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Parent and Educator Definitions of Parent Involvement and Engaged Activities

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Parent and Educator Definitions of Parent Involvement and Engaged Activities

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Abstract

Parental involvement in education is mandated by law (i.e., NCLB, IDEA) and it is the educators’ responsibility to reach out and include parents in the education of their child(ren). To date, there is little available research on parent and educator definitions of parental involvement and the activities with which they engage in or are expected to engage in. The level and intensity of a parent’s involvement is a multifaceted issue (i.e. home environment, job demands, culture); however, investigating definitions, expectations, and activities is an important step in understanding whether or not educators and parents are on the same page. Therefore, the purpose of this project was to investigate parent and educator definitions of parental participation. It was further to investigate educators’ expectations for parent involvement and determine whether parents engaged in activities that matched those expectations. In order to conduct this investigation, I developed online surveys to collect data from parents and educators on their definitions of parental involvement and engaged and expected activities. The surveys involved questions aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do parents define parental involvement? What activities do they report being involved with?
2. How do teachers define parental involvement? How do teachers expect parents to be involved?
3. Do parent and teacher definitions of parent involvement match the involvement activities they engage in or are expected to be engaged in?

A qualitative analysis of definitions and engaged/expected activities was conducted following data collection, and findings will be reported during this presentation.
Parental Involvement

The involvement of parents in their child’s education has been a prominent topic amongst school professionals and researchers alike since the 1900’s. Since the 1950’s, researchers have consistently stated the positive effects that parent involvement has on students’ success in school. These findings paved the way for Project Head Start of 1964 and the Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965 that required parents to participate on school boards and be active in their child’s schooling (Hiatt-Michael, 1994). As women began to enter the work force at increasing rates, school professionals began to see an increase in the attendance of preschool-aged children. At this time, “forms of parent involvement included serving on advisory boards, acting as a teacher assistant in the classroom, participating in school events, working in the school office and other related school activities, and participating in parent education classes” (Hiatt-Michael, p. 255). Since the advancement of public education, the roles that parents play in schools have remained constant, however researchers continue to support that a child’s education is often promoted by parent involvement in school, as well as out of school.

Joyce Epstein has the most widely accepted framework for parent involvement. Originally published in 1987, and updated in 1992, Epstein posited that there are six types of parent involvement which include: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein et al., 2002). Epstein’s framework places an emphasis on the partnerships that are developed between the community, school, and parent with the student being in the center of those relationships (see Table 1). “When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students, and begins its work” (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 7). In the beginning of the parent involvement movement, the duties that parents played outside of school
were overlooked and not necessarily attributed to a student’s educational success. Today, researchers acknowledge that those duties outside of school also play an equally major role in a student’s achievement in school.

Table 1

**Types of Parent Involvement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Involvement</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parenting</td>
<td>Help families establish home environments to support children as students</td>
<td>Home visits, family support programs, workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>Design effective methods for school-to-home and home-to-school communications</td>
<td>Communication notebooks, class/school blogs, conferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Develop opportunities, recruit, and organize parents</td>
<td>Involvement surveys, volunteer programs, classroom parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning at Home</td>
<td>Provide families with information on how to help with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning</td>
<td>Class website with brief instructional videos, Links to websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>Include parents in school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives</td>
<td>PTO/PTA, district-level councils and committees, school representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with in the Community</td>
<td>Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning development</td>
<td>Information on community events, alumni participation, summer programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Epstein created an in-depth definition for parent involvement. While her definition is accurate and complete, Ireland (2014) provides a simpler definition of parent involvement. She identifies that, “Parental involvement refers to the amount of participation a parent has when it comes to schooling and their child's life” (para. 1). Ireland’s definition focuses more on the
quantitative aspects of a parent’s participations, whereas Epstein focuses on the qualitative aspects. However, it’s important to acknowledge that both qualitative and quantitative characteristics are necessary to provide the full range of what parent involvement should look like.

**Importance and Benefits of Parental Involvement**

Parental involvement is critical in the education of children today, but it hasn’t always been a hot topic. Prior to the 1900’s parents were considered to be the primary educators of their children, since at that time school education was limited to affluent families. As public education began to emerge during the early 1900’s, parents began to put the responsibility completely on schools and teachers to educate their children, as parents thought they had better knowledge and the abilities to provide an appropriate education. Rightly so, to control the quality of teachers entering the field, states began to require teachers to be licensed.

However, as parents began to feel the growing separation between schools and parents, the National Congress of Mothers was formed in 1897, which eventually fueled the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). Now there are over 24,000 PTA units across the United States (National PTA, 2005). According to the National Parent-Teacher Association, there are many reasons that parent involvement in education is important. Some of the benefits include: influence the power of volunteering, improve communication, witness measurable results, generate more money for the school, increase children’s well-being, develop partnerships, and comply with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; National PTA, 2005).

According to Epstein et al. (2002), “there is now more and better evidence of the importance of school, family, and community partnerships for student success from elementary
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school through high school” (p. 4). She states that partnerships have the power to enhance a school’s atmosphere, supply local families with supportive assistance, promote the skills and leadership of parents, bridge the relationships between families within the school, and aid teachers (Epstein et al., 2002). She also makes it clear that the involvement of parents is important, because it fuels healthy partnerships among the child, school, and community.

Mapp (2003) investigated why parents choose to be involved in their child’s education, as well as the different elements that motivate parents. There were three common themes present in her research. First, with no regard to race, age, or socioeconomic status, most parents revealed their rooted aspirations to help their child(ren) succeed in school. Second, parents had a thorough understanding of their important role in involvement. Lastly, the activities that parents claimed to take part in went far and beyond the traditional activities often listed as participation (i.e., provided verbal support and encouragement, gave rewards for child to work hard, set up environments that supported school work completion). Through conducting this investigation, she also found that the involvement of parents not only benefits the students, but the parents as well.

Wilson (2011) analyzed the perceptions of parents from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and compared them to the expectations and perceptions of teachers. In her analysis, she cites an example where parental involvement contributed to the improvement of the student’s behavior. In her example, teachers mentioned parental involvement resulted in the improvement of students’ confidence and encouraged them to study more, as well as be more engaged in the classroom. After conducting the study, she found an agreement between teacher and parent groups, who both expressed the importance of positive interactions between parents and teachers, because those interactions aided in the success of the children. This information is consistent
with findings from Mapp (2003), where parents reported awareness of how their involvement affects their child’s educational maturation.

These research findings suggest that parent involvement is important in every stage of a child’s development. The framework of Epstein et al. (2002) lays a foundation that promotes effective partnerships between family, school, and the community. The partnership of key stakeholders is conducive to the success of children. Wilson (2011) further summarizes that positive interactions between teachers and parents contribute to the academic success of students. Additionally, Mapp (2003) found that despite some school’s narrow mindset of parental involvement, families genuinely wanted to be involved and motivate their children to be successful both in school and out of school. Correlation between level of involvement and age of children will be discussed in the following section and will highlight keys aspects of parental involvement at any age.

**Parent Involvement and Age of Child**

There are many factors that influence the level to which parents are engaged in their child’s education. Powell, Son, File, and Froiland (2012) have found that for each year a child increases in age, the quality and frequency of their parent’s involvement in their education decreases. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2003), “Adolescents do better in school when their parents are involved in their lives and that education works best when teachers and parents work closely with one another” (para. 2). So why does there seem to be a trend of parents decreasing their level of involvement as their child ages?

A study conducted by Powell, Son, File, and Froiland (2012) investigated the changes that occur with parental involvement after the (a) prekindergarten to kindergarten and (b)
kindergarten to first grade transitions. They found that parental involvement of students in pre-k through kindergarten either significantly increased or decreased during these transition periods. However, families were more likely to decrease their intensity of school involvement from kindergarten to first grade. The researchers also found that “81% of parents who substantially decreased the provision of cognitive stimulation from kindergarten to first grade had a concurrent increase in the level of variety of out-of-home experiences for their child” (p. 287). These findings support the notion that parent involvement is dynamic rather than static, because while more than half of individual parents drastically increased or decreased their involvement, the overall percentages displayed very little change in family involvement within the school. In other words, it’s important to consider changes in participation over a variety of home and school activities.

