A Case Study: Leadership for Parent Involvement

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A CASE STUDY: LEADERSHIP FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

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Kennesaw State University

October 1, 2017

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

In

Educational Leadership

In the

Bagwell College of Education

Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, GA

2017
DEDICATION

The support of my family made an academic endeavor of this magnitude possible. It is with unending gratitude and love that I thank my husband, Khoi, for his encouragement and belief that this was doable. My children, Clayton and Connor, also receive my gratitude and love for their ability to keep going while I meandered through research, got stuck in rewrites, and lost track of time. They are amazing young men who also model a love for learning. My family’s encouragement to persist made the biggest difference to me, and kept me on the path. The time commitment to be a scholar impacts everyone. Thank you for making it possible to complete this amazing goal.

I also recognize my parents, Robert and Nancy Oliver, who always asked how I was doing with the project, and really believed in my progress and perseverance. Your support and encouragement helped me believe in myself. As a young girl, you gave me an entryway into reading that would become my passion. You modeled caring for others with good works and kindness. Without your love, I would not be the educator I am today.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I gratefully acknowledge the incredible professionals I have been privileged to work with at Kennesaw State University who inspire my scholarship and ignite my drive for learning in the field of educational leadership. Dr. Ugena R. Whitlock, my dissertation chair, saw my professional focus and interests, and guided my research. Her kindness and thoughtful questioning helped direct me towards learning in ways that I did not anticipate, opening my eyes to knowledge. Under her direction, the experience of research as a professional in the field aided and grew my understanding of the dynamics of the principalship, forever influencing my school community and my practice. She has been an insightful scholar who I have been privileged to work with at Kennesaw. Additionally, the members of my committee, Dr. Chinasa Elue, Dr. Susan Padgett-Harrison, and Dr. Arvin Johnson provided encouragement to continue in my endeavors while giving ongoing support for methods and deadlines. They inspired me to continue striving, welcoming questions, while offering support.

The graduate classes I attended at KSU challenged my thinking while developing my scholarship. I treasure my time as a graduate student, being able to look back now and see how each class added to my growing perspective of school leader. One professor has made an indelible mark in my life. In memorial, I recognize Dr. Mary Chandler, who taught one of the first classes I attended as a perspective school leader. Years later she was instrumental in my continued academic career, encouraging me to pursue a far-reaching goal. Her direction was instrumental, motivating, and powerful.

Finally, I acknowledge the amazing men and women I work with everyday in at-risk school environments who bring their heartfelt compassion for families to school. They are filled
with the same level of hope and optimism I possess, if not more. Kindness unites us in our elementary school world. My colleagues see all things possible and believe in the best for families. Without our work together, many would lose hope. Meg, Kristen, Rob, Abby, Carolyn, Jordan, Lee Anne, Amy, Jan, Debbie, Eileen, Todd, Paige, Barbara, Connie, Todd, Jeff, and Kim, thank you for your encouragement and leadership. You motivate me to always do more.
ABSTRACT

Case Study: Leadership for Parent Involvement

By Polly Tennies

Educational leaders, looking to make a difference in an outcome era, build partnerships with families to strengthen student performance. In this case study, intentionally cultivating relationships and building capacity for stakeholders falls under the guidance of a parent involvement coordinator (PIC) working in a parent resource room in a school setting. This turn-around school features a PIC collaboratively focused with an elementary school principal. Capacity building practices result in success for parents, teachers, and students. State and Federal initiatives support parent involvement, yet questions remain on how to make parent involvement happen when barriers keep parents away from school. Transformative leadership practices influence positive outcomes for families in Title 1 environments, as leaders aware of pressures and challenges, use influence to help families. The PIC, a certified teacher, positioned to work with families, builds partnerships to address academic concerns, poverty issues, and a lack of equity. Involving parents in education begins with small steps, impacting families’ lives. This case study showcases collaborative practice between a principal and parent involvement coordinator (PIC) in a turn around school. The impact on the leadership praxis rests squarely in decision-making meets facets of practice for principals.

