Can a One-Size-Fits-All Parental Involvement Framework Be Applied to an Entire School

District? A Comparative Case Study of a District Magnet Program

by

Bradley W. Finkbiner

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Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
College of Education
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Leonard Burrello, Ed.D.
Zorka Karanxha, Ed.D.
Jeannie Kleinhammer-Tramill, Ph.D.
Anthony Rolle, Ph.D.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

This study investigated a district magnet program that required high levels of actual parental involvement. The district that houses this program uses Epstein's framework of parent involvement to reach out to all families. The research sought to match parent responses with the magnet program expectations and the Epstein framework. Interviews were conducted and completed with twenty-four participants including diverse backgrounds. Particularly sought after were parents from different ethnic groups and gender within two separate middle schools. The research also endeavored to learn how the district school choice program forced parents to navigate their child's enrollment, whether at the elementary school or middle school levels.

My findings suggested that the parents in this study fit into more than one framework. During the study, two more frameworks emerged that better place parent engagement with the student choice program along with that of Epstein. My working hypothesis was that a "one size fits all" parent involvement framework does not exist for parents who chose this magnet program.

My study suggests that school districts need to reach out to all parents in whatever form works for both parties: the parents and school programs. School districts are charged with developing the flexibility needed to meet families where they are and provide support necessary to sustain higher levels of parent involvement. This action will lead to more success in the familial journey through their child's educational experience.

CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM, CONTEXT FOR STUDY,

AND STUDY DESIGN

Statement of Problem

As educators, families, and communities attempt to provide the best education for children, there are often gaps in what each believes it should look like and what is actually happening. Historically, the potential or actual disjuncture increased with the demand for accountability and visible results of student achievement for all sub-groups. Just as important has been the impact of accountability on the centralization of authority and the role of the state and particularly large urban school districts that have actually limited democratic participation of stakeholder groups in reform efforts Ravitch (2010).

Mitra and Gross (2009) stated that if democratic learning communities are envisioned, families are essential partners since they have such a strong influence on students and teenage life. If parents and school districts can agree on a set of values for school reform that engage parental involvement or enable parents to exercise their influence on the public school, an educational program with high expectations and active student engagement can result. To sustain educational reform in a large urban school district requires a large group of stakeholders who hold the same ideas and expectations and demand school representatives to deliver the program. My experience as a high school administrator within a magnet program whose main emphasis is on parent involvement substantiates this claim. During the time period of being an administrator within this program, one of my responsibilities was to accept and dismiss families

for the program. This gives me an insight on parents who demand an educational environment for their children that meets their expectations. With this experience, I found parents will do whatever it takes to have their children in a program that holds their ideals, protecting their children and providing them with the best education.

Gordon and Louis (2009) stress the common theme of trust in school and community relations. They believe that trust is a significant factor for collaboration among school staff and the greater community. Organizational trust can lead to social capital, a critical concept influencing relationships between individuals and organizations; however, it is difficult to define and measure.

Context for Study

In the 1970's, a group of parents and community members in a large urban school district in a southeastern state developed a school identity that made high academic performance the focus of the school and required parent choice and accountability. Featured requirements were student adherence to more rigorous program goals, including required parent meetings, increased homework demands for students, and strict behavioral expectations that, if not met would lead to quick dismissal from the school. The schools reformed in this way were largely elementary schools; middle schools and a high school began phasing into the program in 2006.

Currently there are three high school programs available, three middle schools, and six elementary schools. Parents now have a continuous enrollment plan in the District Magnet Program from kindergarten through high school. Since the school district has become increasingly diverse with significant demographic pockets in northern, central, and southern dimensions, it is also apparent that the demand for this special program grew throughout the

county. Because of this demand, the district determined the feasibility to place a continuous track from elementary through high school in each of the demographic areas. What the district did not anticipate was the need to develop fully implemented high school programs in the most northern and southern points of the county. The concern was a high school fully committed to admitting students to a complete program could become a drain of the most involved parents from the rest of the schools. Therefore, school-within-a-school programs were placed in high schools representing each demographic area.

This magnet program is very popular with families. There are waiting lists to receive seats, especially in the elementary years. It is high stakes, high stress, and high demand. The only stipulations for this program are parent involvement in three major themes: parents must sign a contract to ensure their students will do their homework−which must be signed by a parent nightly, and not be a behavior problem. The parent must also agree to attend a monthly night meeting which includes School Advisory Council (SAC) or the Parent-Student-Teacher-Association (PTSA) - see Appendix A. If this agreement is broken, the student can be dismissed from the program which in turn can affect the entire family. If the oldest child remains in the program, any younger siblings then have an automatic seat as long as the oldest sibling resides in good standing. If the child is dismissed, the younger siblings can lose their natural path.

Appleseed Middle School was the first of its type in the northern part of this district. It originally did not have more than 400 students but because of the demand, it replaced another middle school that was closing. It now has doubled its size which allows more families to be part of the program. The ethnic breakdown for Appleseed Middle School during the 2012-2013 school year was 20% minority students with 21% on free and reduced lunch.

The principal was a veteran within the program and brought the majority of his staff over from the original program to the new building. He added some existing staff that he believed would be a better fit. Appleseed Middle School also had very good success with state grading criteria to maintain an "A" status through standardized testing requirements.

Buckhorn Middle School was built to take care of the program demand in the southern part of the county. It was one of the newer middle schools built within the district. When it was developed, transportation was added to the program which allowed minority families better access. This did not happen at Appleseed and is still in effect today. To ensure Buckhorn had the numbers, a gifted program was also placed within its walls. As I began this study, a new principal had just begun and a transition period was observed. During this study's time frame, Buckhorn had a diversity ratio of 47% and a free and reduced lunch ratio of 39%. Once the program became entrenched at Buckhorn Middle, their standardized test scores were very good in relation to the state requirements. There were labeled an "A" school by the state.

Using these two magnet programs, my attempt was to place these parents within Epstein's framework and see if this was a correct fit.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of those parents who chose two magnet schools for their academic orientation and zero tolerance discipline policy. Taking the parameters of Epstein's framework, I was able to follow a group of parents as they navigated a school choice program and to determine how far parents might go to ensure their children maintained a seat within the program.

The research questions for this study are presented below:

Research Questions

1. Why do middle school parents choose mandatory parent involvement magnet schools in two diverse communities in the same school district?

2. How do families determine and describe the benefits of their enrollment in these magnet schools?

3. What are the implications for district expansion or contraction of these parent choice programs?

Theoretical Framework

Joyce Epstein (2002) and colleagues developed and produced a framework to increase the success of parent involvement and schools. She used an external model of overlapping spheres of influence which recognizes three major contexts in which students learn and grow. These include the family, the school, and the community. There is also an internal model of interaction between the spheres of influences. This model looks at the complex and interpersonal relations (p.10) See Appendix B.

In all of these strategies that have been developed and nurtured, the student is the main focus. The model is designed to develop partnership activities to engage, guide, energize, and motivate students to produce their own successes (p. 10).

Epstein gives many of the same quotes I have heard from educators. "If the family would just do its job, we could do our job, or we cannot do anything unless the parents become involved." However, parents will say "I raised this child; now it is your job to educate them." Using these quotes, she emphasizes the need to develop family-like schools as well as school like families (p. 11). In both of these scenarios, the student is the main character. These spheres of influence overlap on the resources the student receives. I will note this should not change based upon the level of schooling, elementary and secondary. I will argue parent

involvement should and can evolve along with the level of schooling and the maturity of the child. Epstein shows research with surveys, interventions, and field studies that confirms this thought. "Partnerships tend to decline across grades, unless schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate practices of partnerships at each grade level" (p. 11).

Sanders (2009) partnered with Epstein to provide a rationale for community involvement. One of her main principles of this theory is that certain goals, such as student success, are of interest to each of these institutions and are best achieved through cooperation and support. School-community partnerships, then, can be defined as connections between schools and community--individuals, organizations, and businesses that directly or indirectly promote students' social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development (p. 31). Sanders and Harvey (2002) identify four factors that support the school's ability to promote and maintain meaningful community partnerships. They include: high commitment to learning, principal support for community involvement, a welcoming school climate, and two-way communication (p. 34).

In looking at Sanders and Harvey's theory of community partnership, this program identifies all four factors. Indeed, it is part of the program's structure to ensure these factors are embedded. The program has shown much success in all levels of schooling. Both schools have scored very high on the state's grading system and are the most demanded type of program within the school district. One of the issues that face district leadership is if this program should be expanded. Because it is so structured, some parents believe the program will stifle their children's ability to be creative. Other families do not believe their children will be dismissed for either academic or behavioral issues. Some families do not believe they can live up to the expectations of the parent agreement. If this program were to expand, there

could be the perception of the have and have-nots, which is prevalent today. Schools that do not have this program are afraid of the best parents' flight to this program and they would be left with those who do not wish to be or don't know how to be involved.

Relevant Research Review

    Parent Involvement. If an educator in the United States is asked to name an important key to student success, one of the top responses is parent involvement. Schools and specialized programs clamor for the best students and best families. It is much easier when the family has predetermined goals for the child and the child follows through by trying to reach those goals.

    If parental involvement is such a valuable commodity, then it is imperative for school districts and schools to access it. Educators want parents to be involved, and they become disconcerted when they cannot reach parents immediately. However, the nature of parent involvement has shifted from making cupcakes and chaperoning to choosing a school, having a say in course curriculum, teaching strategies and knowing the qualifications and success rate of the teachers.

    Children need support from both school and home, but the type of support changes depending upon the child's level of education (Viadero: 2009). Parents and teachers have complementary but separate roles in the education. Teachers are the individual subject masters and purveyors of pedagogy, and the parents are the child's first teachers who model and support learning from infancy. Robinson and Harris (2014) offer an alternative view that parental significance lies in making school important early on, planting the idea of post-secondary education as expected, the regular checking with and on student progress, with the student first and foremost, and then the school. They state "the idyllic conception of an

effective school is one in which the responsibility of educating children is shared equally between parents and teachers, where teachers provide formal instruction and implement school curriculum, and parents reinforce these efforts by creating a cultural milieu outside of school which facilitates the learning process" (p. 1).

In their study, Robinson and Harris delve into the effectiveness of parent involvement. "We should expect the benefits of parental involvement only for some children. Our conclusions suggest that when asked if parent involvement is critical for academic success, the answer depends on the form of involvement and the social class or racial group in question. There is no reason to assume that all forms of involvement will lead to better achievement or that the effects of particular involvement activities will be the same across groups, particularly given that members of different social class or racial groups can have substantially different life experiences within the United States" (p. 25).

A contemporary view of parent engagement is supported by Allen (2005) from elementary school principals from Boston and St. Paul. Principal Emily Shemieh of Boston's John Winthrop Elementary stated "parents are the right arm of the school. They are highly supportive and substantive. It is not about bake sales anymore; parents are advocates of their children. Parents have become a primary educator which allows them to converse with teachers without the suggestion from teachers that they don't know anything that is essential." Principal Maria Castro of Roosevelt Elementary Magnet in St. Paul stated that "parents are modeling for their children today what will be expected and required for student success in the future. This type of modeling allows children of today the opportunity to be more qualified advocates for their own children after they become adults" (Allen, 2005; p. 3-4).

Quint (2006) suggested that one of the challenges of high school reform is creating a personalized and orderly learning environment where students and adults work together for student success. The large size of a lower-performing high school leaves students feeling lost and anonymous, particularly in the ninth grade. However, Quint did not include how parents support the process for student success. Her focus centered on smaller learning communities and actions within the school that would provide support and success.

School Choice. Families came to this country not only for religious freedom, but also to educate their children in the manner they deemed important. Parents certainly teach their children at home during their formative years, but once formal education is available, they make the necessary arrangements for their children to attend either a public or private school. One of the most powerful opportunities a parent has is the ability to choose a form of education or a school. Advocates of school choice argue that incentive-based reforms will increase competition and deliver higher quality. If this is true, can choice and common schooling coexist? (Reich, 2007) Sidorkin (2007) questioned if schooling is a consumer good. He states that voucher programs only work to the extent that consumers perceive schooling as beneficial and desirable. He also suggested learners should be paid for gathering specific levels of knowledge, which in turn, allows the student to make an informed decision on the amount of school needed to receive the financial compensation they will want throughout their life.

Some progressive thinkers believe choice is the new civil right empowering parents. Libertarians view it as a way to limit state intrusion. Conservatives view it as a way to maintain traditional family values. Educational and social theorists and reformers contend choice offers market-style pressure that will force schools to compete for the best students and

most involved families. This demand will lead to improvements in school effectiveness and efficiency (Debray-Pelot, Lubienski, Scott, 2007 and Rothstein 2007). Bast and Walberg (2004) questioned whether parents could choose the best schools for their children. Harmer (1993) suggests that most parents love their children more than anyone or anything else. Parents in the poorest circumstances seem to have the strongest desires for their children to do better; they want good schools and know where they are.

Lareau (2000) has stated, "There is no one best way to teach, nor one best way to learn; there is no one best way for parents to be involved in schooling and promote children's success. Instead there are multiple pathways." She goes on to observe that researchers need to look at the different ways families seek to collaborate with the school and how they go about activating their resources.

Study Design

I have selected a comparative case study design for this study. A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. A case study copes with many different variables of interest other than data points and will rely on multiple sources of evidence with data needed to converge in a triangular fashion that will benefit prior theoretical propositions to guide and analyze data (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

A comparative case study approach was the best fit for this study because I wanted to learn how different sets of parents and schools interact with each other on a more intense level of parent involvement and the perceptions of each side. I chose these two middle schools based upon the diversity of the communities that apply to these programs. In the district, there are a higher number of white families in the northern section of the county; likewise, in the

southern section of the district, a higher number of African-American families reside. This allowed me to gain a wider range of diverse experiences within the participants.

Epistemology

The episiotomy of this study is based upon constructivism. This theory is based upon the core ideas of Piaget and later on Vygotsky. "Piaget believed the nature of knowledge should be studied empirically where it is actually constructed and developed. This can be done either through historical development of knowledge, as it is found in the well-established sciences, or may be studied in the growth and development of an individual. Vygotsky was more interested in understanding the social and cultural conditions for human beings" (Sjoberg; 2010, p. 487). Core ideas of constructivism and learning come from an analysis partly based upon Taber (2006). He states:

a. Knowledge is actively constructed by the learner, not passively received from the outside. Learning is something done by the learner, not something that is imposed on him.

b. Learners come to the learning situation with existing ideas about many phenomena. Some of these ideas are ad hoc and unstable; others are more deeply rooted and well developed.

c. Learners have their own individual ideas about the world, but there are also many similarities and common patterns in their ideas. Some of these ideas are socially and culturally accepted and shared and are often part of the language. They also often function well as tools to understand many phenomena.

d. Although knowledge in one sense is personal and individual, the learners construct their knowledge through their interaction with the physical world, collaboratively in social settings and in a cultural and linguistic environment (Sjoberg: 2010: p. 486).

The researcher is charged to undercover meanings and assumptions that the researcher him or herself might be unable to identify. The study of these human actions are intended to "clarify, explicating or explaining the meaning of a social phenomenon." Schwandt, 2001).

The study used Epstein's framework of parent involvement and place it in a program in which the main focus is on mandatory involvement. The idea was to see how close these parents could fit into the framework. It followed these participants from elementary school into their current middle school, and what their plans were in the future.

Participants

The participants included parents of sixth and seventh grade families who had been enrolled in either an elementary District Magnet Program (DMP) or a non-DMP public school in the same district or private schools. The two programs were located in the northern and southern geographic areas of the district which allowed for exploring two racially diverse groups of parents. I selected and interviewed twelve mothers or fathers from each school and looked for parents (1) whose student had gone through an elementary DMP and (2) parents whose children came from traditional elementary schools in the district and received an open seat into the DMP middle school. Each participant was interviewed once. The original plan was to interview each participant twice; however, as the interview process continued a redundancy of responses were achieved. Therefore, only one interview was required. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed to identify key themes and to triangulate common themes.

Data Sources

Interviews were used to gather the data to develop patterns on perceptions of participants surrounding the research questions for this study. Semi-structured questions included open-ended questions to allow participants the empowerment to offer a deeper study using their own voice.

I conducted open-ended question interviews to gain insight on the perceptions of the participants. Using the diversity of participants in both middle schools granted me a wider perspective on the mind-set of the parents and their thinking processes to provide the best educational setting for their children.

Definition of Terms

Social Capital. The density of trust which is the mutual expectation that arises within a community of regular, cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms (Paldam & Svendsen, 2000).

External Model of Influence. The family, school, and community may be drawn together or pushed apart which will have direct impact on the success of the child (Epstein, 2009).

Internal Model of Influence. Shows the complex and essential interpersonal relations and patterns that occur at home, school, and the community. These include at institutional level when families are invited to an event or individual conferences (Epstein, 2009).

District Magnet Program. These schools which are the subject of this study are founded on a set of common values embraced by parents and staff. The first value is that family membership is a privilege governed by a contract stipulated by signed contract of expectations, roles and responsibilities. Therefore, a strong emphasis is placed on the requirement that home and school work together to promote successful learning (District School Handbook, 2010).

Micro-Politics. The center of the strategic use of power in organizations which are used for two general purposes including: influence which is a proactive organization, and protection which is a reactive orientation (Blase, 1989: 378).

Stage Setting. How parents construct and manage the social environment around their children in a way that creates the conditions where academic success is possible (Robinson and Harris, 2014: 199-200).

Limitations of Study

While the study design allowed me to gain access to the inner-thinking of families as they navigate the school choice process and as they research school options, it also allowed me to capture the passion for education these families have for their children. As the District Magnet Program has grown into high schools, the demands for these programs have increased. This has forced the district to look into the idea of expanding this program, and the benefits and consequences of this program.

A limitation was the fact that the District Magnet Program is not found in a large number of school districts. There are confirmed to be other programs in Louisiana and California, but I could not find the same program requirements that have been used for the program in this district.

Organization of Study

Chapter 2 of this study will focus on the relevant research involving parent involvement, school choice, and social capital. Chapter 3 describes in detail the theoretical perspective underlying this research along with providing an explanation of the context for the study and data collection and analysis methods that were utilized. Chapter 4 and 5 gives background information on the middle schools involved with this study. Chapter 6 draws conclusions and recommendations for parents and the district in the coming years.

Summary

I chose this study to attempt to place these district magnet parents within Epstein's framework on parent involvement. I chose these two middle schools as they represented a diverse sampling for my research questions. My attempt was to see if you can truly label parent involvement within a context of a framework. Using these two schools and communities, I am able to look at the program through the eyes of the parents on program benefits and distractors. This allows me to give the district recommendations about expanding the program or to recognize these types of parents in every school.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to examine parents' perceptions who chose two magnet

schools for their academic orientation and zero tolerance discipline policy. I was able to follow a

group of parents as they navigated a school choice program and the lengths to which these

parents would go as they endeavor to ensure their children maintain a seat within the program.

The research questions for this study are presented below:

Research Questions

1. Why do middle school parents choose mandatory parent involvement magnet schools in two diverse communities in the same school district?

2. How do families determine and describe the benefits of their enrollment in these magnet schools?

3. What are the implications for district expansion or contraction of these parent choice programs?

Introduction

If an educator in the United States is asked to name an important key to student success,

one of the top responses is parent involvement. Schools and specialized programs clamor for the

best students and best families. It is much easier when the family has predetermined goals for the

child and the child follows through by trying to reach them. If parental involvement is such a

valuable commodity for student and school success, then it is imperative for school districts and

schools to learn about it, use it, and assess it. Educators want parents to be involved, and they

become disconcerted when they cannot reach parents immediately, especially if a crisis with the student arises. However, the nature of parent involvement has shifted from making cupcakes and chaperoning to choosing a school, having a say in course curriculum, teaching strategies and knowing the qualifications and success rate of the teacher.

At issue are the conflicting perspectives concerning parental involvement from participants in the school system. In the educators' eyes, parental involvement means allowing the professionals to do their jobs and being available when a behavior issue arises. A parent's idea of school is that it functions as a portal to post-secondary ambitions. If it does not meet the parents' expectations, the result may be the choice of a different teacher or different school. In an era of accountability, the third dimension has come into the equation, which is the data on student achievement and the teacher's role in influencing student learning.

Joyce Epstein - School, Family, and Community Partnerships

Joyce Epstein (2002) and her colleagues developed and produced a framework to increase the success of parent involvement and schools. She used an external model of overlapping spheres of influence that includes three major contexts in which students learn and grow. These include the family, the school, and the community. There is also an internal model of interaction between the spheres of influences. This model looks at the complex and interpersonal relations (p.10).

Epstein's framework includes:

Type 1 - Parenting - this helps all families establish home environments to support their children as students.

Type 2 - Communicating - design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children's progress.

Type 3 - Volunteering - recruit and organize parent help and support.

17

Type 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.

Type 5 - Decision Making - include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.

Type 6 - Collaborating with the Community - identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

As I began this study, an attempt was made to place these sets of parents into Epstein's framework. However, I found that many parents possessed multiple types of this framework, and it was difficult to categorize them into just one. As the study progressed with new literature available, I found the capability in renaming these families into different labels. These will be addressed later in this study.