Núñez et al. (2014) studied the relationships between the perceived parental participation in homework, the behaviors a student has when completing homework, and academic achievement. Of these relationships, they examined the differences that occurred between elementary, middle, and high school students. They found that the relationship between parents helping their children and efficiently completing their homework was indirect, and instead was interceded by the child’s behavior and desire. Additionally, this relationship was stronger or weaker, depending on the student’s grade level. This suggests that the child’s age, behavior, and desire for assistance is what influenced the completion of homework, rather than a parent’s direct guidance. They also found positive correlations between the amount of homework completed and the level of academic success at all three age levels (elementary, middle, and high school). However, the strength of this relationship decreased as grade levels increased. They also suggest that as the child ages, they are more likely to complete homework independently, and their
motivation to do so intervenes with their parents’ likeliness to aid in the completion (Núñez et al., 2014).

Parental involvement in their child’s education might also decline due to less meaningful engagement between schools and families. Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, and Fendrich (1999) conducted a two-year longitudinal assessment that examined how parent participation changes over time and how it can affect a student’s educational success. While a decrease in parent participation was not significant, there were significant declines in the quality of parent-teacher interactions. They also found that parents continued to put forth their efforts to support their child at home. These findings are similar to those of Núñez et al. (2014), in that they widely reported that declines in parent involvement is more likely to occur closer to the middle school transition period, rather than during the elementary years.

Overall, these findings suggest that there is a decline in parental involvement as a child increases in age; however, the change is gradual and not considerably noticeable when evaluated on a year-to-year basis. The types of involvement that parents participate in also fluctuates from year-to-year, and while there may be a decrease in some types, there is a concurrent increase in other types. Epstein et al. (2002) responds to this by stating, “This conclusion…takes a narrow view of involvement and does not consider the wide range of partnership activities that are conducted at home, at school, and in the community” (p. 236). While it may feel like a societal norm for parents to retract themselves from being directly involved in their children’s education as they progress through school, researchers continue to find evidence of positive student achievement as a result of parental involvement throughout all levels of the student’s education. According to Wilson (2011), “As a child progresses through school, the curriculum also becomes harder. Parents with less education are more likely to lack the confidence to help their middle or
high school aged child with their homework” (p. 76). Further, this suggests that an explanation for why parents are less involved as the child ages might be due to parent’s perception of the importance of their own teaching, since the school’s focus on core subjects increases.

**Educator Perceptions of Parent Involvement**

As stated in the online Oxford Dictionary, perception is defined as “a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression” (Perception, n.d.). Everyone has a unique way of perceiving the world around them based on their experiences and background. Thus, individuals that are educators each have their own personal way of perceiving parental involvement. An educator’s personal experiences, values, and goals, as well as the immediate social context, can influence their perception of involvement (Menzel & Maner, 2010). However, while many educators share common interpretations of parent participation, their differences may be identified on a continuum of traditional methods versus modernized methods (Hicks Dunn, 2012).

Hicks Dunn (2012) conducted interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators in an urban area to better understand the decision-making process in African-centered schools, but came across pervading themes, from which she developed a framework to guide her study. To guide her framework and research, she focuses on the differences between two models of parent-school relationships: the *engagement model* and the *involvement model*. She found that “[once] parents, teachers and administrators are of like mind about the culture of African-centered schooling, then change agents for the world are created” (p. 1). While the author’s focus was on African-centered schools, her framework is relevant to an educator’s perception of parent involvement in all other types of schools as well. The characteristics and ramifications of these two models represent the researcher’s *parent participation continuum*, with each model being on
opposite sides of the spectrum. The researcher found that when educators had narrow definitions of parent participation, such as obeyed role adherence, parents were often generalized as being uninvolved; this perspective often represents the *involvement model*. In contrast, parent participation that is valued and revered by school personnel often illustrates the *engagement model*. In the following studies, there are a few educator perspectives that closely align with either of these models, and the categorization of these perspectives will be an important basis for this study.

DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) investigated parent and teacher perceptions of parental involvement. They surveyed staff, parents, and students at a Midwestern junior-high and asked participants involved in the study to rate the importance of fifteen different types of involvement activities related to academic achievement from 1 (*not important*) to 4 (*most important*). They found that educators felt it is more important for parents to teach their child the importance of education at home, than having the parents physically present at school. To be exact, there were eleven activities that were of more importance to educators than to parents. The activities that had the largest discrepancy of average rating were “limiting the amount of time child watches TV,” (*parents* *m*=3.20, *teachers* *m*=3.67), followed by “volunteering at school,” (*difference*=0.41), and “balancing schoolwork and time with friends,” (*difference*=0.3). However, both parents and teachers agreed that ensuring the student is in school every day was the most important (educator mean: 4.0; parent mean: 3.88). Most teachers and staff agreed that the current rates of parent participation were low and assumed this was due to parental intimidation. Even while admitting this fact, staff members did not provide any further explanations as to why parents might be fearful. “[The] data revealed that teachers and students have a higher expectation for involvement than do parents” (p.367).
Epstein and Dauber (1991), conducted an investigation with 171 teachers from inner-city elementary and middle schools to learn about teachers’ attitudes towards parental involvement. They found that when teachers perceive a parent’s views to be similar to their own, there is a greater connection between the teachers and families. This finding is similar to the previously quoted material of Hicks Dunn (2012) which suggests that parents, teachers, and administrators work most effectively when they all understand and accept the culture of the community. Further, when teachers perceive that they do not hold similar values with their student’s families, they report finding these parents much harder to connect with and contact. These differing perspectives exemplify the range of Hicks Dunn (2012) parent participation continuum. The researchers also found a discrepancy in which educators stated that there were not many supporters of parental involvement within their school, however the parent surveys contradicted this belief. Epstein and Dauber (1991) conclude that the beliefs and attitudes of educators are likely to be a strong predictor of the success in those parent-teacher relationships.

Characteristics of the Hicks Dunn (2012) parent-teacher relationship models suggests that parents and teachers have a stronger relationship when parent participation is valued by school personnel, and when educators’ perceptions are more open about what activities exemplify parent involvement. Similarly, Epstein and Dauber (1991) suggest that a teacher who perceives their views to differ than those of parents are less likely to experience an effective relationship with one another. These findings suggest that when educators’ pay less attention to the similarities of their values with parents and are subsequently more open and accepting of their differences, the parent-teacher relationship is more likely to be strong and effective. Research also suggests that educators perceive that a parent’s involvement at home is more important than their involvement at school (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007).
Educator Definitions of Parental Involvement and Expected Engagement Activities

Frequently, educators define parent involvement by stating that parent involvement starts in an education-supporting home (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Educators emphasize the importance of parents aiding the social-emotional development of their children by effectively disciplining them (Wilson, 2011). While discipline can have multiple meanings, in this context it means enforcing a set schedule with the child (i.e., dedicating time to homework, timely bed time). Teachers would also like parents to teach their children that education is important. Further, they want parents to focus on their role at home, and then to consider engaging in the school community (Wilson, 2011).

Moriwaka (2012) conducted an investigation to learn about the perceptions of special educators and parents of children with special needs, in order to create strong partnerships. The investigation was conducted through focus group interviews. She found that “all educators underlined the importance of communication with parents and stated that they use a variety of communication methods, such as sending letters, e-mail, communication notes, and contacting via telephone” (p. 112). Many of the participants involved in this study insisted that it is crucial for educators to create organized, unchanging, and regular communication, while being adaptable and open for communication with families to improve home-school relationships.