Key Words: parent involvement coordinator (PIC), parent involvement, transformative leadership, Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT), educational leadership
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In 2013, fifty-two percent of students attending United States public schools qualified for free and reduced lunch (Suitts, 2015). Educational leaders who serve students living in poverty environments face significant challenges in schools (Kraft, Papay, Moore, Charner-Laird & Reinhorn, 2015). In places where students struggle to meet basic needs, educational leaders must identify and recognize parents’ needs. Levin and Riffel (2000) believe high poverty communities working closely with parents to address academic and social issues make a difference with students’ educational outcomes. In that light, educational leaders enroll the student in the school, and work with the family to create a welcoming school, pursuing academic goals together. Nurtured and prioritized relationships grow while trust builds over time between parents and educators (Parsons & Harding, 2011). Principals understand the value of supporting programs and initiating decision-making designed to engage parents with their child’s learning when school partnerships flourish.

Bonilla-Silva (2014) calls for addressing the needs of the most vulnerable students by school leaders employing strategies to address inequity, reducing disparities through educational opportunities. Henderson and Mapp (2002) state:

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement. When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. (p.7)

In this study, a Title 1 elementary school, focused on growing and supporting parent partnerships through a lens of transformative leadership, explores the interactions of people within the school
environment. Transformative leadership goes beyond traditional practice of educational leadership, and involves a moral and ethical component (Jun, 2011). School leaders operate with intentional purpose to correct social inequity and marginalization. Within this research, attention focuses upon the parent involvement coordinator (PIC), a certified teacher trained to interact with families, in a large school grappling with the impact of generational poverty, and a rising Hispanic immigrant population. The role of the PIC, and how partnerships with families form in the school community work, deserves study and analysis in the face of substantial social and economical challenges. Additionally, the PIC’s relationship with the school leader, an experienced elementary school principal, merits examination and dissection within the context of leadership practices.

This eighty-six year old school sits on the outskirts of a large city. Over time changes occur within the community impacting families. The economic and social challenges increased while the schools’ successes multiplied; this turn of events promotes questions. Reflection on successful environments aids the work of all educators who strive to make improvements in challenging environments (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Examining what works, and how it came to exist furthers the work of school leadership practioners (Parsons & Harding, 2011). This study definitively links parent partnerships to educational leadership within schools. The impact on the leadership praxis rests squarely in decision-making meets facets of practice for principals.

Case study shows the interplay among participants. Principals need to understand how parent involvement grows and shrinks from leadership decision-making conducted within the school (Povey et al., 2016). Parent involvement goes beyond attendance at school events, and includes a voice in critical matters and support for schoolwork at home (Epstein, 2001). Within this case study, examples show how one school built, maintained, and grew parent partnerships.
with intention and purpose. Principals invite and limit parent involvement by the policy and procedures in place within school operations. Parent voice in decision-making strengthens parent partnerships, and by asking for input, principals grow parent involvement. Parent partnership moves on a continuum, a journey to be told which each school develops (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Communication and shared dialogue happens, as educators and families get to know each other, and understand personal needs and individual perspectives of the school (Blankenstein, 2004). Parent participation in decision-making processes at schools promotes partnership, and improves shared outcomes. Sharing the power for decision-making creates a balanced partnership and brings positive changes (Epstein, 2001). School leaders cultivate authentic parent relationships with careful planning, inviting participation in relevant matters.

**Background**

Many schools struggle with parent participation and school leaders want to determine why it fails. Schools say parent participation matters; yet rarely achieve parent involvement at the levels targeted (Bower & Griffin 2011). Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) define parent involvement as parents’ commitment of resources to their children’s academic success, with time being a primary resource. The gap between the desired participation, and actual levels of parent involvement leads to research and unanswered questions. Busy families may not be present on campus; yet place academic success as a desired outcome. Educational leaders focused on student achievement know that children with involved families do better in school (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). A strong association exists with parent involvement and student academic achievement (Epstein, 2001; Jeynes 2005). Understanding the importance of how a shared partnership works within elementary schools benefits school leaders who strive for improved outcomes. Principals, who remove barriers, positively influence parent connections and student
achievement (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016). “Parents are more likely to become partners in their children’s education if they perceive that the schools have strong practices to involve parents at school” (Epstein & Dauber, 1991, p. 289). Schools must rethink what parent involvement looks like in the modern age and find ways to build it within the community.