Epstein summarizes research from the United States and other nations: "Just about all families care about their children, want them to succeed and are eager to obtain better information from schools and communities in order to remain good partners in their children's education. Just about all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to efficiently and effectively build positive and productive programs. Just about all students at all levels, elementary and secondary, want their families to be more knowledgeable partners about schooling and are willing to take active roles in assisting communications between home and school. However, students need much better information about how their schools view partnerships, and more guidance about how they can conduct important exchanges with their families about school decisions" (p. 13).

Richards (2009) discussed the Milwaukee Public School System, which was to receive $4,000,000 of federal stimulus money earmarked for a parental involvement program for 35 schools over two years. The focus of this project was what happens at school and after the last

bell rings. Richards listed four noteworthy roadblocks: "it is hard to identify the right or best way to involve parents, parental engagement with schools are hard to measure, teachers are not trained well in the area of helping parents work with their own children, and teacher responsibility does not include teaching parents how to teach. Parents will argue that they teach their children everyday including manners, a language, responsibility, and what is right and wrong. Teachers argue they should already have these qualities by the time they reach school, especially high school. Teachers need help in supporting what is happening within the classroom, primarily if there is a behavior issue or the student is not being successful.

Change is hard, and when more people are allowed to be a part of personal change, it can become confrontational. Richards stated "parents, no matter what their race or socioeconomic status, care about their children and are willing to do whatever 'it' takes as long as they know what 'it' is." This last statement stands out. If educators are willing to work collaboratively with parents, then there will be more success for the students. The conflict is in the process and how schools rein in the full emotional power of parents who want the best for their children and thus fit them into a school process they may not personally see as important. Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, and Mason, (2008) find that "regardless of incomes, education, and performance at the school, parents believe their involvement is central to their child's academic success."

Sanders (2009) partnered with Epstein to provide a rationale for community involvement. One of her main principles is that certain goals, such as student success, are of interest to each of these institutions and are best achieved through cooperation and support. School-community partnerships, then, can be defined as connections between schools and community individuals, organizations, and businesses that directly or indirectly promote students' social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development (p. 31). Sanders and Harvey (2002) identify four factors

that support the school's ability to promote and maintain meaningful community partnerships. They include: high commitment to learning, principal support for community involvement, a welcoming school climate, and two-way communication (p. 34).

The reason Epstein's framework was chosen for this study is to look at a specialized magnet program in which the main focus is parent involvement. In looking into the framework, the magnet program identifies with each level. I also looked into the community piece in which the magnet itself acts as its own. In this form of community, the parents wish or sometimes demand decision-making opportunities. It can, at times, be overwhelming to staff based upon the volume. However, other parents' main concern is the safety and constant high expectations of staff and families. If a student or family does not meet the expectations, they can be dismissed and a new family enrolled. This allows the consistency of the program to remain true. I have found this to be one of the main belief systems of this program.

In looking at Sanders and Harvey's theory of community partnership, this program identifies all four factors. Indeed, it is part of the program's structure to ensure these factors are embedded. The program has shown much success in all levels of schooling. They are found to score very high on the state's grading system and are the most demanded type of program within the school district. One of the issues that face district leadership is to determine if this program should be expanded. Because it is so structured, some parents believe the program will stifle their children's ability to be creative. Other families do not believe their children will be dismissed for either academic or behavioral issues. Some families do not believe they can live up to the expectations of the parent agreement. If this program were to expand, there could be the perception of the have and have-nots, which is prevalent today. Schools that do not have this

program are afraid of the best parents' flight to this program and they would be left with those who do not wish to be or don't know how to be involved.

Johnson, Gupta, Hagelskamp, and Hess (2013) conducted a study on how parents may be ready to take on a greater role in shaping how local schools operate and advocate for educational reform. Their study was based upon phone surveys with 1,566 sample parents in the five Kansas City counties conducted from May through July 2012.

They portrayed parents into three distinctive groups:

a) Potential transformers - parents who seem ready to play a bigger role in deciding how schools operate.

b) School helpers - these are parents who say they could do more to help out at the schools their children attend.

c) Help seekers - parents who are concerned about their own children's learning and seem to look for more guidance from their schools on how to help their children succeed.

Within this study, there were some factors of note that explain why parents are not as involved or engaged as they could be. Despite their lackluster marks for schools overall, most parents have much more positive attitudes about how principals and teachers perform in key areas. This includes communication from the school and someone parents can trust to give them good advice on how to help their child through school. Another area I found to be important was the lack of knowledge parents have about important school issues. In this study only 40% knew the qualifications of their children's teachers, and 73% knew which classes their children should take to be prepared for college.

Robinson and Harris (2014) gave a name to parents that I totally agree with. It is called "stage setters". "The stage setter reinforces the performance at critical transition phases, such as in between acts. Thus, a good performance can be characterized as a partnership between two

critical components: (1) the actor embodying the role they are portraying, and (2) the stage setter creating and maintain an environment that reinforces (or at the very least does not compromise) the actor's embodiment of their role. Likewise, many parents construct and manage the social environment around their children in a way that creates the conditions where academic success is possible" (p. 199-200). When asked about how parents help set the stage, Robinson and Harris state "students credit their parents for steering their school choices as they transitioned through their academic careers" (p. 202).

In the school where I am now the principal, all three parent groups are represented. However, the majority of my parents fit into the school helpers or help seekers group. There are many areas that we are attempting to move help seekers into the school helpers group and school helpers into potential transformers. This is an expansive idea to attempt but we believe it is something worthwhile. We are using potential transformers to reach out to the other groups to become more actively involved in the school. I believe it is vital to have parent leaders lead others to help move our school forward.

In my school, I also have two magnet programs: one being a leadership program and the other, an International Baccalaureate Program. As the application comes around each year, I notice more parents falling into the category of stage setters and they choose the academic pathway for their child.

Parent Involvement

The majority of research has been done on parents of elementary school children because both educators and parents believe the formative educational years are the most important. The belief is that once a student is in the secondary stage of education, teachers and guidance counselors manage student placement, scheduling and foster participation in the extra-curricular

opportunities of the school. The school is in charge of the processes to advance to high school and post-secondary opportunities. Children need support from both school and home, but the type of support changes depending upon the child's level of education (Viadero: 2009). Parents and teachers have complementary but separate roles in the education. Teachers are the individual subject masters and purveyors of pedagogy, and the parents are the child's first teachers who model and support learning from infancy. Edutopia.org (2009) stated "collaboration with families is an essential component of a reform strategy, but it is not a substitute for high-quality education programs or comprehensive school improvement." Every school is essentially required to have a standardized written objective for parental involvement in their school improvement plan. But parental involvement is a monitoring and follow-through nightmare. If parents are not able to participate in the life of the school for whatever reason, what can the school do to enforce it?

Smith, Stern and Shatrova (2008) have suggested most schools want increased parental involvement, but that administrators and teachers need help in developing effective strategies to build partnerships. In spite of language, class, ethnic and racial differences in your school community, how does the leadership and staff reach out to secure a high level of parent's engagement, which is first love their children and treat them as your own.

Quint (2006) suggested that one of the challenges of high school reform is creating a personalized and orderly learning environment where students and adults work together for student success. The large size of lower performing high schools results in students feeling lost and anonymous, particularly in the ninth grade. However, Quint did not include how parents support the process for student success. Her focus centered on smaller learning communities and actions within the school that would provide support and success.

Herrold, O'Donnell and Mulligan (2008) took a quantitative look at parent and family involvement during the 2006-2007 school year. They analyzed National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) data from 2007 about 54,000 households across the United States. Their findings included the following: 54% of K-12 families received some form of electronic communication from the school, and 49% had received phone communication. 83% of parents received information on helping with homework and 86% of families received information about parent expectations. Of the parents that reported, 89% indicated an adult had participated in a general or parent-teacher organized school meeting. Data also showed only 61% of parents of high school-aged children attended a meeting, compared to 90% of parents with students in kindergarten through second grade, 92% of parents with students in grades three through five, and 76% of parents with students in grades six through eight. This concurs with other studies that have shown parent involvement decreased as the child gets older.

In a different study conducted by Civic Enterprises and financed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, and Mason (2008) conducted quantitative research which used surveys of over 1000 parents of current and recent high school students in urban, suburban, and rural communities. The focus allowed perspectives of parents about high schools in America. They found that parents believe that their involvement is valuable to their child's success no matter what the parent's income is. To the contrary of popular opinion, parents who had lower incomes and less education wanted to see a more rigorous curriculum. This was in contrast to other scholars, 92% of African-American and Hispanic parents compared to 78% of white parents. Likewise, 85% of parents with students currently enrolled in low-performing schools stated that they should be involved when it comes to picking courses and teachers for their children. The fact that these families want to choose teachers is the opposite of what many

educators believe, feeling they know better how to educate children. Looking deeper into this statement, 51% of parents in low-performing schools reported having good conversations with their children's teachers regarding their child's academic performance, compared to 70% of parents with children enrolled in high-performing schools.

Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, and Mason observed that parents wanted earlier contact by school personnel with their children who were enrolled in the eighth and ninth grades. A disconnect exists between the transition for students and the uncertainty of parents as to how welcome their involvement in the school was. Parents believed schools should incorporate homework that involves families, should provide information packets about curriculum, and should hold meetings earlier within the first year of high school. They believed that schools need to accommodate the varying needs of the parents. Accommodating the special needs of the child has always been a focus, but rarely has there been a focus on meeting the needs of parents. They also believe that schools should not only identify needs, but also facilitate processes that will increase parent engagement. Developing a plan to have more parent involvement may pose an issue with schools, teachers, and teacher unions. Since the teacher is the facilitator of formal education and the parent is the valuable support, there are few options that allow parents to have a direct impact on school curriculum, master scheduling, and teaching strategies.

Added to this is research conducted by Hassrick and Schneider (2008) who observed how middle-class parents show an interest in having a direct impact on teaching. The question the team developed is "are teachers constrained by the relational expectations of parents as they go through their daily activities?" They conducted research that invited over 200 pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade families attending a charter school. They observed them for 70 days and conducted 37 interviews including 24 parents, 12 teachers, and one school director. Even though

the study focused on a charter school, the same type of research questions could apply to a public high school. If the emphasis for a large urban school district is to develop a magnet program with its primary emphasis on parental involvement, there are bound to be side-effects that have not been addressed. The strain on teachers, resulting from the sheer number of parents who expect communication, will require a research study. Compared to a study done on 200 families, a look at over 1500 families could be daunting.

Johnson (2013) found most parents welcome the trend of making more information about schools available to the public. But good communication means more transparency and disclosure for most parents. Getting more data and having more transparent policies may be helpful, but direct conversations with parents is their hunger for two-way communications and for a personal relationship with the educators in the school (p.18-19). This goes back to the "trust factor" between educators and parents. How do we break the separation of parents-students-and educators and collaborate with all groups to do what is right for the child? Once this is embedded as a way of work, I believe significant change and success will be noticed. However, the opportunities for alternative ideas have been minimal. What is needed is to place a meaning on accountability and how it directly affects the education movement, especially in the public schools.

In the spring of 2011, the County Schools Office of Strategic Partnerships conducted a parent engagement survey. The data collected were from surveys for parents, teachers, and administrators. The survey was administered through the months of February and March of 2011 and had 738 parent responses, 1506 teacher responses, and 187 administrator responses. The focus of the survey was on the impact of family engagement, involvement at home and at school, school atmosphere, communication, and improving family engagement.

Significant findings of this survey were that 65% of the administrators believe that parents recognized the impact of family engagement on student success. This was compared to 53% of the teachers and 85% of parents. It was interesting to see that only half of the teachers believed that parents believe their impact on their own children. Parents also had the lowest opinion that schools were friendly and welcoming. This is an alarming issue that schools will be required to address. Another issue found in this survey was that 14% of middle and high school teachers never reach out to parents in other than normal communication methods. This was alarming because parents, especially in secondary schools, do not receive communication.

Role of Income and Race

Drummond and Stipek (2004) conducted a longitudinal study of elementary children from school districts in a rural community in the northeast, a large urban Northeast city and a large urban city on the West coast. The purpose was to obtain information about low-income families' beliefs regarding their roles in education and how it affected their children. The objectives of this study were to learn the value of parent involvement that had diverse backgrounds and what parents believed should be done to help their children. The team recruited subjects from a nationally-funded early intervention program for low-income families and chose a group of 200 low-income parents, including new immigrants who spoke little or no English. They conducted phone interviews with over 200 African-American, Hispanic, and Caucasian parents of second and third grade students. Drummond and Stipek found that most parents strongly valued involvement in their children's education. They found insignificant differences among the groups, including those parents who had little English language.

A common thread found in Drummond and Stipek's study was that greater parental effort may be required as these students become older. Parents believed they should be involved in

elementary school because children are just beginning to adjust to school. However, data showed adjustment is necessary at every entry level of school including sixth and ninth grade. Parents in this study relied on the teachers to suggest areas of need. If the teacher believed extra support was needed in reading, then the parent placed a higher emphasis on reading at home. The same was found if teachers believed math was an area of concern. This study was important in observing the value families placed on education even though they were poor and mostly non-educated. It was also important to note the trust parents placed in teachers. Strengths of the study were the personal interviews with the families and their input regarding their role in education. A drawback of this research was the general nature of the study. No specific district data was given as a basis for comparison with other studies. In addition to the Drummond and Stipek study were Smith, Stern, and Shatrova (2008) who focused on Hispanic parents and their involvement in non-metropolitan schools. An English Language Learning teacher asked for volunteers from her caseload to be part of the study. The researchers chose fifteen Hispanic parents with little or no English comprehension to participate in a qualitative study in a Midwestern district. They conducted interviews to establish how schools can reach out to parents who have a language deficiency. The researchers found that parents perceived schools as being receptive to families; however, they also found a lack of effective communication channels, little support training and encouragement of parent participation, low English skills of the parents, economic and transportation issues, and low parental aspirations for their children's success. Similar to Drummond and Stipek's study was the fact that parents expressed a reluctance to question the teacher's authority. The only subject that parents insisted on was English. They saw their role as making sure to supervise homework and to motivate their child to work hard and to keep them from being behavior problems. The issue with this study was again the grade level of students. It

could be assumed these were elementary students because of the fact the parents were ensuring study skills, English language and behavior as important. Further research is needed to look at successful schools and what makes their communication practices effective, how successful English Language learning programs can be expanded district-and statewide, and how this changes with the numbers of illegal immigrants arriving into the county. In this study, the focus was on how all of these groups of students and families are serviced within a school district, although the obvious observation is that no district can have a cookie cutter pattern to meet the needs of all students and families.

Robinson and Harris (2014) concur with this thought by stating "White, Asian, Hispanic, and black families each have different lived experiences within the United States, which poses unique challenges to the "one-size-fits-all" model of home involvement" (p.123).

Although school choice has been touted as a cure to segregation by race and income, segregation may actually increase because people of color and low-income are more likely to enroll their children in neighborhood schools that may have higher minority percentages. A movement toward better schools will enhance equity for disadvantaged children who are stuck in low-performing schools that are poorly funded and have inexperienced or poor teachers. Transportation issues also prevent students from leaving their communities to attend better performing schools (Bell, 2009; Gordon, 2008). The question is who is responsible for providing equal opportunities and outcomes? If a parent does not take advantage of a choice opportunity, the parent should not expect equal outcome. If processes are deemed fair, then parents of color should have the same advantage as proactive white parents.

Abowitz (2008) discussed the standard of justice and how accurately the educational system is measured in performance by class, ethnic, and gender groups. School choice policies

will be judged not only by their potential success, but also on their long-lasting effect on future generations. Education reform is obligated to help children and families, especially those who have been harmed by current educational policies. But an examination of these policies must ensure that future generations are not harmed. Abowitz suggested there has been little or no discussion regarding intergenerational justice as a central goal for school choice. Those who have the most information and are most proactive will be able to manipulate the system. This will provide better opportunities for families who have economic and cultural capital. In an ideal situation, all competitors would be on the same level. However, researchers have found that competition is successful only for those who can move from school to school. Those left behind are faced with a failing school May (2006).

Andre-Bechely (2005) stated, "fifty years after *Brown vs. Board of Education,* there are still schools segregated by race and class." Minority and low-income students did not anticipate or understand the process of magnet programs, and therefore, did not participate as much as districts had hoped. This has caused segregation to continue. An important issue for examination is how to generate a renewed commitment to achieve *Brown's* goal of integrated schools. This process would foster the access, equity, and equality for race and lower income families to become part of a system that would benefit them. Fennimore (2005) accused the public school district of failing *Brown* by not enforcing mandates and finding ways to stratify. White families found ways in the system to ensure their children did not attend schools that are predominately minority. This was shown in magnet schools that catered to white families and became elitist programs. The choice process today requires that the distribution of students cannot be related to ethnicity or social background, which would lead to increased segregation and result in public schools retreating to their status before the *Brown* decision.

In the perfect situation, parents would be involved in every aspect of the child's education and school would be a transition through which students would pass to their lifetime goals. However, not all parents are involved in the process of their children's education. In some families, the child may be the first to attend college. The parents vicariously live their educational lives through their children but do not have the necessary background knowledge to direct them.

Middle Schools and Parental Involvement

Hill and Tyson, 2009 conducted a meta-analytic assessment of the involvement of parents of middle school students. The purpose of the study was to research existing empirical studies to view the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. The three types of involvement included academic socialization, which involves the parent creating an environment that fosters educational and occupational aspirations which in turn makes preparations for the future; home-based which includes monitoring homework; and school-based which allows parents to volunteer at school and school events. The review, restricted to studies published between 1985 through 2006, produced fifty empirical reports. The terms and phrases used to distinguish the reports included parent involvement, parent-school relationships, and family involvement. One common concern with this study was bias against publishing null results and perhaps rendering a bias in favor of statistical significance. Hill and Tyson found parent involvement to be positively related to middle school student achievement. They also found that academic socialization had the strongest positive relationship to achievement. School-based involvement was moderately positive in achievement, and homework assistance was the only involvement that did not have a consistent relation to achievement.

Middle school involvement was less likely to occur because of the size of the student body. Teachers who were responsible for over 100 students had less time to communicate with parents. Parents were also not knowledgeable about instructional styles and course content that could allow them to facilitate the student's schoolwork at home. Further research and observations with this study included theories supporting the idea that parent involvement was directly associated with student achievement. However, there was literature that indicated the motivating effect of parental involvement fluctuated as the child got older. Hill and Tyson also were concerned about current literature which did not allow a thorough examination of ethnic and socioeconomic variations regarding academic outcomes. They believed that ethic differences were the result of economic resources. They concluded that not enough sufficient studies have been completed regarding Latinos or Asian-Americans. This was important because academic socialization relies on parent knowledge of school resources and may be an issue with language barriers. Viadero, (2009) summarized Hill by saying "having your parents involved in a field trip is not wholly consistent with what an adolescent wants. "When you look at parent-adolescent relationships, you see kids pushing back on decisions they want control of, and it's much harder to find out how kids are doing holistically because the teachers see over 100 students per day. "What should be said is "here are the classes you need to take and if your child is not ready for these, here is what you can do to get your child ready so the pathways open." (p. 1 -2).

Parent Participation Rates and Expectations

Herrold, O'Donnell and Mulligan (2008) used data from the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey (PFI) and the 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) to report on how parents interacted with schools. These authors wanted to describe the data as a first look and to encourage readers not to draw causal inferences based

upon the bi-variant results. The reason is that the examined variables may be related, and complex relationships among all variables have not yet been explored. The methods used for this study were multiple interviews and a school readiness survey. They also took a national sample of children enrolled from kindergarten to twelfth grade who were enrolled in public and private schools during the 2006-2007 school year. The researchers found that 54% of the parents for students K-12 received communication directly from the school about their child; 86% received information about the expected role of parents and the school; and 89% of parents attended a school meeting or a parent-teacher conference, although those percentages went down as the student progressed through middle school. An alarmingly lower percentage of high school parents attended a regularly scheduled parent conference−61% as compared to 92% of parents with children in grade three through five and 76% of middle school parents grade six through eight. A higher percentage of white families, 64%, were satisfied with their schools than those of other ethnic backgrounds including African-Americans, 47%, and Hispanic, 59%. This could be because of the schools they attended because they were unable to transfer through their districts' choice programs. An important finding in this study concerned the parents of students in grades 6-12: less than 1% did not expect their children to complete high school; 8% expected a high school diploma, but not the pursuit of post-secondary education; 8% expected their children to attend a technical school after high school; 13% expected their children to earn a two-year degree; 40% had an expectation for their children to finish a four to five-year college; and 30% expected their children to earn a graduate or professional degree. This would lead us to believe there is a plan for the majority of children as they enter school and progress until graduation. What is missing is the breakdown of families based on ethnicity and socioeconomic status of the educational expectations for their children. There is no doubt that involved parents benefit

students and schools. In analyzing other literature on parent involvement it can be observed that the main focus for schools has been to have direct parent involvement in the student's elementary years and then to have a progressive decrease as the student progresses into their secondary educational settings. However, data also showed that involved parents will lead to extra support mechanisms if they continue their focus continuously throughout the child's entire educational experience. With this notion, it is imperative for schools and parents to find a happy and successful median to access this form of support. The question that comes to mind for me is, if studies show that parents who are involved lead to more successful experiences for their child, why is this not an expectation for all parents? It can also be noted that parents do want their children to succeed but many do not know how to go about supporting them. There often is little communication on how students, parents, and schools can develop a successful support system for the student. This is the point that can lead to frustration for all of those involved and can lead to a disappointing end for the child.