The teachers in this study, like most other educators, found it frustrating when a parent didn’t reciprocate the fervent line of communication. However, these educators remained adamant and resilient in their efforts, whereas other studies suggest that teachers who don’t receive qualitative feedback from families, do not continue to exercise the same methods (Miretzky, 2004). According to the Miretzky (2004), “several educators in the study also reported that most communication from the school is related to problems concerning students;
this causes parents to distance themselves from the school” (p. 157). This suggests that while the teachers were proactive in communicating with families, their efforts did not result in positive communication exchange. Often times, studies that focus on teachers’ perceptions of parent involvement have found that teachers would like to see more efforts made from administration to support increased engagement (Miretzky, 2004; Moriwaka, 2012).

Young, Austin, and Growe (2013) interviewed administrators to understand their thoughts on parent participation. They found that parent “active engagement” and “support” were two categories that received the most feedback from administrators. As one participant stated, “parental involvement is when the parent starts at home by instilling the value of an education. Then the parent introduces reading and social behavior at birth to school age and beyond (p. 295).” Young and colleagues concluded that school administrators provide definitions that strongly reflect effective parenting, and administrators should be responsible for collaborating with the school’s educators to create a mainstream definition. A widespread definition could ensure that all teachers are on the same page and hold the same expectations for families.

Wilson (2011) conducted an investigation to understand educator perceptions on parent involvement. In it she provides a list of parenting activities that educators commonly noted as parent participation. She specifically found,

Themes that arose were parenting - including providing for the child and disciplining the child, communicating with the faculty, supporting the faculty, and engaging in at home learning activities such as homework, reading, and communicating to the child the value of education. (p. 161)
Wilson (2011) also included interviews conducted with parents who felt there were not enough invitations for participation provided. However, teachers from the same school noted many engagement activities, such as family nights, community nights, and after school programs that were extended to parents. Ironically, teachers stated that many of these events resulted in low-attendance, unless incentives (e.g., dinner) were offered. Ultimately, when educators thought about the families that were currently involved in their schools, they found they were generally the ones that followed the teacher’s rules and routines for school to home communication.

Based on the investigations at hand, educators want parents to comply with their requests for engagement and hold themselves accountable for supporting their students’ academic success (Wilson, 2011). Teachers also want children to come to school with a positive outlook on education, and a “ready to learn” attitude. As seen in Moriwaka (2012) and Wilson (2011) educators want parents to respect and trust their work and professional judgement. Further, they want parents to model and teach their children to appreciate education and respect authority. In all three studies, effective communication between parents and professionals seems to be a reoccurring theme present in educators’ and administrators definitions of parental involvement. Effective communication leads to effective partnerships, and as such, most educators place communication as the most important form of involvement (Wilson, 2011). Lastly, educators often share their preference for parents to focus on more meaningful interactions and role models within the home setting because they feel positive home-school partnerships start within the home (Moriwaka, 2012; Wilson, 2011).

**Educator Satisfaction with Parent Involvement**

Research shows that there are many internal and external factors that give a teacher a sense of complacency in their career (El-Hilali & Al-Rashidi, 2015; MetLife, 2013). One of the
external factors that can affect an educator’s satisfaction is parent involvement. Many educators stress the importance of parental involvement, and are likely to employ many different actions to enhance parent involvement in their classroom (Wilson, 2011). When parents are involved in ways that teachers deem worthy, they are likely to feel a sense of accomplishment. Sometimes parents aren’t involved in ways the teacher had imagined, and this can cause many different feelings among teachers, one of them being dissatisfaction.

In a study conducted by Ladner (2003), the researcher aimed to compare parent and teacher perceptions of parent involvement and better understand each party’s understanding of involvement. From this, teachers were asked to state whether they are satisfied with the current levels of parental involvement in their classroom, as well as involvement in the home. These were followed up with what barriers teacher think might be affecting either form of involvement. It was found that teachers were more satisfied with home involvement (38%) than school involvement (22%). However, on average, nearly half of teachers weren’t satisfied with either home (46%) or school (67%) involvement. As for the possible barriers, the most commonly reported barrier for both home and school involvement revolved around “logistical issues,” such as the presence of other siblings, many hours at work, and not enough time.

Similar to the findings above, Linek, Rasinski, and Harkins (1997) found that roughly 60% of teachers reported dissatisfaction or equivocality to their past experiences with parent involvement in the classroom’s reading curriculum. The teachers cited many causes for their lack of satisfaction, with the most common responses being that parents with not interested in being involved with their child and parents did not provide their child with an optimal amount of encouragement. However, the researchers detected a discrepancy within the teachers’ responses. “Most of the teachers admitted that between 80-85% of the parents were interested and helpful
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so their dissatisfaction was based on a minority of parents” (p. 100). This study and Ladner (2003) provide a good foundation for educators’ satisfaction with parental involvement, and the following study examines some of the subsequent effects of educators’ dissatisfaction.

MetLife (2013) conducted by project directors Markow, Marcia and Lee, investigated some of the challenges and responsibilities that teachers and administrators encounter, and to ultimately give those with first-hand experience in a school a voice. Educator satisfaction is a multi-faceted issue, and while this study focused on the overall job satisfaction of teachers, it also reveals a positive correlation between parent involvement and an educator’s satisfaction. The researchers found that, “teacher satisfaction has dropped precipitously by 23 percentage points (from 62% to 39% very satisfied), including a five-point decrease in the last year, to the lowest level it has been in the survey in 25 years” (p. 4). Of the educators that reported low job satisfaction, many reported intense levels of stress. One of the major challenges that teachers reported was trying to engage families and the community to be more proactive about the success of their children in school. Past surveys also showed evidence of parental involvement being an on-going issue that has continued to decline. Similar to this, El-Hilali and Al-Rashidi (2015) also found that parental involvement had a strong impact on teacher satisfaction. The results of this study suggest that educators are not satisfied with the lack of parent engagement, and along with many other challenges (e.g. the role reconstruction of school personnel, the insufficient budget and resources, etc.) educators are not experiencing adequate levels of fulfillment.

Given that educators see parent involvement as a necessary component in the success of their student’s education, it is no surprise that parent involvement can have a major impact on teachers. Ladner (2003) and Linek, Rasinski, and Harkins (1997) show specific examples of just
how many teachers are not happy with the outcomes of parent involvement in their classroom. While MetLife (2013) only suggests that teachers are not satisfied with a parent’s level of involvement, they provide a more recent outlook on an educator’s career satisfaction, which may be influenced by parent involvement.

Parent Perceptions of Parent Involvement

Not all parents view parent involvement the same way, because involvement for each family looks different. While an activity like helping with homework is common for parents to participate in, the degree to which they help can be determined by the role that parents assume, the self-efficacy that parents feel towards supporting their child, or the way that parents perceive the potential outcomes of their support (Núñez et al., 2015). Many researchers indicate that parents understand the importance of their participation, and that their participation helps support their child’s achievement and success in school (Mapp, 2003; Powell, Son, File, & Froiland, 2012; Wilson, 2011). However, many parents still view teachers as their child’s primary educator of core subjects and feel confident in helping if they perceive that their support is needed (DePlanyt, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007).

DePlanyt, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) conducted an investigation to better understand parent perceptions regarding their involvement in their child’s education. They found that “parents displayed a link between attitude about parent involvement and their parent-involvement behaviors, which was indicated because behaviors with higher importance ranks reportedly occurred more often” (p. 367). Out of the fifteen total activities, six of these activities would generally occur in the school setting (e.g. observing child’s class, volunteering at school). Four of these types of activities were ranked as the least important out of all, and the other two were not ranked much higher. This suggests that parents value involvement that takes place in
the home over involvement in the school. Parents were also found to overestimate their actions, as students and teachers frequently ranked the behavior of parents lower than the rankings made by parents.

