

**TEACHERS' STRATEGIES FOR USING TECHNOLOGY
TO ENHANCE PARENT ENGAGEMENT**

by

Reem Aleissa

An executive position paper submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Fall 2016

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Reem Aleissa

Approved: _____
Ralph P. Ferretti, Ph.D.
Director of School of Education

Approved: _____
Carol Vukelich, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Education and Human Development

Approved: _____
Ann L. Ardis, Ph.D.
Senior Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education

I certify that I have read this Executive Position Paper and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as an education leadership portfolio for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed:

Rachel Karchmer-Klein, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of executive position paper

I certify that I have read this Executive Position Paper and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as an education leadership portfolio for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed:

Chrystalla Mouza, Ed.D.
Member of executive position paper committee

I certify that I have read this Executive Position Paper and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as an education leadership portfolio for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed:

Barbara A. Prillaman, Ed.D.
Member of executive position paper committee

I certify that I have read this Executive Position Paper and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as an education leadership portfolio for the degree of Doctor of Education.

Signed:

Adrian Pasquarella, Ph.D.
Member of executive position paper committee

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the memory of my late parents, *Nora* and *Abdullah*, whose involvement got me to where I am now.

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ABSTRACT

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA) requires schools to connect and find ways to engage parents in their children's education. Numerous studies have examined the role that parent engagement plays in students' academic achievement. Nevertheless, many educators have indicated that lack of parent engagement remains a barrier to improving student success. However, digital technology has the potential to improve parent engagement and overcome some of the barriers that can hinder effective engagement.

Using a mixed-method approach, an online survey, and a semistructured interview, this Executive Position Paper (EEP) explores the perceptions of K-12 Delaware teachers regarding their experience and strategies in improving parent engagement. Findings revealed that teachers believed in the importance of parent engagement and communication, the second type of Epstein's (1995) parent involvement. These data revealed that communication served as the basis for the other types of involvement: parenting, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. Participants believed in the potential benefits of technology to keep parents engaged in their children's education, especially mobile applications increasingly used to engage parents in many aspects of their children's learning. Social constructivism, Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement (1995), and Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence (1995) served as a conceptual framework.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The partnership between parents and schools contributes significantly to students' education and learning outcomes. Parents play a noteworthy role in supporting education and development, directing and guiding their children, and advocating for their care. In fact, parental support can play an important role in all phases of education. Most schools are committed to reaching out to parents in a variety of ways, and parents are equally committed to supporting their children's learning and advocating on their behalf. Yet, a number of barriers have been noted as obstacles to family engagement in learning communities, requiring creative and strategic planning on the part of schools and families to overcome. Technology has become one way to overcome common barriers that parents might face as they navigate the complexities of the academic domain. Schools are adopting technology tools that not only assist in classroom instruction, but also increase interaction with families and improve the family-home connection. The purpose of this Executive Position Paper (EEP) is to explore the role of technology in facilitating parental engagement.

Parents are vital to improving and ensuring students' academic success and school performance. Parent engagement is defined as a shared responsibility between school staff, families, and community, where all of these stakeholders work together to support the academic, social, and emotional development of a child (Duncan, 2006; Epstein,

2001; Jacoby, 2003). The importance of parent engagement in children's learning and development is recognized not only by education policies at schools and districts, but also at federal and state levels. This is exemplified at the federal level by the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015* (ESSA), which considers parent engagement as a key component in ensuring student success (US Department of Education, 2015). ESSA requires districts and schools to allot 1% of Title I funding to the planning and implementation of effective programming designed to increase parental engagement. Qualifying programming must include professional development for school staff on parent engagement strategies; the creation and dissemination of best practices information on increasing parent and family engagement (especially targeting low-income and minority parents); the creation of programs and activities that reach all families at home, community, and school; and collaboration with community-based services to improve and increase parent and family engagement. There is also a growing body of literature which purports that parental engagement has a positive effect on parents, students, schools and communities alike. Families who work in partnership with other families and communities learn more about each other and work together to support academic attainment (Epstein et al., 2009; Vangelisti, 2012).

The Problem

Despite research highlighting the significance of parent engagement, consistent participation remains a challenge from the perspectives of both school personnel and parents (Epstein et al., 2009; Halsey, 2005). Studies have indicated that effective parental engagement requires sustained effort and does not happen immediately (Giles, 1998;

Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Metlife, 2012; Murnane & Levy, 1996). For instance, a 2012 survey of 1,001 teachers and principals across the US found the majority of participants (72% of principals; 73% of teachers) believed engaging parents and the community was a significant leadership challenge (Metlife, 2012). Factors such as socioeconomic status, level of education, family culture, and language differences were cited as the most profound obstacles (Trotman, 2001). As Goodall and Harris (2008) stated, “Effective parental engagement will not happen without concerted effort, time and commitment of both parents and schools. It will not happen unless parents know the difference that they make, and unless schools actively reinforce that all parents matter” (p. 287). So how do we solve this problem of increasing parent engagement? Drawing on an informal anonymous electronic survey of teachers in the state of Delaware, I conducted a pilot examination to elucidate if and how teachers are currently using the Internet, email, and other tools to strengthen home-school relationships and increase parent engagement.

The eight-part survey was made up of three demographic questions asking respondents to report the grade level taught, years of teaching experience, and gender. Teachers were also asked to indicate whether they teach students who speak a language other than English, and if they have an interest in increasing parent engagement. Using a 5-point scale of frequency (never, rarely, sometimes, often, or all of the time) teachers were then asked to rate the frequency of their communication with parents, rate different kinds of communication methods, and indicate how often parents of their students are involved in the classroom. The final open-ended question asked teachers to share

methods they would like to use to engage parents and explain their reasons for those choices. The survey was shared with Delaware teachers through teacher listservs and email invitations, and 177 teachers responded. Of those, 74 identified themselves as elementary-level teachers, 56 as middle school teachers, and 46 as high school teachers. The average range of years of teaching experience was five to 10 years.

Analysis of the survey data revealed three relevant findings. First, a number of respondents reported an interest in increasing the level of parent engagement in their classrooms ($n = 125$). Second, in response to the question of the types of engagement they would like to engage parents in, respondents wrote about school-based projects such as classroom volunteers, guest speakers, parent night/day, classroom websites, and social media. Third, the majority of ways in which teachers reported engaging parents were not technology related. Of those approaches indicated, technology seemed to have the greatest potential, albeit underused, for bridging the gap between parents and schools.

Concerning barriers, teachers reported a desire to have parents volunteer as guest speakers and/or as helpers in the classroom. It was noted that lack of transportation can prevent parents from being engaged in these kinds of school opportunities. In these cases, technology may be a viable solution. Skype, for instance, is a free videoconferencing tool that may allow guest speakers to join the classroom. Teachers could schedule Skype conferences with parents to speak in the classroom for those whose work or commute inhibits them from physically coming to the school. In addition, teachers may use technical tools such as Google Calendar, social media, and texting apps in order to organize parent classroom volunteers and inform parents about what is going on in the

school/classroom. Overall, the results of the pilot survey found that the sample of Delaware teachers surveyed want to increase parent engagement and that technology is a prevalent resource capable of addressing a number of involvement barriers.

Key Questions

The purpose of this Executive Position Paper (EEP) is to explore the following two key questions:

1. How do teachers engage parents?
2. How can technology be used to facilitate parent engagement?

To answer the key questions, two data-gathering tools were used, an online survey and semistructured interviews, to explore the perceptions of K-12 Delaware teachers regarding their experiences with and strategies for improving parent engagement. This EPP draws on these data, relevant conceptual frameworks, and the existing body of literature on parental engagement to address these questions.

Conceptual Frameworks

This EPP investigates ways technology can be used to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships, and is fundamentally grounded in social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky (1978), people build knowledge through interactions with others and their environment. This perspective emphasizes the role social and cultural interactions play in the learning process, noting that “when people come together to exchange ideas, articulate their problems from their own perspectives, and construct meanings that make sense to them” (Gordon, 2008, p. 324).

In terms of parent-teacher connections, positive social interactions between parents and schools help to reinforce in students the salience of hard working, creative thinking, the value of collaboration, and importance of academic persistence (Epstein, 2009, p. 701). In addition, parent-teacher interaction helps inform both parents and teachers of children's strengths and areas of needed growth, while also keeping parents informed of the schools' learning and behavioral expectations. Without such interactions, parents cannot provide helpful assistance to their children and teachers are limited in the extent to which they can develop their teaching style to meet the students' and families' unique needs (Epstein, 2001).

However, with the growth of technology, new social practices of social interactions are increasing (Horrigan, 2008; Pedersen, 2008). This provides potential for changes in parent-teacher communication (Hargittai, 2008; Pedersen, 2008). Technological tools can support social constructivist learning where teachers play a major role in establishing meaningful parent participation opportunities. Through these opportunities, parents can learn and interact with others to construct their knowledge and improve the experience for all concerned. Therefore, understanding how technology can enhance parent-teacher partnerships is important (Fan & Williams, 2010; Khajepour, 2011).

Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence

Families, schools, and communities, as sites of salient social interactions, are the primary environments that affect child development and academic achievement. These environments are where students and families learn and grow, and are simultaneously

influenced and influential (Epstein, 1987). Involving family members and the community in partnerships with schools is a useful approach to improve schools and help boost student achievement (Epstein, 2001; Sheldon, 2007; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Joyce Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model offers additional insight into parental involvement as an imperative dynamic in the quality of a child's education. Epstein (1995) underscores the influence overlapping influence (see Figure 1) of school, family, community by stating, "There are some practices that schools, families, and communities do separately and some that they conduct jointly to influence children's learning and development" (Epstein et al., 2009., p. 8).

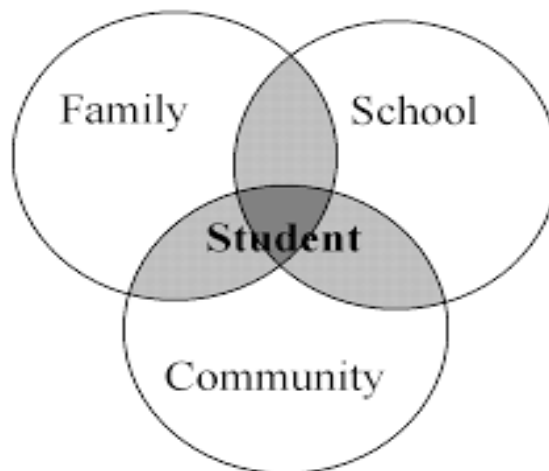


Figure 1. Overlapping spheres of influence.

As seen in Figure 1, the student is at the center of these three influential domains because he/she is the reason for interaction between parents, schools, and the community. When teachers and parents embrace shared responsibilities, they increase their interaction with each other to create school-like families and family-like schools. Likewise, when

communities are involved, they establish family-like settings, which in turn, help build community-minded families.

Family-like schools are characterized by environments where teachers pay individual attention to students, facilitate the achieving of both academic and behavioral milestones, and reinforce their efforts and accomplishments through praise, just as a parent might do. In addition, schools coordinate a concerted effort to welcome and reach out to all families, including, and often especially, hard-to-reach families (Epstein, 1995). *School-like* families recognize that every child is also a student, wherein parents establish a home learning environment which includes communicating the importance of school and education, reinforcing learning at home, reading with children, and monitoring and assisting them with homework (Epstein, 1995). Communities create family-like settings when they provide services, activities, and events to support families such as before, during, and after-school programs. *Community-minded* families participate in these opportunities to learn outside of school.

Epstein's Typology of Parental Involvement Practices

Epstein (2001) developed the Six Types of Parent Involvement framework that has been found to be central for successful parent-school partnership. This framework is meant to guide educators in organizing and implementing partnership activities. Educators, parents, and the broader community share in the interest and responsibility to support student success. This is reflected in various communal and school activities designed to meet the needs of parents and students. An effective partnership is needed to

help all parents find ways to be engaged and supportive in their children's education and school (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002)

Parenting. Parenting is logically one of the key foci of Epstein's framework of involvement. Many studies have shown that positive parent-child relationships have powerful effects on children's learning and social development (Brazelton & Cramer, 1990; Dawson & Ashman, 2000). Therefore, it is essential that parents find effective ways to interact with their children. Parents are responsible for sustaining a positive relationship with their children by establishing healthy nutrition, safety, and supportive learning environments at home. For example, by establishing daily routines that include time for completing schoolwork, watching TV, eating meals, and maintaining a bedtime, parents create an environment conducive for optimum development. These family environmental and interactional factors have been shown to improve children's self-regulation skills, prevent impulsive behavior, and refine cooperative learning skills (Rothbart, Ellis, & Posner, 2004). Children whose parents are engaged in learning activities with them tend to be more motivated and persistent, and typically develop positive learning habits (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). In addition, parents who have high expectations, set limits, and provide emotional support have children who are more likely to perform better in school and have the ability to get along with others (Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997; Parke & Buriel, 1998; Steinberg, 2001).

Communication is Key. According to Epstein (2001), communication is a critical type of involvement. Parents, teachers, and schools are responsible for communicating important information from home-to-school and school-to-home. It is important that parents and schools work together to promote children's education. Schools guide and assist parents by providing information on and resources for improving parent-child interactions and parenting skills, and for creating a home learning environment that cultivates growth and development (DuPaul & Stoner, 2003). Effective communication is necessary for building positive parent-teacher partnerships. Studies have shown that when parents and teachers share information with each other, they are better able to help their children succeed in school (Davis, 2004; Epstein, 2001). This information may include their children's interests, challenges, and strengths, all of which would inform teachers of their students' background and keeps parents informed of areas of growth. In addition, communication with teachers help parents to be more involved in their children's education by promoting an understanding of school programs and ways to effectively address childhood problems (Epstein, 2002).

Drawing on diverse methods of communication is key in meeting parents' diverse needs. Thus, schools are expected to employ diverse methods of communicating. These methods might include traditional ways where teachers share student data with parents through parent-teacher conferences, letters, or report cards, or through technology such email, texting, and online data systems. For example, some parents may prefer face-to-face communication while others prefer phone calls because they work during the day and are unable to attend parent-teacher conferences. Parents are expected to know how to

use these resources to contact teachers and principals and keep track of their children's progress (Epstein et al., 2002).

Volunteerism. Volunteerism is another category of parent engagement. As tutors, classroom helpers, and field trip chaperones, parental volunteers often participate in organizing school events and help with their children's extracurricular activities. Parent volunteers are very beneficial to the school. For instance, when parents actively participate in their children's school, their children witness (and, in turn, internalize) the value parents place on education, which has been shown to improve academic achievement (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Parents act as role models of altruism, reinforcing an ethic of service for students. Parental volunteers also improve students' learning skills by offering individual attention to specific children and making available one-on-one tutoring (Epstein, 2002). Parent volunteers offer a tremendous resource and a great deal of support for teachers as they help to build the parent-teacher partnership (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006).

Learning at Home. Learning at home is the fourth type of parental involvement in children's learning described by Epstein. Studies have shown that the quality of the home learning environment is associated with children's educational achievement and cognitive development regardless of gender or socioeconomic status (Edwards, 2014; Feinstein, 2003; Kirsch, 2002). There are many ways parents can create a home environment that supports learning. For example, parents can help with their children's homework, monitor television time, develop consistent study routines, and engage in other learning activities. They also can enrich learning experience by promoting critical

thinking through activities such as attending sporting events and visiting zoos, libraries, and museums (Alemanne et al., 2013).

Even though parents are often willing to support their learning, they do not always know how or realize the prominence of their role in supporting their children's learning through home activities (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). In order for students to succeed in school, parents and schools need to work together as partners to help parents understand the expectations for homework and how to monitor it (Toney, Kelley, & Lanclos, 2003). They can also teach parents strategies for helping students avoid distractions during homework (Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, Whestel, & Green, 2004). It is important that schools support parents as they guide learning at home by providing workshops, ideas, information, and resources on how to assist with homework and reinforce study habits (Epstein et al., 2002).