Understanding the barriers to participation for families becomes the first step in addressing obstacles (Jeynes, 2011). The U.S. Department of Education (2006) states parent involvement increases with socioeconomic status and educational attainment. Parrett and Budge (2012) believe being less visible at school may be a function of multiple reasons, such as unease in the educational setting, lack of transportation to the school, or financial pressures from employment. Unfortunately, a lack of parent involvement often carries blame for low student achievement (Barnard, 2004; Jeynes, 2011). Schools improve when parent involvement happens, but parent involvement needs to be affordable and convenient. Engaged school leaders who value parental involvement ask how to respond to what families’ need. Blankenstein (2004) offers clever solutions encountered with modern day problems of parents who want to partner with schools. Simple changes such as adding a meal to the delivery of a workshop cuts out the panic entailed when mothers attempt to attend evening programs at the school with hungry children. Providing childcare for kids while parents engage in workshops shows another response that answers the question, “How can I help the parents be able to participate at my school?”

An unwelcoming school climate creates barriers to participation for families. School personnel, who complain about small turnouts, need to ask themselves what stands behind the parent exodus from planned events. When a mirror focuses attention on the actions at schools that lead to results, a better understanding occurs of the situation (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, &
Davies, 2007). Leaders must reflect on how parents feel when they enter the school. Principals prepare their staff for strong communication with professional development on how to build culturally responsive relationships (Buchanan & Buchanan, 2017). Parents avoid school and feel hindered from taking an active role in their child’s education when a feeling of discomfort exists (Georgis, Gokiert, Ford & Ali, 2014). Cultures wish for accessibility, invitation, and welcome (Pena, 2000). Educators need to understand and interpret perceptions that form barriers to parent participation. Attitudes of teachers who work with parents fluent in another language must represent respect and value for families.

School leaders influence their staff and help them find the value within parent relationships. Pena (2000) reports very few teachers receive formal training on how to engage parents within the school setting. Having conversations with parents challenges beginning teachers who lack experience with their role. Furthermore, teachers may feel unprepared to take charge of building a bridge to newcomers to the school. Indeed, teachers may feel judged by parents when families ask questions. In looking at why teachers hesitate to involve parents in school, several reasons surface. Epstein and Becker (1982) shared two reasons teachers hesitate to involve parents with one concern mentioned articulating the time it takes to forge the connection without a specific reward returned. Additionally, teachers noted low commitment and skills of the parents, who may not know the formalized structures of how schools operate. Principals need to share the strengths of building positive parent partnerships with the staff they lead, and use resources to help teachers find the value in a shared commitment for student learning (Parsons and Harding, 2011). Principals cast a vision of transformative leadership practice to the staff within their schools by modeling how to interact with parents living in difficult circumstances (Shields, 2013). Principals set the tone for the faculty and place the value
on parent involvement activities for others at the school to see.

Goslin (2012) notes school leaders set the expectation and model communication practices to teachers. Lopez (2016) articulates parents’ needs to be listened to and heard by school leaders. Trust grows with interactions and relationships flourish within schools, when led by skilled leaders. Families, attempting to navigate relationships within the school, may encounter restriction from entering school during set times; this negatively impacts school climate and perceptions of parents (Povey et al, 2016). Schools need to adjust expectations in light of changing parameters of participation. With new understandings of parents’ involvement, the definition moves beyond traditional measures into parent engagement and parent partnerships (Rothengast, 2016). The methods, behaviors, and communication of principals instrumentally impact and guide staff into professional practices.