Erdener and Knoeppel (2018) conducted a study based on Epstein’s six types of parental involvement framework. They surveyed parents in Turkey to examine their perceptions on their involvement at their child’s school. They found that parents understood their involvement was important for their child’s achievement in school. However, their responses suggested that they still believed that the teachers were responsible for their child’s schooling. While this may be true, the parents involved in the study did not provide an outlook on what “schooling” means to them. The parents also claimed that family problems (e.g. poverty) directly affected their ability to participate in school.

Parents often have similar motives to support their child’s education, but their perceptions of these motives can differ. Fan (2013) conducted a study to examine the perceptions of parents and their involvement in their child’s homework process, as well as explore the differences between parent practices. Following the framework of Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005), they suggested that parents’ involvement is motivated by two belief systems: role construction for involvement, and sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school. Fan (2013) wanted to explore whether parents had different perceptions about these two motivational beliefs. Majority of participants agreed that it was their role to help their child complete their homework, and these actions resulted in successful outcomes for the child. They also perceived that they have enough knowledge, energy, and skill to support their child’s achievement through homework. The authors posited that findings indicate that parents’ decision on getting involved in their children’s homework was motivated by how parents perceive their roles in relation to
their children’s homework, and what outcomes they believe their involvement may bring to their children. In addition, their involvement was also motivated by how they perceived school and teacher invitations, and child invitations. They further found that the parents that had at least a high-school diploma or equivalent were more likely to believe that they had enough knowledge and skills to help their child with homework, providing the child was in the early elementary grades.

The studies conducted by DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) and Erdener and Knoeppel (2018) display findings that suggest that parents perceive involvement as something that primarily occurs in the home. Parents held beliefs that involvement activities done in the home were more important than those done in school. However, even if parents found those activities more important, Fan (2013) found that a parent’s motivation to be involved at home was influenced by the beliefs they held about their roles in relation to their children’s homework. This suggests that while most parents understand and believe that their involvement is important in the home, parent’s direct and intentional actions may differ in quality from one another, due to other perceptions they may have.

**Parent Definitions of Parent Involvement and Preferred Engagement Activities**

Similar to parents’ perceptions of parental involvement, parents’ specific definitions of involvement can drastically differ from family to family due to their experiences and beliefs. Generally, a parent’s definition will fall into one of three categories: general definitions, identification of a specific activity, or statement of importance of parental activity (Ladner, 2003). It’s important for educators to know how a parent defines their involvement, so that they’re not surprised or disappointed with their actions (Gbadamosi & Lin, 2003). This is also true for the activities that parents prefer to engage in.
Zarate (2007) conducted a study to explore the ways that Latino parents perceive and define parental involvement. She found that Latino parents perceived parental involvement as two separate categories: academic involvement and life participation. She noted,

> Academic involvement was understood to encompass activities associated with homework, educational enrichment, and academic performance; life participation characterized ways that parents provided life education and were holistically integrated into their children’s lives in school, as well as away from it. (p. 8)

When parents were asked to list the activities related to academic involvement, they mentioned things such as attending conferences, signing homework requirements, asking about homework daily, amongst others. Activities that defined life participation included things like awareness and monitoring of their child’s life, teaching good morals and respects for others, encouraging abilities and career aspirations, and discussing future plans, amongst others. It was also noted that Latino families believed that by playing an effective and active role in their child’s life, they would ultimately promote school success.

Ladner (2003) surveyed a group of parents and a group of teachers to better understand the differences between each groups definitions and perceptions of parent involvement. When parents were asked to define parent involvement, 81 out of 118 survey responses (67%), stated a specific activity as the definition. The activities named most were “communication with teacher (notes, phone calls, etc.), homework, volunteer / being visible in school” (p. 38). This is interesting, because DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) found that parents ranked the above activities, except for homework, as being less important. Another important note is that participants of the Ladner (2003) study were able to write in unique descriptions, whereas participants in the DePlanty et al. study ranked pre-written activities.
Gbadamosi and Lin (2003) surveyed parents to identify the actual activities they were engaged in, and what other things they would like to do in the classroom. Some of the most common activities parents said they would like to do involved: eating lunch with their child, volunteering for field trips, visiting or observing the classroom, and helping with classroom parties. In comparison, the activities that parents actually engaged in included: helping with homework, reading with their child every night, reviewing graded papers with their children, helping with class parties, and attending after-school activities. Varying percentages of participation from the parents of students in three classes involved in the study supported that parents were interested in and currently involved in activities they enjoy. In conclusion, researchers found that parents were more likely to be involved if the activity was one that they enjoyed. According to Gbadamosi and Lin (2003), “this suggests the need for educators to obtain and consider the interests of parents, so that there is an optimal level of parent involvement in the classroom” (p. 6).

There is some consensus on definitions of parent involvement and engaged activities; however specific activities can carry different levels of importance for different families. Most parents acknowledge that importance of involvement within the home and school, but each family carries their own perception as to what involvement looks like in each of these settings. Research shows the importance of school professionals recognizing and accepting each family’s views and limitations, and effectively considering this when deciding the best way to reach out to families (Gbadamosi & Lin, 2003).

**Summary**

Parent involvement has been a major aspect of education for many decades. Those curious about parent involvement may have questions such as:
• What is parent involvement?

• What does parent involvement look like?

• Is parent involvement important?

More so in recent years, many researchers have attempted to answer some of these questions. Joyce Epstein is one researcher that has gone above and beyond to provide an in-depth analysis of parent involvement and has created a framework that uses parent involvement as an umbrella term for six specific types of involvement. Those types are as follows: parenting, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating within the community (Epstein et al., 2002).

Parent involvement is such a hot topic, because it is certainly important and for many different reasons. The involvement of parents in their child’s education has many benefits for not only the child, but the parents and teachers as well. Epstein et al. (2002) highlights that effective parent involvement is what fuels successful partnerships between all those involved. Often people assume that parent participation is only important during a child’s elementary years, but Epstein et al. confirms that involvement is equally important throughout the child’s education. Often times it is performed differently for what is developmentally appropriate for the child, but nonetheless parent involvement should not decrease over time (Deslands & Bertrand, 2005).

A major component of parent involvement is educators, in that they are the ones that implement some areas, create opportunities for other areas, and experience the effects of it. A teacher’s ideas and definitions of involvement can influence their perceptions of the success of a parent’s involvement. It is thought that when parents and teachers have a mutual understanding and acceptance of the ways that parents are involved in home and at school, both parties see it as
an achievement (Hicks Dunn, 2012). “Teachers' opinions reflect three perspectives on parent-school relations: (1) parents care but cannot do much to help the school or their children in actual learning; (2) parents care but should not help with school learning; (3) parents care and can be of great help if they are shown how to help” (Epstein & Becker, 1982). Most educators are very in tune with what they expect of parents, and how they define involvement. Educators often define involvement as effective communicating and effective parenting, and these qualities are often present in an education-supporting home (Wilson, 2011).

A good way to minimally break down parent involvement is by looking at how parents are involved in the home and how they are involved at school. Teachers often value competent participation in the home over participation at school and suggest that they are better outcomes from participation in the home (Ladner, 2003). Educators claim that they are more satisfied with home involvement, than they are with school involvement, but are not satisfied with involvement as a whole (Ladner, 2003). Educators who are less satisfied with the levels of parent involvement in their classroom, often report higher levels of stress, and consequently lower levels of job satisfaction (MetLife, 2013). An educators’ role in parent involvement is essential, as is the role of parents, and a lack of either can quickly determine the effectiveness of involvement.

Parents have the other essential role in parent involvement, but sometimes their perceptions can differ from those of educators. Parents may find more importance in activities that take place in the home, and often they view involvement as primarily taking place in the home (DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, & Duchane, 2007; Erdener & Knoeppel, 2018). Overall, parents provide some consensus of a definition for parent involvement, but their definitions encompass a wide range of activities and perceptions, in comparison to the definitions of educators. DePlanty
et al. (2007) found that teachers and students hold involvement with much higher expectations than parents do. Nonetheless, parents are aware of the importance and benefits of their involvement, but sometimes a variety of barriers prevent parents from playing their role to the fullest potential. With that being said, parent involvement is a multi-faceted issue that typically doesn’t illustrate a black and white picture. Understanding the individual components of involvement can help and parents and educators find the most effective ways to feel successful and satisfied.