Parents and School Choice

Parents have shaped public education since the inception of mandatory education and universal access from the early 1900's, and will continue to do so. Families came to this country not only for religious freedom, but also to educate their children in the manner they deemed important. Before the public school system took over in the early 19th century, Americans educated their children through private institutions and other arrangements including church-supported schools, local schools organized by towns or groups of parents, tuition schools developed by traveling school masters, charity schools developed by churches for poor children, and private tutoring. Parents certainly teach their children at home during their formative years,

but once formal education is available, parents make the necessary arrangements for their children to attend either a public or private school (Korber, 2007).

Milton Friedman (1962) in his book *Capitalism and Freedom* contended that public education was a free marketplace that maximized consumer interests. Friedman maintained the interests of the consumers could be achieved through the bureaucratic freedom in schools and parental independence. Weidener and Herrington (2006) suggested that market theory as it is applied to educational settings proved that parents were the best judges of schools for their children. This type of competition would lead to better schools and better student achievement. However, it also assumed that a true open market would produce an informed parent. It has not been proven that all parents are informed or want to be informed. There is a sad irony to this statement. Those parents who are aware of a high-performing school's status do not need help in transferring their children to another school, but those parents who truly need to know the status of their school's success do not have correct information or the connections within the system to move their children to a high-performing school.

Some progressive thinkers believe choice is the new civil right empowering parents. Therefore, choice has become a significant and hotly contested issue. Libertarians view it as a way to limit state intrusion. Conservatives view it as a way to maintain traditional family values. Theorists and reformers contend choice offers market-style pressure that will force schools to compete for the best students and most involved families. This demand will lead to improvements in school effectiveness and efficiency (Debray-Pelot, Lubienski, Scott, 2007).

Critics of school choice studies suggest that many studies describe what is in the best interest of the groups supporting the study and do not involve a balanced analysis. Proponents and critics of school choice can creatively select work that will support their ideological

positions. Certain studies can provide an assumption or creative idea that might work and assessments of what is working and not working can be incorporated (Smith, K 2005; Merrifield 2008). Smith and Merrifield correctly suggest that school choice can work in specific districts but it is very difficult to make sweeping reforms across the United States. What works in North Carolina may have little effect in a school district in California. There seems to be little information on students who are labeled as at-risk and use the choice process of their district to observe any significant academic improvement resulting from their enrolling in another school. While some studies showed that parents were happier if they were able to leave their former school for another, I did not see any follow-through with the child's academic progress. Most of the literature analyzed suggested that families in low-performing schools had little chance to access an open seat in a high-performing school. This contradicted the main purpose of choice reform and led to more frustration for the parent and student. Do parents trust school choice research?

Chapman (2007) has refuted the idea that market-driven schools are based upon justice and equity. She claimed that instead of pressure driving student achievement, the system is driven more toward the parental choice rights. However, not all parents have the right to choose or only have limited options. Schneider and Buckley (2002) theorized that parents focus on the factors that are most important to their families. While most parents are interested in the academic success of the school and the programs offered, they are also swayed by non-academic factors such as diversity and location. They go on to presume parents will look at the unrelated factors in education; therefore, public policy on school choice is based on the preferences of a minority rather than the majority.

The frustration of failed education reforms has led parents, students, teachers, and other education professionals to demand radical changes. School choice was one of these innovations. Advocates of school choice argue that incentive-based reforms will increase competition and deliver higher quality. If this is true, can choice and common schooling coexist? (Reich 2007) When available schools are equal, parents have fewer reasons to make changes. If the assigned school does not fit the parents' wishes, the choice process allows the opportunity to seek another school (Gibbons, Machin, and Silva, 2006).

Lotteries can be useful in estimating the family's satisfaction if they are successful in the process. It does produce data on how well the student performs in the chosen school. If a student wins a seat via a lottery process, he/she is more likely to accept a seat in the school. However, a student may be chosen for other magnet programs as well. Since he/she can only choose one school; the data can be skewed. If students receive multiple invitations, they are more likely to choose the school with the highest academic outputs (Cullen, Jacob, & Levitt, 2003). The impression that specialized schools guarantee student success causes concern among some educators. However, although there is little research to back this claim, families compete fervently for invitations to specialized programs.

Process of Choosing Schools

With the opportunity for parents to take advantage of choosing schools and special programs, it becomes important to research the if s and how's of implementing a process for families. Many times families will either not have communication needed to navigate the process or there are a limited numbers of seats available at high-performing schools. Because of these roadblocks, frustration mounts for families who truly want to take part in the choice process. The purpose of a study conducted by Kim and Sunderman (2004) was to examine school

opportunities available to minority and low-income students enrolled in 10 urban school districts. The samples for this study included 10 districts in six different states and were purposely selected because they were either among the nation's largest school districts or were part of a central city. Other factors for choosing these districts were the large percentage of low-income and minority students, and a large percentage of schools were designated as needed improvement and were required to offer transfer options. The data collection for this research was a mix-method approach. They conducted interviews to examine how districts implemented transfer policies. They also collected district statistics on the number of schools needing improvement, the number of students requesting transfers, and the number of students who did transfer. The majority of students who chose to transfer enrolled in another school with similarly low achievement levels. Kim and Sunderman stated that students who enrolled in low-performing schools had the opportunity for a high-quality education; however, a disparity existed in what a high-quality education looks like. Other findings included the interesting point that districts having a large number of schools labeled as needing improvement receive no extra federal money to implement choice processes. In addition, they found local school districts had a difficult dilemma with the limited number of open seats at high-performing schools; therefore, students who might benefit from a higher-performing school were not able to receive an invitation. A recommendation from a civil rights perspective was to increase access to suburban schools that had more resources, middle-class students and better teachers. Because of choice process regulations, creating efficient and effective transfer policies would be difficult and could harm the families who could use the extra support. Transportation is an area that has been an issue with school choice processes. If minority families wanted to attend a special program, they would be given transportation but the time frames allowed some bus rides of more than one hour

each way. In the district on which this study is focused, at the beginning of the choice process implementation, families could apply for any specialized program and the school system was responsible for transportation. This caused a huge transportation cost. In the last number of years, matching programs have been instituted in three geographical areas. This allows families to choose the most popular programs and saves transportation costs for the district.

According to Neild (2005) the key ideas for parents surrounding the choice provisions included: "how parents choose the school for their children, if the school choice alternatives are better than the current school and the basis for leaving the neighborhood school. The issue for parents in an urban school system is that few open seats are available in high-performing schools. The demand is much higher than the supply. This situation can cause an enormous investment of time by the parent, with no educational improvement for the child" (p. 275). Neild also delved into the area of parental management by looking for the way parents managed the choice process and if the process was manageable at all. Another view considered high school choice as a high-stakes process with potential negative outcomes if parents could not obtain a seat in a preferred school. She also studied the tools parents used to manage the process and if they were able to negotiate or influence local schools in regards to curriculum and teachers. In addition, Neild researched the parental management of low-income children assigned to low performing schools and the influence these parents controlled. She conducted her investigation in Philadelphia using semi-structured interviews with19 parents during their children's eighth grade year. All parents interviewed were involved in the basic level of the choice process. Parents also believed making the right high school choice was a critical factor in their children's success. She also found that with limited official information available, parents have to conduct their own serious research to find the right school for their family. Families without financial resources

were only able to manage within the limits of the public system. High-achieving children had an easier time navigating magnet programs while average-achieving students found few spots available outside their neighborhood school. Recommendations for school districts involved a more transparent process including promotion and graduation rates, curriculum patterns to achievable post-secondary goals, expectations of entering freshmen, year-to-year staff stability, and specific careers open to students through an individual school.

Bell (2009) investigated a theory called bounded rationality, which observed parent choice sets as they researched a school. The parents could not consider every school in the district, nor could they choose the highest performing school, but they could select a school that would meet their expectations. Bell conducted a longitudinal comparative study of 48 parents and their thought processes of choice concerning incoming sixth and eighth grade students. Participants were interviewed multiple times over a nine-month period. This allowed access to the before, during, and after stages of the process, which granted the researcher a wide range of diverse thoughts. The research took place in a Midwestern city with surrounding suburbs that had a long history of choice programs but had also seen an increase in magnet schools. Families were assigned to a neighborhood school but had options to transfer if there were open spaces. Parents tracked in the study chose not to search for a school, conducted a closed search of magnet programs, or conducted an open search for all schools. What Bell concluded was that parents overall chose schools based on student well-being and solid academics. She also found that poor and working class parents did not always choose a quality school but more often chose schools that were labeled as failing by state testing standards. This may have been due social networking; they sent their children to the same school as their friends. Middle class families were more inclined to be selective and chose schools that were labeled high-performing. Bell's

study was important because it gave insight into parents' mindsets when choosing a school. What is disheartening is that families of color and of poverty did not take advantage of the opportunity to send their children to higher-performing schools. This naturally led to schools with low-income families and low-performing students.

Research by Bifulco, Ladd, and Ross (2009) concurred with Bell regarding stratification of disadvantaged students. Their purpose was to examine school choice data from Durham, North Carolina, and the environments of students who remain in their assigned public schools. They collected data on elementary and middle school students who used the choice program to transfer from their assigned schools during the 2002-2003 school year. The hypothesis compared characteristics of students who opted out of their assigned schools and compared the peer environments of those who remained in their assigned school. Bifulco, Ladd and Ross found that families of sixth through eighth grade students whose parents had a college education had a higher percentage of students who were successful. In addition, children in both elementary and middle school whose parents were educated were more likely to transfer if they were assigned to a low-achieving attendance zone. The findings were very general with little explanation as to why families made decisions; it was not clear how peer environments affected student achievement of individual students, even though some studies showed that low-performing students had a detrimental effect on low-performing schools. It is important to ask parents about the weight they place on their perception of their child's peer group.

Koedel, Betts, Rice, and Zau, (2009) studied the San Diego public school district and examined choice programs for race, student achievement, and English learner status. What they found was interesting and contrasted with Holme and Richards. They found that students were using choice options to change their peer groups to those with higher economical standing. For

41

this reason, districts were more pressured regarding the supply and demand of open seats. In this school district, the administration had used the lottery system to admit students from a priority group. Participation of disadvantaged students tended to increase integration. However, the participation of advantaged students applied segregating pressure on the school district. They also found that integrating magnet programs restricted student movement that was designed to promote integration, and integrating programs in accordance with open enrollment choice policies were used as long as transportation was provided. Transportation seemed to equalize obstacles for disadvantaged students. Koedel, Betts, Rice, and Zau concluded that applicants will transfer to schools that have a higher number of above median test scores, highly educated parents, and fewer English language learners.

As the debate continues, winners and losers emerge. Systems of choice will ultimately produce schools that are popular because of high student performances on state-wide tests. Schools whose students continually score higher on standardized test such as the ACT, SAT, and AP will have a smaller number of open seats for minority and low-socioeconomic families. Evidence exists that some schools will skim the best students. Poor communities may not have enough high-performing schools from which to choose (Gordon, 2008).

Parents and Program Opportunities

As parents are able to access more power, the role has shifted from involvement to influence. This is evident in the choice of a school or academic program, the curriculum taught, and the instructors teaching. Parents now want data on teachers of the same subject area to judge student achievement. The pressure placed on teachers and administration will ultimately increase as expectations for students continue to rise. Parents now expect to have major influence on final

decisions in school processes. In choosing a school, parents look for magnet programs that will meet the needs of their children.

Archbald (2004) researched national data to examine relationships between magnet based school choice and income-based stratification found within school districts. He used a liberation model for his study that assumes poor and minority children are more likely to be trapped in inferior schools with little chance of movement. Archbald suggested that parents have a variety of motivation to seek information, and the ability to use it to make choices from a list of schools. Critics of this plan claimed magnet schools may worsen the stratification levels. Studies from Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and San Antonio showed enrollment in magnet schools is comprised largely of students from higher-income families. For some reason, these programs attracted fewer low-income families and neighborhood students. This caused a perception of elitism. A small percentage of families are successful in lotteries for open seats. Families who do not obtain an open seat are forced into a school they may not have chosen. They then attempt placement in another program or request placement on a waiting list in hopes of securing an open seat. This could cause segregation for minority and low-income children either with different schools or within individual schools (Andre-Bechely 2005; Gibbons, Machin, & Silva 2006). These opinions assumed families of higher socioeconomic status or higher education levels take advantage of the processes currently in place and leave other families in their wake. Archbald's study made very general assumptions while using interviews from 1991-92. His claim was the larger the school district, the more chance for economic segregation; however, he also stated there is little evidence of proof for this assumption.

Catalanello (2012) used district numbers for 2012-2013 data on applications, the following was seen: 9,346 students applied for magnet and fundamental programs at all grade

levels; 5,336 students received at least one invitation to a magnet or fundamental program; 17,471 applications filed by students seeking entry level seats in kindergarten, sixth grade, and ninth grade for 6,389 total entry level seats in these programs. Catalanello interviewed two current board members who believed that expansion should be looked into these programs; however, one board member had a concern; "I don't think it is a fair system. Until all of our schools are good schools, the DMPs are going to have that attraction; they're going to have that cachet."

Accountability

A type of education reform has been isolated on the accountability of stakeholders in the success of the child. Arens (2005) conducted research on accountability and parents. She used data from on ongoing research project by the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning. The emphasis was observing if parents ascribed to their accountability for their children and schools and to what issues students and parents were to be held accountable. The methodology was surveys of parents and community members, including teachers and school administrators, followed by focus groups and interviews. It was important in this study to receive actual comments from families who wanted to be informed. However, most conversations held between the school and home are vague and not related to accountability. The school may view accountability as having the parent support both the teacher and school without hesitation. In some cases this would be factual unless the parent begins to see a pattern of discrepancies. Arens found that parent accountability would need to be compared to a set of standards for which students and teachers are held accountable. Parents suggested that student achievement accountability should be shared, but felt the major responsibility should fall on the teachers. When school leaders and families do exploration for accountability collaboratively, the groups'

transparency required all stakeholders to process the current data and to manage processes. Parents believed that families who are not vocal are limited in their education, and the most vocal families get more attention and, at the end, a better education. This thought is embedded in Freire's culture of silence (1970). In his theory, Freire argued those who were considered the "oppressed" would defer to the "oppressors" or the ones in power that had the knowledge. I concur with Arens when she recommends that parents are part of the interpretation of student-level data. However, this is not done with the transparency needed for true reform. How the stakeholders of a school understand and give meaning to accountability has been largely ignored. It is also important to develop guidelines for each group of stakeholders to have direct impact on student achievement and school accountability.

Johnson (2013) states most Americans generally applaud the goals of the accountability movement and support some of what has been accomplished. However, some see this movement as incomplete because few answers to problems are seen. This is because there are too many irresponsible parents, too many unmotivated students, too little support from the community and messages from society that undermine learning and education (p. 2). Her qualitative study included focus groups from Washington, DC; Detroit; New Orleans; Westchester County, New York; Birmingham; and Denver. The study findings included some interesting results: "It is clear that nearly all parents value what schools and teachers do and want them held accountable. But most also believe that families, communities, and the broader society also have responsibility in educating children and these groups should be held accountable too." This seems to be a novel idea for accountability to reach all who have direct and indirect influence on a child, but how and who would monitor? How would we know if the child is struggling and who should be the instigator of support at whatever level is needed?

There is also a concern about the success of the public school. Johnson reports only 29 percent of Americans say they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in public schools. Also, seven out of ten likely voters say it is urgent to improve US high schools. African American and Hispanic parents continue to voice high levels of concern about high dropout rates and low standards. I have found this to be true as well. As principal, I meet monthly with African American parents to develop ideas to close the achievement gap. Overall, these parents believe we should be harder on the child and also the parent. Johnson addresses this idea "as many of these parents describe it, when parents don't take responsibility for their own children's behavior, it is extraordinarily difficult for schools and teachers to be effective" (p. 9).

I have found that parents want to know that other families choosing the same school have the same expectations for their children. The parents' prevailing desire is to have students with the same goals and work ethic in the same school. It is important to them that all have an educational focus and do not just send their children to a certain school because it is the closest to their home. Many families conduct years of research in choosing a school track and begin the process when their children are in elementary school. Some high school programs have entrance policies that allow families first right of refusal to their program. For example, a child enrolled in a specific elementary program may be automatically enrolled into the same program in the middle and high school. If the parent wishes, the child may be in a similar program his/her entire educational career. Other students not having this access are forced to undergo a lottery system and have their fates determined by a district computer. I agree with Johnson when she states "for some school leaders, allowing parents to choose which schools their children attend is the true form of accountability− in effect−the parents will vote with their feet."

Politics of Parent Involvement

Indicator systems are used to reflect key aspects of educational systems and interrelationships between schools and stakeholders. Reformers and scholars promote five different but overlapping uses of educational indicators: to describe, to advance policy agendas, to serve as the basis for accountability, to evaluate policies and programs, and to serve as information management systems. Information demand has two dimensions. One dimension is density that is a direct function of the number of indicators that make up a system. Sometimes, more or less information is required. A second dimension is information demand that can be more or less complex based upon the number of relations between indicators (Ogawa & Collom, 2000: 202-204). This can be seen in school choice as parents gather information on which schools are researched by families to produce a final choice for their children. This can also be seen as an end result on what schools or special programs offer parents that other schools do not.

Ogawa and Collom provide concerns in the use of indicators regarding the quality of information the indicators provide. There is a sense that indicator systems lack the rigor of design or depth of data needed. Another concern would be that school-based management does not use information well. Educators are notorious for using information that confirms polices already in place and dismissing any data that does not support their stance.

Malen (2003) suggested that most policy implementation research focuses on specific locations at a single point in time; therefore, it is hard to tap into typical responses to state policies and whether state influences on local school districts is an episodic blip or an enduring force. This is another perceived detriment of the usage of indicators; however, state policies dictate local school district policies. Schools are graded based upon indicators of how standardized test scores of subgroups increase or decrease. Whether or not educators agree or

disagree with standardized testing, these policies tend to produce changes for better or worse by teachers and administrators. As test results are reported, there is more pressure for accountability of schools; even more pressure is felt in the classrooms. Teachers are now under much more scrutiny to provide quality education to children and to ensure students pass the required state testing. Parents are much more aware of the pass rate of teachers. Information on advanced placement testing is public knowledge on how each teacher and their students perform on AP exams; schools have the ability to break down scores on state tests for both students and teachers.

Mazzoni (1991) discussed state policy-making using an arena model. He acknowledges that arena is a middle-range term in referring to political interactions characterizing specific decision sites through which power is exercised to initiate, formulate, and enact public policy. Mazzoni discusses the opportunity for school choice in Minnesota but is also seen in the use of choice with parents in a district magnet program. Because of the opportunity given, parents are given more power to choose; the DMP schools receive power because of the large number of families that apply and put more pressure on the school district to provide more opportunities. It is the basic economic concept of supply and demand. If the demand far exceeds the supply, there can be a public clamor for the district to comply. There is also more accountability on the schools to provide the education parents and students expect to enable student success at the post-secondary level.

Joseph J. Blase produced a series of articles based upon the micropolitics of a school. Micropolitics are the center of the strategic use of power in organizations which are used for two general purposes including influence, which is a proactive organization, and protection, which is a reactive orientation (1989: 378). The question that drives the articles is "What strategies do

teachers use to influence and protect themselves from the school principals?" Blase (1989) gave the following strategies teachers use in dealing with principals which include acquiescence, conformity, diplomacy, passive-aggressiveness, confrontation, ingratiation, extra involvement, visibility, and advocacy. In his article about closed school principals, there is a promotion of the development of relatively closed political orientations in teachers which are characterized by the use of protective, reactive, and indirect or covert strategies (Blase, 1991: 359). Closed school principals were described as inequitable, practiced favoritism, inflexible, and indecisive. Because of these characteristics there was a lack of professional interaction, critical self-examination, and mutual decision-making. There was also little evidence of collective consciousness (Blase, 1991:377).