Problem Statement

The articulated problem shows many factors, identified as barriers, influence and limit participation of parents at their child’s school. Limited research exists on how a parent involvement coordinator, (PIC), in this case a certified teacher, effect and grow parent partnerships at schools. Additionally, very little research shows the relationship between parent involvement coordinators and the school leader in purposefully creating a vision for schools to build parent involvement and develop parent partnerships. School leaders need models on how to build collaborative cultures within school communities. Can parent involvement coordinators and principals build environments that foster partnership with parents while engaging families with the school? The dynamic alignment of principal and parent involvement coordinator working together deserves study. School leaders need to understand the value of supportive programs and transformational decision-making designed to engage parents with their child’s
learning.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study examines how the parent involvement coordinator or PIC impacts parent partnerships in a poverty environment engaging families in education. Additional information shared regards how a school leader practices transformative leadership with moral purpose aimed at assisting parents to become involved in the education process. Together with the PIC, the school leader builds a shared vision, and grows the capacity of all stakeholders to work together. Crafting a shared vision of parent involvement at school happens over time; studying the work of accomplishing this complicated task benefiting many stakeholders.

The value of creating authentic partnerships with families exists for schools. The parent involvement coordinator works directly with families while also assisting teachers to build a skill set for partnerships with parents. Teachers’ need preparation for partnerships and support in professional practice. Indeed, parent involvement takes many pathways, so finding ways to build bridges, eliminate barriers, and assist families’ ranks as a priority in an economically troubled school community looking to engage families in the work of education (Baker et al, 2016). In wanting to have an impact within the community, a school leader needs to address equity issues, using influence to support families in the process of finding their voice and presence at school.

In this case study, educators note how parent involvement fits on a continuum of practice and must be cultivated (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). A key step involves assessing the value of involvement with staff and shows the evolution of expectations from parent attendance to parent involvement. With recognition, cognizance of ability to engage families grows, and the target moves towards partnerships that include shared academic responsibility for children to supportive, responsive environments for parents. Parents in highly involved environments, take
on the role of shared instructor for their children and partner with the teacher in achieving academic goals. Reading about successful schools benefits educational leaders, since examples shared feature how varied communities operate. Principals looking to replicate strategies expand processes of operation in new directions. Those taking the time to read this study see the power of small decision-making adding up to supportive networks for parent involvement.

The purpose of this study provides a context to the parent involvement journey all elementary schools must take (Shields, 2013). Detailed examples of successful schools initiating and effecting parent partnerships grow the professional development of educational leaders by influencing the choices school leaders make. Intentionally constructing an inviting environment leads school leaders to successful outcomes with the parent community. A decision about committing a teacher to the role of parent involvement coordinator impacts the process of a supportive, educational setting. Who the principal employs to fill the position of the parent involvement coordinator (PIC) indicates a critical hiring selection at a school. Consider this case study as a detailed view of an environment purposefully composed to support and invite participation, involvement, and partnerships at school.

Henderson, Mapp, Johnson and Davies (2007) look at ideal environments and core belief systems observed within schools for parent partnerships to grow with four beliefs present for parent involvement to flourish. School leaders must ask themselves these questions in assessing the school environment. When leaders know their personal stance, consider the next step of presenting the questions to the faculty to assess the belief system of all teachers.

- Do you believe that all parents want the best for their children?
- Do you believe that all parents can support their child’s learning?
Do you believe that parents and school staff should share the power, and be equal partners?

Do you believe the responsibility for building the partnership lies with the school, most especially the school leader?

When all four beliefs are present, the school can proceed with authentic engagement (Henderson et al., 2007).

This paper broadens viewpoints on what parent engagement means in schools while promoting parent involvement. New views of parent involvement exist, and definitions look at parents engaged with their child’s learning beyond the physical walls of the school. This paper leads principals towards a vision of partnership among family, school, and community, while looking at non-traditional partnerships and new methods of operation. Shared benefits of participation must exist for parents to engage with the school (Epstein, 2001). By opening up to each other about the realities faced in education, solutions for parent involvement multiply and positively impact schools. Learning from each other in the school environment strengthens the work we do as educational leaders.

**Research Questions**

The question addressed within the case study design broadly looks at the work of parent involvement.

- How and to what extent does the parent involvement coordinator (PIC) impact parent engagement within the school community?

Sub questions address specific issues of the parent involvement coordinator’s work.

- What steps does the parent involvement coordinator take to impact all stakeholders
involved?

• How and to what extent does the PIC remove barriers that prohibit and limit families from participation?

• How and to what extent did the work of the principal and PIC align to create a shared vision for the community?