Methods

Given the dearth of information available, there is still a need for a more direct definition of parental involvement. To date, there are no empirically derived multidimensional scales of parent involvement to inform early childhood and primary grade education (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000). Therefore, the purpose of this project was to investigate parent and educator definitions of parental participation. Gathering definitions from two different perspectives is important in order to understand any similarities and differences in expectations. Another purpose was to investigate educators’ expectations for parental involvement and determine whether or not parental involvement activities match those expectations. Specifically, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How do parents define parental involvement? What activities do they report being involved with?

2. How do teachers define parental involvement? How do teachers expect parents to be involved?

3. Do parent and teacher definitions of parent involvement match the involvement activities they engage in or are expected to be engaged in?
It is important to understand if a mismatch exists between activities parents typically participate in and educators’ expectations of parental participation as a mismatch can hinder parent-professional partnerships. The level and intensity of a parent’s involvement in his or her child’s education is a multifaceted issue (i.e. home environment, job demands, culture); however, investigating definitions, expectations, and activities is an important step in understanding whether or not educators and parents are on the same page.

**Research Design**

This study was conducted using mixed methodologies. An anonymous online survey was developed to gain qualitative information on parent and educator definitions of parental involvement, as well as quantitative information on engaged activities.

**Participants**

Participants included educators working in Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade settings; as well as those working in early care settings (e.g., daycare, homecare). Participants also included parents of school age children currently attending early care programs or Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade. Recruitment was coordinated through local Midwestern schools and early care centers, as well as Facebook groups organized for educators or parents of school-age children. Informed consent was embedded in the survey; by completing the survey parents and educators agreed to participate in the study. All procedures associated with this investigation were approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Data Collection**

An anonymous online survey was developed to obtain information regarding parent and educator definitions of parental involved and engaged activities. Copies of the surveys are attached (see Appendices A & B). The survey was developed to be anonymous in order to
promote the honest and authentic answers of participants without the risk of being identified.

Questions on the survey primarily revolved around parent and educator definitions and engaged activities. Amongst demographic and other involvement questions, questions below were present on the survey to elicit responses in attempt to answer the research questions:

- How do you define parental involvement?
- Select from the following list to identify the types of activities you typically participate in/require parents to participate in.
- How else would you like to engage in your child’s education?
- How else would you like to parents to engage in their child’s education?

The survey was sent via electronic link through local school emails and Facebook groups with members who were currently educators or parents of school-age children. Links sent through school email were forwarded to teachers working in those schools and parents of children who attend the schools. See Table 2 for a break down waves of survey delivery.

Table 2

Waves of Survey Delivery to Schools & Facebook Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Wave</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wave 1 (10/05/17)</td>
<td>Parent: 37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educator: 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 2 (01/31/18)</td>
<td>Parent: 54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educator: 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 3 (03/19/18)</td>
<td>Parent: 18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educator: 39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Parent: 58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educator: 38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis
Data from the parent and educator definitions were analyzed through a multiple coding approach used to organize the data (Barbour, 2001). Line by line coding was completed independently by two people: the student researcher and the capstone adviser. The student researcher and capstone adviser then discussed their independent coding in an effort to come to agreement. Consensus was reached on all codes. Codes were then merged and categories were identified and collapsed. Similarities and differences were then identified among participants and within the categories. The constant comparative method was used to guide the analysis; repeatedly returning the data and organizing and discussing categories and themes as recommended by Charmaz (2000). Based on categories and themes, new parent and educator definitions were created. Analysis of the demographic data, as well as data on the frequency of engaged and expected activities were completed through descriptive statistics.

**Results and Discussion**

**RQ1: How Do Parents Define Parental Involvement?**

Based on the frequency of keywords found in parents’ definitions, parent involvement is necessary for student success and includes engagement and active participation in school events and activities, assisting with school work and skill development, communicating regularly with the teacher, staff, and their own child, and remaining informed about school expectations, news, and child progress (see Table 1). Many of the other frequent keywords such as, “attending” and “monitoring” relate closely to other keywords that had a much higher frequency. It was found that parents either provided a definition that expressed their feelings towards parental involvement (i.e. poor, lacking), or a definition that listed actions they associate with involvement. In the following sections, other studies will be compared to the findings, and there will be discussion on whether these findings carry any meaningful significance. Overall, the
proposed definition encompasses what majority parents stated in this study, as well as other studies.

Table 1

Frequency of Keywords and Themes Found Within Parent Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Descriptor/activity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement (48)</td>
<td><strong>Volunteering</strong>&lt;br&gt;School events, sharing talents, classroom</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Attending</strong>&lt;br&gt;School events, parent-teacher conferences, open house</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong>&lt;br&gt;Actively participating in school (presence), engaged with students, staff, teachers in and out of school, relationship with school staff</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting</td>
<td>Home (schoolwork, reinforce skills)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Progress, homework, implement teacher feedback</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>Teachers, staff, own child</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational sentiments</td>
<td>Convey educational importance to child, convey interest in school activities, convey positive sentiments about school/teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting</td>
<td>Teachers, administrators, child</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed</td>
<td>Classroom happenings and expectations, curriculum, students, teachers, schoolwork, progress</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings needs of child</td>
<td>Enriched home environment, discipline, basic needs (sleep, food),</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>With school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Traditional versus modern.** Ladner (2003) conducted a similar study that asked parents to provide their definition of parent involvement. Despite being conducted fifteen years ago,
parents frequently reported the same top five activities, but in a slightly different order (see Table 2).

Table 2

2003 vs. 2018 Parents’ Definitions of Parent Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Communication w/ teacher</td>
<td>Volunteering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>Assisting w/ homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Volunteer/Visible</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Aware/Informed</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>Informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Conferences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The age of the child was the only major difference between these two study methods in that Ladner (2003) sent surveys directly to parents from three different elementary schools, whereas in this study, the surveys were available to parents with children of any age. In comparison, the 2018 study only had 52% of the reported ages of children fall within the elementary school-age category.

The most significant difference in results is the opposite rankings of communication and volunteering. In Ladner (2003), communication was most frequently mentioned, but in this study in 2018, volunteering was most frequently mentioned. There could be many different reasons for this occurrence including, but not limited to: the myriad of changes over fifteen years (e.g. technology), geographic locations, average age of parents who reported, ages of parents’ children, etc. While the specific rankings of activities have been noticed, it’s important to note that both studies were not significantly large, therefore the specifics may or may not indicate true
DEFINITIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGED ACTIVITIES

reality. Further research on the same issue would need to be conducted to draw any meaningful conclusions.

**In-school definitions versus out-of-school definitions.** DePlany, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) found that many parents perceived activities that generally take place outside of school as having greater importance than activities that occur within the school. Initially, when I categorize the frequent keywords stated by participants based on in-school activities and out-of-school activities, parents named a larger variety of activities that occur outside of school than within the school (see Figure 1). After further analysis, it should be noted that the total number of keyword frequencies for each category does not show much range. While parents’ definitions listed a larger variety of activities that occur outside of school, the smaller list of activities occurring within the school were mentioned nearly the same amount of times. Nonetheless, I find it important to highlight this finding to suggest that the larger variety of out-of-school activities could signify importance.

Figure 1

*Comparison of Definitions that Listed In-School Activities vs. Out-of-School Activities*
In comparison to the DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) study, with no regard to what parents find most important, my findings suggest that while parents have more involvement opportunities outside of school, these opportunities do not necessarily outweigh the significance of opportunities that are available within the school. The definitions provided in my study do not necessarily indicate importance, therefore I find only a minimal correlation to the DePlanty et al. study. It should be noted that DePlanty et al. created their activities based off staff, parent, and student interviews, where participants were asked to name their ideal type of parent involvement that may occur in the home, school, or community and were from a junior-high school population.