In contrast, Blase also researched open school principals. As opposed to closed school principals, open school principals had reasonable expectations regarding teachers' job performance and were honest and non-manipulative in their interactions; they were more communicative, collegial, supportive, and expected collaboration with staff (Blase, 1989: 384). In this type of situation, teachers felt their political interactions with the principal were more effective than those teachers associated with a closed school principal. Looking at this research done by Blase, it is apparent that the leadership skills of the principal are an integral part to the success of the school or the specific program. This is particularly true with the District Magnet Program that relies on the accountability of the parents. If parents really are held accountable for their actions as well as their students, then it can be assumed there is a higher accountability factor for administration and teachers. If a closed school principal were placed into a specialized magnet program, it would be very difficult to achieve success; the closed school principal would not have the experience or skill set as opposed to an open school principal who might already

have the inherent skills of an open school principal to satisfy parents' demand for openness in the school. Anderson (2009) uses leadership focus on turning bureaucratic institutions into caring communities. Each parent I spoke with, no matter the school site, expressed how much they believed the teachers and staff truly cared about their children. This allowed a feeling of social trust between the school and the home. Anderson also believed that advocacy is needed across the board to ensure the powerful do not oppress the powerless. "The goals of schooling seem to be shifting under the competition state to a greater emphasis on the maximization of individual advantage for one's own children. The ripple effect of this shift is pulling back from policies that benefit the common good, and toward policies that allow the middle and upper classes to cash in their relative advantage in economic, social, and cultural capital. But this begs the questions: How do they get away with it? Why don't those who are left out of the system push back? We have a political system in which theoretical groups can organize to demand more authentic, equitable social policies" (p. 54). So−where are these groups? There still, to this day, is a long wait-list to get into these programs, especially at the elementary level. There are few seats but huge numbers. What is the district to do without separating the classes of families who can get in?

Epstein (2005) developed a theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Her theory has been used to better understand how families and communities interact with school personnel to increase student achievement. There are educators who say "if the family would just do its job, we could do our job," while there are families who say "I raised this child; now it is your job to educate them" (Epstein 2009: 11). In her study, a survey was conducted using schools, colleges, and departments of education to discover the readiness of leaders. The findings indicated that 70% of teachers, 89% of principals and 85% of counselors should be prepared to conduct

effective family and community involvement activities. However, it was acknowledged that college graduates were poorly prepared to conduct partnerships. The survey also showed that one of the factors that limited change was faculty resistance (Epstein, 2005:128). Using this information leads to the assumption that educators are reluctant to know how to use parent involvement to their advantage. Educators must also be aware of who has the power to affect student achievement. I suggest that all key stakeholders hold a certain amount of power, responsibility, and accountability on the success of educational reform. This includes the interactions and respect for ideas between educators and families.

Epstein (2005) uses these ideas to conduct a study on effective programs for partnerships and educational professional development. She conducted this study with schools, colleges, and departments of educations. Epstein believed teachers and administrators need knowledge and skills to work with the ever-changing diversity of schools that are not familiar with the United States school system. The sample included deans, chairs, and professors form highly diverse institutions in 37 states including public and private institutions (p. 127). Her findings concluded that a large majority of leaders strongly agreed that prospective teachers (70%), principals (89%), and counselors (85%) should be prepared to conduct effective family and community involvement activities; Leaders acknowledged their graduates were poorly prepared to conduct these partnerships (p. 128). This can be seen as a major concern of district, school, and college leaders on this issue. As I have been involved with parent conferences, it is apparent there is a divide on what teachers and parents need from each other to ensure the child is a success. I have been in situations where the parent is begging for help from the educator. I can tell you that many educators handle these very easily and the partnership grows and nurtures itself to better things. Unfortunately, I have been in situations where the educators truly do not have a game

plan to reach out to the parents and the students to make sure of success. The questions that come to the forefront are: How can schools help develop newly hired teachers who may or may not have had much development in these areas, and how do schools and school districts develop meaningful professional training?

Conclusion

In reading the literature on parent involvement, I looked into a variety of instances regarding how parents could be involved directly with their child's education. I also looked into roadblocks that could prevent parents from being involved efficiently. Using Epstein's framework on parent involvement, I noticed a number of categories the families of district magnet programs fit including: an educational environment at home, communication with the school, and input on issues that could directly affect the school. What I did not see was a category for those parents who go out of their way to research and choose a program. The parents in this specific program go out of their way to ensure their children are in the program and then they break into three separate groups: those who will do the minimal to ensure their children remain in good standing, those who will be directly involved if there is an issue that needs to be addressed, or the parents who educators affectionately call "helicopter parents", those who will be at the principal's door when he/she arrives in the morning or threatens to contact an attorney, bring the press on campus, or call the superintendent. Epstein does discuss issues about preparing staff for parents, but since there are different levels of parents it is difficult to prepare incoming educators of what to expect.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to examine parents' perceptions who chose two magnet

schools for their academic orientation and zero tolerance discipline policy. The research

questions for this study are presented below:

Research Questions

1. Why do middle school parents choose mandatory parent involvement magnet schools in two diverse communities in the same school district?

2. How do families determine and describe the benefits of their enrollment in these magnet schools?

3. What are the implications for district expansion or contraction of these parent choice programs?

Qualitative Research

Creswell (2007) stated "a qualitative research method is considered when: (a) a problem

or issue needs to be explored; (b) a complex, detailed understanding of an issue is desired; (c) the

researcher's goal is to empower the study participants by their sharing their stories, presenting

information in their voices, and minimizing any power that may exist in the relationship between

the researcher and the study participants; (d) the researcher elects to write in a flexible, literary

lead style that is not limited by restrictions of formal academic structures of writing; (e) the

problem or issue is studied in the same context or setting in which it is addressed by the study

participants; (f) the researcher wishes to develop theories because existing theories are partial or

do not adequately address the complexity of the issue being examined; and (g) quantitative measures and statistical analysis do not adequately capture the nature of the problem (Creswell, 2007, pp. 40-41)

I have selected a comparative case study design for this study. A case study investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. A case study copes with many different variables of interest other than data points and will rely on multiple sources of evidence with data needed to converge in a triangular fashion that will benefit prior theoretical propositions to guide and analyze data (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

A comparative case study approach was the best fit for this study because I wanted to learn how different sets of parents and schools interact with each other on a more intense level of parent involvement. I chose these two middle schools based upon the diversity of the communities that apply to these programs. In the district, there are a higher number of white families in the northern section of the county; likewise, in the southern section of the district, a higher number of African-American families reside. This allowed me to gain a wider range of diverse experiences within the participants.

Epistemology of Study

The epistemology of this study is based upon constructivism. This theory is based upon the core ideas of Piaget and later on Vygotsky. "Piaget believed the nature of knowledge should be studied empirically where it is actually constructed and develops. This can be done either through historical development of knowledge, as it is found in the well-established sciences, or may be studied in the growth and development of an individual. Vygotsky was more interested in understanding the social and cultural conditions for human beings" (Sjoberg; 2010, p. 487).

Core ideas of constructivism and learning come from an analysis partly based upon Taber (2006).

Tabor states:

a. Knowledge is actively constructed by the learner, not passively received from the outside. Learning is something done by the learner, not something that is imposed on him.

b. Learners come to the learning situation with existing ideas about many phenomena. Some of these ideas are ad hoc and unstable; others are more deeply rooted and well developed.

c. Learners have their own individual ideas about the world, but there are also many similarities and common patterns in their ideas. Some of these ideas are socially and culturally accepted and shared and are often part of the language. They also often function well as tools to understand many phenomena.

d. Although knowledge in one sense is personal and individual, the learners construct their knowledge through their interaction with the physical world, collaboratively in social settings and in a cultural and linguistic environment (Sjoberg: 2010: p. 486).

The researcher is charged to undercover meanings and assumptions that the researcher him or herself might be unable to identify. The study of these human actions are intended to "clarify, explicating or explaining the meaning of a social phenomena" Schwandt, (2001).

Sampling

This comparative case study was conducted using two district choice middle schools within the same school district. One middle school was geographically located in the northern part of the district and the other in the southern part. This allowed the researcher to compare two samples of parents and students in two geographically distant schools that offer distinct groups of parents and represent two distinct demographics of the district. Appleseed Middle School is the most northern school and was the first of its program type to be developed;

Buckhorn Middle School was built especially for the southern part of the district using this program prototype and enrolls a higher percentage of minority students.

Recruitment

In each of the chosen middle schools, I attended a Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) meeting as well as a School Advisory Council Meeting (SAC). The principals were kind enough to allow me a few minutes within their agenda. Because of the mandatory meeting requirement, there were many possibilities to choose from. I looked at the diversity of the parents to maintain a fair population sample. I chose twelve families from each school to interview. They signed the required forms for a qualitative study. I also went to their school to make it more comfortable for them to be asked these questions. I found these families to be very open and eager to join this study.

Table 3.1
Participant Comparison

Participant	Years in Program	DMP Elementary	Non-DMP Elementary	Gender	Ethnicity
Appleseed	More than 5 years (8)	10	2	Females (9)	White (9) Africa Am. (2)
	Less than 5 years (4)			Males (3)	Hispanic (1)
Buckhorn	More than 5 years (5)	5	7	Females (8)	White (4) Africa Am. (7)
	Less than 5 years (7)			Males (4)	Hispanic (1)

Data Sources: Parent Interviews

Interviews were used to gather the data to develop patterns on perceptions of participants surrounding the research questions for this study. Semi-structured questions included open-ended questions to allow participants to offer deeper insights using their own voice.

I conducted open-ended question interviews to gain insight on the true perceptions of the participants. Using the diversity of participants in both middle schools granted me a wider perspective on the mind-set of the parents and their thinking processes to provide the best educational setting for their children.

Another factor was those families who had been enrolled in traditional, private, or charter elementary schools and had made the change to a district designated middle school. Each parent was interviewed one time in the school setting to allow a more comfortable environment. The total number of interviews from each school was twelve with a grand total of twenty-four. The scripted questions led to deeper questioning throughout the interviews which allowed me to delve deeper—see Appendix C.

The interviews averaged 60 minutes for each of the participants. After the interview questions were completed, each participant had the option to relate any feelings that were not covered.

The parent interviews took place over a ten-day time frame. The school was also cooperative with the study as they placed information on their school website for interested families. These families contacted me within three days of the meeting to volunteer for the study. The participants were chosen based upon their interest in being involved in the study. All participants signed the consent form.

I conducted the interviews at the school as to have a more familiar and accessible setting. All of the interviews were after school to reduce distractions. I interviewed families with varying backgrounds for the elementary school experience. Fifteen families were enrolled in the DMP elementary schools before turning to a middle school program, four families had their children enrolled in private elementary schools for a time, and then were able to secure a seat in a district program elementary school, and five families had their children enrolled into a traditional district elementary school and transitioned into a middle district program.

Coding and Analysis

My intent was to interview each family twice; however, after the first interview I saw distinct patterns and a saturation of the same type of answers, which indicated that a second interview was not required.

All interviews were transcribed by myself and an additional professional. All interviews were read through and notes were attached. The interview questions were initially coded by the research questions and keywords. As I began asking the scripted questions, I could then ask probing questions which came out in the conversations. Common themes and categories emerged and are found in this study.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study followed procedures of qualitative, grounded theory and case study research. Creswell (2009) stated that researchers in this type of study dig deeper and deeper into understanding the data. He compares this idea to peeling an onion layer by layer to find the initial core layer of understanding that makes a representation of a larger meaning. In this type of study, ongoing reflection takes place to discover patterns or themes for more study.

As I worked through the process of this study, patterns developed that are detailed in later chapters. I was able to gain insight on how these parents navigated the choice system, and to what extent they would go to ensure their children maintained a seat within the program.

Appleseed Middle School Setting and Context

Two schools were chosen for this study. Appleseed Middle School is located in the northern section of the district. The Appleseed Middle School program began in 1994-1995. In 2008-2009 it was relocated to another middle school that offered more seats. Capacity grew from 550 students to 850 during this time frame. In the 2011-2012 school year, the percentage of minority students was 19% of the total enrollment. Students on free and reduced lunch program are also approximately 19% of the population. The breakdowns of ethnicity for applications at Appleseed Middle School for the 2012-2013 school year were as follows:

Table 3.2
Ethnicity Applications at Appleseed Middle School

	6th grade	7th grade	8th grade	School-Wide
Total Applications	577	61	55	693
Black/Mix	10% (57)	13% (8)	5% (3)	10% (68)
Hispanic	8% (46)	16% (10)	7% (4)	9% (60)
Asians	5% (26)	0% (0)	3% (1)	3% (27)
White	77% (448)	71% (43)	85% (47)	78% (538)

The school is an older building that was originally used as a traditional middle school. It then transitioned into offering more available seats for the north county middle school families. The building itself sits in a residential area off of a main thoroughfare. As the program moved

into the larger building, the staff was required to interview for open positions within the program. Another issue with the move was the fact that athletics were available at the traditional middle school. In district choice elementary and middle schools, athletics are not an option. Once the program gained traction in the larger building, athletics were taken out as an extra-curricular activity.

The instructional staff at Appleseed has a total of 49 members with no first-year teachers. With this total, two African American and two Hispanic staff members are included. Their staff has 30% with one-to-five years' experience, 35% with 6-to-14 years' experience, and 26% with 15 years or more experience. The instructional staff has 42% with advanced degrees, and 7% who are National Board Certified Teachers.

The ethnic breakdown for Appleseed Middle School during the 2012-2013 school year was 20% minority students with 21% on free and reduced lunch.

Buckhorn Middle School Setting and Context

Buckhorn Middle School is located is the southern portion of the district. It sits on a main thoroughfare across from an executive golf course and is one of the newer schools that have been built. The reason for Buckhorn Middle School to be built was the need for more seats in the district magnet program. During the 2011-2012 school year, the original principal left the school in mid-year. He was replaced by an assistant principal who had been over the district program as a school-within-a-school high school.

One of the interesting factors at Buckhorn Middle School is the institution of a gifted program within the program. The original principal saw the need to add programs that could attract a different set of parents. As the school began to expand, this program became a feeder program for gifted elementary schools. The other interesting curriculum addition includes a

focus on the arts and the introduction of Mandarin Chinese as a world language. A field trip to China was arranged to permit their students the real-life exposure to this curriculum.

In developing this study, I wanted to ensure that a variety of families were interviewed. I attended a Parent-Teacher Association meeting which allowed me to recruit families for this study. I found very excited parents who wanted to be a part of this process. In the end, I chose families who fit into the chart of those families who were selected for the study.

As Buckhorn Middle was built, the capacity for the district program increased greatly. To ensure the building was filled to capacity, a gifted program was developed and placed within the school. The parents of the gifted program then had to agree with the policies and mandates of the district designated program. With these two programs available for open seats, the diversity of the program saw a difference. Because the school was located in the more southern part of the district, the hope was that more minority families would take advantage of the program. This is seen in contrast to Appleseed Middle School.

At Buckhorn Middle School, the ethnic breakdown was developed for the gifted program which separated from the traditional district program for the 2012-2013 school year. The total numbers of applications for both programs are found in this table.

Table 3.3
Traditional District Program

	6th grade	7th grade	8th grade	School-Wide
Total Applications	780	101	56	937
Black/Mix	32% (253)	37% (37)	27% (15)	33% (305)
Hispanic	4% (34)	3% (3)	7% (4)	4% (41)
Asian	4% (35)	0% (0)	3% (2)	3% (37)
White	60% (458)	60% (61)	63% (47)	60% (538)

During the 2012-2013 school year, Buckhorn had a minority percentage of 47% and a free and reduced lunch percentage of 39%.

Table 3.4
Buckhorn Gifted Program

	6th grade	7th grade	8th grade	School-Wide
Total Applications	319	33	13	365
Black/Mix	29% (92)	36% (12)	38% (5)	30% (109)
Hispanic	4% (11)	0% (0)	0% (0)	3% (11)
Asian	6% (20)	3% (1)	8% (1)	6% (22)
White	61% (196)	61% (20)	54% (7)	61% (223)

Table 3.5

Comparisons of Key Program Components

Themes	Applewood	Buckhorn	Conclusions
Transportation	None	Arterial busing	Allow more minority students to enroll
Leadership	Experienced Principal	New Principal in transition	Buckhorn needed more time to adjust.
Environment	Homey−family	Separated programs	Not as homey an environment Based upon separation of programs
Extra Programs	None	Gifted	Needed to fill seats when program began
Staff	Veteran	More separated due to programs	Had a direct impact on environment
Diversity	Under 20%	Over 30%	Program aimed for part of the district which had more diverse population

CHAPTER 4

DISTRICT MAGNET PROGRAM: APPLESEED MIDDLE SCHOOL

Appleseed is located in the northern section of this county school district. It began in 1994-1995, and in 2008-2009 the DMP was relocated to another middle school which offered more seats. Capacity grew from 550 students to 850 during this time frame. The percentage of minority students in the 2011-2012 school year is 19% of the total enrollment. Students on free and reduced are approximately 19% of the population.

Advantages of Program: Academics, Zero Tolerance on Behavior, and the Best Educational   Setting Available

Why it was so important for your family to be in a middle school DMP--Responses included: "Because of the accountability, organization, structured learning environment," "We chose the DMP because of its emphasis on the standards placed on students and parents. We liked the focus on academics, zero tolerance on behavior issues, the total package which are all factors that make for a great education." My son came to me and said "I like it when another student does not do their homework and is held accountable; it makes me want to make sure I don't make that mistake." He feels that everyone is treated the same."

Other parents felt that it was most important to have their children in a DMP middle school because of their belief in what the DMP could bring to them. "We wanted our child to be in DMP through his middle school years because of the transitional years between pre-teens and teenagers. We felt that this program would be the best to the safe learning environment, the culture, and the level of accountability. "We felt more comfortable with the environment where

most of the behavior and disciplinary problems were off the table, and students could focus on what they needed to be working on." "We wanted to see the transition from elementary to middle school within the DMP program, especially those kids that hate middle school, that age group tends to be the ones who push the limits more. That is just fine, but they need to have some structure with which to push against and have adults guide them on the correct path."

Another set of parents focused on the academics. "We were completely impressed by the dedication of the staff that was extended, just what the program put on the table." "First and foremost is the safe environment for kids and staff. The child can learn, the teacher can teach, and the kids are comfortable. You hear all the time about some of the traditional schools, things that are happening and you know that it will not be tolerated in a DMP."

One parent commented on the change in his son who was in a traditional elementary school and then enrolled into a middle school DMP. The older sister had gone through the program until high school but the son began his education in a traditional elementary school. "The interesting thing about him was as he entered the DMP, I saw a change. Because he had been in both types of programs there was a marked changed when he enrolled into a DMP. His personality, his school work, his approach to school and everything... everything changed. Is that all DMP or did he grow up watching his sister go through the program? I can't answer that but the distinction is definitely there."

The families were adamant on wanting their children in the DMP. As the conversation moved toward the main focus and underlying values of the program, it turned more specifically to academics and how the DMP acts as an extension of the home.

As the participants pondered the main focus of the DMP, it extended from why they originally wanted their children in the program to more specific attributes. "I want the

concentration to be on education, we want our kids to have the best education possible." "There are higher standards for the students, they have to come prepared. The accountability of the child, parents, and staff, we were sold," "This program teaches them responsibility, the discipline, the academics are phenomenal. I mean my children are, I feel, very smart, but all parents feel that way. Actually they are not the smartest kids anymore in the school so it is challenging for them. It is very good for them to realize there are kids as smart or smarter and they have to work harder."

Other participants discussed the focus on all stakeholders. "Mandated parent involvement, sign homework allows a select group of students and families that are dedicated to education. The parents say that they are willing to do whatever it takes to make sure their kids are appropriately place and toe the line. I don't want my kids to be in an environment where the other kids around them don't care about their education, the parents don't care, they are just fooling around and the teacher is just doing crowd control." "The entire family is involved, at least that is how we feel. It is actually welcoming to walk in the door and staff knows if there are any problems; either the teacher or administration will communicate with me immediately." "Having parent involvement mandated. The only two things you have to do to keep your kid in school is to sign off on the planner and attend a night monthly meeting."

There were also discussions about the underlying values that students receive by being in the program. "It teaches them responsibility, self-discipline, and structure." "There are consequences for their actions, being rewarded for doing the right thing, respecting other people, working as a team because everyone has to be on board for the program to work."

Other families found support of the moral values they had instilled in their child at home. "She came home the other day with an envelope with five dollars she had found in the hallway.

She turned it into the office and nobody claimed it so they gave it back. It is an environment where all of the families have known each other for a number of years. It is like a small town with a lot of traditional value appeal in being here." "I will say that it has traditional moral values, honesty. He did get in trouble and told the truth not knowing that he was on video tape. It is nice, especially with him being a boy, taking responsibility for his actions, which can be hard for a child his age." "My child has received a lot of life skills from this school."

Another family made a point about the culture of the school. "The teachers and administration show the kids they really care. The teachers want to be here and it shows them that education is important. The teachers and administration truly love the students."

One of the predominant thoughts about the district magnet program is the culture that is expected of all families. Because parents and students must sign an agreement to remain in good standing within the program, there is an inherent comfort level that all will abide by the policies of the school and program. When asked how important it was for all families to be on the same page, responses included: "to make sure your kids are working their way upward through middle school, the same expectations by all is of most importance." "It is absolutely important, my child was in private school and we were not that impressed. I had heard about the DMP but really was not listening. Once she received an invitation we absolutely accepted it. The DMP was like a private school without the religious education. It is a great environment for our kids; it has grown since we started. There is a smaller, nicer environment, we know more people. Even with the growth of the program, we are still very satisfied because we have people at the top that care about our kids."