Decision-Making. Parental participation in school decision-making is one of the most important types of engagement identified by Epstein. Parent participation in school decision-making provides many benefits to students, teachers, and parents (Epstein et al., 2003) and can affect students' academic outcomes (Cooper & Christie, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001). Actively engaged parents have an increased awareness of the school system and district policies, which helps develop a sense of ownership in their children's education (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009). This understanding of the school system and its programs results in better decisions concerning the kinds of action taken and resource sought towards helping their child succeed in school. Moreover, schools with high levels of parent participation in decision-making showed higher levels of student achievement

and community support (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). With effective partnerships, schools respond to parental concerns, recognize their contributions, invite and welcome their suggestions, and acknowledge parents and teachers as equal partners in the decision-making process. Schools are responsible for encouraging parents' participation in activities such as parent-teacher organizations, school councils, and various other committees (Batey, 1996), or for helping to develop school improvement plans and goals.

Collaborating with Community. The sixth type of parental involvement from the Epstein model is collaboration with community. Epstein recognized the importance of involving community resources to expand students' learning opportunities and meet the families' needs. Collaborating with community enables students to improve their skills and talents through extracurricular activities and helps students to become more aware of career options and opportunities for future education (Epstein, 1995). Moreover, the use of community services increases parents' skills and knowledge and enables them to interact with other families in the community and be aware of the school's role (Epstein, 1995; Gestwicki, 2007). More importantly, collaborating with community enables parents to gain access to services and resources that address their needs. For example, schools can provide food assistance to low-income students by working with local food banks to develop school pantry programs. Collaborating with the community has been shown to increase teachers' awareness of community resources that enrich the classroom experience and reinforce classroom learning goals (Epstein, 1995)

In an effective partnership, schools work with communities on activities that strengthen programs and encourage student learning and development. Schools can

promote these community activities and resources to show parents the importance of these programs. Engagement in community activities increases the parents' knowledge and prepares them to help their children with learning skills.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parental engagement is a vital component of a quality educational experience. Such a partnership helps all stakeholders (families, educators, and community) to better serve the students and reinforce learning. Studies sampling from preschool through high school have shown that parents are an important part of the children's learning and success. Teachers often engage parents as helpers, which can help to assuage teacher time and classroom management issues. In addition, there are many other ways in which parents can help in the classroom, including constructing classroom bulletin boards, editing students' writing, reading to students, assisting in planning special days in the classroom, and much more. These benefits have been found to extend beyond the classroom as well.

Benefits of Parent-Teacher Partnerships

Parent engagement, in general, refers to parental interactions with schools and children in order to promote academic success and involve parents in school activities (Hill & Tyson, 2009). It can improve students' attitudes and behaviors toward school, parent-child relationships, parents' self-confidence and knowledge, and home-school relations (Bermudez & Marquez, 1996). Many studies provide evidence of the positive effects of parent engagement on students, families, and schools (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007; Yan, 1999, 2008). Pointing out the shortfalls of

a segmented approach to student development, Epstein (2001) asserted that “educators need to understand the contexts in which students live, work, and play. Without understanding, educators work along, not in partnership with other important people in students’ lives (p. 5).

Student benefits. Studies have indicated that parent engagement in schooling has several benefits. When parents are involved, students are more likely to show appropriate behavior, develop better social skills, have better self-esteem, and earn higher grades and higher standardized test scores (Fan, 2001; Gestwicki, 2007; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). It increases the students’ chances of success and improves their achievement (Loucks, 1992; Topor, Keane, Shelton & Calkins, 2010). Children become motivated to succeed (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2007) and show perseverance and resilience (Rubin, Abrego, & Sutterby, 2012) when their parents are an integral participant in their education. According to a study based on data from 1,364 children from 10 U.S. cities shadowed from birth (1991) to fifth grade, when parents increased their engagement through school visits and by cultivating a supportive home learning environment, behavioral problems declined and children showed improved self-control and better social skills (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010).

Parent engagement in school benefits children’s learning (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hourtenville & Conway, 2008). Engagement is clearly linked to positive student educational outcomes, including higher grades and test scores, higher graduation rates, higher homework completion, and higher attendance rates (Fan, 2001). Parent engagement may also improve child behavior (Fan, 2001; Gestwicki, 2007;

Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). A positive parent-teacher relationship is associated with positive social and academic outcomes, including better performance, less behavior problems, and regular school attendance (Clark & Fiedler, 2003). According to Henderson and Berla (1994):

The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to: (1) Create a home environment that encourages learning; (2) Express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers; and (3) Become involved in their children's education at school and in the community. (p. 160)

When children see their school is supportive and their parents are engaged, they are less likely to have problem behaviors and more likely to have positive attitudes toward school and learning (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1991). According to a review of 18 studies by Cotton and Savard (1982), parent engagement is particularly beneficial to children when schools provide parents with training and orientation on how to support teaching and learning efforts (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Engaged parents are more likely to track their children's capacity and capability to do schoolwork and to help address any academic or behavior conflict that may negatively impact learning (Zill & Nord, 1994). Third, when parents are engaged, they take an active role in decisions affecting their children's education (Blankstein, 2009). Engaged parents become more aware of the children's areas of needed development and available resources. For example, parents who are involved in creating Individualized Education Programs (IEP) tend to have greater knowledge of how to access and navigate supportive learning and testing services, and often feel more empowered to act as advocates for their children.

Research has indicated that academic achievement among racial and ethnic groups seems to be associated with the degree of parent engagement (Columbo, 1995; Smith & Hausafus, 1998; Yan, 1999) and with increased academic achievements of their children (Houyenville & Conway, 2008). For example, Halle et al. (1997) examined the achievement-related beliefs and behaviors of low-income minority parents and the relationship between parental factors and children's self-concept and academic achievement. They found that parental expectations were important to their children's subsequent achievement in math and reading, and that parents' perceptions about their children's academic skills were related to children's achievement scores.

Benefits to parents. Parents also benefit from increased engagement at their children's schools (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Parents who are involved at school are able to help their children perform better academically and gain more confidence in themselves (Coleman, 2012; Collins, Moles, & Cross, 1982; Epstein, 1995; Thompson, 2012). The time parents spend in school helps them to gain a broader knowledge of the school system and its educational programs. It also shows their children how much they care about them, which fosters a strong parent-child connection (Brown, 1989; Davis, 2000; Epstein & Salinas, 2004). Furthermore, parental engagement represents educational values and aspirations for their children (Greenwood & Hickman, 1991; Hill & Taylor, 2004). In addition, families may build supportive relationships with other families in the school community (Epstein, 1995; Gestwicki, 2007; Rubin et al., 2012), which helps them to make new friends, learn more about the school's system and how it works, get ideas on how to support and help their children succeed in school, and even learn how to

access community resources.

For some parents, being involved in their children's school is not easy, especially if they do not feel comfortable in the school or talking to teachers for a variety of reasons, such as bad experience in school when they were children and feeling unwelcomed (Kreider, Mayer, & Vaughan, 1999). Parent engagement in school helps to build self-confidence in a parent's ability to interact with school personnel (Booth & Dunn, 1996). Therefore, teachers who initiate positive communication, suggest ideas and activities for engaging parents, and educate parents as to how they can help their children succeed help make parents more comfortable and confident (Davis, 2004; Epstein, 2001). In addition, parent engagement in school is important for parents who are recent immigrants to the United States and have difficulty understanding and connecting to the school system. These parents would be able to learn about American culture and politics through the school (Rogers, Saunders, Terriquez, & Velez, 2008).

Schools that provide parents with training and leadership opportunities help parents build knowledge and confidence, which then increases their engagement (Corbett & Wilson, 2008; Nistler & Maiers, 2000). As a result, greater engagement has been found to help parents develop leadership and decision-making skills and increases their confidence to advocate for their children (Booth & Dunn, 1996; Coleman, 2012; Collins et al., 1982; Epstein, 1995; Thompson, 2012). Engagement in school can also help parents build within-school relationships, as well as those within the broader community in which they reside (Epstein, 1995; Gestwicki, 2007; Rubin et al., 2012).

Benefits to school. Schools that are most successful in engaging parents tend to have better reputations in the community and perform better than schools with less parent engagement (Henderson & Berla, 1994). This partnership between parents and schools provides valuable experiences through volunteering, fundraising, and classroom support (Weiss et al., 2006). Moreover, parents become part of the school-based decision-making process (Cochran, 2007), leading to increased trust between school and parents (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Kraft & Dougherty, 2012). Parents who participate in decision-making improve the family-school relationship and bring forth new ideas that could help to increase the problem-solving capacity of the school (Marschall, 2006). Also, parent engagement is important in solving problems that could place students at risk of educational failure, such as attendance or school discipline (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

In addition, parent engagement is beneficial for the teachers themselves. Teachers who work in schools that have established a solid partnership with parents have higher parent ratings and improved teacher morale (Schargel & Smink 2001). Parent engagement also makes the teachers' job easier as the family could provide information to the teachers that could be useful to classroom instruction (Gonzalez-Mena, 2001; Good, 1996). Parents who create a home environment that encourages learning and a collaborative relationship with teachers tend to support classroom instruction. This, in turn, has been shown to increase teacher job satisfaction and teacher's self-perception (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Moran & Hoy, 2007). Engaged parents also have a better understanding of school curriculum, policies, and the teacher's job, and schools with

more engaged parents tend to have better community support (Davis, 2000; Olsen & Fuller, 2008).

Schools that create a welcoming and supportive environment to parents and provide them with engagement opportunities improve the school climate and make parents and other family members more likely to become engaged (Cohen, 2006; Epstein, 1995; Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). Thus, a school with a high percentage of parent engagement establishes a respectable standing in the community, often resulting in communal backing and support when it is needed (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Second, schools that provide a variety of parent engagement opportunities tend to have high quality programs (Olsen, 2008). Schools that have high levels of parent engagement have succeeded in increasing student achievement (Epstein et al., 2009; Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Barriers to Parent-School Partnerships

Parents know their children better than anyone else, which makes them the most important partners in their children's education (Wherry, 2009); however, there are barriers that could lead some parents to be less involved in their children's education (LaBahn, 1995). Several studies have shown minority parents, in particular, are less likely than other parents to be involved in their children's school (Floyd, 1998; Smith, 2006; Strauss & Kohn, 2013; Turney & Kao, 2009). Tinkler (2002) identified several barriers regarding parental engagement with schools, which can be very stressful for families. Tinkler noted that the most critical barriers are school environment, culture and language, educational level of parents, and logistical issues. Understanding parents'

obstacles that prevent them from being involved is the first step toward overcoming these barriers and building teacher-parent partnerships. Recognizing barriers helps schools determine the level and nature of parent engagement (Epstein, 2001) and gives teachers insights into their students and families that can lead to increase in parent engagement (Davis, 2000).

School-based barriers. Some of the common school-based barriers for parent engagement include "deficit perspectives, a negative school climate, and a unidirectional approach to parental involvement" (Azzam, 2009, p. 92) by school personnel, who themselves are part of the barriers (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003). The social and educational atmosphere of a school where parents feel needed, respected, and trusted is an important aspect of increasing parent engagement. A school that initiates contact with parents and provides many ways to get involved tends to have high parent engagement in the school (Auerbach, 2007). It would behoove schools and families if schools work to establish and maintain a welcoming positive and responsive school environment (Wherry, 2009). Parents feel more welcomed when they perceive positive attitudes among school staff toward families and community, and when the schools facilitate parental accessibility to the school by, for example, providing interpreters, scheduling school meetings at considerate times, or offering before and afterschool childcare (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). Unfortunately, not all schools have the same care and commitment to increase parent engagement.

Schools with a large number of students of color and low-income students often have parents who do not feel welcomed (Lott, 2001). Minority parents feel less welcome

in their children's schools and their suggestions and interventions are less respected compared to middle-class parents (Lott, 2001). For example, one of the low-income Puerto Rican mothers in New York City told an interviewer "our opinions are not valued" (Harry, 1992). Feeling unwelcomed, unappreciated, and unheard are the most significant barriers to parent engagement (Hill, 2009; Quezada et al., 2003). School personnel are not always clear concerning the nature and importance of parental engagement (Vandergrift & Greene, 1992). Many programs define parent engagement only in terms of the schools' needs or in terms of deficit views of the families they serve (Campbell & Arias, 2008). For example, some schools serving large or predominate minority populations have been criticized for having negative views of certain minority and low-income families and communities (Arias, 2008). This negative perception is reflected in teacher views of students and families as problematic, which undermines a motivation to learn about and implement strategies for working with diverse populations (Gibson, 2002). Negative assumptions about families imply that the fault and responsibility of low engagement lie with the families rather than the school, when, in fact, some teachers tend to be reluctant to initiate contact with parents of color and low socioeconomic status (Shearer, 2006). According to Casanova (1996), the typical engagement efforts of parents of color and low socioeconomic status are difficult to accept and often underestimated. Mexican American mothers in the study, for example, had a hard time understanding why their children were having trouble in school when they believed their children to be smart and capable at home.

The goal of partnerships is to create learning settings where parents, schools, and communities work together to provide educational opportunities for children. However, a unidirectional approach to parent engagement, where parents are expected to support the school and their children's academic achievement rather than one that is mutually supportive, could make parents' interactions with schools challenging and discourage them from getting involved (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Gibson, 2002; Tinker, 2002). Many schools only inform parents of the academic progress of their child, which is helpful to a certain extent, but does not assist in involving parents in broader education goals and programs. In two-way sharing of knowledge and power with parents, the school might, for example, invite parents to speak at professional development events and provide them with trainings (e.g., literacy and ESL classes).

Many parents indicated that they would spend extra time working with their children if teachers provided directions on how to help them (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Parents need to be directed, informed, and notified of the existence of educational and parent engagement programs (Cotton & Wikelund, 2001). Therefore, it is important that schools are clear about the types of activities appropriate for parental participation, and for teachers to provide parents with ways to help support learning through activities such as reading and tutoring.

Language differences. There are an increasing number of parents in the school system who do not speak English as a first language. According to survey data by the U.S. Department of Education (1997), parents who do not speak English at home are less likely to be involved in school-based activities. They are more likely to have limited

education as well as problems with English skills. Communication issues have been identified as one of the greatest barrier facing immigrant parental engagement (Golan & Peterson, 2001; Peterson & Ladky, 2007; Ramirez, 2001). Moles (1993) identified that “for many disadvantaged parents, a serious handicap in supporting their children’s education is their limited education and their lack of fluency in English” (p. 31). Language differences may prevent parent engagement because parents may not have the language skills to help their children with schoolwork. Also, many of them are not sure about their role in the American academic context and how to help their children.

In a qualitative study of 28 Mexican parents of prekindergarten, kindergarten, and third/fourth grade children, Pena (2000) found that language was influential in determining the activities that parents chose to participate. It was especially apparent at parent meetings. For example, the lack of Spanish translation at previous meetings kept many of these parents from participating in subsequent parent-teacher events. Participating parents felt their attendance was pointless at meetings that were conducted in English only because they could not understand what was being discussed.

Furthermore, the lack of English skills inhibits some of these parents from finding useful resources for their children, such as afterschool programs or tutors. Some teachers perceive parents who lack the educational background and skills as lacking resources to promote and support their children’s learning at home (Fine, 1993). Nevertheless, it does not mean parents do not care about their children’s education, despite the fact that many teachers associate the lack of parent engagement with the lack of parental interest (Lopez, 2001; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Coll (2001) reasoned that there exists a need for

programs that support parents as they improve English language skills and earn academic credentials in order to improve parental familiarity and confidence with the U.S. educational system and subsequently increase the likelihood of engagement in their children's education.

Disjuncture between school and home culture. Parent engagement practices differ within and among cultures and communities. In some cultures, family engagement at school is appreciated; in others, it is not important (McCollum & Russo, 1993). Some perceive parent engagement as participating in their children's school if they attend field trips or if they assist with fundraising activities; others perceive it as helping their children with homework or monitoring their children's television time (Robles, 2011). However, differences in cultural values have an impact on family engagement and conceptualizations of what appropriate engagement entails, which may create a psychological barrier and a lack of confidence to initiate contact with schools (Velsor & Orozco, 2007).

According to Carreon, Drake, and Barton (2005), Hispanic immigrant parents want to be involved in their children's schools, but when compared to Hispanic native-born parents, these immigrant families tend to have limited engagement because of the cultural challenges that cause them to feel less comfortable with being involved in the school community (Turney & Kao, 2009). Immigrant parents grappling with the stress of acculturation and adjustment often view the school conventions and practices as foreign and may choose to avoid them altogether (Tinkler, 2002).