Powell, Son, File, and Froiland (2012) conducted a study which found that parents were more likely to decrease their level of school involvement, but concurrently increase their level of home involvement as their child grew older. The Powell et al. study provides support to the DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, Duchane (2007) study in that a junior-high population of staff, parents,
and students are more likely to value and participate in out-of-school activities. Similarly, the Powell et al. study supports my findings in that 52% of the childrens’ ages reported were elementary age or between the ages of five and eleven. Furthermore, it’s understandable that my findings would indicate generally more equal levels of in-school and out-of-school involvement, because about half of the participating parents currently experience involvement opportunities that typically occur at the elementary school level. This finding was also evident in Ladner (2003) where she states, “parents…did include school centered involvement but they also include a variety of home and community activities giving a broader definition of parent involvement” (p. 24).

**RQ1A: What Activities Do Parents Report Being Involved With?**

In this part of the survey, parents were able to check mark which specific activities they feel they take part in. The activities were provided, and this question was asked after parents were given the opportunity to define parent involvement. I think the order of survey questions carries significance, because parents had to initially define involvement without any hints or reminders. Perhaps if they saw a provided list of activities first, they may have defined parent involvement differently. The most frequently chosen activities were: ask child about their school day, review info sent from home, attend parent conferences, assist with homework, attend school programs, practice skills at home, and monitor homework and grades (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2](image-url)

*Frequency of Participation in Specific Involvement Activities Reported by Parents*
Relations to other studies. Gbadamosi and Lin (2003) also conducted a similar survey in which parents reported engagement in the following activities: helping with homework, reading with their child every night, reviewing graded papers with their children, helping with class parties, and attending after-school activities. Three of the activities in Gbadamosi and Lin’s study were also present in my study, those being helping with homework, reviewing graded papers, and attending after-school activities. These compiled findings suggest that these activities occur more frequently among parents. This is important to note, because these activities were also identified through the proposed definition of parental involvement.

Participation in activities reported versus proposed definition of parental involvement.

When parents were asked to indicate which provided activities they partake in, the top three activities that parents indicated were “ask child about school day,” “review info sent from home,” and “attend parent-teacher conferences.” These activities mostly align with their
definitions, for example parents who ask their children about their school day partake in communicating with their child, as stated in the proposed definition. Parents who review information that is sent home from school are following the part of the definition that says parents are informed about school news and their child’s progress. However, 56 out of 58 parents indicated that they attend parent teacher conferences, but when I look at the frequency table of parent definitions, “attending” was mentioned far less often. “Attending” was included as a part of the overall theme of engagement, and engagement does follow the proposed definition, but “attending” specifically was defined far less frequent than it was reported. This might imply that parents attend conferences, but don’t see it as a defining feature of parent involvement. Perhaps parents see this activity as something that is concurrent with sending their child to school, and therefore don’t define it as parent involvement, because it is what’s minimally required of parents. In other words, this might suggest that parent involvement all together is optional, but certain activities like attending parent teacher conferences are a requirement, which is why parents report involvement in this activity, but don’t use it to define involvement.

The reported activity “monitor homework and grades” was also defined far less frequently than parents reported doing it. 52 out of 58 parents reported that they monitor their children’s homework and grades, but this activity was only mentioned 3 times in parent’s definitions. This does strike some concern; However, it might be assumed that things like monitoring your child’s homework and grades would better fall in the category of being informed, which is in the proposed definition. This might suggest that viewing homework and monitoring grades is part of a bigger picture, like being informed. Without being able to follow-up with any of the participants, it’s difficult to make an assumption like this, but it’s important to
understand why parents report high levels of involvement in this activity, but do not necessarily use it to define parent involvement. Parents were first asked to define involvement in their own words, and then were given the opportunity to specify how they are actually involved. This is important to consider, in that their definitions were thought of without any suggestions, and what they listed was what was off the top of their head at the time. It is much different when you are given a suggested list of activities, because now they might report involvement in an activity that they didn’t initially think about in the prior question. It’s more likely that parents might have reported involvement in an activity that they didn’t initially think of in the prior question about the definition of involvement, because they were given a list of suggested activities. I wouldn’t say this hinders the validity of their reported activities, but it does make a difference in definition frequencies versus activities reported.

The proposed definition of parental involvement based on parents’ responses highlighted the key words engagement, assisting, communicating, and informed. In the table below, I have indicated which involvement activities parents reported being involved in and to which definition keyword each activity matched up with (see Table 3).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Chosen Involvement Activities</th>
<th># of Parents that Chose Activity</th>
<th>Matched Definition Keyword -also listed in proposed definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask child about school day</td>
<td>58/58</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review info sent from home</td>
<td>56/58</td>
<td>Informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend parent teacher conferences</td>
<td>56/58</td>
<td>Engagement (attending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist with homework</td>
<td>55/58</td>
<td>Assisting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend school programs</td>
<td>55/58</td>
<td>Engagement (attending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice skills at home</td>
<td>55/58</td>
<td>Assisting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor homework and grades</td>
<td>52/58</td>
<td>Monitor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen from Table 3, all but one of the reported activities was matched with a keyword that was also listed in the proposed definition. This suggests that parents are likely to define parent involvement based on the activities they partake in. However, a deeper analysis reveals that some of the most frequent definition keywords like “volunteering” was not one of the top activities that parents reported being involved in. The specific activity “volunteer at school/in-class,” was only chosen by parents 43 times, which makes the 12th chosen activity. Why do parents most frequently define parent involvement as volunteering if not all parents do such tasks? The opposite is also evident, in which the definition keyword “communicating” was only used to define involvement 14 times, but 100% of parents reported active involvement in the activity “ask child about school day.” It should also be noted that the keyword attending was only mentioned nine times in reference to parent-teacher conferences, school events, and open houses, but 56 out of 58 parents said that do in fact participate in the activity “attend parent-teacher conferences.”

Any implications of these discoveries can only be suggested, and surely cannot be verified. As stated earlier, parents were first asked to define involvement in their own words, which lead to some general opinions of the topic, and some specific activities. Had parents been first asked to specify the activities that they are involved in their own words, their answers may have been more closely aligned with their choices of already suggested activities. Further, parents were not asked to list any activities at all, and from the frequency of keywords (see Table 1), it can be concluded that parents each have their own perception of how they should go about defining parental involvement. Therefore, we cannot make any testifying assumptions about the discrepancies found between definitions and reported activities.
Relations to other studies. In Ladner (2003) parents responded to two separate open-ended questions about how they are involved with their child at school and at home. Parents most commonly said that they were involved by communicating, volunteering, being at important events such as assemblies, helping/reviewing homework, reading with or to their child, and talking to their child. These findings are similar to the ones in this study, in that communicating, being at important events, helping/reviewing homework, and talking to their child are consistent with the most chosen activities in this study. However, in the Ladner (2003) study, volunteering is commonly stated by parents, and in this study, volunteering was only chosen by 75% of parents, which is far less than the other activities. Although in Ladner (2003) parents were asked in the form of an open-ended question, the similarities and differences of how parents report being involved in school and at home are important to compare.

RQ2: How do teachers define parental involvement?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Descriptor/activity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Volunteering Conferences, class events, school functions, open house, holiday party, curriculum night, partnering with teacher, classroom, meetings, workshops, observing</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attending Engaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting</td>
<td>Reading, skills, developmental activities, homework, learning strategies, learning at child’s level</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Check folders, homework, grades, email and other correspondences sent home (i.e., newsletter), returning work/permissions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>Regularly, as needed, verbal, notebook, teachers, administrators, needs of child,</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the frequency of keywords found in educators’ definitions, parent involvement is necessary for student success and includes parent engagement in school events, communicating regularly with the teacher regarding progress and needs of child, assisting with and monitoring school work, performance, and behavior, and conveying educational sentiments about the value of education, the teacher, and the school. In the frequency of keywords provided by educators, there was a clear distinction of what is seen to be the most important aspects of involvement. Keywords stated less often such as, “informed” may have been stated less, because educators assume that if parents are actively communicating with their child and the school, they should automatically be informed. Overall, the proposed definition encompasses what majority of educators stated.