Nature of the Study

A case study implementation promotes an understanding of how the parent involvement coordinator works within the school and the resulting impact for parents. A case study shows how multiple pieces interact and promote change within a school setting. Building and addressing parent capacity for partnerships effects many facets of the school and relates to student success in academics. The beauty of case study permits background stories’ voice, promoting the telling of individual stories at the school. Reading about the changes made within the journey provides a more complete picture of the complex situation that schools work in when asking, “What do parents need?” One innovation explored within this case study shares how parent capacity can be built with personalized student data and focused parent workshops where parents partner with teachers on academic goals.

Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) designs parent learning based on the child-parent connection in partnership with teachers at the school. This research-based practice results in increased student learning as parents and teachers work together towards achieving a specific data related goal (Parades, 2010). Within the case study, readers learn how a specific individualized approach in APTT, which provides accurate up-to-date data about children, provides more meaningful workshops for parents. Within the APTT workshop, parents develop community with other parents, exploring the connections families make provides greater
community growth. Social capital helps other parents participate throughout the programming, and provides a collaborative environment for learning. School leaders promoting parent connections provide a school environment conducive to student success.

Growing the connections shared in case study research represents a journey of development at Baxter Elementary (a pseudonym). Knowing the story that changes over time provides a deep look into change agents and the decision-making of a principal in collaboration with a parent involvement coordinator. Understanding the interplay of people frames the study for an opportunity for school leaders to learn. Jeynes (2011) looks at the impact parent expectations place on children’s learning. When seeking to improve the lives of at-risk youth, bringing together families, schools, and community members in collaboration strengthens and supports children’s academic outcomes (Baek & Bullock, 2014). Leaders must know the community, and look at the positive and the negative influence contained within its boundaries. Educational leaders who operate with transformative leadership practices build solutions to support families.

Solutions present in communities come from resources available at churches, non-profits, and agencies to assist families in need. Political leaders within communities also provide a key asset for bringing about change in at-risk neighborhoods, contributing ideas and support when problem solving answers. Building a relationship with a political leader takes an educational leader outside of the school setting in transformative leadership practice. In looking at an authentic experience of family, school, and community partnership, support from multiple levels garnered brings about positive changes for families. Communities addressing inequity issues benefit when school leaders look outside of the school. Henderson et al. (2007), found “well-planned family learning and support activities tend to increase self-confidence, so parents and
family members go on to pursue a high school diploma, additional job training, and higher education” (p.3). Suitts (2016) believes communities must change policy, practice, and thinking about education, or the lack of equity in children’s lives will bring ill effects for generations to come. By committing to parent partnerships at schools, communities invite positive change.

A pivotal strategy central to the case study employs a parent involvement coordinator, herein referred to as a PIC. Deliberate connections made with a person dedicated to the mission of supporting family engagement influence the school community and families. A parent liaison position acts as a change agent in the world of parent engagement. This person takes the time to establish relationships with parents and guardians who try to support children in the school setting. Ferrara (2015) views the position of PIC as a person who works to network and facilitate connections with parents. When a PIC collaborates in connection with a school administrator, purposefully designed supports establish strong assistance for all adults at school.

This innovation of a dedicated certified support person makes a tremendous impact in my own school setting where I serve as the elementary school principal. As the educational leader within the research, my voice describes a journey of understanding and impact built around collaborative practice with a parent involvement coordinator. In telling this story, I deviate from traditional research methods to personalize the journey sharing my narrative inquiry, inviting the reader to understand more thoroughly the interactions of the people within the school in a case study. I share how the PIC and I collaborate for our community and become catalysts for the work of engaging families at the school. I write in first person to share the stories of the school and my own process of understanding. Reflection embedded within the case study shows my thoughts as a school leader changing over time, influenced by experiences gained working with the PIC and parent community.
I explore how the role of PIC impacts the school, examining how the coordinator forms parent networks and uses social capital with families to gain increased involvement. Social capital makes use of how collective groups operate and influence each other and in this case, the PIC connects parents who have a shared commitment to the school and their children. The energy devoted as a functioning parent group helps lift other parents into engagement and involvement at the school. The social connections build friendships, which positively impact the school. The PIC becomes the leader of a large collective network at the school (Stevens & Patel, 2015). Telling the story of how social groups impact the school’s parent partnerships benefits other schools on the verge of exploring the power of parents’ in-group networks.