Moreover, immigrant parents are as likely as nonimmigrant parents to attend parent-teacher conferences, but less likely to volunteer at schools (Nord & Griffin, 1999). Some parents may not know that they are expected to interact with schools because their expectations could be based on school experiences in their countries of origin (Trueba & Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). This cultural divide could make teachers stop trying to reach out to these parents (Lawrence, 2013). In addition, many African American parents face barriers that prevent them from being involved in school activities, meetings, and parent-teacher conferences, such as negative interactions with school personnel, negative school experiences during childhood, competing child care demands, and inflexible work schedules (Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005; Williams & Sánchez, 2011). According to Litwak and Meyer (1974), “Parents from racial, ethnic and cultural minorities, especially those of low socioeconomic status, tend to feel less affinity for the school than those in the mainstream middle class” (p. 15). In other words, the achievement gap among students is associated with race and ethnicity.

McNeal (1999) found that parents of wealthy European American students had positive effects on their children more than African American, Hispanic, and Asian American students. Sy and Schulenberg (1997) found that parent engagement by Asian American families and European American families differ in many ways. Both race/ethnic groups were academically successful, but Asian American parental engagement is mostly home-related involvement (e.g., making sure homework is completed) rather than school-based involvement (e.g., attending meetings and events at school). The findings of the study showed that cultural differences among different race

and ethnicities have an influence on how families think of parent engagement. Furthermore, parental beliefs on the importance of education play an important role in the children's outcomes, and differ from one culture to another (Little, 2010). Parents' perceptions of their role in their children's education can be either a barrier or beneficial to parental involvement. For example, some parents who see their role only as someone who makes sure their children get to school usually are not willing to be involved in home-based or school-based parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). However, this attitude is more common in some communities and cultures than others (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Hence, it is important to understand cultural experiences, views, and perceptions as schools consider ways of increasing parental engagement (Trotman, 2001).

Parental education. Numerous studies have shown a significant relationship between parental education levels and their involvement in their children's education (Davis-Kean, 2005; Shapiro, 2009). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) pointed out that parents who do not believe in their ability to help their children tend to avoid being involved in school because they think they will not bring positive benefits for their children. In addition to the low proficiency in English skills for those parents whose native language is not English, native English speakers who have low academic aptitude may feel equally challenged by the school setting and may have less confidence in their ability to effectively communicate with teachers and/or help their children with schoolwork. Although the ability to support children through most of their schooling does not require an advanced level of education for parents, these perceived limitations often

hinder engagement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1997; Hornby, 2000). Lontos (1991) wrote,

Low income, culturally different parents have traditionally been marginalized through an inability to communicate with schools and through the inflexibility of the school as an institution. This tradition has fostered the feelings of inadequacy, failure, and poor self-worth which are cited as reasons for low participation of parents from marginalized groups. (p. 15)

Socioeconomic status (SES) has been shown to also negatively influence levels of parent involvement (White & Rogers, 2000). According to the National Household Education Survey of 2007, only 17% of parents reported involvement in school's committees, programs, and activities. Parents whose income was more than \$100,000 participated in school committees about three times as often as the parents whose income was less than \$50,000. In other words, parents with higher educational levels tend to have higher income and higher parent engagement than those parents with low SES (Crosnoe, 2001; Desimone, 1999; Lareau, 2000).

Logistical issues. Logistics such as intensive work schedules or lack of transportation may also prevent or limit activity involvement, ability to volunteer, and/or opportunities to attend parent-teacher conferences (Floyd, 1998). It also could affect the students' ability to improve academically by making participation in afterschool tutoring or extracurricular activities difficult or impossible (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008).

In a study of barriers to parental involvement, Baker (1997) divided 111 participating parents into 16 focus groups, where half had high school diplomas and the other half had education beyond high school. The findings from this qualitative study indicated single parents or dual-earner families faced greater challenges to attending

school events or volunteering resulting from unpredictable schedules or rotating shifts. This study also found that logistical issues may be compounded by having younger children at home. While some schools provide childcare for families during PTA meetings, they did not provide transportation, which is yet another obstacle that prevents working-class parental involvement in schools. A lack of financial resources is another impediment to parental involvement. Parents commented that some of the activities that were offered by the school require financial contribution from the family. For example, not all parents could afford to participate in picture day, book fairs, or even bake sales. Parents who live in low-income neighborhoods where they have less flexible work schedules to balance their work life with their children's school are less likely to have access to the same financial and educational resources as those in middle-class neighborhoods (Lareau, 2003; Newman & Chin, 2003).

In sum, logistical barriers often serve as an obstacle to effective parent engagement for some parents of different SES backgrounds, language-speaking, and academic levels. Understanding the barriers that inhibit parent involvement will allow teachers and schools to develop parental outreach strategies. Taking into consideration family context when planning and implementing school-to-home and home-to-school communications activities and strategies will help to overcome barriers and improve parent engagement (Ho, Hung, & Chen, 2013; Sanders & Epstein, 2005; Williams & Sanchez, 2013).

Technology and Parent Engagement

Ongoing and meaningful communication between home and school is an

important factor in enhancing parent engagement. Indeed, such communication is an expectation for Delaware teachers. Delaware Professional Teaching Standards includes Leadership and Collaboration (Standard 11): “The teacher seeks appropriate leadership roles and opportunities to take responsibility for student learning, to collaborate with learners, families, colleagues, other school professionals, and community members to ensure learner growth, and to advance the profession” (1500 Professional Standards Board, 2007, p. 2).

Today, most people have spent time using technology. Whether texting, emailing, talking on cell phones, or listening to music, technology has come to dominate the globe and is becoming an integral part of people’s lives. As technology rapidly develops, traditional paper communication is being replaced in the schools by e-communication tools that help to prevent scheduling conflicts and issue school notices to parents (Ho, Hung & Chen, 2013). Mobile devices and Web 2.0 tools such as blogs, wikis and social media platforms have opened avenues for students, parents, and teachers to communicate and collaborate (Shields & Behrman, 2000).

Keeping parents informed. Today, many schools are using different forms of technology to improve communication between families and the school (Mitchell, Foulger, & Wetzel, 2009); engage families in supporting their children’s learning; inform parents of their children’s academic performance, attendance, and school activities; and provide families with resources that can improve their lives (Bladwin & Wade, 2012). The use of technology for communication purposes includes e-mail, e-bulletin boards,

school and classroom websites, voice mail, and online access for parents to students' attendance, homework, grades, and progress reports (Bouffard, 2006).

Many teachers have created classroom websites to keep parents in the loop on what is going on in class through updating the site regularly, uploading photos to it, and communicating with them via a "comments" section. Others prefer to use free online collaborative and communication applications, especially with busy parents who want to know what is going on in class and how their children are performing (McCrea, 2013). Teachers have a responsibility to share their knowledge of their students' learning and development with the parents because educating children requires a collective effort from various community constituents (Dodd & Konzel, 2002). Indeed, such contributions would make teachers and parents valued partners in supporting student success. Technology provides parents convenient strategies for knowing and understanding what their children do in schools.

Sharing relevant information between home and school concern offers teachers the ability to provide needed help to improve academic performance. For schools, knowing how to take advantage of available tools to connect with the parents and making sure parents understand and know how to use these tools, grants teachers the chance to focus on teaching and frees them to support students in the classroom (Rubin et al., 2012).

Keeping parents involved. A positive parent-teacher relationship is an important contributor to a child's school success. Many studies have indicated that effective parent and teacher communication improves teacher-parent relationships and has a positive

effect on students' learning (Angelides, Theophanous, & Leigh, 2006; Michael, Dittus, & Epstein, 2007). Moreover, Epstein (2004) asserted that effective communication with parents requires the implementation of clear, varied, and effective methods. Today, there are many ways that parents and teachers can communicate with each other. Through technology teachers have an opportunity to build solid relationships with parents and enhance their engagement (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012). Technology offers ways to facilitate the involvements of parents in schools (National School Boards Association, 2000), making school programs more accessible to families and allowing for a more streamlined flow of information (Bauch, 1998, p. 229). For example, teachers who use technology (e.g., classroom website/blog) to post homework assignments make it easier for parents to know more about their children's learning and to monitor their schoolwork, thereby increasing parent engagement.

Using technology to overcome barriers. It is clear that when effectively employed, parent-teacher communication strategies can help to facilitate a home learning environment that reinforces academic goals and objectives (Graue, 1999; LaBahn, 1995). Parents and teachers are extremely busy, and technology offers different ways to keep in touch with parents, which includes email, class/school webpage, and parent portals. It must be recognized, though, that not all parents have access to technology, so providing information in a variety of formats is imperative.

A body of research literature relating to parent engagement highlights parents' conflicting work schedules and lack of English skills as barriers to parent engagement (Thomson, Ellison, Byrom, & Bulman, 2004). The technology can be used to support

school-home communication and overcome common barriers to parent engagement, such as time, distance, and language. It provides ways to bridge long distances and fits in nicely with parents' busy schedules. Parents who cannot physically visit the school to attend parent-teacher conferences or school events can still contribute and participate through the use of tools such as Skype or live streaming.

Supporting learning at home. Direct involvement with learning materials at home has proven to be one of the most helpful ways of improving student learning, behavior, attendance, and retention (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000). Engaging in homework support grants parents access to information about content and skills that their children are learning at school (Portier, Peterson, Capitaio-Tavares, & Rambaran, 2013). Using technology to link the school and home learning environments allows parents to support their children's learning. According to a three-year study by Portier et al. (2013) investigating the effectiveness of blogs and wikis in homework, teachers used a blogging website to post class assignments and inform parents about homework, projects, and upcoming school events. This study found that 58% of the parents who were surveyed for the study preferred this method because it was easier for them to track their children's work, and gave parents the opportunity to discuss, seek online information, and work with their child.

Parents help their children improve skills and master content through the use of technology. There are many available online resources such as games, activities, and information for projects that will help improve mathematical thinking and problem-solving, spelling, vocabulary, and reading skills, while at the same time building their

self-confidence and appreciation for these subjects. Technology-based tools make the parents an essential part of the team that supports student's learning.

Many studies have shown the importance of parental engagement (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). The positive effect of parental engagement on improving outcomes in areas such as learning, behavior, and graduation rates shows the desire of many parents and schools to work together to support the students' education. However, obstacles and challenges to parental engagement often arise from the parents and/or the school, which may include school environment, culture and language differences, educational level of parents, and logistical issues. Today, technology opens avenues for students, parents, and teachers to communicate and collaborate effectively. Emails, class/school websites, and online access to student data provide schools with fast and reliable ways to get important information from and out to parents. However, many parents may not have access to technology or may not have had the training to use it. Schools need to provide a variety of methods for communicating with parents, from low-tech to high-tech.

Chapter 3

PHASE I

As described previously, I collected two types of data for this project in an effort to examine K-12 Delaware teachers' perceptions of their experiences with and strategies for improving parent engagement: an electronic survey and semistructured interviews. This section of the EPP describes the electronic survey and respondents and presents a descriptive analysis of the data collected.

Electronic Survey

The first phase in this EPP was to administer an online survey. The term "survey" is used in many ways, but commonly refers to the collection of data from a specific population or a sample from a population, and a questionnaire or interview is typically used as the survey instrument (Robson, 1993). In comparison with other methods, online surveys tend to be convenient for respondents, faster in response times, easier to complete, and cheaper than paper surveys (Klandermans & Staggenborg, 2002; Leary, 1995; Oppermann, 1995; Saris, 1991). "There is no other method of collecting survey data that offers so much potential for so little cost as Web surveys" (Dillman, 2000, p. 400). The online survey was generated using the survey tool Qualtrics.

The survey instrument was adapted from the *Measure of School, Family, and Community Partnership* (Salinas et al., 2002), designed by researchers at Johns Hopkins University and Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (2002; see Appendix A) and

framed by Epstein's (1995) six types of parental involvement described earlier in this EPP: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community. The survey was chosen because it provided a research-based framework for understanding teachers' perspectives of how their schools involve parents, community members, and students in meaningful ways. Although the developers recognized that the practices included in the survey might not be appropriate for every grade level, they were chosen as representative ways of "meeting challenges to involve families in many different ways that will improve school climate, strengthen families and increase student success" (Salinas et al., 2002, p. 1).

The survey used in this EPP consisted of 59 items: 22 items measured on a yes/no scale (give one example), 22 items measured on a 4-point Likert scale (give one example of such item), four open-ended questions (give one example), and 11 demographic items (e.g., age, gender, number of years of teaching experience). The Likert-scale questions followed the yes/no questions by asking participants to rate the frequency of the delivery methods they used to implement a particular practice. For example, one question asked respondents to indicate yes or no if they encouraged families to attend school meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families. If the respondents answered yes, they were asked to rate the frequency with which they implemented the practice via digital, face-to-face, or paper correspondence.

The survey questions were inputted to Qualtrics, an online survey program used at the University of Delaware. When I created the survey, I neglected to force responses for each question. In other words, respondents were able to skip questions. This resulted in

differences in the number of teachers who answered some of the questions. The range in responses was 67 to 69. To help readers make sense of the data in this section, I included tables that list the questions and number of responses under each type of parental involvement. If I were to create the survey again, I would make sure to force responses so the same number of participants responded to each question, thereby allowing me to make precise interpretations of the data.

Participants

Delaware teachers were identified to participate in this project through convenience and snowball sampling procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I shared the survey with different education listservs including Delaware State Education Association, Delaware State PTA group, and Delaware Instructional Technology User Group. I also sent the invitation to participate through direct email invitations to teachers I knew professionally. In addition, my committee members shared the survey with their professional colleagues who teach in Delaware K-12 schools. The invitation asked respondents to share the survey with their colleagues, potentially increasing the return rate. A total of 117 teachers started the anonymous survey and 69 K-12 teachers completed it.

Table 1: Demographic Survey Question and Number of Responses

<u>Demographic Question</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>
What is you gender?	69
What is your age?	69
What is your ethnicity?	68
How many years have you been teaching?	68
What is your level of education?	69
What grades are you currently teaching?	69
Have you had training in parental involvement in schools?	69
Do you teach students who speak languages other than English?	69
Do the majority of parents/guardians of the students in your school have home or work access to the Internet?	68
Rate your technology-savvy	69

The survey respondents were K-12 teachers who taught in the state of Delaware and represented different backgrounds and experiences. There were 51 females and 18 males. Thirteen were between the ages of 20-29, 53 between the ages of 30-59, and three between the ages of 60-69. There were 26 elementary teachers, 19 middle school teachers, and 24 high school teachers, and the majority ($n = 44$) had earned master's degrees. The number of years of teaching experience varied. A total of 13 teachers reported between one and five years of experience, 14 teachers reported between six and 10 years, and 41 teachers had more than 11 years of experience. In addition to the demographic data, the survey asked several yes/no questions on a variety of topics. A

total of 51 teachers stated they had never been professionally trained on the topic of parental involvement in schools, and 17 reported they had been trained, although the specifics of the training were not reported. During the 2015-2016 academic year, 56 of the respondents taught students who spoke languages other than English. On the topic of technology access, 54 of the teachers reported the majority of parents/guardians of the students in their schools had home or work access to a computer and the Internet. Moreover, teachers were asked to rate their technology-savvy and six rated themselves as beginners, 39 as intermediate, and 23 as expert users. Table 2 provides the demographic data as reported by participants.

Table 2: Demographic Information as Reported by Participants

<u>Item</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Gender		
Female	51	80
Male	18	20
Age Range		
20-29	13	19
30-39	20	29
40-49	21	30
50-59	12	17
60-69	3	4
		(continued)
Ethnicity		
African American	12	11

	White	94	83
	Hispanic	3	3
	Other	4	4
Teaching Experience			
	1-5 years	13	19
	6-10 years	14	21
	More than 11 years	41	60
Level of Education			
	Bachelor's Degree	23	33
	Master's Degree	44	64
	Doctorate Degree	2	3
Grade Level			
	K-5	26	38
	6-8	19	28
	9-12	24	35
Professionally Trained			
	Yes	17	25
	No	52	75
Students Speak Languages Other Than English			(continued)
	Yes	56	81

	No	13	19
Parent Technology Access			
	Yes	54	79
	No	14	21
Technology-Savvy			
	Beginner	6	9
	Intermediate	40	58
	Expert	23	33

Descriptive Analysis

Types of involvement. Many of the questions on the electronic survey were framed around Epstein's (1995) six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. The framework was useful for this part of the project because the purpose of the survey was to learn as much as I could about general approaches to parental involvement used in DE schools. The semistructured interviews that followed then dived deeper into the teachers' perspectives and allowed me to focus more on potential technological applications that could be used to better facilitate parental involvement. Three to six yes/no questions were posed to ascertain types of involvement teachers' implemented in their schools. If the teacher responded yes to the practice, he/she was asked to rate the frequency of the delivery method used to implement it. I included a table at the beginning

of each section below that illustrates the number of responses to the yes/no questions under each type of parent involvement.