There are other families who showed a concern about the large amount of students who were allowed into the program as the original DMP expanded into a regular middle school to add

seats. The families who originally enrolled in the traditional middle school were allowed to stay as long as they signed the agreement. Part of the concern was the thought that the program may be watered down because of non-district magnet students being allowed to be part of the program. "I worry about it sometimes because I truly wanted my kids to have the best education and I was not sure if the program could be controlled with the larger number of non-DMP students." "It can be a problem at times but I am not terribly worried about it. The kids that are used to DMP know what the expectations are. They will help the student who is struggling with DMP processes if they can. I don't have a problem with the transition." One of the most interesting and telling quotes I received was "I believe that all students should have the opportunity to enroll into the DMP program, but if you are not serious about school or don't want to be there, don't be around my kids because they are there to learn and I don't want anyone getting in their way."

There were many benefits of the DMP that were brought up during the interviews. I asked the participants what were their top three benefits the DMP provided. The top three listed in priority: a) accountability - "I like the fact that everyone is required to meet a certain standard." "It makes me want to be a better mom because I am held accountable for my son's education." b) superior education - "through the staff, teachers, and children - all have chosen to raise the bar on educational experience." "my children's love of learning, they like the school, they like learning, and at this school they have learned how to learn." c) safe learning environment - there is no tolerance for disruptive students." "When I drop my kid off here, I am not worried that anything is going to happen. I think the program builds discipline and responsibility. It is a required expectation." "You cannot protect them from everything but they are in a more protected environment here." The other benefit seen from the majority of

participants was the culture of the school. They were most comfortable with having a situation in which all children were held to the same standards and the school had processes in place to deal with disruptive students if there was a pattern.

Commitment and Accountability of Students, Parents, and Staff

Once a family commits to the DMP, the student must sign an agreement that basically states that there will not be any behavior or academic issues. They know homework must be completed and signed by the parent. The parents were asked what their children had to do to maintain their status: "Do your homework and get it signed, follow the dress code, and get to school on time." "It is no more than any other school's expectation, except the fact that if they don't do it they could be dismissed." "They have to adhere to the program expectations and guidelines. They have to work closely with the teachers. My son has been supported in the traditional program, but the DMP is a different level of commitment, I feel on both sides it is successful." "I have had three children go through the program; my youngest never has a problem with keeping up with homework and a responsibility, my middle child has learned to prioritize her time and organize to make sure there are no issues. My oldest one is now in high school, hard telling what the hell she is doing but I don't hear anything bad." "They have to pay attention. Because it is not an environment of child care, they do realize the value of their education how it propels forward and they will need it later on as they pursue different avenues in their life." "He cannot fall short at any time; it is an everyday process for him. If he decides to stand down a little, it can be overwhelming for him; it really has to be consistent." "I have to think that it is every child's responsibility to know what is in the agreement they sign. They come to school; they are here to learn so the homework and other expectations are just what they should be doing anyway. The only other thing that is above and beyond the traditional program

69

is the dress code. Every child should have to do this. It helps them pay more attention in class and they are going to try their hardest, they are not going to do ridiculous things."

The parents are also required to sign an agreement before their child begins their first day of school for each year. Parents are required to attend one monthly night meeting, they must sign their children's homework, ensure there will not be a behavior issue and to attend required conferences if scheduled. I asked the participants about the sacrifices they must go through to make sure their child remains in good standing. Some of the responses included: "Driving your kid to and from school every day gets old at times. Figuring out how to balance their school expectations as well as their outside activities can be a struggle." "I don't mind the sacrifice because it is their education. There is so much pressure on the kids and if you can keep them in an environment; there is still going to be peer pressure, still going to be some nonsense but at least it is more of a controlled environment." "In order for DMP to work, it has to be a total engagement by the family and done no matter what hoop you have to jump through to keep my kid in the program. The main thing is that my son likes it, he feels comfortable, he learns, and because of the home expectations, he is required to excel." "It is important for my wife and me to make sure there are no issues. We had three different children in three different DMP's. We then had to attend three different night meetings, but we made it work because it was important to us and to our children."

Some parents suggested that they go beyond the required expectations, particularly those families who have children with special education needs; "on my part, I work with my child every day. My son and I sit down for an hour or two and go through his agenda book very thoroughly. We go through his homework, we go through upcoming projects, and we put together a timeline. We are very close to the guidance counselors at school and we reach out to

teachers if we need help. It is tough because my son has ADD and we definitely struggle to maintain him in the program because of his organizational and focus challenges. He and I work together; it's more of a partnership, definitely collaboration and I feel we have a lot of support from the teachers and staff at the school." "As a parent coming from a traditional middle school into a DMP middle school, I don't think my role has changed much. With my son's ADD, I have always been involved with the teachers, guidance counselors, and administration so not much has changed. I feel that the environment around us has changed. I use to have a weekly one-on-one meeting with his teachers but now it is part of the culture and we are part of this school community. I feel like we fit in because everybody has that level of involvement and commitment for their student."

Because of the high expectations that are experienced by the student and parent, I wanted to know if the roles were reverse, especially in the field of expectations toward school staff. Responses included: "I did have high expectations but they certainly have met them. I would expect that if I and my child are held to a higher expectation then I could expect more from all staff." I expect the school to communicate with me through email or phone call. Because the grades are posted online, I can help the teacher make sure my child is doing what they are supposed to do. However, I also want to make sure the teacher is keeping up with their grades online." "They DMP staff exceeded my expectations. They showed my kids that they cared. Kids know it when the teachers and administrators are real. In private school, it is actually pretty fake, here, they feel, these kids are part of their family and I didn't feel that at the private school, even though I was there for a long time."

Pressure and Stress of the District Magnet Program

Because of the looming possibility of dismissal, there is an inherent amount of stress on students and parents. Within the program, if a student misbehaves or has ten or more demerits caused by missed homework two times in a six week period, they will be forced to face an Intervention Academic Committee (IAC). This committee makes a recommendation to the principal on the status of the student and family. They can be placed on probation for as little as six weeks or for the rest of the year, depending upon the circumstances. Students may also be dismissed because parents do not meet the monthly meeting requirement. If a parent misses two or more meetings during the school year, the child can be dismissed at the end of the year. Participants were asked about the pressure their family faces by being enrolled in the program: "I think it is challenging for a child even without a special need to maintain because it is different, especially if the child is coming from a traditional elementary school. We had to go through an acclimation period. In a traditional school, if you don't do an assignment, what is the true consequence? The parents aren't really sure if the work is being done or not." "It took us a full year to become acclimated to the program. I find it fair and reasonable for teaching my child to be accountable for their own success, but we struggle at times with the demerits. We have to pay special attention that we don't get close enough to go in front of the IAC."

Others felt there was no extra stress. Their comments included: "There is some stress, but the program takes away all of the other stress, such as distractions." "There really is no extra stress. I will be honest with you, when I finished looking at the programs, I didn't see any other options. He was not going to his close-to-home middle school; I checked into private school education but was not impressed." "I have not seen any extra stress. My kids were in private school and the DMP is more disciplined than there." "It holds the parents accountable to make

sure their child has to follow the policies of the program. My child will not suffer because of me not doing my job."

Every parent has a certain concern that their student could be dismissed because of breaking a probationary status for too many demerits or for a disciplinary issue. I asked the participants what was plan B. Responses included: "I don't think I have one, but he sure wouldn't be homeschooled!!" "Plan B would be their zone middle school. I have just heard about bad situations at that school, plan C would be to look into a private school but financially it would be a stretch. I also have to think about my younger children who can have a seat at the district magnet middle school because of sibling priority. If my older child is dismissed, my younger children could then be in jeopardy of losing their seat." "I would have to look at private school but I am not impressed with them. It is very difficult for parents who want to do the right thing by their child and make the extra effort to ensure they stay within the program. I am making this sound like life and death, but it is not a happy alternative." "Yea, I do have a plan B but I will never tell my child that. She is a late bloomer and she has gotten it a lot better this year. I am resilient and I am not willing to let her collapse, she has to pull her own weight. Can it be stressful—it depends on the child. Do we all need stress in our life—yes. We cannot always live a care-free life. Stress is good; it is the amount to stress that causes the issues." "If my son was kicked out, he would go to his traditional middle school. It would affect them badly. I don't care what school you go to, you have to find something that works for you. You just have to put this aside and you don't normally get there and you can get whatever you want out of the school you attend."

Leadership

The principal at Appleseed has been there for a number of years and has built a rapport with the families. At School Advisory Council and Parent Teacher Association meetings, he will take some time out the meeting to discuss important issues directly involving the school or social issues that affect middle school students. As I was discussing the expectations of school staff, an overwhelming amount of participants discussed the effectiveness of the principal. "The principal of this school - this man loves these kids. They all do. He almost had me in tears the other night at the SAC meeting when he was talking about how much he cares about them and I thought, wow, this is not what it was like at the private school that I came from. It sure wasn't like that. Why would you even think of being at a traditional school, there is nothing to win from there." "I don't mind going to meetings at all because I know that administration is bringing important issues to the parents. Some of the topics have been mind-blowing. We heard about what was going to be expected in high school, we had a topic on drugs, we had a topic on the use of Facebook. I am 47 years old and didn't give two thoughts about this until I saw those pictures of the kids that had died. They didn't even know what they were doing possibly; we then get to have conversations with our kids to make sure they don't do that."

Diversity

One of the concerns to the DMP is the number of minority students within the program. At Appleseed, the diversity is nineteen percent but has dwindled to five percent at the only full district magnet high school. Participants were asked about the lack of diversity within the DMP program. Responses included: "There is a lack of diversity within the DMP. I think that it is a huge negative. I believe that minority families do want their children in the DMP, but they may not be able to make the required parent meetings or are not able to drive their kids to and from

school. The only busing at this school is on the public transportation bus and some parents don't trust that. You lose a certain amount of diversity and you don't have that, you go into the workforce you can't survive. The workforce is now diversified. This is a real problem in my opinion. If you want to have a successful program, you have to find a way to make it work across the board. "

Making a Difference: Success and Parent Engagement

Because of being a part of DMP, I asked the participants what difference they really made. Their responses included: "Because I am so involved, it makes everyone be a part of the process, it really is a team effort." "It makes a difference to my child that I am involved. We are not doing the work for them but rather we are there with them hand in hand. We are truly connected to the school." "It demonstrates to our children that we are serious about their education and they better be serious too. We have to do more stuff than the average parent." "I am not as involved in middle school as I was in elementary school; there seems to me less need for me here." "Because I am so involved, it helps set boundaries for my son to know that I am here for him and the staff. I think he realizes that the staff here really cares for him; they are not just running their mouths. He realizes they have his best interest at heart." "It is just normal for me to be around, if I wasn't, I think she would believe it was weird. It helps them to know that I care, that they are important to me." "We have met great families in this program who have similar values as ours. When you can be with like-minded individuals who pay attention to what their kids are doing, and want them in a structured environment, that is going to help them succeed, it is helping set yourself up to have better success to avoid some trouble." "I have been helping throughout my child's entire educational experience so I know a lot of these kids. When I

come into the school, the kids say Hi to me, so not only have I influenced my children but I hope I have been able to influence others."

Because these parents wanted to ensure their children were in the DMP, I was curious about how this program helped them gain their final educational goal for their children: "The DMP teaches you what you need in life. You need accountability, you need structure, you need organization, and you need a good work ethic. All of that is what you need to carry you through life." "The DMP has put a true focus on education. Not so much on sports and all the other things that can take away from the quality of education. The foundation has been made and the end will be attainable." "He is held at higher standards which I expect out of him." "In our family, education is the number one priority. The DMP is a primary preparatory program that will assist them into their higher education, getting into a good college, and succeeding in life. Not only through academics, but everything they learn here including responsibility, organization, and being respectful." "The requirements they put on them develops them into responsible young people. It is going to develop them, give them what they need to follow through in high school." "He has gained what he needs to move on to the next level. He still has organizational skills to work on and if he needs help, there is a woman right here to help. I am thrilled that my kids were able to go through this process."

Implications of District Magnet Program: Supply and Demand, Perceptions of the Program

Because of the demand for the program, I asked the participants what they say to perspective families who are on the fence about taking a chance and applying for the program. Participants responded: "I tell them that you have to decide how important your child's education is, but is there something that would prevent you from making that sacrifice for your child, their education, their future. If you can do it, it is absolutely worth the effort." "I definitely tell them to

look into the programs offered by the schools, talk to administration, get some information to make sure they understand what the program is and to make sure they want to be part of it." "I believe choosing the DMP takes a lot of effort, even just to apply. They don't necessarily make it easy for you to apply. You have to do your homework, have to be willing to research even to apply. But you tell them that the benefits so much outweigh any effort you have to make." "I tell them that academic excellence is icing on the cake. I tell them about the small town aspect or feel. I tell them to get on the list. You may not make it into the school but you would be crazy not to put your name of the list and try." "I tell them that if you give up the opportunity, you will not get it back unless by the grace of God. It has a lot to do with how much the kid wants it and how much the parents will make their child endure." "It is a no brainer!! What could you get better at a traditional school? I can't think of anything. Coming here is like family." "You would be a fool not to try. Is this about you and how convenient it is for you to drive twenty-five minutes to take your child to and from school? If you don't try, don't try to come back next year because you are going to be on that big old waitlist again. You won't get in if you don't apply."

There are many perceptions of the DMP. I wanted feedback on perceptions of families within the DMP, and those that could not get in the DMP. Those families our participants spoke to about the program who were not able to get in had the following reactions: "The number one response I get is "I have never heard of it --don't know anything about it. I went to this traditional elementary school and my children are going to attend there." "Why aren't there more opportunities for children to start in this program? Why have I been on the waitlist for six years? When is somebody going to recognize what a great program this is and give more students and families an opportunity to be a part of it?" "I came from out of state, so I didn't know what the terms district magnet programs meant. It was hard for me to find a person who I could call and

find out." "Most of the conversations that I have had are "Gee, I tried to get in but I could not." The other thing I hear the most is that they can't come because they don't have transportation." "I am sorry for them—if they really want it. It is really hard when you want your kids in." "I hear people say that the DMP is too strict for my child. I don't find it any worse or strict than what I expected to begin with. I do have people that have seen their child become stressed out and they took them out of the program." "I have heard people say that it would not work for them, I don't think my child would fit it. Why would I want people hovering over my child? I heard another parent say that it would be a step back for me to sign their homework. The one had a very irresponsible child and she thinks the way to make him responsible is letting him do it on his own, the other one has a very responsible child and thinks that I don't want to take a step back by starting all over."

The perceptions of those families within the DMP included: "It is overwhelmingly positive. Some have been through it from day one and some are newcomers to the middle school program. We applaud those parents who will do whatever they have to do to keep their kids in school." "It is the best thing that anyone could be a part of. It is very structured, not a lot of discipline problems, they feel their kids really get a one-on-one attention they deserve, they love it!!"

Being a former administrator of a DMP high school, I have heard terms from those families who were not been able to get into the program, as well as those who had received seats as entitled, exclusionary, and elitist. I asked the participants how they responded to these terms: "You see it sometimes from the school board members; some are not sure about this program. From a parent's perspective they just wish they could have their children in an environment where there are minimal disruptions. I don't want to call it jealously, but you are here for a

reason. For me it is about the bottom line." "It is like not getting into the club that everyone wants. None of my black friends applied for this program because that was not how they were raised, neither was I but I feel like each generation should want better for their kids." "They don't like the fact that they have to sign papers, tired of having to look at things, why should they want to do that?" "Who are we excluding? I guess it means that you are going to get rid of the parents who didn't want to be involved, with the kids who didn't want to follow the program. I am not entitled to anything. Entitlement is when you feel that you should be giving me everything. There are some parents that feel they are entitled; they feel you should do everything for them. I believe the onus is on the parent and child to achieve and strive to do better." "I am all three of these—we did what we were supposed to do going into kindergarten. My child was fifth on the waitlist and when I received the invitation, I said that I will be down to the school tomorrow and sign the papers. I didn't call anyone to ask how can you get my child into the program, it is not how it works, it is a lottery and you have to take advantage once you get the invitation. I hear those comments that we paid our way to get in here—it doesn't make any sense, it really doesn't. It the same process for everyone. If you can't get in—you can't get in." "I have heard the term exclusionary. There are some parents with kids in the DMP that think they are better than everyone else, but I don't hear that all of the time" You may want to say—you're right—you're right, but that is just nuts quite frankly. Maybe some parents do, but I think we are proud of the fact and feel fortunate that we are part of the program." "We feel amazingly blessed, absolutely. It is a gift. It is a privilege to be in this school. The quality of education proves it." "I don't feel entitled because it took me two years to receive an invitation in fourth grade. We applied every year and finally got in."

During the last application period for the 2012-2013 school year, over 9000 applications were turned in for magnet seats, with the majority for DMP. Because of the overwhelming support for the DMP there are not enough seats for all the families requesting. When I gave this question to the participants, I was looking for their first responses without really thinking about the question. Responses included: "Amazing−it clearly says the DMP is doing something right. The kids are not getting what they need because of the disruption in the traditional middle school." "I would say an overwhelming majority of people want to get into the program." "I am having some trouble with the bigger they make it, the better chance the program will be watered down. If your kid comes to school and they are not ready to do what they need to do, they are not going to make it." "I think the word has gotten out about the quality of education in the DMP. Because of the economy, there are a number of families who cannot afford private school. Just looking at pure education, I am much more satisfied here than I was in the private school." "I am not surprised. Why doesn't the district do something about it? I feel privileged and blessed that my kids are in this program. It is unfortunate that there are wonderful families out there who don't get this opportunity." "The county needs to do something about that. If there are that many people wanting their child to go to the DMP, they need to make it happen. It is not going to cost them any more money than running a traditional school."

Because of the demand for seats in the FP K-12, I wanted to know the participants' impression on how the DMP affects the school district. The first question asked was "Is the DMP good for every family in the district? The participants struggled with this one because they had encountered so much success by being a part of the program. Responses included: "No, I don't believe the DMP is good for every family, they don't agree with how the program operates. I spoke with one parent who said that it would hinder his creativity and who he is as a person. The

DMP is more like a military school and I don't want my child in that type of environment."
No−not all families is made by the same cookie-cutter." "You have some families and students
who would not be able to survive in this culture. Other families have students with special needs
who believe this program would not be the right fit." "I don't think it is good for everyone in
today's society. Twenty years ago I would have said yes but, our society has lowered the bar so
much. It would be hard to raise the bar and get this group to be successful. Coming from that
point in society and our culture in this day and age, it might be too much for everybody, but I
still think it would be beneficial for most." "Some parents don't want to be involved, it is almost
offensive to them that a teacher would care about their kid or be involved to wonder what is
going on in the home, they would find that intrusive."

Other families could see both sides of the argument: "It could be. It starts with the parent,
first they have to commit. Even if the parent is not educated in all that it takes, I think that adults
can learn just like children." "I would like for it to be. You would like people to want the best for
their kids." "Yes and no−is it, of course yes, but realistically will all families be able to make the
effort? I don't think they can the way it is now." "It should be but I know it is not. Ideally if you
have a child, you should want your child to have the best they can have. You should want them
to succeed." One other participant was adamant that it was good for every family. They
responded: "It should be a requirement. There is a 51% dropout rate in the county−you have any
other answers?"

The next question dealt with the effect of the DMP on traditional middle schools. The
majority of participants believed there would be a large effect on the traditional middle schools
losing students and parents to the DMP. "I don't know how much of an effect there is. Some
parents believe that my kid is just going to get through school and hopefully graduate high

81

school." "I think it wreaks havoc on the traditional middle school because they are seeing that we are getting much more. Our children are succeeding so much more. We are rocking the boat for traditional schools because they are not stepping up." "It makes the traditional middle school look bad because our scores are consistently better." "That is a tough question—I think the DMP is pulling some very committed families out of the traditional programs. There are other families that are still there, still involved, and still committed but there is not as many." "Because you are taking the best students and families, it creates an imbalance at the traditional middle schools."

The last question revolved around the DMP and if it was good for the district as a whole to have a possible disparity between the traditional middle schools and DMP middle schools. Reactions included: "I don't think there is a problem that it shouldn't be demanded in every school." "Yes—I think it is good for the district. But I do not feel that every family should be forced into the DMP if they don't want to participate." I believe the next statement summed this section very well. "No—I don't think it is good for the district but let's be honest. The fact that the program does exist tells you the story. We are going to take advantage of the best opportunity that is available to us."

Summary

During these interviews, I observed families who loved their children very much and would move mountains to enroll them into the best educational program. They chose the DMP because of the superior educational experience it provides for them. I also surmised that they would want all families to have the opportunity to be in the program if all would follow the processes. They did not have time for those families who did not take education or the DMP seriously. They did not have patience for parents who did the minimal requirements, but they did have sympathy for those families who had a single parent and would hope the school would be

82

flexible in meeting requirements. The participants were extremely loyal to the program and to the entire staff of the school. They especially said the teachers and principal were phenomenal. They could not say enough about their experiences within the program and the extension the school had with the family. When I asked them for any final thoughts, you could see and hear the emotion in their voice: "My husband and I cried when we found out we got in for middle school. We feel amazingly blessed, it is a gift. It is a privilege to be in this school, the quality of education proves it." "I feel very honored, privileged to be a part of the DMP. I do feel for the families who are waiting to get into the program." "We have been so fortunate to have our kids in this program. We want to make sure we got our youngest one through before the district screws it up." We were so excited when he was accepted. I now know where my younger children are going to be and I could not be happier."