Few studies look at the training and integration of a parent involvement coordinator. A key question becomes what qualifications matter most to the person who serves in this role. What forms of social and emotional skills need to be held by the person successful in this position? My own experience led to a certified teacher in this role, although most studies cite a parent coordinator without a certified degree of teaching. Sanders (2008) describes the power of positive interactions and purposes defined and articulated in a school setting for a staff member charged with leading parents. The process of engagement moves carefully for parents, and relationships cultivated over time strengthen within the school. When reading case study, the perspective of how engagement builds becomes articulated and shared with educators who want to build a context of understanding. Readers gain assurances when studying other people’s processes to build parent involvement. School leaders learn from each other’s experiences, especially in difficult environments.

Transformative leadership practices play out in at-risk environments, promoting social justice and equity for families. Jun (2012) details the notion of critique, empathy, democracy,
and dialogue as key features displayed by principals practicing this form of leadership. In supporting the work, educational leaders take a stand for partnerships; in which shared power happens among parent, school, and community (Epstein, 2001). In a Title 1 context, parents must offer opinions and input to the parent structures within Federal programming. Encouraging parents to participate while creating an environment conducive to voicing opinions takes time. This case study illustrates the impact within the context of parent involvement for ways to involve and empower parents at school. A key feature of this case study explores the relationship I conduct as the principal with the parent involvement coordinator and how we influence change at the school. As the principal, I help to create a shared vision at the school, articulating goals, gathering input into organizational decision-making, and formulating the vision and mission supported by students, staff and families. The parent involvement coordinator works in tandem with me, guiding the parent base through modeled participation, encouraging parent voices to be heard at the school. A parent involvement coordinator puts into practice the policies instituted by involving parents for increased decision-making.

Rothengast (2016) talks about the catalyst for involvement her parent liaison initiated with engaging parents within the school. The right person in the position connects with parents, facilitating involvement in many aspects of the school. Together the parent liaison and principal considered how to implement parent involvement measures using Epstein’s six level of parent involvement (Barnard, 2004). Considering moves the school supports involves discussion that must include families. Parent voices enhance critical decision-making when educational leaders make decisions regarding supportive practices. Promising practices of use include all six of Epstein’s Levels of Parent Involvement (Barnard, 2004). The practices include:

- Supporting parenting
• Learning at home
• Communicating with the school
• Volunteering for the school
• Decision-making regarding the school
• Collaborating with the community

Include parent voices when writing and devising a plan to reach parents. Without parent input, the success rate of planning misses the mark of reaching the target population.

**Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework organizes ideas for the purpose of examination and assists in explaining the significance in research. In this section, a connection between educational leadership and parent involvement in elementary school establishes a foundation in critical theory and the political sociology of education (Popkewitz & Fendler, 1999). Political sociology studies power, and plays out within micro questions of education, class, and race (Manza, 2011). Frequently addressed in American education policy, parental involvement aims to strengthen partnerships between schools and families.

Parental involvement presents as a complex idea with the term, defined in multiple ways, leading to debates (Georgious, 1997; Long & Greene, 2008). Fantuzzo, Davis and Ginsberg (1995) refer to parent behaviors that openly or subtly influence children’s cognitive development and school achievement. Parents might join the PTA, attend a parent-teacher conference, or volunteer in the school for traditional parent involvement. Argument also exists for parental involvement beyond the context and setting of a school building. Establishing a bedtime or limiting television watching shows a parents’ attachment with their child through care-giving, and the positive influence of setting expectations thus showing parent involvement. This form of
parent involvement leads more to discussion regarding choices families make when rearing children. Bakker and Denessen (2007) see parental involvement definitions as a debate on socioeconomics, class, and culture with roots of parent involvement definitions entangled in inequality and social class with the white, middle-class parents being edified. In 21st century schools, importance in seeing multiple ways families participate in schools deserves attention.