The following section presents teachers' responses to the most and least frequently implemented *practices* related to each of Epstein's types of involvement.

Parenting. Parenting was defined as practices that help parents to establish healthy nutrition, safety, and supportive learning environments at home for students. Epstein (1995) described these practices as suggestions to support their children's learning specific to each grade level, including parent education classes and home visits to help students transition to different points of schooling.

Table 3: Parenting Questions and Number of Yes/No Responses

<u>Parenting Question</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
I provide information for parents on child development and developing positive home conditions that support school learning	68	32	36
I help parents understand topics that help them become equal partners with teachers in improving their children's academic achievement	69	46	23
I provide families with information about school workshops and meetings on parenting	68	15	53
I encourage families to attend school meetings to help families understand schools & to help schools to understand families.	69	41	28

The practice that received the most *yes* responses was helping parents understand topics that help them become equal partners with teachers. These topics could include

curriculum standards and state and local assessments. A total of 46 respondents (67%) reported they did implement this practice, but there did not seem to be notable differences in how they delivered the information. For instance, digital delivery (e.g., website, email) was used the most often ($n = 19$), while paper (e.g., newsletters, notes) and face-to-face interactions reported slightly less often ($n = 17$). Table 4 presents all of the Likert-scale responses to this question.

Table 4: Frequency and Delivery Method for Helping Parents Understand Topics

Practice: I help parents understand topics (state standards, state and local assessments, etc.) that help them become equal partners with teachers in improving their children's academic achievement.

	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
Digitally	8	22	13	6
Paper	12	18	14	3
Face-to-Face	3	30	12	5

The practice that received the lowest *yes* response was providing families with information about school workshops and meetings on parenting. The 15 teachers who did implement this practice did so using paper communications the most often ($n = 13$), followed by face-to-face conversations ($n = 6$) and then digital methods ($n = 4$). Table 5 presents all of the Likert-scale responses to this question.

Table 5: Frequency and Delivery Method for Providing Parents with Information

Practice: I provide families with information about school workshops and meetings on parenting

	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
Digitally	11	8	3	1
Paper	5	6	7	6
Face-to-Face	6	11	4	2

Table 6 illustrates the total number of responses for each delivery method. As one can see, face-to-face communication was the most utilized, followed by digital and then paper delivery.

Table 6: Total Number of Responses Indicating Delivery Method Under Parenting Category

<u>Delivery Method</u>	<u>Frequency Across Parenting Practices</u>
Digital	120
Paper	111
Face-to-Face	136

Communication. Communication was defined as practices that promote two-way communication from home-to-school and school-to-home about school/classroom programs and student progress. Epstein (1995) described these practices as suggestions to build an effective working relationship with parents.

Table 7: Communication Questions and Number Yes/No Responses

<u>Parenting Question</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
I conduct an annual survey for families to share information and	68	14	54

concerns about student needs & reactions to school programs, and their satisfaction with their involvement in school.

I develop communication for parents who do not speak English well and do not read well.	69	25	44
I establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home.	69	66	3
I communicate with parents about curriculum, plans, expectations for homework, and how parents can help.	69	64	5
I contact families of students having academic or behavior problems.	69	68	1

The practice that received the most *yes* responses was contacting families of students having academic or behavior problems. A total of 69 respondents (99%) reported they did implement this practice, but there did seem to be notable differences in how they delivered the information. For instance, digital delivery (e.g., website, email) was used the most often ($n = 47$), and face-to-face interactions ($n = 37$). Table 8 presents all of the Likert-scale responses to this question.

Table 8: Frequency and Delivery Method for Contacting Families of Students Having Problems

Practice: I contact families of students having academic or behavior problems				
	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>

Digitally	2	16	27	20
Paper	16	23	11	7
Face-to-Face	2	27	31	6

The practice that received the lowest *yes* response was conducting an annual survey for families to share information and concerns about the student's needs. The 14 teachers who did implement this practice did so using paper communications the most often ($n = 8$), followed by digital methods ($n = 4$), and then face-to-face conversations ($n = 1$). Table 9 presents all of the Likert-scale responses to this question.

Table 9: Frequency and Delivery Method for Conducting an Annual Survey

Practice: I conduct an annual survey for families to share information and concerns about student needs & reactions to school programs, and their satisfaction with their involvement in school				
	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
Digitally	9	7	1	3
Paper	4	4	3	5
Face-to-Face	10	5	0	1

Table 10 illustrates the total number of responses for each delivery method. As one can see, face-to-face communication was the most utilized, followed by digital and then paper delivery.

Table 10: Total Number of Responses Indicating Delivery Method Under the Communication Category

Delivery Method	Frequency Across Communication Practices
Digital	209
Paper	189
Face-to-Face	213

Volunteering. Volunteering was defined as recruiting parents and providing different volunteer opportunities for them to support students and school programs (Epstein, 1995).

Table 11: Volunteering Questions and Number of Yes/No Responses

<u>Volunteering Question</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
I invite parents to visit my classroom to observe the instructional program	68	32	36
I encourage parents to be involved with the school in a variety of ways	69	21	48
I conduct an annual survey to identify interests, talents, and availability of parent volunteers	68	8	60
I share information on events and volunteer opportunities for the parents	69	37	32

The practice that received the most *yes* responses was sharing information on events and volunteer opportunities for the parents. These opportunities could include tutoring students, field trips, and fundraising. A total of 37 respondents (54%) reported

they did implement this practice, but there did not seem to be notable differences in how they delivered the information. For instance, digital delivery and paper was equally used the most often ($n = 16$), and face-to-face interactions reported less often ($n = 8$). Table 12 presents all of the Likert-scale responses to this question.

Table 12: Frequency and Delivery Method for Sharing Information on Events and Volunteer Opportunities

Practice: I share information on events and volunteer opportunities for the parents				
	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
Digitally	5	14	7	9
Paper	5	14	8	8
Face-to-Face	7	18	5	3

The practice that received the lowest *yes* response was conducting an annual survey to identify interests, talents, and availability of parent volunteers. The eight teachers who did implement this practice did so using paper communications the most often ($n = 3$), followed by digital methods ($n = 3$), and then face-to-face conversations ($n = 1$). Table 13 presents all of the Likert-scale responses to this question.

Table 13: Frequency and Delivery Method for Conducting an Annual Survey

Practice: I conduct an annual survey to identify interests, talents, and availability of				
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parent volunteers				
	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
Digitally	7	3	0	2
Paper	4	4	0	3
Face-to-Face	6	5	0	1

Table 14 illustrates the total number of responses for each delivery method. As one can see, even though there was little difference among the responses, digital delivery was the most utilized, followed by paper delivery, and then face-to-face interactions.

Table 14: Total Number of Responses Indicating Delivery Method Under the Volunteering Category

Delivery Method	Frequency Across Communication Practices
Digital	79
Paper	74
Face-to-Face	69

Learning at Home. Learning at Home was defined as providing parents with information and resources on how to assist their children with homework and study habits (Epstein, 1995), such as providing information on homework policies and skills that need to be mastered before moving to the next grade level.

Table 15: Learning at Home Questions and Number of Yes/No Responses

<u>Learning at Home Question</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
I provide information to parents on how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home	68	48	20
I provide ongoing and specific information to parents on how to assist students with skills that they need to improve	69	48	21
I assign homework that requires children to interact with parents	69	30	39

There were two practices that equally received the most *yes* responses: (a) providing information to parents on how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home, and (b) providing ongoing and specific information to parents on how to assist students with skills that they need to improve. For the first practice, a total of 68 respondents (71%) reported they did implement this practice, but there did not seem to be notable differences in how they delivered the information. For instance, digital delivery was used the most often ($n = 19$), while face-to-face interactions ($n = 17$) and paper were reported slightly less often ($n = 15$). For the second practice, a total of 69 respondents (70%) reported they did implement this practice, but there did not seem to be notable differences in how they delivered the information. For instance, digital delivery ($n = 21$) and face-to-face ($n = 22$) were used the most often and paper was reported slightly less often ($n = 14$). Tables 16 and 17 present all of the Likert-scale responses to these questions.

Table 16: Frequency and Delivery Method for Providing Parents with Information on How to Monitor Schoolwork

Practice: I provide information to parents on how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home				
	Never	Occasionally	Very Often	Always
Digitally	10	17	10	9
Paper	15	13	9	6
Face-to-Face	5	25	14	3

Table 17: Frequency and Delivery Method for Providing Parents with Information on How to Assist Students with skills

Practice: I provide ongoing and specific information to parents on how to assist students with skills that they need to improve				
	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
Digitally	6	18	16	5
Paper	9	16	10	4
Face-to-Face	2	23	17	5

Table 18 illustrates the total number of responses for each delivery method. As one can see, face-to-face interactions were the most utilized, followed by digital and then paper delivery.

Table 18: Total Number of Responses Indicating Delivery Method Under the Learning at Home Category

<u>Delivery Method</u>	<u>Frequency Across Communication Practices</u>
Digital	97
Paper	93
Face-to-Face	106

Decision-Making. Decision-making was defined as encouraging parents to help make school-related decisions by participating in parent-teacher organizations, school councils, and various other committees. Epstein (1995) describes these practices as ways of including all parents to share their views toward decisions that may affect their children’s education and school.

Table 19: Decision-Making Questions and Number of Yes/No Responses

<u>Decision-Making Question</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
I encourage parents to attend parent meetings, Family Nights, PTA, PTO, and Site Council meetings	69	50	19
I contact parents who are less involved to solicit their idea	69	7	62
I provide parents with information on how serve on school committees or in leadership positions	68	10	58

The practice that received the most yes responses was encouraging parents to

attend parent meetings, Family Nights, PTA, and site council meetings. A total of 50 respondents (72%) reported they did implement this practice, but there did not seem to be notable differences in how they delivered the information. For instance, digital delivery was used the most often ($n = 23$) and paper ($n = 18$) and face-to-face interactions were reported slightly less often ($n = 14$). Table 20 presents all of the Likert-scale responses to this question.

Table 20: Frequency and Delivery Method for Encouraging Parents to Attend Meetings
Practice: I encourage parents to attend parent meetings, Family Nights, PTA, PTO, and Site Council meetings

	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
Digitally	3	20	8	15
Paper	13	13	6	12
Face-to-Face	6	23	7	7

The practice that received the lowest *yes* response was contacting parents who were less involved to solicit their ideas. The seven teachers who did implement this practice did so using digital delivery the most often ($n = 2$), followed by paper communications and then face-to-face conversations ($n = 1$). Table 21 presents all of the Likert-scale responses to this question.

Table 21: Frequency and Delivery Method for Contacting Parents who are Less Involved to Solicit their Ideas

Practice: I contact parents who are less involved to solicit their idea

	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
Digitally	3	7	0	2
Paper	5	4	0	1
Face-to-Face	4	5	0	1

Table 22 illustrates the total number of responses for each delivery method. As one can see, paper delivery was the most utilized, followed by face-to-face interactions, then digital delivery.

Table 22: Total Number of Responses Indicating Delivery Method Under the Decision-Making Category

<u>Delivery Method</u>	<u>Frequency Across Communication Practices</u>
Digital	57
Paper	86
Face-to-Face	85

Collaborating with the Community. Collaborating with the Community was defined as promoting community activities and resources to show parents the importance of these programs, and working with communities on activities that strengthen school programs, and student learning and development. Epstein (1995) described these practices as suggestions to raise an awareness of community programs and services that can be used to improve students' learning.

Table 23: Collaborating with the Community Questions and Number of Yes/No Responses

<u>Collaborating with the Community Question</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
I provide information on services to help students or parents such as: tutoring, after-school programs, or workshops adults can attend to help their children in school	68	44	24
I provide information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students	68	24	44
I encourage parents to be involved in service to the community (e.g., recycling, fund-raising)	68	15	53

The practice that received the most *yes* responses was providing information on services to help students or parents. A total of 44 respondents (65%) reported they did implement this practice, but there did not seem to be notable differences in how they delivered the information. For instance, digital ($n = 16$) and paper delivery ($n = 15$) were used the most often, and face-to-face interactions were reported less often ($n = 9$). Table 24 presents all of the Likert-scale responses to this question.

Table 24: Frequency and Delivery Method for Providing Information on Services

Practice: I provide information on services to help students or parents such as: tutoring, afterschool programs, or workshops adults can attend to help their children in school				
	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
Digitally	5	23	9	7
Paper	9	16	13	2

Face-to-Face	5	24	6	3
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The practice that received the lowest *yes* response was encouraging parents to be involved in service to the community. The 15 teachers who did implement this practice did so using digital delivery the most often ($n = 8$), followed by paper communication ($n = 6$) and then face-to-face conversations ($n = 3$). Table 25 presents all of the Likert-scale responses to this question.

Table 25: Frequency and Delivery Method for Encouraging Parents to be Involved in Service to the Community

Practice: I encourage parents to be involved in service to the community (e.g., recycling, fund-raising)				
	<u>Never</u>	<u>Occasionally</u>	<u>Very Often</u>	<u>Always</u>
Digitally	2	6	3	5
Paper	4	6	5	1
Face-to-Face	4	7	2	1

Table 26 illustrates the total number of responses for each delivery method. As you can see, digital delivery was the most utilized, followed by paper delivery, then face-to-face interactions.

Table 26: Total Number of Response Indicating Delivery Method Under the Collaborating with the Community Category

<u>Delivery Method</u>	<u>Frequency Across Communication Practices</u>
Digital	73

Paper	65
Face-to-Face	63

Analysis of Open-Ended Questions

For the qualitative analysis, I did open coding. I read and reread sentence by sentence through teachers' responses to find key ideas and then grouped the data in a meaningful way into more refined categories (Creswell, 2009). I identified three codes: (a) Successes in the Use of Technology-Based Communication Methods, (b) Challenges to Increasing Parental Engagement Using Technology, and (c) Suggestions of Technology Strategies or Activities to Get Parents Involved.

Successes in the Use of Technology-Based Communication Methods

There were 40 qualitative answers to the question, "What successes have you had using technology to increase parent involvement?" Teachers were asked to identify their most successful strategies for implementing technology to engage parents. Responses suggested successes in four areas pertaining to the use of technology as a way to increase parental involvement. These are:

1. *Improved access and connection.* Teachers were able "to communicate with parents allowing for communication to occur more often" and often "instantly." They stated that it serves as a "great connection with parents and their support." One teacher added that by "staying in contact with the parents through technology...parents feel connected to their students";
2. *Greater information sharing and feedback.* Allowing teachers to "message parents directly so that they can get instant feedback and information throughout the school day";

3. *Increased support.* Allowing teachers to make "...quick update[s] on issues in the classroom" or to provide assistance such as helping with a "Science Olympiad carpooling, providing snacks, helping students";
4. *Increased availability and transparency.* For both teacher and parent, "it allows conversations when both people have time" and the use of multiple technologies that "allow for a lot of transparency."

Challenges to Increasing Parental Involvement Using Technology

There were 48 responses to the question, "What are challenges you have faced using technology to increase parent involvement?" A number of challenges were reported by the teachers in their use of technology to increase parental involvement. The challenges were in relation to:

- 1 *Access and the checking of messages.* Parents sometimes do not have all-day access to technology, and while the teacher may use the technology and the parent has the technology, often phone messages or email are not checked on a consistent basis. This may further be complicated by the fact that the "student population does not have the technology available to them outside of schools";
- 2 *Fragile infrastructures and family status.* Teachers noted that "state infrastructure is fragile (limited/no district funding) and sometimes not available. Some parents are not reliable on keeping the school updated on their contact information and are not savvy." Issues such as "parents phones run out of minutes," "lack of workable phone numbers and zero email addresses of parents," and "parents being busy with family and activities and may not see digital information. It can get buried," were reported, as well as the reality that many parents do not have access to the Internet or their access is inconsistent/frequently interrupted for billing and moving reasons;
- 3 *Need for online translator or at least one that is more accurate;*
- 4 *Lack of parental interest in the use of technology.* One teacher noted that "many of the parents of my students have no interest in technology to communicate. They are provided with multiple ways to communicate with me, but choose not to";
- 5 *Absence of/poor technological skills.* Challenges tend to arise in the administration of the technology. For example, "School secretaries don't update e-mails in a timely fashion, or there are too many typos made." Some teachers also have "very limited skills with all of the new technologies," while there are "a high percentage of parents/guardians that are not committed to supporting their child's education."