Another interesting thought from the interviews was the mandated parent involvement. Why would parents need to be mandated to be involved in their child's education? I believe that all families would want the best for their children. What comes to mind would be the amount of effort needed to ensure they were successful. Another thought that came to mind was could specific district magnet policies transition to a traditional school? The required homework for incoming sixth graders or ninth graders at the high school level could be something that could be installed in a traditional program. Currently in the DMP high school setting, a ninth grade student is required to have their homework signed by the parent for the entire year. If the student achieves a grade point average of 3.0 or higher, the requirement is waived beginning in the tenth grade year. If the student dips below the grade point requirement, then they will need to have the homework signed again until their grades rise to acceptable levels. I found these interviews to be very thought provoking and will help me be a better principal. As the assistant principal within

the district magnet program, I found students who have been invited during the school year have a much harder time adjusting. This was especially true at the end of the semester. Students from other high schools who were invited into the program, at times, were two to three chapters behind. This was especially true in math. The students were very nice and cared very much for their education, but returned to their zone school within a month because the DMP was too much for them. Within the interviews I also saw the need for the very best teaching staff possible. It was apparent with the parents that the teaching staff was a major reason why the program was most successful.

CHAPTER 5

DISTRICT MAGNET PROGRAM: BUCKHORN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Buckhorn Middle School is located is the southern area of the same county school district. It sits on a main thorough-fare across from an executive golf course. Buckhorn is one of the newer schools in the district. The reason for Buckhorn to be built was the need for more seats in the district magnet program, particularly in the southern part of the district, which allowed for more minority students to be enrolled. During the 2011-2012 school year, the original principal left the school in mid-year. He was replaced by an assistant principal who had been over the DMP as a school-within-a-school high school program.

One of the interesting factors at Buckhorn is the institution of a gifted program. The original principal saw the need to add programs that could attract a different set of parents. As the school originated, this program became a feeder program for gifted elementary schools. The other interesting curriculum notes include a focus on the arts and the introduction of Mandarin Chinese as a world language. They also made a field trip to China to allow their students the exposure to this curriculum.

Advantages of Program: Academics, Zero Tolerance on Behavior, Student Accountability, and the Best Educational Setting Available

The parents of Buckhorn Middle School were very accommodating to this study. They seemed interested in wanting this study to be published and the public knowing more specific details about the DMP. More than one of the parents told me this study should be shared with

district and state education leaders to show them what can be done with when parents are mandated to be involved with their child's education.

When asked why it was important for their children to attend a DMP middle school, parents stated: "the selling point of this school was the staff." "The small community feel of the school was what drew me." "We like the expectation of parent participation. People choose to be here and are not stuck here. The students are in a safe environment." "I was not going to send my children to any public middle school. I came to an open house here and the principal convinced me that this was the right place. I came for the gifted program and it has been the right move." "I worked in school districts in Chicago and Houston and this county does not do a good job with students who are disruptive. The DMP is the only way I felt I could get my children a decent public education."

Both school families saw the importance of a safe environment and a high quality staff being an important factor on why they enrolled their children into the DMP. The accountability piece was also a huge factor for both schools—the issue that if a student or a parent did not live up to the agreement would mean they would be dismissed from the program. This factor was important to parents because of the minimal disruption their children would be exposed to.

As the question about the main focus of the DMP was asked, the following patterns and statements were observed: "controlling the behavior patterns of children. By encouraging the students to do better or to move them forward by placing them in higher level courses." "Mandated parent accountability: The parents take responsibility for their children's actions." "The school is really good in making sure the kids succeed. The teachers are more dedicated than most teachers I have seen. They work very hard to accommodate the gifted students, kids that learn differently or think differently." "I believe there is a huge correlation between parent

involvement and academic, emotional, and social success of children. That was huge for me." "I wanted the DMP for the gifted program. I wanted my child to be challenged both academically and socially. I really did want them in a stricter environment with very high standards."

The underlying values of the DMP were listed as the following: "The single biggest value with this program is to help students achieve independence. They have to be accountable for their education and I see it helping my child grow." "My child is very organized, structured, focused, and actually data driven. He is on the Portal system to find out what he is missing or what grade he received on an assignment." "The gifted classes have made him be more challenged. He was lackadaisical which he cannot be in this program. He has to focus which is hard for him because gifted kids are flighty, they make you be organized." "Exposure to the arts, the variety of classes that are made available to them based upon their learning level." "The kids become responsible, respectful and rule followers who do take an active interest in learning. I don't see kids who struggle not trying–they really try to get better."

I found in this section that Appleseed Middle School had a more intense factor in the area of the program being an extension of the home. This is not to say Buckhorn parents did not believe that it was not important, what I found at Appleseed was a yearning for the school to be an extension of the home. I believe it was because Appleseed was more of a homey environment than Buckhorn. The Appleseed parents reflected that the principal of the school treated all of the students like family, which was not seen at Buckhorn because of the leadership transition.

When parents were asked what were the three main benefits of the DMP, the following observations were noted–"the connections to real-life experiences, structure and processes, and accountability." If you want to have a good career, all of these are important. "It is parent involvement, the safe school environment, and the opportunity to know that he is doing what he

is supposed to." "What he is learning is invaluable, the kids have the same expectations so it is easier to fit in, and the teachers and administrators are so educated they are good role models." "My kids were accelerated, enriched, and pushed academically in all subject areas. The other thing is that my child still has friends from her elementary DMP. That is a huge benefit."

I asked the question about the importance of having all students and parents on the same page with the possibility of dismissal if all expectations were not followed. The majority of parents felt that culture was a major factor in the success of the DMP. The responses were generalities of the parents interviewed. "It is very important because you are the company that you keep. I want my children to be leaders, not followers." "We teach our kids that school is like work and the expectations at work are that you come and perform your job and duties. You get paid to get good grades." "We had a rough first year becoming acclimated to the program. I had not signed a single piece of paper in elementary school but now I had to stay on top of everything." "I like coming to a school where the expectation is that teachers can teach and not be glorified baby-sitters. I like this school because students and parents have expectations and if they don't meet them, they will need to find another school. That does not mean the school will not try everything in their power to support the child and the family." "In elementary school students and parents must be trained in the DMP. If you are really into this program and this is what you want, then you will make it work."

Both sets of parents specifically commented on the culture of the school. They stressed that it was vital that all students and parents were on the same page under the same stipulations. They did not want their children to be exposed to students who did not have the same education focus as they did. I did find at Appleseed some feelings of concern about allowing more DMP seats to be made available. The concern was the watering down of the program which they

believed in the end could hurt the program. However, both sets of parents believed that it was important for families to have the opportunity to be in a DMP.

Commitment and Accountability of Student, Parents, and Staff

Once a child is enrolled into a DMP, they too have to agree and sign an agreement to hold onto their seat. When the parents were asked what children had to do to hold onto their seat, the following statements were recorded: "He has to remember to get everything signed." "He complains about the amount of homework, he is a slow, steady worker. He cannot just zip through it. I believe there is too much but we agreed to be in this program, so he has to do what he has to do." "She likes the program because it is so structured and she understands what is expected and what is desired from her teachers." "My child has to communicate with her teachers about work especially if she has missed some days." "I told my daughter that it is not my job to remind her about homework. It has taught her better independence." "She has really taken responsibility for her own education."

Both schools agreed that the student must take more responsibility by adhering to the homework requirement. They also believed that it made the child communicate more clearly with the teacher to ensure they had all of the information needed to complete the homework correctly.

Parents are also required to sign the DMP agreement to ensure their children hang on to their seat. When asked what it takes to be accountable for this to happen, I heard the following six common statements: "I am committed to having my child have a better education than I did." I have to come to the monthly meetings, sign the homework. It keeps me more involved when they are studying." "We have to be aware of what the teachers are requiring." "I chose this school

even though it was farther away. I make sure she is here every day and if she misses a day, then she is responsible for communicating with the teachers and making up the work."

One of the parents has a child with special needs. This gave me a different look at parent commitment. "My commitment is huge. When you have a child with special needs, I am not sure the DMP knows what to do in accommodating them. At times, I have had to really push and go above the administration to get my child what law entitles them to get. Sometimes I don't feel the DMP does a service to children who don't fit the mold." What does this mold look like? I was keenly aware about those students with disabilities and how much harder they worked to be successful within the program. Unfortunately, a number of parents with special needs students did not choose to attend the program because of their worries. However; some parents were even more adamant to have their children within the program. At the high school I was part of, there was not a self-contained special education unit that was found at one of the district magnet middle schools. Parents petitioned the state to have this added, and it was. I had one parent continuously tell me "I will get what I want because I have the phone number of the Governor". Her child graduated last year.

Most parents at the two programs believed the parents had three major responsibilities. They were to make sure their children did the homework and to sign off, to make sure there were no behavior issues, and to attend parent meetings. The major concern was the parent meetings. Some parents had issues with the night meetings because of their work schedules. Those parents who had meeting issues found there was little flexibility to make up meetings and either had to change their work schedule or to voluntarily withdraw.

The participants were asked their feelings about having higher expectations for staff especially since there were higher expectations for students and parents. The following

statements came out: "I am appreciative of what they do. I don't expect any more of them. I did expect more from the traditional school teachers and was disappointed." "No - I feel that there are very high standards and very high commitment from the teachers." "Children are embraced and guided there."

Other families did have a higher expectation for the staff. "At the elementary school, I could go in a see the principal whenever I wanted. It is much harder here. I have an easier time having conversations with the assistant principal. I think it is just because the school is so much bigger." "I had a problem with one teacher, and tried to work it out with her. When I didn't hear from her then I went to the principal and I heard from her that afternoon."

Pressure and Stress of District Magnet Program

Because of the inherit demands of the program, the question about the stress the DMP puts on families became relevant. I asked about the pressure and stress on students and parents, as well as, what would plan B be if the DMP did not work out. "We only focus on plan A which is to keep my child in this program, but we always have a plan B just in case." "I see my friends who go crazy because their child got a "D". I had to tell her to relax, but pressure is the nature of this program." "Initially there was pressure because of the night meetings. I have all sorts of time in the morning to volunteer but that does not count, it has to be a night meeting."

"I really don't have a plan B. He has never had an issue meeting expectations, but if there was a problem, I would have to do some research into private and traditional public schools."

"Plan B would be for me to teach her. I have seen parents who have had their child dismissed from the DMP and they look as if they are a little relieved because the pressure is off, but I have seen others who have walked out really dejected because this is the last thing they wanted to have happen."

Other parents did not believe there was any stress to be in the program: "I don't think there is any more pressure. We have a process at home and he knows what the expectations are. He also plays sports outside of school. I am also going back to school, so the expectations are high in my home. It depends on your dedication to education." "I have a similar system in our home. I want him to be successful as a man, not just a successful sixth grader." "I don't believe the program added any more pressure. What I saw was the normal pressure from transitioning elementary to middle school."

Stress and pressure within the program depended upon the family structure itself and not so much the schools. Some parents believed there was little or no pressure because the student was expected to have no issues either academically or behaviorally. Parents of children with special needs had another opinion. They believed there was major pressure on the student and parents to maintain their seat within the program. It was a constant worry, especially if they were put on probation by the IAC for demerits or behavior issues.

Leadership

Buckhorn Middle had a leadership transition in the middle of the year. When the interviews were conducted, the new principal had been there less than a month. Participants spoke about the former principal and what they hoped to see from the new principal. "Under good leadership, you can have good control over your population without excluding anyone. You can put your regiment in place to help kids who otherwise would have nowhere else to go."

"The former principal knew the name of each child even when there were over 900 students. It was amazing. Many principals aspire to do that, but he really could match the parents to their children at the monthly night meetings." "I don't think the school is homey, but middle school is not usually warm and fuzzy. I think the principal has to take care of what the state

92

needs for them to do and they cannot have a homey environment but I think that is what parents want." "This is a sink-or-swim environment. You have to come into this system with the survival skills needed. How amazing that would be if they actually showed parents how to navigate the DMP." "When the new principal got here for the first parent meeting, he had everyone shake hands with someone they did not know. My husband said that he was going to reach out to more folks he did not know for the rest of the year. We need to do more of that. The communication has to get better because our students were not really aware when there was a change of principals." "Our former principal was a real visionary who took this school from a catch-all school to one in which the students could develop their creative side. I hope the new principal will really communicate with all of us. Communication was lacking with the former principal. We want to be a group, not individuals. We want to move everyone forward because we are not just about supporting our kids; we want to support all of the kids here. That is what DMP is all about."

Diversity

As the program was designed and developed at the southern district magnet program, diversity was a leading factor. Since there is a larger faction of minorities who live in the southern part of the county, it made sense to the district to develop this school into a DMP to allow more seats available for minority students. Twenty-four percent of the school population is made up of minority students.

"I tell minority parents that the program is worth the drive. I am responsible for him and his education. It all goes into the commitment. I know some minority parents are concerned about transportation, and some are single parents and they cannot make the parent meetings every month. "A lot of them do not want to feel that burden or pressure to keep their child within

the program. Some are scared of the commitment. "Some minority parents were not successful when they went to school and are not sure on how to support their children." "I think location of the high school may make a difference. Some families are content with their close-to-home high school because of the things offered. They believe once the middle school years are navigated, high school will be successful no matter where they go." "Right now the DMP is not considered to be a part of the fabric of the educational system for the district. Right now the perception might be that there this program is something else and I can't get into it." "Many people look at the busing thing strictly as a way of excluding the lower class, but I am thinking they are doing everything they can to save on busses. With the high schools having more seats, I am hopeful more minority families will take advantage of the program." There were many different opinions on why some minority families did not choose the DMP. The majority of parents I spoke with believed the program would be beneficial for minority families. Could this type of DMP be able to eliminate the achievement gap between blacks and non-blacks?

Making a Difference: Success and Parent Involvement

Parents were asked how their involvement in this program really made a difference in their child's life. "My motivation filters through me to my children. You don't shortchange yourself. I put in the drive and he knows how important it is, I talk education all of the time."

"They have known since grade school that they were going to college; that has never been a question. "I know I have high standards for him, high expectations, every belief that there is nothing he cannot accomplish." "I want him to attend a high school DMP for two years, then go to early college so at the end of his high school tenure, he will have a high school diploma and an associate's diploma from college." "I have kept my son in this school. My wife has been

in the district fourteen years as a science coach. We understand the importance of education. I can truly say our involvement has kept my son alive here."

These parents certainly had a game plan for their children to have a post-secondary opportunity after high school. I asked them how the DMP supported in their educational plan for their children.

"You are setting a good example now on how college will be in the future. It encourages them to move forward academically in helping them plan for what is available after high school."

"My objective is to open every door that can be because I want him to have every option he can have." "The DMP provides a positive road map from middle school to high school and then beyond." "It is the educational standard, the standards of discipline, and the standard of decorum which I feel builds the child's self-esteem and the desire to do well."

District Implications of District Magnet Program

When asked what you tell families who are on the fence about applying for the program, the following statements were given. "I tell them it is an individual thing. Those friends who own a business, it might not be the right move because of the meetings." I try not to convince them, but tell them to look at themselves and determine if that time you would be spending driving your child to school, the time you are spending signing homework, going to meetings, it is worth knowing that they are in a safe place getting a great education." "They don't have anything to lose by trying to apply. I have a friend who was having a hard time deciding between DMP and private school. She thought her quality of life might decrease if she enrolled into DMP because of the homework and how much is involved when coming here. Her daughter has learning disabilities and it would take a lot of night time activities to be enrolled in DMP." "I know several people who wish they had applied sooner so they could enroll in DMP so they can go

through high school without the worry of being in a school that did not have a safe environment."

One of the parents had a more specific observation. "I have a master's degree in mental health and work as a mental health counselor. I put on workshops for the community on how to understand the school choice process. I knew it would take parents a long time to figure out the system. Parent education about navigating the choice process and conducting research on magnet programs is a must."

The perceptions of the DMP are divided into three sections. The first section to be discussed is those families who were currently enrolled in the program. "I hear them say they really like the program. They want their child here but there are some children who do not want to be here. They are the ones that act out. I have not heard anything negative from those who are in the program." "When you are in a magnet program and you hear about DMP, the one thing you hear is that it is a lot more rigid. Once they were enrolled, some parents were upset. A friend had to go in front of the IAC committee because she would not sign homework. She was looking to withdraw but I told her to give it some time so her child could get use to the system. It has worked out better for them. "There is an agreement that there is too much homework. The majority of communication is about homework and that caused one parent to leave the program—that surprised me. Compared to traditional middle schools, I would rather make sure the homework is completed." "I heard one parent describe it as a private school at a public school price. Parents who are engaged are familiar with each other, and if they continue through the DMP, they help each other out." "It used to be that this was a private education. Now people think this is a utopia where there are no issues. That is not necessarily the case, that while we want everybody to be successful, it takes time, and not all will make it." "It is a good program

and my kids are learning. However, it is changing because some of the students who are being allowed in the program."

Another section presents where the parents who were not part of the DMP either by being dismissed or could not secure a seat. "The traditional middle schools are in chaos, not as much rigor goes on in the curriculum and it is just not working. For those who were dismissed or left, the DMP was just too strict for them. It is at times more the fault of the school than the students. Sometimes they put the kids out for parents not attending the meeting requirements. There are processes in place to support parents; however, if the kids do not want to be here, they will do everything they can to be dismissed." "One of my son's best friends was dismissed because the parents could not attend the night meetings. Grandmother was going to come but could not. My son thought that was not fair. Here was a kid who got here and struggled but was coming around and now has to leave because of the parents."

The third section highlights what some might call less than complimentary terms for the DMP program. They are: exclusionary, elitist, and entitled. "I think they are right at times. If a parent cannot provide transportation then they will not even apply. There are other parents who own their own business and have to work nights so they won't be able to come to the meetings. They don't apply either but they would be great addition to our program." "I think it might be exclusionary because if you don't have a parent who can put in the time to be there for your kid, then that kid does not get the opportunity."

"There are some that believe the program is elitist but that comes from other educators at other schools. Oh−you work at the DMP so there are no issues. I know a lot of educators who could not handle teaching in this program." I can personally tell you of instructors who were placed by the district human resources department who left the district magnet program. One

veteran instructor came to me within the first three weeks of the school year and said she could not handle the parents emailing her all of the time; it was way too much stress. I asked her to give it six weeks and gave her a mentor to help but she did not last another week. There is a true belief that staff needs to be trained continually, knowing they are under scrutiny at all times.

For the 2012-2013 school year, there were over 9,000 applications for magnet applications. I questioned the parents on their feelings about the supply and demand of the DMP. "We are doing something right. It is a consensus that more programs or seats are needed."

"The DMP is working to bridge the achievement gap and close up some of the issues in the district." "It is a shame for those families who want it but cannot get the opportunity. The school has found something people like and they need to expand it." "It shouldn't be where you have to have people beating down doors trying to get into a successful program. If you put struggling kids in a room full of successful kids then it motivates them to do better." "There are no guidelines for conduct that equals the DMP. My neighbors would benefit from this if the DMP could be at all neighborhood schools."

There were other statements that were more specific on what would be needed. "A lot of people run away from traditional middle schools without really knowing what the DMP is about. I don't believe the DMP agreement tells the whole story on what is needed to hold on to your seat. We have to give a true picture on what is required." "There are families who live near the school that have no idea what they are getting into. It takes time to acclimate them or to get them out." "It is a crazy−crazy lottery. I don't think this county, with its history, can really move forward until we educate the parents."

Both sets of parents believed that the numbers proved the need for more DMP schools. Again, there was a concern about the watering down effect if this took place. The main issue at

this point was the lottery system that chose families who did not have a priority to advance to the next DMP. If you were enrolled in a DMP elementary school, you then had first priority to apply and accept a seat in a DMP middle school. If there were enough open seats available, a lottery was held for non-DMP students to apply and accept an open seat. There was a thought on how some DMP processes could be implemented in traditional middle schools. The only drawback of this would be not having the ability to dismiss families because they did not adhere to the DMP process attempting to be implemented.

When parents were asked their opinion on the impact of more DMP's within the district, there were many diverse thoughts which included: "Traditional schools are losing a good chunk of involved families." "Traditional schools have to step it up to draw parents to help them out." "The traditional middle schools have disruptive students and cannot move them out as easy as DMP can." "The DMP is drawing some of the most creative, best teachers from the traditional middle schools. They have the ability to get through the curriculum and bring things from the outside into the classroom as a real-world application." "I would like to see the difference in the drop-out rate with students who come through the DMP as compared to those who were in a traditional program."