A well-established history shows government orchestrating a policy of parent involvement. Noguera (2011) argues that schools in poverty environments must respond to social and environmental issues for positive change to occur for students. In 1965, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, ESEA, served as one of the first laws connecting education and parent involvement (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). President Lyndon Johnson created ESEA as a part of the War on Poverty, and required Title 1 designated schools to have parents’ serve on school advisory boards and to participate in classroom activities (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). As the educational leader of the school, principals comply with policy and enact legislation within the school setting. Government directs school leaders to promote family connections at each school with the purpose of improving educational outcomes for at-risk students (Leadership Conference Educational Fund, 2016). Principals comply with government policy when operating school buildings within communities.

Policy demands participation by school leaders in addressing parent involvement issues. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) required all schools and school districts receiving Title 1 funds to have a written parent involvement policy, as well as build school capacity to implement the plan (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). Henderson et al. (2007) speaks to the significance of NCLB:

In passing the No Child Left Behind law, Congress and the president made a promise to
our children that all will have an opportunity to get a high-quality education and master high academic standards. That means all our children—no matter what language they speak, how much their families earn, what disabilities they may have, what God they worship (if any), or what holidays they celebrate. (p. 1)

Further legislative support came when The U.S. Department of Education released Goals 2000, also called The Educate America Act. Parent involvement direction to schools advised supportive partnerships to increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (OESE, 2000). Human emancipation, present in critical theory, empowers those in despair who struggle to have their basic needs met. In this case, schools provide a way out of the mire for at-risk populations. Political forces, legislating the value of parent involvement, hold educational leaders responsible for empowering change for the disenfranchised.

Improvements for marginalized parents and children happen when those with a voice, stand up for those who lack power at school. Students reared in poverty environments struggle with inequity and marginality present in the community. In 2010, present numbers show the United States with one of the highest child poverty rates of an industrialized country with 15.3 million children living in poverty, a number currently trending upward (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Social mobility stalls for poor children, and a broken promise of an American Dream exists. Shapiro and Purpel (1998) recognize the difficulty of the oppressed to gain ground in fractured environments. Educators play a key role and “must see their work as being in the eye of a vast social storm; education and teaching are inseparably linked to the crisis of the social order” (Shapiro & Purpel, 1998, p. ix). Haig (2014) reports the leadership of the Salvation Army calls for schools to become an oasis of opportunity for students living in poverty, and make up the
disparity present in children’s lives. Education connects to a larger world of social concerns, and cannot be separated from marginalization. Schools opening doors to fixing community problems become a part of the solution in plagued areas (Noguera, 2011). Education therefore becomes a political and ethical activity with school leaders entrenched in the process of assisting families.

Eleanor Roosevelt stated, “We do well when we all do well” (Blankenstein et al, 2015, p. 5). Blankenstein and Noguera (2015) see the work of school leaders in terms of a moral imperative for social justice and recommend principals act accordingly to influence outcomes for the better. Vulnerable populations, supported within schools, benefit the entire country since school reform changes lives of children and focuses on future opportunities. Equity-based reforms garner political support for those looking at economics. Make no mistake, how educators think about poverty influences the work carried out in at-risk environments, since equity issues must be recognized and addressed first. Marginalized people benefit from school leaders who look beyond their schools into the community served. At its foundation, communities become stronger when economic circumstances improve for families (Levin & Riffel, 2000). Hope of a better life for future generations of current students guides the work of school leaders in poverty environments.

**Definition of Terms**

The following list of relevant terms and definitions provides meaning to this study:

- **Barriers**- factors preventing families from participating at the school.
- **Parent involvement coordinator (PIC)**- a staff member at a school who works to coordinate and assist parents within the school community, also known as a parent liaison.
- **Parent participation**- an early term used for parents on campus. Parent attendance.
• Parent involvement- parents’ commitment of resources to their child’s academic success (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994).

• Parent engagement- “schools build a foundation of trust and respect with families, reaching out to parents beyond the school” (Redding, Langdon, Meyer, and Sheley, 2004, p.1). Parents’ ongoing involvement and interest.