Suggestions of Technology Strategies or Activities to get Parents Involved

There were 25 responses to the question, “What suggestions of technology strategies or activities that could be used to get parents involved?” The teachers suggested technological strategies/activities that they believe could aid in improving parental involvement. Their suggestions had two main themes: strategies that stimulate parental direct engagement and education and strategies that are facilitated by the school.

Direct parent engagement and education. Participants suggested that a helpful strategy was to increase parental direct engagement and education. This involves using technologies such as Twitter/Class Dojo to show “parents what we do daily in class and school” and using a website “as a steady stream for feedback.” Direct engagement can also be achieved by giving parents the ability to:

1. Log in and get their student's grades;
2. Set up “social clubs for parents to gripe, share strategy, and empower the child's learning”;
3. Develop a “class webpage and online grades system that helps them monitor their child's progress and class activities”;
4. “Make more homework utilize technology so the parent would be forced to get involved and provide access to technology and connection with school”;
5. In terms of education, schools can offer to “teach parents using the computers in the school how to login and communicate with teachers to help the technology challenged parents.” Participants offered ideas as to some topics that may be covered such as the basics of what a megabyte is and how technology is used today.” Participants believe that improving parental use of technology would aid in “getting parents more interested in their children.” Some may still resist the use of technology, admitting, “I am old fashioned and still believe the best communication is speaking directly to the parent by face-to-face conferences or by telephone.”

School facilitation. It was also suggested that the school could facilitate more of the activities by providing Internet access to parents. The school could also take advantage of events where there are large crowds of parents in the school to provide “a quick presentation on the importance of technology and connecting with the child's teacher.” The teachers noted that some activities would be particularly helpful for parents who did not have Internet access while others “hinged on parents having regular Internet access.”

Summary

The survey data indicated that the most implemented practices were those that encouraged parent engagement in home-based activities more than community/school-based activities. Across all the six types of involvement, most of the practices that involve sharing information with parents about their children's education were commonly implemented, indicating an understanding among educators of the importance of communication in student learning.

The topics of communication between parents and educators varied greatly, with some topics addressed more often than others. Most educators reported communicating information pertaining to services to help students or parents, such as tutoring, afterschool programs, and/or workshops. They also stated the importance of involving parents in homework to improve their engagement. However, the findings showed that few teachers communicated information concerning community activities that link to learning skills and curriculum. One might assume that teachers themselves may not be aware of these resources and activities, or their connection to student learning, suggesting

a need to increase parents' and educators' awareness of community services to help their children. In addition, 54% of educators shared information on events and volunteering opportunities. While representing more than half of the sample, the 46% who do not may reflect an assumption (and reality) that volunteering often takes place at a time or requires a time commitment that is not convenient and/or feasible for working-class families.

Similarly, a small percentage of the sample reported providing parents with information on how to serve on school committees or in leadership positions. Doing so may increase parents' role in decision-making regarding the education of their children and help in creating programming and events that meet their specific needs. Teachers need to know that volunteering does not necessarily require the physical presence of parents. Some tasks may be done virtually and on a flexible time table. Finally, less than half of the educators sampled provided information for parents on child development and developing positive home conditions that support school learning, indicating a potential need for more in this regard. Very few educators reported developing communication for parents who do not speak English well and/or do not read well. This creates concern about a lack of resources and a void in communication for these ELL families.

The findings also indicate a willingness to rely on a variety of delivery methods in communicating with parents. Most educators sampled reported a sense of technological competence and an appreciation for the potential technology holds, yet acknowledged barriers that may prevent them from using it, primarily lack of family access. As educators embark upon adding technology to their repertoire of communication strategies, this should be considered. Teachers may elect to use different types of

technology to meet the parents' needs with parents' preferences and access in mind. For example, there continues to be a need for traditional school-home communication measures, such as face-to-face conferences, letters, and flyers, in order to keep parents abreast of important information and events. Therefore, the use of traditional means of communication seemed to be the preferred approach for communication as it overcame the technological barriers that parents, schools, and teachers may have.

Chapter 4

PHASE II

Phase II of the EPP was intended to explore in more depth teachers' perceptions of parent engagement with a focus on technology-based strategies. This chapter will describe the interview protocol, the teachers who participated in the interviews, data analysis of the interview responses, and the findings.

Participants

Phase I of this EPP was an online survey in which 69 Delaware teachers responded. The last question of the survey invited respondents to provide their email address if they were willing to be interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was to gather in-depth information about their survey responses related to parent engagement in the schools.

Participants were also asked as part of the survey to provide contact information for future follow-up interviews. A total of 20 respondents out of 69 provided their emails. After the survey was closed, participants were emailed to set up an interview time and place convenient for them. Of the 20 who provided email information, 11 participated in the interview portion of the project. Interview data were collected over a four-week period, giving participants the option of conducting the interview in person or over the phone. Prior to starting the interviews, each participant completed an informed consent

form (Appendix C) and was assured of the confidential nature of the personal information provided. To protect their identity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym. The interview participants taught a range of grade levels and represented different races, ages, years of teaching experience, and educational backgrounds. Of the 11, seven were elementary school teachers, one was a middle school teacher, and three were high school teachers.

Table 27: Demographic Information as Reported by Participants

<u>Teacher (Pseudonym)</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Experience (Years)</u>	<u>Highest Degree</u>
Sherrie	K	F	7	B.S.
Liza	1	F	25	B.S.
Tanya	1	F	30	M.S.
Susan	1	F	4	M.S.
Brook	4	F	5	M.S.
Megan	5	F	13	M.S.
Melissa	K- 5/Technology	F	20	M.S.
Carla	9/11- Special education	F	14	B.S.
Emily	6- Spanish	F	13	M.S.
James	9/10- Science	M	13	M.S.
Jim	9/10- Technology	M	4	B.S.

Before the project began, several essential procedures were followed (Fink, 2003). An authorization was obtained from the University of Delaware Institutional Review Board (UD-IRB). After getting the approval from the UD-IRB, an online survey (Phase I) was emailed to Delaware teachers regarding their perceptions and strategies to engage parents. The participants were asked to sign an informed consent form before the interview (Appendix A). They were assured of confidentiality of their answers. The 15- to 30-min interviews were guided by 12 semistructured questions and a varied number of follow-up probes determined by responses to 12 questions from the original survey (Patton, 1990).

Questions were categorized according to Epstein's six types of involvement to provide information regarding teachers' perceptions and strategies of engaging parents for each type. Data were collected from the interview questions during 15- to 30-min interviews. With the permission of all the participants, interviews were audio recorded, then transcribed, and saved to a password-protected OET server account and the password-protected Sakai project site. In the survey, participants were asked to provide their email address if they are willing to be interviewed.

Interviews

Semistructured interviews were used to explore teachers' perceptions of parent engagement with a focus on technology-based strategies for engaging parents and Epstein's six types of involvement. Semistructured interview questions were used in conjunction with the survey findings to gather valuable information about participants' insight, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Johnson &

Christensen; 2008; Kendall, 2008; Lewin, 1951). The same protocol (Appendix B) was used in each interview in order to increase reliability. This technique was used to organize the analytical processes of the investigation and in preparation for subsequent interviews by developing and following a consistent protocol that address a list of topics for the propose of this project. Additionally, semistructured interview questions

...are flexible, allowing the conversation a certain amount of freedom in terms of the direction it takes, and respondents are also encouraged to talk in an open-ended manner about the topics under discussion or any other matters they feel are relevant (Borg, 2006, p. 203).

Data Analysis

Dedoose, a mixed-methods software program, was used to organize and categorize the emergent themes from the interviews. Transcripts were uploaded and coded and the analysis of the interview responses was conducted in two phases (Bodgan & Biklen 1998). First, open coding was used to create a list of themes from the data. During open coding, transcripts were repeatedly read and reread line by line. Similar phrases, ideas, and comments were noted that seemed relevant and important to the project questions. For example, teachers consistently reported ways of reaching out to uninvolved parents. Thus, “strategies for reaching uninvolved parents” became a theme and the different modes of outreach such as newsletters, conferences, phone calls, and emails were designated as subthemes.

Codes were then organized under key headings and themes under subheadings, forming the basic units of the analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). An a priori list of codes based on Epstein's six types of parent involvement prior to the interview was subsequently used to focus responses for categorizing according to the Epstein's six types

of parent involvement, segmenting and narrowing the information. Codes were applied to the segments that fit them, collapsing phrases together. From the teachers' responses emerged 11 categories: (a) definition of parent-teacher partnership, (b) definition of parent engagement, (c) factors that influence parent engagement, (d) strategies for reaching uninvolved parents, and (e) use of technology and engagement success. The last six categories are based on Epstein's six types of involvement: (a) parenting, (b) communication, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision-making, and (f) collaborating with the community.

Definition of Parent-Teacher Partnership

Participants offered their understanding of parent-teacher partnership, wherein having a “good way to communicate with parents,” making sure that everyone was on “the same wavelength,” and wanting “the best education for the child” seem to be at the heart of the relationship. In addition to the communication between parent and teacher is the salience of verbal and digital support. Respondents highlighted that for the partnership to work, the home-school interactions should be consistent and deliberate. For example, attending parent-teacher conferences would help parents to be more involved in the academic lives of the children, and learn different ways to help the children perform at maximum capabilities in school. Also, communicating with the children and getting them to share information concerning school activities was identified as a way to improve educational outcomes such as reading performance. Transparency with parents was deemed by participants as an additionally important factor in helping parents gain knowledge of what is being taught and information on school activities.

Finally, collaborating with parents in addressing behavioral issues was perceived as important for reducing the children's challenges and for developing behavioral and academic problem-solving strategies. For instance, Megan, a fifth grade teacher, highlighted the importance of the parent-teacher partnership by indicating the following:

The parents are the first teachers the kids have and there are people to go to the students to reinforce what we are teaching at school whether it is reading at home, or completing homework, or being respectful to the teacher. We need their participation; otherwise it is just us who are doing the work.

This quote suggests that the effectiveness of school engagement hinges on the home-school partnership. This was a general consensus among the participants: The long-term benefit of parent-teacher partnership was to ensure that children behaved well in the classroom setting. Overall, teachers view parent-teacher partnerships as a relationship with parents that requires working together, valuing each other's role, communicating regularly, and sharing responsibility and mutual participation to improve students' outcomes. Participants felt that building effective parent-teacher relationships began with ongoing communication to gain a better understanding of the students and their families that would lead the teachers to do their jobs more effectively. In addition, teachers' responses are supported by other studies that show evidence of the benefits of a partnership, including improving communication with parents, reducing behavioral problems, and increasing parents' understanding of their children's education (Davis, 2000; Lindsay & Nye, 2000; Olsen & Fuller, 2008).

Definition of Parent Engagement

Every teacher has his/her own understanding of parent engagement. Participants spoke of different activities indicative of parent engagement, including being present at significant school events and activities such as meetings, parent conferences, and school/class functions. Some educators felt that these activities allowed parents insights into what their children were doing in school/class, and helped to establish a cooperative trusting relationship between teachers and parents. Participants also underscored the importance of consistent two-way dialogue, such as letting the teacher know parental concerns, and when a significant event has occurred in their children's life. Specifically, it was noted that private discussions assisted teachers in understanding contextual (home) factors that may affect learning. Liza, for example, noted:

Basically to let me know their concerns [...] some parents will call and say I just want you to know this happened or if there is a death in the family, they will write it in the child agenda book so I have heads up if the child will not behave or if they are out of sorts, or they are not feeling well or for whatever.

Other participants indicated that this information may be, and often is, communicated via email, through handwritten notes, or through direct text messages to the teachers.

Two-way home-to-school communication offered many family benefits according to participants, including increasing parental knowledge of the grading system through their involvement. Another perceived benefit involves students who are struggling, as consistent feedback was reported to help with tracking progress. Teacher-parent communication offered a level of "...accountability for the student proficiency in specific classes," Megan asserted. Home-to-school dialogue also encourages parents to ask for

help in advancing their own learning. For example, Tanya noted, “Sometimes I will have parents ask me to teach them some how to do strategies in reading so they can help their kids.”

Parent engagement included activities such as signing the children’s agenda book, offering to help out, sending gifts and little thank you notes to teachers, homework, and reading log completion. Brook shared the following example of how this engagement can benefit the classroom:

Those parents will do things outside of school to enhance learning and things we are learning in school. So I often have the child share during morning meetings that they went to certain museums or zoos and things that are connect to things we are learning in school, and make those connections with their child. The kids come very excited.

Some teachers admitted that despite the importance of parent engagement, some parents engage in little or no activity. Megan lamented, “We send home notes or messages and some parents do not respond at all, and some do not come to any of the assemblies. Some parents do not attend parent conferences.” Unfortunately, less parent engagement may limit the child’s learning. When parent and teacher have a close relationship, participants believed that child feel comfortable and supported and tend to do have fewer problems in school. However, there are many reasons that could limit parents’ engagement, such as resources, distance to school, and work schedule. Many participants expressed the importance of respecting parents’ choices and continue to offer a variety of opportunities for parents to get involved. Teachers’ responses showed a recognition of parent engagement as taking on various forms. Respondents indicated an adherence to the belief that involving parents in student-related issues is more critical

than involving them in school matters such as volunteering and board meetings. Megan explained,

When we see issues or behavior problems, we want to know if there is something different going on at home. I think this for us is most beneficial because we know how to perceive that day or that week, or kid is not on medication because whatever it is. There are many things that can pop up, if we do not know the background is then we do not know. We cannot help. We cannot work with them.

Respondents recognized that parent engagement could be encouraged through many techniques. These included: (a) school-based activities to attend conferences, activities, and events; (b) a constant back-and-forth communication to make sure their child is on the right track; and (c) showing appreciation to teachers. In addition, teachers showed their willingness to help parents to understand the class content to be able to support their children's learning at home.

Factors that Influence Parent Engagement

The teachers' responses to surveys provided insight into the factors that influence parental engagement, including parental misunderstanding of or confusion about the education processes, which may manifest itself in reduction in parent engagement as the children get older. Teachers reported that many factors could influence parent engagement at home and school. The three most common barriers to parent engagement identified by teachers were parent's educational level, logistical issues, and school-based barriers. Another factor is that parent engagement decreases when children get older. Parents of younger children tend to be more engaged. Liza described,

When the child is young and little, the parents show up for everything, and I think when they get older like the older grade teachers say that we in the lower grade usually get at least half of parents, and the upper grade they do not get [...] maybe a third to fourth of the parents come in for conferences.

In some cases, educators felt that the level of education of the parents might affect their level of engagement, as they may not be able to or feel competent or confident enough to help their children. Aligned with the issue of the parental education, the value placed on education by the parents is often a result of their own childhood school experiences and/or feelings of intimidation/discomfort. These factors may hinder parental willingness to initiate and maintain active involvement. Tanya explains how she deals with the intimidation:

I think a lot of it has to be with me. I think that if I do not give something positive, they can be turned off. They can be intimidated. I have to talk to them without a bunch of educational terms. Just keep it general sometimes and clarify things so they totally understand we are on the same page, and I get buy in from them.

Economic issues also emerged as a noted reason for low parental engagement. Work schedules, according to many of the teachers, were an undeniable factor for low parental engagement, especially in low-income schools where the parents “Have jobs and they are working and do not have time” (Tanya), or “They have other kids at home” (Liza) and limited child care support/resources, and/or “Do not have the money for transportation” (Megan). Demanding work schedules may also mean “They are not home with their children to help with homework,” as was pointed out by Emily.