"I really like to look at the big picture. I would like to see a new breed of enrichment, expectations, and more evenly dispersed. You are always going to have to handle dissidents. You will need a place for them to go. All kids can be held to higher standards at neighborhood schools, which would alleviate the necessity for DMP." "I think it is necessary because our school system is afraid to think outside of the box and force policies and procedures that could be enforced for the disruptive student." "You have to start somewhere. That's a quandary for parents as well as it is for the district. What happens if they open up more schools and seats? It

may really segregate the families and students who cannot or will not adhere to the DMP policies."

Summary

As the interview finished, participants were given the opportunity to have the final say. Responses included: "It is awesome to be in the DMP because of the nature of the system. I constantly think about what is the answer, where do families go when they cannot meet the requirements. I feel traditional schools are hurt by that. " "I think more DMP's are needed and I think that it will assist in preparing our students coming up for college, raising the graduation rate, and closing the achievement gap." "I just wish there was more flexibility for those families who cannot make the night meetings. They are good families and their children really excel in the program. I am sad that children are hurt because of parent shortcomings." "Parents should be held accountable in every school, not just in DMP. Our tax dollars are not for baby-sitting services. Parents should be accountable for their children. It is not ok that they send their kids to school to learn the very basic manners and respect, kids will be kids but some just don't get what they need at home. It is not the school's responsibility to give it to them." "Sometimes the parent meetings really don't give you anything. That is why I serve on a school committee to off-set the parent meetings. I want to be involved in my child's school."

I do believe in the DMP. I don't think the elementary DMP is aligned with the middle school DMP as good as it should be." "The DMP has been tried and proven. I believe it works very well. We need to re-look at the DMP and really look at the impact it is having, not on just some kids, but what kind of impact it has on all families. This program brings families to the table, that is the part I don't think we are getting right." "I hope this study will really make district people think about what can be done. The southern schools have been overlooked for a

long time. Even if it does not create more DMP schools, then at least it should bring some of the

policies into the traditional schools."

Table 5.1
Comparisons of Key Program Components

Themes	Applewood	Buckhorn	Conclusions
Transportation	None	Arterial busing	Allow more minority students to enroll
Leadership	Experienced Principal	New Principal in transition	Buckhorn needed more time to adjust.
Environment	Homey−family	Separated programs	Not as homey an environment Based upon separation of programs
Extra Programs	None	Gifted	Needed to fill seats when program began
Staff	Veteran	More separated due to programs	Had a direct impact on environment
Diversity	Under 20%	Over 30%	Program aimed for part of the district which had more diverse population

What I found with these comparisons were major differences between the programs in

the two schools. Appleseed had been a smaller program, which, because of demand moved into

an existing middle school and expanded the numbers. However, the original magnet program did

not provide transportation; it was not expanded to the new school. Buckhorn did provide

transportation as the school was built. The main reason was to ensure minority families could

enroll with the assurance transportation was available. Another theme that arose surrounded

leadership. Appleseed's principal had come over from the original program. He brought a

number of his teachers to the new school. It was more of a family-type atmosphere in which

parents trusted the principal very much. Buckhorn had just received a new principal. He had only been there for three months. Because of the separate programs available, there was more of detached atmosphere.

The staffs of the two schools were different as well. Appleseed's staff for the most part came from the original program. They knew the families. Once they received a position there, they did not leave unless they retired or moved up. The Buckhorn staff was hired by the first principal. They had not been in their positions that long. There was also a disparity because of the gifted program and the regular program. Buckhorn was given a gifted program to fill seats as the school began. They were more separated than Appleseed. The gifted program had their own meetings but parents could also attend the regular required meetings the program held. Since Appleseed had already brought over a large number of families, no special programs were added.

Buckhorn was built to allow a more diverse population to attend. It was purposely placed in the southern part of the county which had a higher population of minorities.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of those parents who chose two magnet schools for their academic orientation and zero tolerance discipline policy. Taking the parameters of Epstein's study, I was able to follow a group of parents as they navigated a school choice program and to determine how far parents might go to ensure their children maintained a seat within the program.

The research questions for this study are presented below:

Research Questions

1. Why do middle school parents choose mandatory parent involvement magnet schools in two diverse communities in the same school district?

2. How do families determine and describe the benefits of their enrollment in these magnet schools?

3. What are the implications for district expansion or contraction of these parent choice programs?

Summary of Study

This study was designed to gain insight on why parents enrolled their children into a specialized program with a unique stipulation on the mandatory involvement of parents. I interviewed parents from two distinct attendance zones with different socio-economic student populations in the same school district in a southeastern state. This comparative case study was

103

informed largely by the research of Epstein and her colleagues that with influx of parental involvement, a true learning community could be formed. In using the framework of the six types of involvement, parents could be actively engaged with the school. The issue for me was could the Epstein framework inform a district magnet program? The case study took place over four months and engaged over 24 parents individually or collectively within the two distinct schools for four weeks. Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, second interviews were not conducted, but significant changes were added to the original transcriptions and data analysis was begun.

During the interviews, these parents made it clear to me on the importance they place on their children's education. They also provided a clear expectation for the school and school district on what was believed to be the best educational setting. From Appleseed and Buckhorn parents, there was a belief that all students and families who enrolled into the DMP, to have the same focus and expectations for all. Those who did not want to follow the policies and expectation of the school were seen as not being as serious as the others. I found that parents who were interviewed and had a special education child harbored a real concern about their child meeting the rigorous expectations of the program. This provided a different level of pressure on the family to keep up high expectations.

There was also a pattern within the interviews that the DMP was the best educational setting for their children. The program provided the skills necessary to be successful throughout their middle and high school experience, but would also help them in post-secondary opportunities. Parents at both schools had high long-range goals for their children and believed the DMP had the best program to meet these needs. An interesting series of questions allowed me to see if the DMP could be successful at all schools and for the district. The majority of

parents believed the DMP is not for every family but thought the program should be expanded

to allow for more families to enroll. In looking at the number of district applications for the

DMP and the existing open seats, the families believed it should be open for all. However, there

was a concern that the program would be watered-down because of more families having

access. Some parents believed the program is strong because of those who have been enrolled in

the DMP from elementary through high school.

Discussion of Findings

Turning to my research questions, I insert the scholarship on parent engagement and

partnerships into each discussion where applied.

Type 1 - Parenting−this helps all families establish home environments to support their children as students.

Type 2 - Communicating−design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children's progress.

Type 3 - Volunteering−recruit and organize parent help and support.

Type 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.

Type 5 - Decision Making−include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.

Type 6 - Collaborating with the Community−identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Research Question #1

Parents made the conscious choice to send their children to the DMP based upon the

structures in place, the high rigor and expectations, discipline policies, and the learning

environment. In both schools I noticed the parents wanted the least amount of distractions

possible. They wanted their children to have an environment which was focused on learning. There was little patience for those families who did not have the same attitude and drive for the academic press of DMP schools Chenoweth (2007). Subsequently, parents also liked the fact that if families and students did not follow policy, then they would be dismissed. This would minimize those who were not as passionate as they were about education.

I see many parents who are fierce advocates for their children whether they are in a specialized program or a traditional program. They commonly tell me they want better for their children than what they had. At times, some do not know how to go about helping their children communicate with the school and the school staff does not have a clear process to have open communication with the parents. This coincides with literature which confirms that "parents, no matter what their race or socioeconomic status, care about their children and are willing to do whatever "it" takes as long as they know what "it" is." "Regardless of incomes, education, and performance at the school, parents believe their involvement is central to their child's academic success" (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, and Mason, 2008; Richards, 2009). This is something both parties can work on to develop and maintain a process for open and fruitful communication which will help all those involved.

Research Question #2

The majority of parents believed accountability, the superior education provided by the staff, and the safe school environment played major factors of the accomplishments of the DMP middle schools. Both middle schools received high state grades for the past three years and their reading and math scores ranked high in the district. They believed because of the mandated parent involvement, the students would be successful in middle school and make the transition

106

to high school more efficiently. Parents also considered the skills the DMP provided to their children which would develop them as life-long learners.

Literature has shown that parents have high expectations for their children and the school they attend. Herrold, O'Donnell and Mulligan (2008) used data from a National Household Education Survey which said that less than one percent of parents expected their children not to finish high school. Eighty-three percent of the families surveyed expected their children to move on to post-secondary schools. This idea is seen every day in schools that have students not on track to graduate. Sitting in these conferences, it is obvious the passion of the parents as they are asking for help to ensure their children graduate. A number of times, the conversation will be "I don't care what has to be done, but my child has to graduate." This proves to me that parents want better for their children no matter what program or school where they are enrolled.

The middle school experiences in many large districts nationally are the major selecting and sorting mechanism to get into a district of choice best high schools. The impact of middle school then on the future opportunities of each child needs more consideration as a means of preparation. Informing parents of on how to research schools and specialized programs is a must. However, many families are satisfied with their neighborhood school and choose to be with their friends. They have enough faith in the school to not look into specialized programs. I don't believe this makes them uninformed at all, as they are making an uninformed choice.

Commitment and Accountability of Students, Parents and Staff. Parents in this study had high expectations for their children, as well as the school staff. The parents had a high respect for the teachers of their children and appreciated the extra support provided. Since open communication is a stalwart in the DMP, there is no reason why it cannot work in the traditional

program. The expectation is for school staff to communicate with parents within twenty-four hours, as well as the updating of school grades on the district software package. Experience has shown me that more interaction with parents will benefit both the family and the school. The DMP program has very high expectations for the student and parent; it makes sense there should be high expectations in return for following the policies.

Richards (2009) listed roadblocks to effective parent involvement: "it is hard to identify the right or best way to involve parents. Parent engagement with schools is hard to measure, teachers are not trained well in the area of helping parents work with their own children, and teacher responsibility does not include teaching parents how to teach. Parents argue that they teach their children about manners, responsibility, and the difference between right and wrong. Teachers argue they should already have these qualities by the time they reach elementary school and especially by the time they reach middle and high school". Teachers want help when the child is misbehaving, but are not as comfortable when parents continue to question what is being taught within the curriculum or how the processes are developed within the classroom. The Florida Parent-Teacher Association's (2009) purpose is to have parents and teachers cooperate intelligently in the education of children.

If expectations for communication are clear and open, it allows for the school and families to have continual contact to provide the best opportunity for the student to succeed. Expectations should be high for all in the educational field. Students coming out of high school need a college or technical degree to receive a high-paying job, and because of today's economy, this might not be enough. Many educators state they are tired of having to teach to a test. I would argue that skills need to be taught that will help students be successful in life, not just for a test. Another faction of high expectations is graduates who enroll into a College or

University and are required to take a remediation course or retake a failed course. The discussion needs to be had between post-secondary teachers and high school teachers to develop a transition from level to level without the need for remediation and re-teaching.

What I did find, as an administrator within the district magnet program, was how little staff was prepared for the influx of these parents who demanded the best for their children. Many times teachers came to me demanding that I dismiss a student because of their behavior or demerits that added up because of not following through with work. What I found was the instructor had not followed-through with their part of the agreement. Those were intense conferences with the teacher and parent. It was more like refereeing a match. Who was right and who was wrong? Many times the answer was both, but then there had to be a mediation agreement formed to ensure the student was successful because it truly ended up on them.

As one of the main focus elements of the DMP, parent commitment saw different positions. The majority of parents interviewed stated they would do whatever it took to help their children succeed. There was also a pattern in which parents wanted flexibility for parents in regards to the meeting requirement. Parents who serve on committees are given credit for the monthly meeting requirement. There could be some flexibility offered, such as using parent as volunteers during the day which would enable them to fulfill this policy.

It can be assumed the more parent involvement, the higher success rate of the student. The question that arises is what does parent involvement look like in each school? It is apparent there is much more parent involvement in the DMP as it is mandated. However, I am not sure you can find a school where parents do not want their children to be successful and receive a high school diploma. The conversation surrounds how schools access parent involvement to meet the needs of individual students. If clear processes are developed, it makes it easier for

parents to monitor their students and how they are achieving. Clear communication is the key to breaking down barriers for parents to be involved. I have found parents very willing to help as long as they know how. Successful schools have plans to coordinate efforts for parental involvement. When schools will strategize ways to involve parents, they make parents equal partners by allowing them voices in major school decisions, and there is an open and civil atmosphere which includes two-way communication (Allen; 2005; Epstein & Salinas; 2004; Rasmussen; 1998; Viadero; 2009).

In the district magnet program I was part of, the main complaint was the agendas of the required meetings. The parents were compliant because they knew it was part of keeping their child in the program. If a parent missed monthly meetings, the child could be dismissed. I always thought it was unfair because it was not the student's fault. Robinson and Harris (2014) state "if the stage setting is done correctly; a busy parent with a demanding career could be a successful stage setter with minimal direct involvement in their child's schooling affair (p. 210). The parent would say "I work at nights and I am a single parent." There was more leeway for high school, but elementary and middle schools kept a very tight rule, that if you missed more than one meeting in a row, you were put on probation and could be dismissed on the next incident. As the parents from both schools believed, the program eliminates some outstanding families who would be very successful. Why should we over-policy someone out of a successful program?

Parents liked the fact that students had to take responsibility for their own education. It developed organization and communication skills the students had to use in keeping up with their homework and other class assignments. Parents also liked the fact that students were required to have homework signed. It allowed more in-depth conversations at home in regards

to their education. I see no reason why students cannot have homework signed in traditional schools. The high school where I am now principal has instituted all ninth grade students to have homework signed. I also provided planners for all ninth grade and special education students to allow them to be more organized and to ensure parents have the opportunity to keep updated on work being done in all classes.

Research Question #3

 Diversity. During the interviews with the minority families enrolled in the DMP middle schools, I asked them why there were not more minority students enrolled. The comments consistently came back as some African-American families did not believe they would be able to meet the meeting requirements or they had not had success in their own schooling and they believed their children would not be able to handle the structure. This went back to the fear of watering down the DMP or the fact some minority students may not have the discipline needed to be successful within the program. However, I have found minority families to have an incredible intensity to make sure their children were enrolled and successful within the program. Their focus was to have their children to have a more successful educational experience than they did. I have found minority families to be very involved and want communication every week so they could be a support resource at home. What Bell (2009) concluded was that parents overall chose schools based on the student well-being and solid academics. She also found that poor and working-class parents did not choose a quality school, but were more inclined to choose schools that were labeled as failing by state testing standards. This may have been due to social networking; they sent their children to the same school as their friends. Middle-class families were more inclined to be selective and chose schools that were high performing. Bell's study was important because it gave insight into the parents'

mindsets when choosing a school. What is disheartening is that for unknown reasons disadvantaged families did not take advantage of the opportunity. This obviously led to schools with low-income families and low-performing students.

In reading the literature on diversity and social capital, I was not surprised that some minority families do not have the capital to successfully navigate choice processes or know how to communicate with the school on a level where the students will receive support from both school and home.

Herrold, O'Donnell and Mulligan (2008) used data from the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey (PFI) and the 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES) to report on how parents interacted with schools. An alarming lower percentage of high school parents attended a regularly scheduled parent conference, 61% as compared to 92% of parents with children in grades three through five; and 76% of middle school parents' grade six through eight.

Leadership. Parents from both schools agreed that leadership was a major factor of the DMP success. The North county school had a principal who had been there for a number of years. He brought a family-type atmosphere to the parents which allowed him to bring up sensitive topics at parent meetings. The Appleseed parents said that they believe he has their children's best interest in mind. The Buckhorn Middle School was going through a transition of principals. There was a confidence level from the parents who believed this was going to be a good change. The new principal had been the DMP coordinator for one of the high school programs. With any successful program, the principal would set the tone for the climate of the school. Both of these principals had the vision which the parents believed would take their children to the next level.

Anderson (2009) states "most exemplary instructional leaders would agree that good instruction, particularly in low-income schools builds on the funds of knowledge, learning styles and concerns that students bring from their communities and that the active participation of parents in all aspects of school life is desirable" (p. 101). This would be ideal but how realistic is this? Robinson and Harris (2014) go back to "setting the stage." If done correctly, parents need not be actively participating in school life.

Anderson (2009) uses leadership focus on turning bureaucratic institutions into caring communities. Each parent I spoke with, no matter the school site, expressed how much they believed the teachers and staff truly cared about their children. This allowed a feeling of social trust between the school and the home. Anderson also believed that advocacy is needed across the board to ensure the powerful do not oppress the powerless. "The goals of schooling seem to be shifting under the competition state to a greater emphasis on the maximization of individual advantage for one's own children. The ripple effect of this shift is pulling back from policies that benefit the common good, and toward policies that allow the middle and upper classes to cash in their relative advantage in economic, social, and cultural capital. But this begs the questions: How do they get away with it? Why don't those who are left out of the system push back? "We have a political system in which theoretical groups can organize to demand more authentic, equitable social policies" (p. 54). So−where are these groups? There still to this day is a long wait-list to get into these programs, especially at the elementary level. There are few seats but huge numbers. What is the district to do without separating the classes of families who can get in?

Pressure and Stress. Because of the possibility of being dismissed, there is an inherent amount of stress. The majority of parents do not believe the program provides too much pressure. They believe the school is an extension of the family expectations.

In middle school DMP, students are able to come off the waitlist throughout the school year. In the high school level, it is more difficult to allow. Because of graduation requirements, the high school DMP coordinator must make sure the student is on track to graduate. In the high school I served, students came off the waitlist the first ten days of school and at the beginning of second semester. Especially at the second semester, it was discovered that many students who enrolled from traditional schools were far behind academically. This was especially found in math courses where end of course exams were used. Students who came into the DMP from traditional schools were found to be at least one to two chapters behind. Because of the gap in the curriculum and the stricter guidelines, many could not sustain the rigor and moved back to their traditional school. More transition time is needed for families who come from traditional programs. There is also a need for schools to provide better training to families to allow a more efficient transition.

Supply and Demand. With the demand for seats within the DMP, there were was a confirmation with both schools for the district to do something. The main thought was there should be more seats available for families who wanted to be in the program. Each one of the DMP middle school programs had a waiting list. The issue then goes back to the concern from some parents about watering down the program and what affect more DMP programs would have on the district and the traditional schools. Because of the demand for high school seats, the school district added two school-within-a-school programs where the hope is to have 600 students in four grade levels. The issue that I noticed was that DMP families are reluctant to

enroll their children into a school-within-a-school program because there are two separate schools and DMP families do not want their children exposed to traditional students who do not follow the same structured policies. There is also a thought that if more full-time DMP programs were developed, traditional schools would be hurt by the pull-out of involved families. In talking with parents from both schools, there was contemplation of having DMP policies embedded in traditional middle school policies. What could be done with those families and students who did not follow the rules? How would the district provide resources to these families?

I had the opportunity to serve on the team to develop the first DMP high school in the state. During this incredible opportunity, I saw first-hand the passion parents had for their children to be successful and to do what was needed to maintain their seat within the program. I also had the unfortunate responsibility to dismiss students and families because of poor choices made, which caused them to terminate their time within the DMP. Many times, I thought about which stipulations of the DMP could be successful in a traditional school. As I became the principal of a traditional high school, I took DMP ideas to increase parental involvement on a daily basis.

Each ninth grader was given a planner which helped in organizational purposes, but the other important piece for me was the idea that parents would sign homework each night. I especially wanted the academic core teachers to expect and follow-through on having parents sign the homework. This is an easy way for parents to be involved without taking time out of their busy schedules to maintain an idea on what is going on within the school and how it affects their children. Other ideas that are being implemented are how parent meetings are scheduled and developed to increase involvement. I know the child and family cannot be

dismissed, but it is an easy way to find out who is involved and more importantly, who is not. With this information, the school can reach out to the families.

What this taught me is how unprepared parents were by the school leadership and the need to engage parents into determining how to be successful from day one in a school with DMP expectations. Anderson suggests that we, as administrators, need to level the playing field by using a system of advocacy leadership. He argues that examples exercised by community or groups or individuals, principals miss opportunities to use advocacy for all parents because they focus on the powerful middle class. Most parents see advocacy only linked to self-interest. Parents rightly advocate for their children, and this is unlikely to change in our individualistic culture and school choice policy environment. Parents with more economical, social, and cultural capital will generally be more effective. Who will be those advocates for low-track students who end up in the "dumb classes" or the leftover schools, if not the school professionals"? (p. 33).

District Implications. The implications of this study can be broken into different arenas. The implications for a school district would be the opportunity to produce programs such as the DMP which would allow families a chance to enroll. A possible drawback would be to assess the impact on traditional schools that are directly affected by the DMP. Could the solution to this be adding more DMP elementary and middle schools? The district is currently looking into a wide-sweeping initiative to transform education to be more personalized for each student. It is beginning with a pilot group of high schools to institute how to "hook" each student to be accountable for the own educational success. Could the basics of the district magnet policies then transfer into a personalized learning system that would be beneficial for all? Another implication for the district would be to implement DMP policies in all schools. Many parents

stated the DMP is just good education. How can high expectations for all students and parents be bad? How does a school district with over 100,000 students accommodate those families who are demanding a different type of education in which parent involvement is mandatory?