These results are consistent with DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane and Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2007; 2005), in that educators frequently define parent involvement as
something that starts and is consistent in the home. Regular communication with the teacher is also a common defining feature of parent involvement, and educators like to see parents who show concern toward their child’s homework, grades, and needs (Moriwaka, 2012). Many researchers have also found that parent involvement is also parents supporting the school and faculty (Wilson, 2001; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). However, the key word support was only mentioned two times in this study. It is unclear as to the possible reasons for this discrepancy, and further research on the matter would need to be conducted.

**RQ2A: How do teachers expect parents to be involved?**

Educators were asked to choose which of the provided activities do they expect parents to be involved in. These activities were the same choices that parents were given for the activities they engage in. The activity that was chosen most by educators was “attend parent teacher conferences,” followed by: talk with child about day at school, direct communication with teacher, assist with homework, review info sent home from school, attend IEP meetings, and practice skills at home (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

*Suggested Activities that Educators Expect Parents to be Involved in*
As with the activities that parents chose, I also matched the activities that educators chose with any definition keywords to determine the agreeance between definitions and expected activities (see Table 4).

### Table 4

**Educators Expected Activities Matched with Definition Keywords**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Chosen Involvement Activities</th>
<th># of Educators that Chose Activity</th>
<th>Matched Definition Keyword - also listed in proposed definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attend parent-teacher conferences</td>
<td>36/38</td>
<td>Engagement (attending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk with child about school day</td>
<td>33/38</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct communication with teacher</td>
<td>30/38</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist with homework</td>
<td>29/38</td>
<td>Assisting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review info sent from home</td>
<td>29/38</td>
<td>Informed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend IEP meetings</td>
<td>28/38</td>
<td>Engagement (attending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice skills at home</td>
<td>27/38</td>
<td>Assisting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only one activity, *review info sent from home*, was matched with a definition that did not agree with any of the keywords in the proposed definition. Although, that’s not to say this activity is any less important, simply because educators did not define the theme “informed” as often as other themes. While informed was not named in the proposed definition, the keyword monitor was, and a deeper analysis of the differences between the words informed and monitor can be found in the following section under the next research question. These findings are similar to the findings that were found in the literature. For example, Wilson (2011) found that educators expect parents to provide for and discipline their child, communicate with and support the school, and engage in learning activities at home (e.g. homework, reading, etc.).

**RQ3: Do parent and teacher definitions of parent involvement match the involvement activities they engage in or are expected to be engaged in?**

**Parent definition versus educator definition.** According to our proposed definitions for parents and educators, both parties most frequently noted words like engagement, assisting, and communicating. However, the parents’ definition also included informed, and the educators’ definition included monitoring and conveying educational sentiments. The question now is what is the difference between staying informed and monitoring? Some of the words that followed informed in parents’ definitions were: classroom happenings and expectations, curriculum, students, teachers, schoolwork, and progress. In contrast, some of the words that followed monitoring in educators’ definitions were: check folders, homework, grades, email and other correspondences sent home (i.e. newsletter), and returning work/permissions. I would say that for the most part parents that stay informed and those that monitor are being involved in many of the same ways.
However, this comparison is interesting, because while parents used the word “informed” most often, they rarely used the word “monitor.” The opposite is also true for educators, many used the word “monitor,” and few used the word “informed.” This requires me to look deeper into these two words and their differences. The word “informed” was most commonly used as an adjective (e.g. be informed, stay informed), and the word “monitor” was used as a verb. This suggests that educators want parent involvement to show active monitoring of the child’s education, which would usually result in noticeable and measurable acts. Whereas parents want parent involvement to show acts of being informed, which is much harder to measure. While it’s hard to draw any conclusions from this comparison of words, it does implicate a need for further research.

With the words monitor and informed out of the way, the phrase convey educational sentiments is left. While this phrase wasn’t implied most frequently through definitions, it was stated enough to be a part of the educators’ proposed definition. Educators find that parents should be involved by conveying the importance of school, expectations, educational value, and interest in child’s learning, and engage in discussions about school. Out of the 55 parent definitions, phrases about educational sentiments were only mentioned three times, whereas out of the 38 educator definitions, phrases were mentioned thirteen times (see Table 5). This indicated a significant difference between definitions and may be a large contributor to the common “grey-area” found within the success of parent involvement. However, further research on this suggestion would be needed.

Table 5

Comparison of key word frequencies between parents and educators
Activities engaged in versus expected activities. Both parents and educators most frequently chose the activities: attend parent-teacher conferences, talk with child about school day, direct communication with teacher, review info sent home from school, practice skills at home. Although these activities were not ranked in the same order, they were most frequently indicated (see Table 6).

Table 6

Comparison of Suggested Activities Chosen by Parents and Educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Engaged Activities by Parents (% of parents to choose)</th>
<th>Most Frequently Chosen</th>
<th>Expected Activities by Educators (% of educators to choose)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talk with child about school day (100%)</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Attend parent-teacher conferences (95%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review info sent home from school (98%)</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Talk with child about school day (87%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist with homework (95%)</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Direct communication with teacher (79%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor homework and grades (90%)</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Assist with homework (76%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEFINITIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGED ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review info sent home from school</td>
<td>(76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct communication with teacher (88%)</td>
<td>#5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend IEP meetings (74%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice skills at home (71%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The activities that were chosen by parents and not educators were attend school programs and monitor homework and grades, and the activity chosen by educators and not parents was attend IEP meetings. It’s understandable that educators may have a higher expectation for attending IEP meetings, because they are thinking about all the parents that are involved. Parents were less likely to choose this activity, because not many of them actually engage in that activity. It’s noteworthy that parents also claim to be engaged in attending school programs and monitoring homework and grades. However, we can’t use this as a means to say that parents are engaged in activities that do not meet educators’ activity expectations, because there were significantly less educator participants than parent participants, which skews this part of the data comparison. Overall, there were six specific activities that educators expect parents to engage in, and parents are engaging in those six specific activities.

Any discrepancies may lie within the exact order of educators’ expectations versus the exact order of the activities that parents are engaged in. Next to each activity the percentage of participants that chose that activity is listed. Although, it’s important to be mindful of the variance in participation numbers. For example, 95% of parents chose the activities that ended up falling into third place, and only 79% of educators chose their third-place activity; This is due to a total of 58 parent and 38 educator participants. While it might be important to point out that parents were less likely to choose “direct communication with the teacher,” as it fell under the 8th most chosen activity at 88%, it is unclear whether parents are fulfilling teachers’ expectations or not, due to the contrasting numbers (see Figure 4).
Figure 4

Contrasting Variables Impeding Research Question #3

Concluding thoughts with definitions and activities in mind. Parents’ definitions and educators’ definitions of parental involvement had many similar aspects, as well as the activities parents are currently engaged in and activities that educators expect parents to engage in. It should be a sigh of relief to know that parents and educators seem to be on the same page in terms of parent involvement. Although, if this were the truth, parent involvement would not be as controversial and multi-faceted as it currently is. Regardless of the similarities, it’s imperative to pay attention to the discrepancies that have also been identified. These small differences are what make up the “grey-area” within parent involvement. The “grey-area” being the question, “If everyone is on the same page, then why isn’t parent involvement more successful and efficient?”