Susan, a first grade teacher, felt that early engagement of parents was likely to be sustained throughout the year. She stated:

If they are involved at the beginning of the year, they will stay involved through the whole year. It's just the parents that they are involved from the get-go [...] I feel the majority of my parents once they become involved and see how easy it is to contact me, and how fast I respond that it is easier for them to stay constantly in contact.

While some parents fall short on engagement with their children for what might be considered “legitimate” reasons, a number of the teachers indicated that apathy may be an issue. Liza noted, “A lot of them [parents] do not care unfortunately,” and Melissa suggested that a reason for this lack of involvement is that “[Parents] do not want to admit that their child does have a behavior problem so they will cut you off completely.”

Strategies for Reaching Uninvolved Parents

In light of these varied factors, teachers were asked about their strategies for engaging uninvolved parents. Their responses revealed creative and deliberate strategies to reach out to these parents for the sake of their children. For many teachers, reaching out to uninvolved parents required a wide range of approaches, as noted by Liza:

We have report card conferences were only half of the parents showed up, so I wrote messages in their agenda book, and I send home forms for them to please get back to me. Many of them never did, and some of them will call up and say I would like a phone conference because there is no way they can make it here, which is fine. But I used to spend years tracking them down and calling them and calling them.

Others identified methods that were most effective at regularly reaching each parent, including newsletter home about once a month or notes on how the class is doing and what they are learning. For example, Megan explained about her efforts to reach out:

We just sent flyers, emails, and invitations [...] letting certain students know that we really want to see their mother or father or guardian. We just keep doing it. We do not count them out even though we have not seen them all year.

James stated that he regularly “Email[s] them directly because it is the only legitimate way to talk to them formally. We also have Schoology which is a digital learning management system.” Sherrie reported using more assertive methods:

I usually stalk them. I call and I call and I call [...] I have my daily agenda book that I write notes and I write notes [...] I have gone so far to ask the Principal to call because sometime when it's not me calling, they will pick up and responded to her voice mail.

Teacher responses showed they are aware of the parents’ role as influential contributors to enhance students’ learning and are committed to getting as many parents as possible involved with their children. Yet, many of them are still struggling to get parents involved, and do not feel their approaches are successful. Teachers’ responses revealed that most of their strategies to reach out to uninvolved parents were nontech strategies. Moving forward, it may be that teachers should consider implementing the use of technology to improve parent engagement. For example, technology can be used to inform parents of their children’s social interactions and schooling through the use of websites and apps.

Six Types of Parent Involvement

Epstein developed a framework for assessing parental involvement using six types. The teachers were asked questions related to these types and their responses indicated the use of varied types of involvement.

Type 1: Parenting. Teachers’ responses showed their awareness of the parents’ role in creating a positive environment for their child. Teachers seemed to be encouraging

parents to provide social and emotional support to their children. Strategies for helping families establish home environments to support children as students were discussed by respondents, including praising and encouragement. Liza suggested that parents “compliment their child and talk well about them and what they can do can increase their self-confidence.” Suzan pointed out the importance of parents taking an interest in their children’s homework,

Sit down with their child to complete the homework together rather than go do your homework and sit in the corner and then you can go play. I think it is important to have that interaction everyday between the family and the child.

The teachers also felt it was important to improve children’s education outside of school through “Exposing [them] to things that are connected to things we are learning in school,” Brook opined.

Teachers’ responses showed an awareness of parents’ potential to create a positive environment for their children. Social and emotional support seemed to be the type of development that teachers are encouraging parents to cultivate.

Type 2: Communication. Communication is indicated where the focus is on designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school exchanges of information about school programs and children's progress, for which there were a wide variety of program and methods used by the teachers. The methods used included mostly nontech methods such as flyers for events and activities, a curriculum letter and newsletter every month, a communication book, and the agenda, which is a notebook they take home. The technology methods the teachers reported using were website, phone calls, and emails. Most of the teachers made reference to a software called Class Dojo,

which they believed has assisted the communication process between school and home significantly. Megan described it as follows: “A behavior program. In Class Dojo, there is a text message. We can interact back and forth with parents by sending a text without giving your cell phone number.” Many found this tool rather useful.

Some respondents emphasized the importance of parent-teacher communication via a variety of mediums, including one-way communication (e.g., flyers, newsletter) and two-way communication (e.g., phone calls). The majority of teachers believe two-way of communication with parents is important for students’ success because it helps both parents and teachers to learn more about the children and share mutual responsibility and expectations. Teachers expressed gratitude for the use of digital technologies in making communication with parents efficient and easier. However, the potential for misunderstanding that comes with emails and texts led some teachers to prefer the use of traditional ways over technological ways in their communiqués with parents, such as phone calls and face-to-face conversation rather than emails and texts. Tanya shared, “I prefer to speak with someone. I think you lose something when you do not get the facial expressions. I think I misinterpreted through an email or the parent’s feeling or thinking can be misinterpreted.” Likewise, there are some teachers who are themselves resistant to technology. Liza explained her preference for the phone: “I think it is a lot easier to get a cross communication on using the phone. That way there are no mixed signals.”

Type 3: Learning at Home. This involvement type involves the provision of information and ideas (to families from the school) about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. A

number of teachers gave examples of strategies they have used to enhance students' learning. For example, reading to children is an important factor in developing their literacy skills and reading ability. This led many teachers to encourage parents to read to their children through providing them with a reading curriculum, which, according to Carla, is "a unit that lasts the whole month. At the end of every month, we send it home and we ask parents to read it with their kids, and go over the questions with their kids." Providing parents with booklists is another strategy to encourage reading. Sherrie shared, "I give parents a list of books that the child should be reading at home that I am reading in the classroom. So they can go to the library and follow up with those skills." Additionally, technology can be used to encourage reading at home. Tanya talked about how she uses technology to motivate other kids to read. She believed posting pictures on her websites of her students reading at home motivated other students to read. She explained:

I challenge the parents to read to their child and the child to read to stuffed animals or a pet, I ask them to show me. I ask the parents to send me pictures so I can upload it to show the kids. Here is a child being a proactive and practicing reading at home, and here is a picture of them reading to their bunny, reading to their dog.

Another strategy is teaching parents skills to support their children's learning. Melissa stated that one such strategy is to "[teach] parents some technology." In addition, teachers can host back-to-school nights or meet with parents to show them how to teach certain skills. Another shared:

We have a math night, a social studies night, reading nights, science nights, kindergarten nights. We have nights the teachers do the teaching and parents rotate from classroom to classroom to teach skills for that age level. Also, in open house, I show them a couple tricks on how to teach.

Classroom handbook is a strategy the teachers use to educate parents about their classroom. Brook shared, “We create a packet, with anything that we want the parents to know like what the grading system is, what the expectations for behavior, what we are covering in math, science, social studies, and reading.”

Using different strategies to make parents aware of their role in supporting their children’s learning at home showed that teachers recognize the importance of parent-teacher collaboration in ensuring their children’s academic success. Teachers’ responses showed that few employed technologies to help parents support their children’s learning at home.

Type 4: Volunteering. Volunteering is a type of involvement that highlights the recruiting and organizing of parent unpaid help and support. The teachers offered both positive and negative sentiments regarding parent volunteers and the nature of their volunteering. For most teachers, this type of parental involvement was best for school events rather than classroom involvement. For example, one respondent pointed out that for her classroom, “It is more distraction for my students to have any difference in the room [...] if they come to the classroom, the students are not going to perform the way if they were not there [*sic*].” The teachers felt parent volunteers were needed to help with afterschool activities and special programs at the school such as fundraisers.

Some participants indicated that they recruited volunteers through technological means such as ClassDojo, email, phone calls, and texts, while others recruited volunteers through paper means such as flyers, newsletters, take home notices, and letters. There was a general consensus that parent volunteers were welcome as they, “share the

workload [...] some of the things that I need to get done that cannot get done during the work hours.” Parent volunteers may not be essential to some of the teachers’ classroom activities, but they are necessary for events such as theater productions, fundraisers, the yearbook distribution party, and other extracurricular activities. Teachers could create a structured volunteer program to allow parents to offer their assistance in the classroom. This would allow teachers to be clear about the skills and services needed and areas in which parents could be most useful and make the most significant contributions.

Type 5: Decision-making. This type includes strategies designed to include parents in school decisions and to develop parent leaders and representatives. It also captures parent engagement in the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), or other parent organizations, advisory councils, and committees for parent leadership and participation. Some of the teachers indicated that they did not have active PTA/PTO groups in their schools. Though these organizations may exist in some schools, the schools in the current study seem to have the ever-present challenge of getting parents out to meetings and galvanizing parental input and presence. One possible reason for this was suggested by Megan, an elementary teacher:

I think in fifth grade they [PTA] are not as active because their kids are going to the next level to middle school so it is like kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade ...they’re more active and fourth grade they are not. Fourth and fifth grade are not as active because the kids are going on.

Despite the inactivity of some parents in PTA, PTO, and other parent-led groups, the teachers felt that it was important for parents to be involved not just as able bodies who “do most of the fun things, fundraising, and lunches,” but also as stakeholders

helping to shape the curriculum and developmental direction of the school. Their involvement “gets them more invested in the school system,” one educator asserted. Others pointed out the distinction between parents’ feelings on certain matters in contrast to administrators’ or teachers’ opinions. One educator spoke of how she involves parents in curriculum planning for their children:

I do think it is very important to involve parents in education as far as designing lesson plans, and instruction, and behavior management. Often times, I will call a parent to see what is working for you at home, and how do you think I can help your child better at school. You know different things and we all kind of brainstorm together how to help their child best and I found that is very valuable.

Teachers believe it is very important to engage parents in shared decision-making, which includes curriculum-related decisions and behavior management. When parents are given opportunities to provide their feedback and share their ideas, schools become more aware of parents’ perceptions and parents are more likely to become engaged, educated, aware of the needs of the children and supportive of the school. Therefore, it is important to encourage parents to be part of decision-making at school through inviting them to board meetings, school events, and social media.

Type 6: Collaborating with Community. This type speaks to the identification and integration of resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Participants made reference to various programs that demonstrated the connection between the community, the family, and the school. Some programs addressed physical needs while others addressed academic needs. For example:

- The backpack program and food bank: “For students that need extra food at home. They get a bag every Friday”;
- Library tours/visits.: “We take the students to the public library, and show them how to check out book and how to use the resources in the library”;
- Low-cost wireless Internet: “In this community, yes, because a lot of parents do not have transportation, a lot of parents do not have monetary resources. They are offering families in this area that attend the school for just having Internet [for] \$9.85”;
- Summer camp school with STEM opportunities offered free or at a reduced cost;
- Provision of transportation and breakfast and lunch with programs.

Teachers emphasized the importance of community collaboration and synergizing between home and school in providing a positive environment for the students and enriching their curricular and extracurricular experiences. It was noted from teachers’ responses that collaboration does not always have to be academic, such as the case of providing food. It can also be socioeconomic. However, the challenge for the teachers seemed to be getting the parents to utilize the services and resources.

Use of Technology and Engagement Success

For many of the teachers, the use of technology provided an ideal solution to address some of the factors that affect parental involvement and the teacher-parent relationship, primarily in the areas of supporting learning and increasing home-school communication with significant success. To support learning, teachers spoke of an

application called Class Dojo, which was found to be an effective tool in supporting learning objectives by keeping the parents connected in real time. Tanya explained:

I think the most successful is the Class Dojo this year because the parents do not have to see us they can have a conversation with their kids. They can see exactly. It tells what the child got a point for and what did not get a point for. If the parents have more questions, they can send me a text and I can respond to them so the parents can address it with the kids.

Susan discussed the effect of the use of Class Dojo on working with a child and his mother:

One of my students struggled with his behavior. He was very sporadic impulsive with his behavior and since we start using the Class Dojo app, mom is able to communicate with him during the day. Sending him “you are doing great,” “keep it up,” or “turn your day around” [or] “I see you are having some problems, turn it around”[or] “Let us make better choices” and when I read that to him and show him the messages he does take to heart. He does try to turn his day around. So I have seen it changing his negative behavior and also support his positive behavior, which is wonderful. I loved how the mom can communicate with her son throughout the day and just send messages. That is not something you would not have without the technology.

Sherrie spoke of her experience having parent volunteers in the classroom: “I had the four parents volunteer, and that was a success because I had so many high-needs students that year. That year really went well having all that support from the parents.”

To enhance communication, the Class Dojo has also been applied and the results have been positively overwhelming. According to Brook:

The Dojo has been extremely successful. The children are inspired by it. I think the fact that I am checking on my parents when I arrive at school during my lunch time, during my planning time, after school, after I go home, I think my commitment to do that four [or] five times a day is what making things more successful.

In a real sense, it would appear that Class Dojo is a valuable addition to the technological toolkit of the teachers to improve parent engagement. This was captured in Susan's sentiment:

It is my first year doing it and it provides that immediate feedback and it has been wonderful. It has been exciting to see how quickly parents are able to answer especially our working parents that not available to always call.

Summary

Teachers expressed the need for parent participation and recognized that parents are their children's first teachers and the people who know them best. These results indicate that gaining a better understanding of the students and their families can help teachers function more effectively in the classroom. An awareness of family situations allows teachers to respond to the children with consideration for personal issues such as a family death, and evidence of problems or adjustment issues that might result. Teachers acknowledged that parental involvement can take different forms and can be established for different reasons, including: (a) school-based activities to attend conferences, activities and events; (b) constant back-and-forth communication to make sure their children is on the right track, and (c) showing appreciation to teachers. These data also reveal that teachers struggle to get parents involved, notwithstanding barriers that include parent's educational level and logistical issues (e.g., work schedules, transportation). The two common problems reported by teachers were the lack of parents' response to the teachers and lack of parents' attendance.

The majority of teachers believe that two-way communication with parents is essential for students' success because it helps both of them to learn more about the child

and share mutual responsibility and expectations. Respondents emphasized the importance of using variety of ways to communicate with parents, including the use of one-way communication (e.g., flyers, newsletter) and two-way communication (e.g., phone calls). Without communication, parents may not be aware of important days at the school, volunteering opportunities, resources available, and their children's behavioral and academic issues. For example, mobile application technologies have the potential to engage parents remotely, especially reaching out to those parents who are unable to visit the school in person. Results also showed that even though many teachers expressed gratitude for the use of digital technologies in improving communication with parents, most of their strategies for reaching out to uninvolved parents were nontech strategies. The use of nontechnological strategies is influenced by three factors: parents' lack of access to technology, concerns for being misunderstood, and a preference for personal interaction over impersonal ones. Teachers' efforts in using different strategies to make parents aware of their role at supporting their children's learning at home showed that they recognize the importance of parent-teacher collaboration for the children's academic success.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this EPP was to explore Delaware teachers' approaches to engaging parents in their children's schooling and ways in which technology could facilitate positive relationships. Drawing on Epstein's six types of parent engagement, this EPP considered the different ways teachers can involve parents in the daily activities of learning and teaching. A survey and interviews revealed the salience of communication as key to effective parent engagement. That is, without communication between teachers and parents, the other five types of engagement identified by Epstein could not be realized. This section offers recommendations to teachers regarding how to build effective parental engagement through the use of technology and discusses strategies organized around the major themes identified in the data analysis.

Discussion

Studies have shown that parent engagement is essential to student achievement. The findings of the survey and interviews conducted to supplement this EPP also revealed that educators believe in the importance of parent engagement and its impact on students' learning and social process, and that effective engagement includes communication, understanding, and openness (Borkowski, 2014). Interestingly, the findings demonstrate that communicating with parents, the second type of Epstein parent

involvement, serves as a foundation for the other types of involvement: parenting, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community.

Teachers communicate with parents for different purposes. For example, they communicate to provide information on various topics such as behavioral expectations, ways to help with homework (parenting, learning at home), events and school trips (volunteering, decision-making), and community resources and afterschool programs (collaborating with the community). Through communication with parents, teachers have a better understanding of what parents are available for and capable of (LaBahn, 1995). These data also reveal that specific types of communications are essential. While research has indicated that one-way communication such as sending home notification letters and newsletters is an effective way to educate parents and raise their awareness of certain school issues (Dworkin, Gonzalez, Gengler, & Olson, 2011), the teachers sampled in the present study stated that their preferred communication strategy with parents is two-way communication. Two-way communication can become the first step toward enhancing parent engagement in education (LaBahn, 1995; Marcon, 1999). Educators sampled reported that two-way communication helps to prevent misunderstanding and misinterpretation with parents and is an important way to build trust between parents and teachers (Briggs, 2012). Two-way communication “develops out of a growing trust, a mutuality of concern, and an appreciation of contrasting perspectives” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 24).