An implication of this study for families is to help explain how the DMP works. It helps the family research programs offered by the district in greater detail, and allows them to look at possible alternatives to their traditional school. The study also will give families a blueprint on parent involvement within schools. Hopefully this study gives ideas on how to relate to school staff and what expectations they should have. However, it is also important to better educate staffs on how to deal with parents, especially seeing them as individuals and not groups that bring different experiences to the world.

Implications for schools and leaders is to have an idea on how to reach out to families who never thought they could be directly involved in their child's education. It also allows leaders to have an idea on social and human capital which is important to view how we can access the parent's strength to build the school from the inside out.

Robinson and Harris (2014) suggested important lessons that could drive national discussions on parental involvement. They found: (1) Families from different socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds engage in different forms of parental involvement, (2) Schools need to have well-developed programs to assist and guide parents with home involvement, and (3) Vast cultural, socioeconomic, and socio-demographic differences in students' backgrounds prevent a one-size-fits-all model of involvement from being widely accepted across families and from generating the type of academic success schools envision" (p. 230).

Recommendations

My experience of being a member of the team that brought the DMP to the first high school developed in the district, as well as the state, allows me to have a different lens to look through when recommending ideas to the district.

The first recommendation I would suggest is to add at least one more DMP middle school. After hearing from these parents, the middle school years may be the most important in the educational life of a child. It is a formative time frame that can make or break the continuation of education. I heard time and time again, the benefits they derive from the DMP allows students to be successful in whatever high school program they choose to proceed with their education.

A second recommendation would be the idea of a continuous parent education program. Possibly a parent university which would include: how to research magnet programs, how to navigate the choice process, and how to be successfully involved with children at home and school.

A third recommendation would be to provide school staff with training on how to provide better supports for families who are very involved and those who are not.

A final recommendation would be for Colleges and Universities to better prepare instructional and administrative staff on the specifics of reaching out to families and to enlist them to make a better educational environment at home and school.

Probable Future Studies

In future studies on the DMP, I would like to focus on the interaction of parent involvement and teachers. Are DMP teachers under more scrutiny than teachers of non-district

magnet students? How does the interaction between teachers and parents of DMP differ from teachers and parents of non-district magnet students?

Another study I would be interested in would be how a school district meets the demand for DMP seats and maintain the other traditional schools that could be affected? The concern from the interviews was the fact that traditional schools could be severely affected by the possible exodus of involved parents to DMP. I would like to interview school board members and district personnel on how to handle this delicate balancing act to serve all students and their families.

An additional study worth considering is to follow a student beginning in sixth grade as they continue to follow their journey through the DMP. How did they handle the pressure of always knowing they could be dismissed for academic and behavioral issues? Did the DMP meet the expectations of the student and family?

A parent brought forward an interesting study. They would like to see the drop-out rate of DMP students as compared to traditional students. This would either confirm or disprove the idea that DMP helps with the achievement gap.

Finally, how we prepare teachers and principals to interact with parents should begin before they arrive at the school house door. In a study by Epstein and Sanders (2009), the focus was on colleges and universities who offered course work on parent involvement. Findings included: "most offer at least one course and some coverage of topics on partnerships, but there is not enough to prepare all teachers, counselors, and administrators to conduct meaningful programs and practices of school, family, and community partnerships. There have been increases in research on partnerships and leaders in higher-education have become aware of

pressures and state policies to increase future educators' skills on family and community partnerships" (p. 109-110).

Summary

Within this study, there were some factors of note that explain why parents are not as involved or engaged as they could be. Despite their lackluster marks for schools overall, most parents have much more positive attitudes about how principals and teachers perform in key areas. This includes communication from the school and someone parents can trust to give them good advice on how to help their child through school. Another area I found to be important was the lack of knowledge parents have about important school issues. In this study only 40% knew the qualifications of their children's teachers, and 73% knew which classes their children should take to be prepared for college.

Using Epstein's framework, the next two areas brought up by this study caused me to have concern. The first area was that many parents believe they are already doing as much as they can for their children's schools or they don't believe they have any more time to be involved. In fact, about 25% say they have not been invited to be more involved. The second area I noticed was the idea that many parents do not see greater parent involvement within school policy as the best way to improve schools. Over 50% of the parents believed it is more important to become more involved in their children's education at home. Using this idea, how does a school develop processes for family-like schools or school-like families? In the study I have conducted, the parents are potential transformers that easily fit into Epstein's framework of parent involvement. Parents were also seen as school helpers who supported the traditional ways schools were accustomed to.

Reflections as an Educational Leader

As I began this study, I thought I had a clear idea on the type of parents who had navigated the choice process and received a seat for their child in the district magnet program. I was a part of the first team of administrators to attempt this type of program at the high school level. The program had been a stalwart for the district in elementary and middle schools but had not reached the high school level until 2006. The school had been failing—for three years it had received a state grade of "D" and could possibly be the first "F" school within the district. The school did not have an anchor magnet program so the type of students we received were those who did not get any of their choices in the school choice system. There was minimal loyalty and families attempted to remove their children as quickly as they could.

The district program was phased in over four years. It goes without saying; the first two years were very stressful as we were running two different schools with two different plans and expectations. Many parents would not put their children into the program until the school was at least half mandated by the program. We saw was an increase of middle school parents, who had children in the program, conduct diligent research on what programs would be best for them. After the second year of implementation, we started to see a tremendous increase in the number of families who continued their educational journey from elementary through high school within this program. The last three years within this high school program, I was the administrator in charge of bringing students in and dismissing them from the program. I can tell you that it absolutely opened my eyes to what these parents wanted and at what lengths they would go to achieve their goals. My clerk and I were sometimes promised whatever we wanted; a father came in and placed a blank check on the desk and told us to fill in an amount as long as his daughter received a seat. One parent called me to ask the closest housing location he could

purchase to ensure his child could come to the school. Unfortunately, the system only allowed for those families who were already in the district program from middle school to have secured seats, as long as they applied, and accepted the seat. The hard conversations were those families who had not filled out an application or accepted the seat. There were lots of tears and threats to go to the school board unless I agreed to waive this stipulation.

The other difficult conversations were those when I had to dismiss a child. Not only did it affect the high school student but it also affected the younger siblings who had first right of refusal to attend. If the oldest child was dismissed, the family lost the guaranteed seat and had to hope for the lottery to open a spot for the younger child. Again, this caused many hard feelings. However, by the time we got to that point, the parent was resigned to the fact that the program was not best for their child and we worked together to have a smooth transition to their zone school.

A large amount of this study and my hypothesis was about minority families or the lack of minority families who are part of the district magnet program. I was directed to an article by Maria Konnikova (2014) in the New York Times that discusses poverty in a different way. She states: "we make a mistake when we look at poverty as simply a question of financial constraint". Konnikova also suggests that some are poor with their use or non-use of time efficiently. As she discusses time, the idea is that efficiency is always more exhausting and a demanding alternative. She also discusses that efficiency, or the lack thereof, does not affect everyone equally: "the poor are under a deadline that never lifts, pressure that cannot be relieved. The poor is so taxed they don't even realize they have a problem." As I interviewed the families of minorities, I did not believe they were poor financially or with time. They made a specific decision to place their children within the program, knowing what it took on their part

to maintain their status. It truly did not matter to them what color they were. They were going to do whatever was needed to ensure their children were in the best educational setting and the chose this program.

As the study concluded and I went back into the research, I noticed some things I did not expect. Three studies that continued to come into my thoughts were Epstein's frameworks, which this study is based upon, Johnson, Gupta, Hagelskamp, and Hess (2013), and Robinson and Harris (2014). What I conclude with these three studies were the labels each gave a set of parents. Johnson, Gupta, Hagelskamp, and Hess used the term "potential transformers". These were the parents who would advocate the hardest for their children to be enrolled in a program they chose. These were also the parents who wished to have direct input on which teachers were in front of their children. Many times I received requests from parents wanting to know the failure rate of a teacher, and the request to move their child out of that class, or they had heard of an outstanding teacher with a great success rate and their desire to move their child into that class.

I was given a book written by Robinson and Harris; their labeling of some parents as "stage setters" intrigued me. I went back to my childhood and thought of my parents. During my late elementary grades and junior high grades, my father was president of the school board where my brother and I attended school. My mother was a teacher in another school district close by and my uncle was the regional superintendent of schools for the entire county. My parents placed a tremendous amount of importance on our education but did not attend any parent conferences. In my mind they were the perfect example of that time period of "stage setters" for my brother and me. Robinson and Harris state: "effective stage setting is more rooted in lifestyle than in parental involvement activities. Once the stage is set for academic

success, children are on the course toward being academically successful. A key advantage of stage setting over traditional conceptions of parental involvement is that it does not conform to the one-size-fits-all mantra."

As I go back to this study and the group of parents I interviewed, I look at them as "stage setters" for their families. Because of the high-stakes testing that students and schools are under now, if there is an opportunity to choose a school environment that will best benefit the child, they will absolutely fight for it. In a conversation with my parents, they both told me "if you were a child now and we lived in this district, we would do whatever was needed to get you and your brother into this program." Many parents in this district program do the absolute minimum to retain their child's seat once they receive an invitation. The things parents must agree to do are attend a monthly meeting, sign their child's homework, and make sure they are not a continuous behavior problem. I was in charge of the PTA meetings, in which parents signed in, sat in the back, answered emails and played solitaire on their electronics and turned their card in to leave. They had their child in the program they wanted and were compliant with what was needed from them to ensure their child would never lose their enrollment. There were others who fought over and over to ensure their child stayed. My last two years at this district program high school had an African-American male who was a special education student. He probably should have been dismissed both years I was there, but the parent appealed and won the right for him to stay. As I left the school and became a principal on my own, I heard his name from my former colleagues who said he was still there. In June of 2014, I attended graduation and heard his name called. In the background behind me I heard the biggest cheer of the night−it was the mother. She saw me and started yelling "We did it Mr. Finkbiner−We did it!!! This parent was not only a "stage setter' but a "transformer" for her child's education.

"We need to move away from the idea that everything parents do will be helpful, and all that is necessary is to provide parents with a clear pathway to be involved. Perhaps it is helpful to view students and families as different from one another and to consider that race and social class matters, so that we can think more creatively about ways to maximize academic benefits for all students with the help of their parents" (Robinson & Harris 2014: 231).

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APPENDIX A

Parent Contract

PINELLAS COUNTY SCHOOLS
FUNDAMENTAL SECONDARY SCHOOL PARENT/GUARDIAN
COMMITMENT AGREEMENT

School Name: _____

Student's Name: _____ Grade: __
(Please print clearly)

Fundamental schools are schools of choice and membership In fundamental schools is a privilege. Fundamental schools are designed for students who work best where expectations are clearly defined. Participation by parents/guardians is also a requirement. Students may be returned to their zoned school for failing to comply with the fundamental school policies as outlined in the Parent/Student Handbook and the School Board approved Procedures for Countywide Programs. Each student and parent/guardian is required to sign and comply with the following agreement for each child attending a fundamental school.

As a student in this fundamental program, I agree to:
 • Adhere to all rules and regulations stated in the Code of Student Conduct.
 • Follow the dress code as explained in the Parent/Student Handbook.
 • Adhere to the expectations of the Homework/Classwork Guidelines
 • Read, understand, and abide by the Discipline Guidelines,
 • Read, understand and agree to abide by The Procedures for Countywide Programs.

I understand that I am responsible for my actions. I will abide by the terms of this agreement. Failure to honor this agreement may result in reassignment from the fundamental school program.

Student Signature: _____ Date _____

As the parent/guardian of a student in this fundamental program, I understand:

A student's continued enrollment in a fundamental school depends upon the cooperation of parents or guardians in this educational philosophy. Fundamental school parents and students are expected to comply with all the following commitments.
 • Sign the parent commitment agreement affirming, in writing, that they will abide by all policies, procedures and rules of the school as a condition of enrollment.
 • Understand that fundamental schools are designed for those students who excel in a structured learning environment.
 • Understand that continued enrollment in this school depends on cooperation and compliance with all fundamental policies and procedures.
 • Adhere to the parent/guardian requirements concerning attendance at Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA), School Advisory Council (SAC) or other approved meetings.

- Attend parent/teacher conferences, when requested
- Adhere to the Homework/Classwork Guidelines, and Discipline Guidelines.
- Review and sign all homework assignments. High school homework signature guidelines vary by grade level and student performance.
- Understand that reassignment of a student to a district discipline program or expulsion will result in immediate removal from the school; no readmission will be considered.
- Parents provide timely transportation to and from school and furnish transportation for any after school activities including detention, except as may be otherwise provided by School Board Policy.
- Understand that if a family utilizes public transportation it is their obligation and responsibility to instruct the student concerning proper conduct on public transportation, as well as safety matters, including but not limited to, the differences between riding a school bus where vehicles will stop for loading and unloading and riding public transportation where vehicles do not stop when passengers are loading and unloading
- Understand that it the school receives any complaints about the student s conduct on public transportation, disciplinary referrals could result in the student's removal from the school

I understand that the records of all students who are brought before the school's Intervention and Appeals Committee (IAC) are reviewed by all members of that Committee which includes parent representatives and school staff. I agree that confidential information concerning my child may be disclosed to all members of the committee," including student evaluation records and personally identifiable information contained therein.

Parent/Guardian Name _____ Date _____

Signature _____

"Additional information regarding fundamental procedures can be found in the School Board approved Procedures for Countywide Programs"

.   White - School   yellow - Parent/Guardian   Category B

PCS Form 2-3113
Review Date 8/11

APPENDIX B

Epstein's Framework of Parent Involvement

Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement
(Including: Sample Practices, Challenges, Redefinitions, and Expected Results)

TYPE 1:
PARENTING

Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.

Sample Practices

• Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level.
• Workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing at each age and grade level.
• Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy.)
• Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services.
• Home visits at transition points to pre-school, elementary, middle, and high school. Neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families.

Challenges

• Provide information to *all* families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building.
• Enable families to share information with schools about culture, background, children's talents and needs.
• Make sure that all information for and from families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school.

Redefinitions

• *"Workshop" to mean more than a* meeting *about a topic held at the school building at a particular time. "Workshop" may also mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read any where, any time, in varied forms.*

Results for Students
• Awareness of family supervision; respect for parents.
• Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family.
• Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework.
• Good or improved attendance.
• Awareness of importance of school.
•

Results for Parents

• Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school.
• Awareness of own and others' challenges in parents.
• Feeling of support from school and other parents.

Results for Teachers

• Understanding families' background, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children.
• Respect for families' strengths and efforts.
• Understanding of student diversity.
• Awareness of own skills to share information on child development.

TYPE 2
COMMUNICATING

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

Sample Practices

• Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed.
• Language translators to assist families as needed.
• Weekly or monthly folders of student work sent home for review and comments.
• Parent/student pickup of report card, with conferences on improving grades.
• Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.
• Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools.
• Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions.

Challenges

• Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and nonprint communications.
• Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type.

• Review the quality of major communications (newsletters, report cards, conference schedules, and so on).
• Establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home.

Redefinitions

• *"Communications about school programs and student progress" to mean two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community.*

Results for Students

• Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades.
• Understanding of school policies on behavior, attendance, and other areas of student conduct.
• Informed decisions about courses and programs.

• Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator.

Results for Parents

• Understanding school programs and policies.
• Monitoring and awareness of child's progress.
• Responding effectively to students' problems.

• Interactions with teachers and ease of communication with school and teachers.

Results for Teachers

• Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly
• Appreciation for and use of parent network for communications.
• Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programs and progress.

TYPE 3
VOLUNTEERING

Recruit and organize parent help and support.

Sample Practices

• School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents.
• Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, resources for families.
• Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers.

• Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information.
• Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs.

Challenges

• Recruit volunteers widely so that *all* families know that their time and talents are welcome.
• Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable parents who work to participate.
• Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs; and recognize efforts so that participants are productive.

Redefinitions

• *"Volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time -- not just during the school day and at the school building.*

Results for Students

• Skill in communicating with adults.
• Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers.
• Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parent and other volunteers.

Results for Parents

• Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carry-over of school activities at home.
• Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education.
• Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school.
• Gains in specific skills of volunteer work.

Results for Teachers

• Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school.
• Awareness of parents' talents and interests in school and children.
• Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers.

TYPE 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.

Sample Practices

• Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade.
• Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.
• Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments.
• Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class.
• Calendars with activities for parents and students at home.
• Family math, science, and reading activities at school.
• Summer learning packets or activities.
• Family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work.

Challenges

• Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bimonthly) that gives *students* responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork.
• Coordinate family linked homework activities, if students have several teachers.
• Involve families and their children in all-important curriculum-related decisions.

Redefinitions

• *"Homework" to mean not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life.*
• *"Help" at home to mean encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing -- not "teaching" school subjects.*

Results for Students

• Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and classwork.
• Homework completion.
• Positive attitude toward schoolwork.
• View of parents as more similar to teacher and of home as more similar to school.
• Self-concept of ability as learner.

Results for Parents

• Know how to support, encourage, and help student at home each year.
• Discussions of school, classwork, and homework.
• Understanding of instructional program each year and of what child is learning in each subject.
• Appreciation of teaching skills.
• Awareness of child as a learner.

Results for Teachers

• Better design of homework assignments.
• Respect for family time.
• Recognition of equal helpfulness of single-parent, dual-income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning.
• Satisfaction with family involvement and support.

TYPE 5
DECISION MAKING
Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.

Sample Practices

• Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation.
• Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements.
• District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement.
• Information on school or local elections for school representatives.
• Networks to link all families with parent representatives.

Challenges

• Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school.
• Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents.
• Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups.

Redefinitions

• *"Decision making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not just a power struggle between conflicting ideas.*
• *Parent "leader" to mean a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families.*

Results for Students

• Awareness of representation of families in school decisions.
• Understanding that student rights are protected.
• Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students.

Results for Parents

• Input into policies that affect child's education.
• Feeling of ownership of school.
• Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions.
• Shared experiences and connections with other families.
• Awareness of school, district, and state policies.

Results for Teachers

• Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions.
• View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles.

TYPE 6
COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY

Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Sample Practices

• Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services
• Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.
• Service integration through partnerships involving school; civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations; and businesses.
• Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others).
• Participation of alumni in school programs for students.

Challenges

• Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for collaborative activities.
• Inform families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, business partnerships.
• Assure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services.
• Match community contributions with school goals, integrate child and family services with education.

Redefinitions

• *"Community" to mean not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also any neighborhoods that influence their learning and development.*

• "Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools.
• "Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just those with children in the schools.

Results for Students

• Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences.
• Awareness of careers and of options for future education and work.
• Specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources, and opportunities that connect students with community.

Results for Parents

• Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services
• Interactions with other families in community activities.

• Awareness of school's role in the community and of community's contributions to the school.

Results for Teachers

• Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction.

• Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist students and augment teaching practices.
• Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to needed services.

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D., et. al., Partnership
Center for the Social Organization of Schools
3505 North Charles Street Baltimore, MD
21218-3843

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. The District Magnet Program handbook states that parents must agree with the philosophy of the program. Do you agree with the philosophy; if so what is it about the philosophy of the program that drew you to it?

2. What does it take for you to uphold your end of the commitment to maintain the basic expectations of keeping your child in good standing within the program? (explain) Your child's responsibilities as you see it?

3. Why did you choose a middle school District Magnet Program for your student over a traditional middle school?

4. What do you see as your role as a parent to uphold District Magnet Program goals? How would you define parent involvement in the program? In what ways is it challenging for you to meet its requirements?

5. What do you see as the main focus of the District Magnet Program? What do you think are the program's underlying values?

6. What are other people's perceptions of the District Magnet Program? What do people say about it or refer to it as?

7. How do you characterize parent involvement in middle school more/less important than elementary school?

8. What would you tell other parents looking into selecting a traditional vs. District Magnet Program?

9. What is your perception of parent involvement and accountability? See 2 above

10. How do you see the District Magnet Program as a means to an end?

11. Do you foresee or have you seen any difficult with you and your child's participation in the program?

12. In what do you believe your participation in the school makes a difference?

13. Please list three benefits you see from the District Magnet Program and rank them in order of importance to you.

IRB Approval Form

DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-5618

January 12, 2012

Bradley Finkbiner Educational
Leadership

     RE: **Expedited Approval** for Initial Review IRB#:
     Pro00006450
  Title: Parental Choice and Fundamental School Programs in Pinellas County: A Comparative Case
Analysis

Dear Bradley Finkbiner:

On 1/12/2012 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above referenced
protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 1-12-2013.

Approved Items: Protocol
Document(s):

Parental Choice and Fundamental School Programs 11/21/2011 in
Pinellas County: A Comparative Case Analysis 8:59 AM   0.01

Consent/Assent Documents:

	Name Modified	Version
Parental Choice and Fundamental School Programs in Pinellas County (IRB #6450) informed consent form (3).docx.pdf	1/12/2012 10:21 AM	0.01

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Please note, the informed consent/assent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approval stamp located on the form. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form. These forms can be found under the Attachment Tab.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions

Sincerely,

John A. Schinka, Ph.D.

John Schinka, PhD, Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Cc: Various Menzel, CCRP
USF IRB Professional Staff

regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.