Again, parent involvement is and always will be a multi-faceted issue that looks different in every classroom, but surely there must be some static concepts that act as the foundation for parent involvement. With static concepts and guidelines, parents and educators can confidently
carry out their roles within parent involvement, and accordingly build upon those strict foundations to best fit their needs. Based on the combined activities that parents are engaged in and the activities that educators expect parents to be engaged, of which also match a definition keyword in each parties’ proposed definition, *parent involvement is necessary for student success and includes parent engagement and active participation in school events and activities, communicating regularly with teacher, staff, and their own child regarding progress and needs of child, and assisting with school work, skill development, performance, and behavior*. This proposed definition provides a good part of the foundation that is needed for parents and educators to feel that parent involvement is successful. Other considerations for the combined definition include aspects not mentioned by both parties, yet are equally as important that include, *monitoring school work, performance, and behavior, remaining informed about school expectations, news, and child progress, and conveying educational sentiments about the value of education, the teacher, and the school*.


DEFINITIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGED ACTIVITIES


APPENDIX A

PARENT SURVEY
Dear Parent,

You are receiving this information because you are the parent of a school-age child. We are currently recruiting participation in a project, titled “Parent and Teacher Definitions of Parental Involvement.” This research is being conducted by Dr. Stephanie DeSpain and Ms. Ashley Kivikoski from Northern Illinois University. We are seeking your participation in a brief [anonymous] online survey aimed at learning about your definition of parental participation and the types of involvement activities with which you typically participate.

The purpose of this project is to learn about parent and educator definitions of parental participation. Further, the purpose is to investigate educators’ expectations for parental involvement and determine whether parental involvement activities match those expectations.

The brief survey should take less than ten minutes of your time to complete. **By continuing on with this survey you consent to sharing your responses with the investigators.** Although we will have no way to identify you through your submission, your answers may be shared through future presentations and publications. Participation in this investigation is voluntary and you may terminate completion of the survey at any point, without penalty or prejudice, by simply exiting out of the survey. **Again, by continuing on with the survey you are consenting to participate in this investigation.**

Any questions about this study or the participation in this study should be addressed to: Dr. Stephanie DeSpain  162 L Gabel Hall  Dept. of Special and Early Education  Northern Illinois University  DeKalb, IL 60115  (815) 753-4609  sdespain@niu.edu

If you wish to obtain further information regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at (815) 753-8588. Your assistance is greatly appreciated! Sincerely, Stephanie DeSpain, Ed. D  Ashley Kivikoski

This project has been approved by the Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, & Safety (Protocol # HS17-0252) at Northern Illinois University.
Q1 Which of the following best describes the demographics of the school that your child(ren) attends?

- Rural (1)
- Urban (2)
- Suburban (3)

Q2 How many children do you have?
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q3 What is your child(ren)’s age(s)?
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________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
Q4 How would you define Parental Involvement in schools?

________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________
Q5 How are you involved in your child(ren)'s education? Please indicate all of the following that apply.

- Assisting your child with homework (1)
- Attending parent-teacher conferences (2)
- Attending Individualized Education Planning (IEP) Meetings (3)
- Attending open houses (4)
- Attending special family nights (ex. family reading night) (5)
- Chaperoning field trips (6)
- Creating materials for the teacher to use in the classroom (ex. Bulletin board materials) (7)
- Involvement with Parent Teacher Organization/Association (PTO/PTA) (8)
- Practicing skills at home (ex. Math facts) (9)
- Attending meet the teacher events (10)
- Monitoring assignments and grades (11)
- Engaging in conversations with your child about his/her school day (12)
- Reviewing information sent home through home-school notebook/folder/email (13)
- Volunteering at the school or in the classroom (ex. guest presenter, reader) (14)
- Assisting with fundraising efforts and/or booster club activities (15)
- Using technology applications to monitor classroom activities (ex. Classroom Dojo) (16)
DEFINITIONS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGED ACTIVITIES

☐ Direct communication with teacher (ex. communication notebook, email, meetings) (17)

☐ Attending school programs (18)

Q6 What other ways would you like to be involved in your child(ren)'s education that were not included above? Please list.

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Q7 How do you prefer to be involved in your child(ren)'s education? Why?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Q8 How does your child(ren)'s teacher(s) currently try to involve you?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
Q9 Are you able to engage in these activities? Why?
APPENDIX B

EDUCATOR SURVEY
Q1 Dear Educator,

You are receiving this information because you work in a school that is participating in a research project, titled “Parent and Teacher Definitions of Parental Involvement.” This research is being conducted by Dr. Stephanie DeSpain and Ms. Ashley Kivikoski from Northern Illinois University. We are seeking your consent to participate in a brief [anonymous] online survey aimed at learning about your definition of parental participation and the types of involvement activities with which you typically expect of parents.

The purpose of this project is to learn about parent and educator definitions of parental participation. Further, the purpose is to investigate educators’ expectations for parental involvement and determine whether parental involvement activities match those expectations.

The brief survey should take less than ten minutes of your time to complete. By continuing on with the survey you consent to sharing your responses with the investigators. Although we will have no way to identify you through your submission, your answers may be shared through future presentations and publications. Participation in this investigation is voluntary and you may terminate completion of the survey at any point, without penalty or prejudice, by simply exiting out of the survey. Again, by continuing with the survey link you are consenting to participate in this investigation.

Any questions about this study or the participation in this study should be addressed to:

Dr. Stephanie DeSpain  162 L Gabel Hall  Dept. of Special and Early Education  
Northern Illinois University  DeKalb, IL 60115  (815) 753-4609  sdespain@niu.edu  
If you wish to obtain further information regarding your rights as a research subject, you
may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at (815) 753-8588. Your assistance is greatly appreciated! Sincerely, Stephanie DeSpain, Ed. D Ashley Kivikoski

This project has been approved by the Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, & Safety (Protocol # HS17-0252) at Northern Illinois University.
Q2 Which best describes the your current teaching position?

- Early Childhood (Pre-K) (9)
- Elementary (1)
- Middle level (2)
- Junior high (3)
- High school (4)
- Early Childhood Special Education (Pre-K) (10)
- Elementary special education (5)
- Middle level special education (6)
- Junior high special education (7)
- High school special education (8)

Q3 Which of the following best describes the number of years you have been employed as an educators?

- Less than two years (1)
- Three to five years (2)
- Six to ten years (3)
- More than ten years (4)
Q4 Which best describes the demographics of the community that you work in?

▼ Urban (1) ... Suburban (3)

Q5 How many parents of children in your class are regularly involved in their child's education?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Q6 How would you define parental involvement?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Q7 How do you expect parents of the children in your class to be involved in their child's education? Check all that apply.

- Assisting with homework (1)
- Attending parent-teacher conferences (2)
- Attending Individualized Education Planning (IEP) Meetings (3)
- Attending open houses (4)
- Attending special family nights (ex. Family Reading Night) (5)
- Chaperoning field trips (6)
- Creating materials for you to use in the classroom (ex. bulletin board materials) (7)
- Volunteering in the classroom or school (ex. guest presenter, reader) (8)
- Involvement in Parent Teacher Organizations/Associations (PTO/PTA) (9)
- Practicing skills at home (ex. math facts) (10)
- Attending meet the teacher events (11)
- Monitoring assignments and grades (12)
- Engaging in conversations with their child about the school day (13)
- Reviewing information in home-school notebooks/folders/emails (14)
- Helping with fundraising and/or booster club events (15)
- Using technology applications to monitor classroom activities (ex. Classroom Dojo) (16)
Maintaining direct communication with you (ex. communication notebook, email, meetings) (17)

Attending school programs (18)

Q8 Are there other ways that you expect parents to be involved in their child’s education that were not listed above? Please list.

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Q9 How do you promote parent involvement in your classroom?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Q10 What, if any, accommodations do you make for parents who are unable to be regularly involved?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Q11 Do you use technology to communicate and involve parents in their child's education? If so what type of technology do you use (ex. Classroom Dojo, email)? Please describe.