Results from the survey and interviews support the work of Thao (2003), who concluded that two-way communication is critical for building a positive relationship

with parents. Ineffective communication between parents and teachers can be a major barrier when trying to solve students' problems (Epstein, Steven, & Sheldon, 2004). Moreover, teachers sampled in the project emphasized the importance of being transparent, consistent, clear, and honest with parents because it helps to strengthen their relationships with them (Rogstad, 2015). They emphasized the importance of sending positive messages to parents and celebrate their children's success. These findings are consistent with Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence model. When teachers take action to make parents part of their children's learning, the overlap is apparent; consistent and clear communication reinforces this partnership (Epstein, 1995). Teachers in the project also noted that communication with parents helps their students to succeed academically, as it engages parents in different aspects of their children's learning (Davis, 2004; Epstein, 2001). Teacher responses reveal evidence of a shared belief in the benefits of a parent engagement as a means for improving communication with parents, reducing behavioral problems, and increasing parental understanding of their children's educational processes. Studies have shown that when parents work with children on homework, student achievement increases (Campbell, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey, 2001; Van Voorhis, 2003). Cooper et al. (2000) highlighted the importance of parent engagement with their children's homework, which has been associated with increasing student achievement as well as improving student attitudes and behavior. Homework is one example of the many ways to improve parent-teacher relationships, as it provides parents with content and skills—that is, information regarding what their children are learning at school (Portier et al., 2013).

Technology can be of assistance in this regard. According to a three-year study by Portier et al. (2013) on the effectiveness of using blogs as homework, the teachers used a blogging website to post class assignments and inform parents about homework, projects, and upcoming school events. It found that 58% of the parents who were surveyed for the study preferred this method because it was easier for them to track and check their children's work, and it gave them the opportunity to discuss, seek online information, and work together with their children. Homework is one of the strategies the teachers can use to engage parents with their children at home.

Most teachers prioritize parental assistance with teaching basic skills (e.g., reading and writing) over enhancing academic experiences (e.g., museum trips). This suggests that type four (parental involvement; learning at home) is the teachers' most valued type, followed by type two (communication). Findings from this study support the literature on the importance of creating a home environment that supports and promotes learning, a well-researched and widely accepted predictor of student success (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Given that some children may have difficulties remembering or explaining to their parents what they learned earlier that day (Daugherty, Dossani, Johnson, & Wright, 2014), teachers should assist parents with ongoing information on ways to develop clear expectations and strategies for helping their children at home (Pearson, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Promoting parent engagement in children's schooling remains a challenge to many teachers. Teachers in this project reported facing challenges in engaging parents. The challenges to parent engagement that the majority of them noted were: (a) the lack of

two-way communication, (b) parents' lack of knowledge in supporting their children's learning at home, and (c) the lack of parents' time to volunteer and attend events and decision-making activities at school. These findings are supported by the literature on barriers to parent engagement. Tinkler (2002), Azzam (2009), Peterson and Ladky (2007), and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandel (1997) all found that barriers such as language differences, work schedule conflict, and parents' education level prevent parents from becoming engaged in their children's education. Teachers affirmed that there are parents who cannot volunteer in their classroom or attend events and conferences due to logistical problems, such inflexible work schedules. These findings indicated that volunteering and decision-making are critical barriers, particularly for working-class families.

Engaging parents effectively requires that teachers employ creative outreach strategies aimed at reducing and eliminating barriers to parent engagement. Involving parents in homework assignments helps to increase student-parent interaction (Hoover-Dempsey, 2001), and such interactions are important to the growth and development of the child. It is thus vital that schools invite and encourage parents to participate by developing engagement strategies that meet their needs (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). One such way to accomplish this is by embracing the use of technology to engage and connect parents to schools.

Technology can be used to help accommodate parents who cannot make it to school physically. Thompson (2008) found that constant emails between parents and teachers helped to build and enhance their relationship with one another. Although most

of teachers surveyed for the project reported strategies that were nontechnological, their responses offered insight into how technology can be used to engage parents. Communicating with parents through technological tools can help to further promote parent engagement. Parents who use technology to share information about their children tend to seek advice, get answers to questions, and feel more engaged in their children's education (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2012). Some of these methods include using a classroom website to provide information about the class content, an email to send information on how to help children with homework, phone calls to inform parents of students' issues, a texting app for sending reminders of important days, or a social networking site to announce school/class events and volunteer opportunities. Contacting parents regularly using email or text messages is another communication method found to build and sustain cohesive parent-teacher relationships (Ho et al., 2013).

Overall, teachers valued technology as a means for promoting parent engagement and overcoming some of the barriers. Interestingly, mobile applications seemed to be the new trend teachers are increasingly using to engage parents in many aspects of their children's learning. Educators reported moving to mobile apps as a supplement to their existing strategies and as a way of establishing better connection with parents. A well-established body of research has indicated that effective parent and teacher communication improves teacher-parent relationships and has a positive effect on students' learning (Angelides et al., 2006; Michael et al., 2007). Mobile applications have the potential to improve the teacher-parent relationship by making parent-teacher

communication more effective and efficient, addressing logistic barriers to communicating by providing immediate access to information from anywhere, at any time, through mobile devices. Parent-teacher communication is essential for the success of the students. It enables both parents and teachers to support student learning more effectively and respond to student needs more readily (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Recommendations

The findings of this project support the notion that adopting mobile applications may be an effective way of promoting parent engagement. The following recommendations are mostly technology-based strategies. However, these are tools and ways that are recommended for improving parent engagement; some tools may not work for some parents. Teachers need to be aware of this before implementing any these tools. Thus, it is important to note that technology is an effective tool for parent-school communication, but only if it is properly used (Ertmer 2005; Harris & Sullivan, 2000). For example, using emails to send updates that are written in English to parents who do not speak English would not be beneficial. In addition to the proper use of technology tools, the following recommendations depend on the availability of technology for parents and teachers.

Use a variety of communication tools that meet the parents' needs. Two-way, consistent, and meaningful communication is critical for building a strong connection between parents and teachers and for ensuring students receive support in school and outside of school. The majority of the teachers who participated in this project stated that it is not always easy to communicate with parents because of the lack of teachers' time

and lack of parents' responses. Fortunately, technology offers tools that can be used to overcome these challenges by contacting parents in a timely manner via e-mail and texting. In addition, it is important to make parents aware of any new technology tool that will be used in the classroom that offers parent access. Educators can send letters home that contains information about classroom website links, teacher's email and social networking accounts, and classroom apps that will be used for the entire year, along with sign-up information. Teachers may send out an introduction letter to parents about certain tools such as Edmodo, Schoology, and Remind, with information on how to login.

Another way to make teacher contact information available to parents is through an informative and simple email signature at the end of email messages. Teachers can include their website/blog/social media links and phone numbers. E-mail is a commonly used medium for sending individual updates and just-in-time communication. If a child cannot come to school due to sickness or family issues, then parents can reach out to teachers and let them know. The use of digital tools such as email, texting, and websites has allowed parents to check in on various aspects of their children's educational experience, such as attendance, homework assignments, grades, and disciplinary action. In addition, it has facilitated communication between parents and teachers and made it more efficient and timely.

Some parents do not check their e-mail regularly. Therefore, texting can be another great avenue to communicate with parents, especially for those who may not have Internet access. It is also a just-in-time communication form that can be used to send alerts, reminders, and assignment due dates. Concerns about sharing a personal phone

number with parents can be addressed through free, easy-to-use communication apps that will help teachers to connect with parents via text without disclosing personal numbers. Apps such as Remind Edmodo, Bambizo, and ClassDojo allow teachers to work with their students in the classroom and to communicate with parents.

A website is another technological tool that has the potential to enhance parent-teacher communication and engage parents in their children's education without the need to make calls or send letters home. It is an easy tool that can be used to keep parents informed and updated of what is happening in the classroom through posting class events, pictures, homework assignment, and test dates.

Finally, technology can be used to help build effective parent-teacher relationships through sharing online resources, exchanging information pertaining to the students, and maintaining an ongoing communication with each other (Rubin et al., 2012). Articles and examples of technological tools for keeping parents and teachers connected include:

1. <https://www.remind.com>
2. <http://www.buzzmob.com>
3. <https://groupme.com/>
4. <https://www.parentsquare.com>
5. <https://www.classdojo.com>
6. <http://www.schoolcircle.com>
7. <https://ryanorilio.wordpress.com/2013/03/02/review-of-remind-101-ios-app-for-teacherstudentparent-communication/>
8. <http://csdedtech.blogspot.com/2014/09/remind-101-is-now-remind-and-is-more.html>
9. <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/689>
10. <http://corkboardconnections.blogspot.com/2014/11/5-ways-to-engage-parents-using-google.html>
11. http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/11/07/11digitalparent_ep.h32.html
12. <http://www.weareteachers.com/blogs/post/2015/09/01/bloomz-vs.-remind-which-parent-communication-app-should-you-choose>

Share ongoing information about school. Teachers and parents have a responsibility to share information about student learning and development with one another. Parents who are engaged provide teachers with information that is helpful for supporting their children's needs. This information may include the children's interests, health, previous education, and other issues that teachers should be aware of, and which may help inform the recommendation for services and needed assistance. One-way communication is most often used by teachers to share information with parents, including letters, notes, agenda books, flyers, and newsletters. These methods are effective modes of communication that provide parents with information on ways to help their children at home and reports on curriculum progress, as well as alert parents about learning objectives, resources, assignment due dates, and upcoming events.

In addition, two-way communication helps to prevent misunderstanding and misinterpretation with parents and is an important way to build trust between parents and teachers and aid in problem-solving. Parents want the school to provide them with information about their children's academic progress and behavioral expectations. Parents expect to receive early and regular information about their children so they can address any issues immediately.

Help parents to be an active part of school activities. Schools need parents' participation in a variety of areas to improve programs and solve problems, which leads to higher achievement standards. Parents and teachers must work together to effectively support student learning. Thus, keeping parents updated with current information will enable parents to actively participate in the decisions that affect their children. The

parent-teacher conference is a way parents and teachers work together and keep one another updated of their children's progress and issues. However, it is not always easy for many parents to participate physically in the school due to barriers such as work schedules, transportation, or childcare. The use of technology has the potential to give parents who want to contribute an opportunity to do so by providing them with the flexibility needed to be part of their children's education.

For instance, at the beginning of each year, teachers can introduce to parents the idea of virtual parent conferences that are comparable with face-to-face parent teacher conferences in case they cannot make it to school (Kadel, 2015). Video conferencing is easy to use and does not have to be expensive. It can be on a computer or a smartphone using free apps such as Apple FaceTime, Google Hangout, or Microsoft Skype. Teachers can invite parents to observe their classrooms or hold parent-teacher conference over these tools. Video conferencing is a simple way to contact with parents and engage them in decisions relating to children's education (e.g., individualized education programs).

Today's schools are becoming more linguistically diverse and some teachers face language barriers that potentially impede parent engagement. Parents who have difficulties in communicating might be discouraged from participating in school activities. Technology can create opportunities for parents and teachers to connect and facilitate engagement in schools. Through the use of translated printed materials or technology apps that translate such as Remind and ClassDojo, language barriers can be avoided, strengthening the family-school connection. It is a way for both parents and teachers to communicate and keep informed about the student's education and academic

progress. Moreover, for ELL parents, there are websites that are designed as bilingual resources to help parents support their children in learning to read.

In addition, live streaming is an effective way of integrating technology towards increasing parent engagement. Parents who cannot physically be at school for PTA meetings, conferences, assemblies, or special events can still participate or contribute virtually to the conversations and decisions being made by watching live streaming broadcasts. Streaming video gives the school an opportunity to broadcast any event on the school website or school Facebook page, which not only enables community members and parents to watch special events, but also enables the school to archive any event for parents to watch the recording later.

There are many free tools that provide accessible video broadcasting, such as Facebook Live, Meerkat, uStream, and Periscope. Teachers are encouraged to consider live streaming their classroom to make parents feel involved in their children's education. This can give parents an idea of how the class is being taught, how the students behave, and what kind of improvements are needed to make the class run better. Opening the doors digitally to parents and the community will make them feel welcomed and involved in what is happening in the school. Examples of articles and technological tools to facilitate parent engagement in school activities include:

1. <https://www.periscope.tv>
2. <http://appadvice.com/appguides/show/live-broadcasting>
3. <http://blogs.cheshireacademy.org/social-media-teen/2016/03/15/5-ways-use-facebook-live-boarding-school/>
4. <http://elearning.tki.org.nz/Beyond-the-classroom/Engaging-throughtechnologies/Using-Ustream-to-share-assemblies>
5. <http://www.tcea.org/blog/live-stream-graduation/>

6. <http://www.socialmediaexaminer.com/meerkat-or-periscope-how-to-broadcast-video-via-mobile/>

Expand parent volunteering opportunities. Teachers often have difficulties recruiting parent volunteers. Teachers are encouraged to find creative ways to engage parents because “volunteering doesn’t necessarily require parents to come into the school building, instead volunteering mostly involves parents supporting school goals and children’s learning at any place and time” (Kutner, 1992, p. 12). The use of a variety of digital technologies makes it easier for parents to volunteer. For example, teachers can use video platforms such Skype or Google Hangout to invite busy parents to read to their children. Teachers also could ask parents to film themselves reading a story to their children’s class and send it to the teacher to play it the classroom. Asking parents to contribute from home by being in charge of updating the class websites, planning fundraisers, or organizing volunteer class time is another way teachers can use parents’ help. To make parents aware of volunteering opportunities, teachers can post them online or via email. Educators are encouraged to consider replacing paper sign-up sheets with online sign-up sheets because a parent volunteer letter may not make it to the hands of parents because students may forget to show the letters to parents or lose them. Thus, replacing paper with an online version would make it more efficient and convenient for parents to respond faster with a tap on a screen or schedule themselves for volunteer shifts from their smartphone or computer. Here are a few resources:

1. <https://www.volunteerspot.com/teachers><http://teachers>
2. <http://www.roommomspot.com/2013/08/28/classroom-volunteer-calendars/><http://www.roommomspot.com/2013/08/28/classroom-volunteer-calendars/>
3. <https://www.parentsquare.com><http://www.parentsquare.com>

4. <https://www.skype.com/>
5. <https://hangouts.google.com><http://hangouts.google.com>
6. <http://instructionaltechtalk.com/5-ways-to-use-skype-in-the-classroom/><http://instructionaltechtalk.com/5-ways-to-use-skype-in-the-classroom/>
7. https://www.regents-austin.com/uploaded/RPC/Using_Google_Docs_For_School_Sign_Ups.pdf

Educate parents to support student learning at home. Parents are not always aware of what their children are learning in school, which can hinder their involvement in home-based activities that are built on what children learned in school. However, technology can help parents to get critical information, and there are many techniques that can be used to successfully tackle home-based engagement barriers. Using technology to link the school and home learning environments is a way to enable parents to support their children's learning. One way is through flipping the classroom, which is one of the new educational methods that have been increasingly adopted by many educators. It is a teaching style that combines traditional classroom instruction with digital content such as PowerPoint presentations, notes, audio podcasts, and video lectures. It also can include an online discussion board that allows students and parents to post questions and comments. This approach allows teachers to create interactive lessons, videos, and instructions and post them to a website or learning management system (LMS) for students and parents to view. It can be used to post resources to guide the parents in how to help their children with homework and a source for both the parents and students to find more information about the classroom (Golding, 2008).

A flipped classroom can increase parent engagement by allowing parents to support their children's learning at home. This model gives parents an opportunity to see and understand what their children are learning at school by making the classroom

transparent, which is critical in increasing parent engagement with education processes (Cockrum, 2013). Parents will have access to the lesson content and will be able to see how lessons are taught. They may review the class materials, watch videos, or listen to audio with their children, and as a result, may become more engaged and involved in helping them with their schoolwork. Moreover, integrating technology into homework assignments can also be a great way not only to keep the children engaged inside and outside of school, but also to engage parents in their children's education.

