horn and I am a school psychologist/developmental teacher working at Schwettman Education Center in Pasco County. I am also a student in the School Psychology Program at the University of South Florida (USF). I am completing my thesis this semester in order to obtain my Ed.S. degree and regular school psychologist certificate (I currently have a FL temporary certificate). In order to obtain my goal, I need your help. I would like to collect data at your child's school, where I completed part of my internship two years ago.

My study focuses on parents' perceptions of their own school experiences and parents' perceptions of their child's school. If you choose to participate in the study, please fill out the attached survey completely and return it to the school (this can be done through your child) no later than **Friday, March 11, 2005**. This information will be collected anonymously from the parents of 6th, 7th and 8th graders, whose children currently attend this school (during the 2004-2005 school year). The information collected would not only help me to complete my study, but would also provide the school (results of the survey will be shared with the principal, Mr. Johnson) and county important information about parent involvement at the middle school level and on how to better the process. Also, the 6th period class at the school who has the highest return rate of surveys by 3/11/05, will receive a pizza party. Please feel free to contact me with any questions at 813-794-0017.

Completing the Survey: There are 46 questions on the survey, and it is expected that total completion time will be about 10-15 minutes. If you would like help in completing the survey, or would prefer to answer the questions via telephone, please contact Roxana Sanchez-Horn at (813) 794-0017. If you choose to participate, please either complete the attached survey and return it to the school by 3/11/05 or contact Roxana Sanchez-Horn.

Please Note: Your participation is completely voluntary. By returning the survey, you are agreeing that you consent to participate in this research. If you choose not to participate, or if you withdraw, this will in no way affect your relationship with the School District of Pasco County, the school, USF, the Florida Department of Health, or any other party.

Confidentiality of Your Responses: There is minimal risk to you for participating in this research. Your privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services, and USF

Institutional Review Board may inspect the records from this research project, but your individual responses will remain anonymous.

Questions? If you have any questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in a research study, you may contact a member of the Division of Research Compliance of the University of South Florida at 813-974-5638 or the Florida Department of Health, Review Council for Human Subjects, toll free at 1-866-433-2775.

Thank you,

Roxana M. Sanchez-Horn
School Psychologist/Fl Temporary Certificate