Some parents need guidance on how to help children with their homework. Flipping the classroom is beneficial especially for those parents who get frustrated during homework sessions because they do not understand the materials. Thus, teachers can help these parents by posting materials and video lectures of themselves teaching the lesson so that the recorded lesson can be paused and rewatched as needed. Bergmann and Sams (2012) suggested that teachers who want to flip their classroom should create short videos that contain one topic for each video. They also suggested starting with flipping a few lessons on a few selected topics that students may struggle with. Flipped classrooms provide parents with the ability to be part of their children's education through interaction and viewing their children's progress. For example, parents can watch lectures with their children at home and help to explain it if they understand it themselves. There are many tools that can be used to flip a classroom, such as Learning Management Systems (e.g., Moodle, Schoology), Edmodo, Blogs, and websites. There are ways that teachers should consider implementing for reaching out to parents and improving their engagement. The

following are examples of tools and articles that contain information about flipping the classroom:

1. <http://web.seesaw.me>
2. <https://www.edmodo.com>
3. <https://www.schoolology.com><http://www.schoolology.com>
4. <https://www.weebly.com>
5. <http://library.collaborizeclassroom.com>
6. <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/flipped-learning-getting-everybody-on-board-jon-bergmann>
7. <http://www.sec-ed.co.uk/best-practice/tips-for-flipping-your-classroom>
8. <http://gettingsmart.com/2013/03/7-essential-tools-for-a-flipped-classroom>
9. <https://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200909/Ten%20Tips%20for%20Involving%20Families.pdf>

Limitations

This project has five noteworthy limitations. The first one is the sample size. There were eleven teachers interviewed, which may not accurately represent the typical teacher. Second, the project was conducted in one location. All the teachers who were interviewed and surveyed were from the State of Delaware. So findings of this project may not be generalized to other schools in other States due to the influence of issues related to this location. The third limitation is that the teachers who were interviewed were mostly elementary teachers. Thus, the methods that are used by these teachers may not be as applicable for higher-grade teachers (middle and high school teachers). This project did not allow for a close analysis of data by grade level. Research suggests teachers and parents have different perspectives of the parent-school collaboration depending upon students' grade level, and I was not able to make such distinctions in this project. Fourth, this project relied on self-reporting measures of survey and semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the project reports only on teachers' perspectives and

not how others, such as principals or parents perceive their parent-school collaboration efforts. The fifth limitation is this project was framed by Epstein's work. I utilized Epstein's six types of involvement as priori codes that navigated the majority of my thinking about the data. This could be a limitation to the analysis of the data by not being open to additional codes that may emerge during the analysis, and there may have been additional ways of making sense of the teachers' perspectives beyond Epstein's 6 types.

Considerations

There are also some considerations to remember before implementing any of these technology-based strategies. First, integration technology depends on access. Inequitable access to technological resources is a limitation to implementing many of the above-mentioned recommendations. Teachers must consider parents who prefer reading a hard copy over emails, and those who are not comfortable with using technology. The same applies for other digital tools such as social networking sites and texting apps, as some parents may not have smartphones or an account for certain sites. For this reason, teachers should survey parents at the start of the school year concerning their preferred contact methods, while also informing parents of their (teacher's) preferred time and way to be contacted.

Second, there are barriers that technology cannot alleviate. Some of these barriers include parents' lack of education and cultural and language barriers. These barriers could prevent parents from understanding the materials and helping their children. For example, in some cultures and communities, parent engagement in school is not encouraged nor practiced. Therefore, some of these parents may not be aware of that they

are expected to be involved with the school, while others may feel uncomfortable being involved in a foreign environment which is the school community. Technology would not solve these kinds of issues. It would be helpful to connect these parents with someone from their culture who can act as cultural guide, helping them to understand the U.S educational system and school expectations of parents. Another issue that should be considered before implementing the recommendations is parents' lack of technological literacy skills, which may limit their engagement. Teachers could help by providing these parents with workshops on the tools that are being used in the classroom that connect them with the teachers. Another way in which teachers could help is by sending letters home that contain clear step-by-step instructions on how to use the tools.

Conclusion

Understating barriers to engagement and considering the factors in choosing parent engagement strategies are vital for establishing a good partnership between parents and teachers. Parent engagement in their children's education can be increased. It will, however, take effort on the part of teachers to develop creative ways to engage the parents. Parent engagement through communication with teachers is critical for students' success because it helps both parent and teacher to learn more about the child and share responsibility and expectations. Not only that, it also helps the parents to be aware of other opportunities for getting involved in different aspects of their children's lives. Communication with parents is essential to promoting various types of parent engagement. Therefore, ensuring proactive and consistent communication between parents and teachers is the first step to creating a supportive environment for students at

the school and home. Technology, especially mobile apps, offer teachers ways to stay connected with parents. It can increase parent-teacher interaction through allowing both parents and teacher to communicate directly and instantly. Technology should be used as a supplemental strategy to existing strategies in order to facilitate a better connection with parents. However, teachers need to consider the factors affecting parent engagement before choosing a strategy because each parent has different purposes and needs for collaboration.

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Appendix A
ELECTRONIC LETTER OF CONSENT

Dear Educators:

My name is Reem Aleissa. I am a doctoral student at the University of Delaware in the program of Educational Leadership. I am inviting you to participate in a research project entitled Teachers' Strategies for Using Technology to Enhance Parent-Teacher Partnerships. You are encouraged to forward this invitation to your colleagues.

The study is going to be conducted under the direction of Dr. Rachel Karchmer-Klein. I would like to explore: (1) how teachers involve parents and (2) how technology can be used to facilitate parent-teacher partnership. The purpose of this research project is to explore Delaware K-12 teachers' practices for involving parents in the classroom environment and consider ways of using technology to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. Your participation will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes. You will be asked to provide some demographic information about yourself, as well as respond to items inquiring about your strategies to establish partnerships with parents.

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, I hope that your participation in the study would be a valuable contribution to the field of education regarding parent-teacher partnerships, and will add to future decision-making and

educational practices. The results of the study will be analyzed and available upon your request.

There are no risks in participating in this project. Your participation in this project is voluntary and strictly confidential. All of your responses will be kept anonymous, and the data you provide will be used for research purposes only. You may refuse to participate. You are free to stop your participation at any point.

You will have approximately four weeks from the time the survey is sent to you to complete and submit the survey. By completing the survey, you are stating that you have read and accept the information above, and indicating your willingness to participate in this study. You will be eligible for a raffle to win a gift card worth \$25. Four people among the participants in this project will receive the gift card.

Your survey is very important to the success of this study. I appreciate your time and your willingness to participate in this survey! If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact me at (407) 970-5658 or raleissa@udel.edu.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may have contact the University of Delaware Institutional Review Board office at (302) 831-2137 or hsrb-research@udel.edu.

Sincerely,
Reem Aleissa

Would you like to continue to the study? By clicking "Yes, I agree to participate" below you indicate that you have read and understood the information provided on this page.

- ☐ Yes, I agree to participate.
- ☐ No, I do not wish to participate.

Appendix B
INSTRUMENT

Instructions:

Please read each item carefully and mark the appropriate space or write your response in the appropriate space. Please respond to all statements.

TEACHER DEMOGRAPHICS:

Please answer the following questions about yourself. Please consider your current place of employment when you answer all questions. Select applicable response(s) provided after each question.

1. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

2. What is your age?

- ☐ 20-29
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60-69

3. What is your ethnicity?

- ☐ African American
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Other _____

4. How many years have you been teaching?
- ☐ 1-2
 - ☐ 3-5
 - ☐ 6-10
 - ☐ 11-15
 - ☐ 16+
5. What is your level of education?
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
 - ☐ Master's Degree
 - ☐ Doctorate Degree
6. What grades are you currently teaching?
- ☐ K-3
 - ☐ 4-5
 - ☐ 6-8
 - ☐ 9-12
 - ☐ Specialist
7. Have you had training in parental involvement in schools?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
8. Do you teach students who speak languages other than English?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
9. Do the majority of parents/guardians of the students in your school have home or work access to the Internet?
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
10. Rate your technology-savvy:
- ☐ Beginner
 - ☐ Intermediate
 - ☐ Expert user

11. Do you teach in the State of Delaware?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED

Please answer the following question regarding strategies for involving parents in their children's' education.

1. PARENTING: Helping families establish home environments to support students.

1. I provide information for parents on child development and developing positive home conditions that support school learning.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Digitally (website, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, notes)_____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

2. I provide information for parents on developing positive home conditions that support school learning.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Digitally (website, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

3. I provide information to parents on how to develop positive home conditions that support school learning.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Digitally (website, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

4. I help parents understand topics (state standards, state and local assessments, etc.) that help them become equal partners with teachers in improving their children's academic achievement.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Digitally (website, email, phone calls, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letter, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

5. I provide families with information about school workshops and meetings on parenting.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

6. I encourage families to attend school meetings to help families understand schools & to help schools to understand families.
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

2. COMMUNICATIONS: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.

1. I conduct an annual survey for families to share information and concerns about student needs & reactions to school programs, and their satisfaction with their involvement in school.
- ☐ Yes

- No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

2. I develop communication for parents who do not speak English well and do not read well

- Yes
- No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

3. I establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you do this?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

4. I communicate with parents about curriculum, plans, expectations for homework, and how parents can help

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you do this?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally

☐ Frequently

5. I contact families of students having academic or behavior problems.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you do this?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

3. VOLUNTEERING: Supporting school goals and student learning or development.

1. I invite parents to visit my classroom to observe the instructional program

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

2. I encourage parents to be involved with the school in a variety of ways (assisting in classroom, giving talks, monitoring halls, leading activities, etc.)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you do this?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

3. I conduct an annual survey to identify interests, talents, and availability of parent volunteers, in order to match their skills/talents with my classroom needs.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

4. I share information on events and volunteer opportunities for the parents

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

4. LEARNING AT HOME: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum- related activities, decisions, and planning.

1. I provide information to parents on how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

2. I provide ongoing and specific information to parents on how to assist students with skills that they need to improve.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

3. I assign homework that requires children to interact with parents.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

5. DECISION-MAKING: Including parents in school decisions and developing parent leaders and representatives.

1. I encourage parents to attend parent meetings, Family Nights, PTA, PTO, and Site Council meetings

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely

- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

2. I contact parents who are less involved to solicit their idea.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

3. I provide parents with information on how serve on school committees or in leadership positions

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

6. COLLABORATING with the COMMUNITY: Identify and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning.

1. I provide information on services to help students or parents such as: tutoring, after-school programs, or workshops adults can attend to help their children in school.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

2. I provide information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

3. I encourage parents to be involved in service to the community (e.g., recycling, fund-raising)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, (check all that apply)

1. How do you share this information?

- ☐ Digitally (website, phone call, email, other) _____
- ☐ Paper (newsletter, letters, notes) _____
- ☐ Face-to-face

2. How frequently?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Frequently

COMMUNICATION METHODS

How do you currently communicate with parents? Please rate the frequency with which you use each method on a scale of 1 (never use) to 4 (use always)

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always
Letter of introduction				
Meet the Teacher/Orientation				
Phone Conferences				
Notes				
Instant Message/Texting				
Class or School Website				
Social Media				
Email				
List-serve to send out group updates or information (e.g. Google Calendars, Remind)				
Video Chat Applications (e.g., Skype, Google Hangout)				
Apps to improve student behavior (e.g. ClassDojo)				


b. What are other communication methods have you used?




The USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN INVOLVING PARENTS

Technology offers teachers a variety of ways that can increase parental involvement, and overcome common barriers to parental involvement. Please answer the following open-ended questions.

a. What successes have you had using technology to increase parent involvement? Please explain.



b. What are challenges you have faced using technology to increase parent involvement? Please explain.



c. What suggestions of technology strategies or activities that could be used to get parents involved.

f. I am interested in learning as much as I can about parental involvement in Delaware K-12 schools. To this end, I would like to interview as many teachers as possible to gain insights into their perspectives on this topic. If you are willing to be interviewed for 30-minutes as a follow-up to this survey, please include your email address below.



Appendix C
INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEWS

Dear Educator,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview as part of my doctoral research entitled Teachers' Strategies for Using Technology to Enhance Parent-Teacher Partnerships under the direction of Dr. Rachel Karchmer-Klein.

The interview, for which you are being asked to participate in, is a part of a doctoral research study that is focused on parent-teachers partnerships. As the researcher, I am interested in exploring: (1) how teachers involve parents and (2) how technology can be used to facilitate parent-teacher partnership. The purpose of this research study is to explore Delaware K-12 teachers' practices for involving parents in the classroom environment and consider ways of using technology to strengthen parent-teacher partnerships.

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, so you may pass on any question that makes you feel uncomfortable or stop your participation at any point, and there is no penalty for discontinuing. The interview will take about 30–45 minutes. You will be asked a series of questions about your perspective and strategies in involving parents in their children's education.

The benefit of your participation is to contribute information to the field of education regarding parent-teacher partnerships, which hopefully will add to future decision-making and educational practices. There are no risks associated with participating in the study.

All your information and interview responses obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential. The interview will be tape-recorded then transcribed. Your name and identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, you will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your identity, and only this name will appear on all transcripts and relevant data. Interview responses and notes on paper will be shredded after they are saved electronically. The researcher will not share your individual responses with anyone other than the research supervisor.

Sincerely,

Reem Aleissa

Agreement to Participate in the interview with Reem Aleissa

By signing below I acknowledge that I have read and understand the above information. I am aware that I can discontinue my participation in the study at any time.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

The researcher will use a digital recording device in order to tape record the full interview between the participant and the researcher. Your signature on the line below gives your consent to having this interview tape-recorded.

Signature

Appendix D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

Parenting:

1. How do you define “parent engagement”? Why it is important?
2. What do parents do that tell you they are involved in their children’s live/education?

Probe: How do you reach the parents who do not usually participate in their children's education?

Communications:

1. How do you communicate with parents?

Probe: Email? Phone? Notes? In person? How often do you use these ways?

Probe: What is your preferred method to be contacted? Why?

Probe: Do you have ELL parents?

Probe: What is the best way to communicate with them?

Probe: What kinds of information you share via phone and email?

Probe: What is the purpose of most of your contacts with parents?

Probe: Can you give me an example of what kind of information is most useful/helpful to you?

Probe: What do you wish parents would tell you more about?

2. Do you see technology to enhance communication with parents? How?

Volunteering:

1. Is parents volunteering important to your classroom/children? Why?

Probe: Do you have parents volunteer in your classroom?

Probe: How do you seek them?

Probe: How do parents know they are welcome?

Probe: What kind of volunteering opportunities do you think it would a good fit for parents?

2. Do you use technology to seek parent volunteers?

Probe: If yes, what kind of technology tools do you use to recruit volunteering opportunities?

Learning at Home:

1. How can you help to strengthen families' knowledge and skills to support and extend their children's learning at home?

Probe: What kind of information and ideas have you shared with families about how to help students at home?

2. Based on your experience, how do you see technology can help parents to support their children learning at home?

Probe: Can you give me examples of what the parents of your students have done to support their children's learning at home?

Decision-making:

1. Are the parents of your students active members in Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) , Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs), or other school committee?

Probe: Why do you think they are active/not active?

Probe: Is it important to involve parents in education such as curricular decisions, instructional plans, or school management issues? Why?

2. What do you think should the teachers/school do to make parents aware of the importance of their roles in decision-making at school or the district?

Probe: Example?

Collaborating with the community:

1. Are the resources and services from the community important to your students' learning?

Probe: Why? How?

2. What you have done to make parents aware of the community resources to support their children's education

Other:

1. Describe the ideal parent/teacher relationship? Can you describe the kind of relationships you have with parents?
2. Describe two of your most successful or interesting partnership practices? Why did you select these practices? What were your goals for these practices?
3. What is your most successful example of using technology with parents?

Appendix E

IRB APPROVAL FORM



RESEARCH OFFICE

210 Halliher Hall
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19716-1551
Ph: 302/831-2136
Fax: 302/831-2828

DATE: October 14, 2015

TO: Reem Aleissa
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [813713-1] Teachers' Strategies for Using Technology to Enhance Parent-Teacher Partnerships

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: October 14, 2015

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # (1,2)

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please remember to notify us if you make any substantial changes to the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or nicolefm@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.