• Parent partnerships- the epitome of terms in describing the level of involvement a family has with the school. Parents’ work equally with educators to educate the child.

• School leader- a principal.

• Social capital- “Personal relationships, trust of others, and networks of contacts with people in organizations, government, work and places of worship make up with researchers call social capital” (Henderson et al, 2007, p. 200).

• Turn-around schools-“dramatic and breakthrough change in operations and results at high-poverty schools. Low-performing schools show progress, few agree to what standard” (Burnette, 2010).

In this paper, four terms describe relationships with parents: parent participation, parent involvement, parent engagement, and parent partnerships. Use of all terms displays sequential understanding of the evolution present in research and showcases parent relationships in schools, illustrating the parent’s level of engagement with the school. Schools strive for partnerships with parents, yet begin with participation in planned events. Understanding the perceptions present in terms relates to parent practices at schools providing critical knowledge for readers.

**Significance**

Alameda-Lawson (2014) documented the need for outcome studies which detail how
alternative approaches to parent involvement makes a difference in at-risk environments. Practitioner research, by job-embedded experts, provides valuable insights within high-poverty schools (Khine & Salleh, 2011). Looking at what works, instead of focusing on failure, strengthens leaders who strive to work for children in their communities. Through sharing successes, the capacity of leaders who study turn-around schools develops. Building schools with strong outreach into the community focuses leaders on what works for difficult environments. This case study aligns educational leadership in impacting parent involvement within elementary schools. Too often a deficit mentality takes over in education when insurmountable issues weigh down the work, school leaders need to find a way to persist, stay positive, and grow with collaborative practices.

**Contributions to Social Change**

The building blocks of social change, active in government policy, appear in at-risk communities. Freedom from poverty, a function of social class, begins with the politics of education and includes the involvement of parents in their children’s education. Can schools provide the solution for marginalized families in today’s society? Freire (2000) writes about the disenfranchised and speaks about hope for the oppressed. A strong belief that education becomes an empowerment tool exists, and students who follow this thinking believe education becomes a social change agent. A mission emerges for practioners of transformative leadership within our schools as the organization provides support, and elevates families who suffer in their current oppression. Critical theory seeks to revolutionize society by knocking down barriers and improving lives.

Critical theory originated in The Institute of Social Research, in Germany. Horkheimer, as cited in Bohman (2016), served as a past leader of the school who had three criteria for critical
theory studies: explanatory, practical, and normative actions. Identifying the wrong, who fixes it, and how the transformation impacts the greater good of society functions as an element of critical theory (Bohman, 2016). A tension exists between actuality in the school setting, and desired outcomes for families. Empowerment stands at the heart of parent involvement and aligns with critical theory promoting change. Strong leadership needs to navigate and build partnerships between schools and families making the work a priority. Principals firmly centered in transformative leadership, direct the work of schools for parent involvement inviting change.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Past U.S. Secretary of Education, Rod Paige believes school improvement hinges on parent partnerships (Paige, 2002). For this literature review, Kennesaw State University’s online library provided the primary search engine within the databases of ERIC and JSTOR. Key word searches established historical parent participation within a political context in the school community. As the search continued and narrowed, specific information sought principals and transformative leadership, parent engagement, parent partnerships, and barriers to parent involvement. Conducted searches examined titles of staff within the parent involvement coordinator role: such as parent coordinators and parent liaisons. Parent centers or parent resource centers provide the setting within schools. Study representing the combination of school leaders and parent coordinators showed limitations when completed.

Topics in the literature review include social capital and relationships, parent capacity, barriers to parent participation, school leaders, politics and education policy, social justice and transformative leadership. The purpose of the literature review provides context for understanding politics of parent involvement in educational settings and the manner in which schools conduct relationships with parents through educational leadership practices. In framing this review, the researcher looks at how parent involvement works across actions of key participants: a parent involvement coordinator and principal. Transformative leadership theory also provides context for operations of principals within schools. This work focuses on parent involvement in relation to school leaders and parent involvement coordinators.
Transformative Leadership Theory

Transformative leadership theory offers decision-making in a context of social change “demonstrating the new VUCA strengths of vision, understanding, clarity and agility” (Shields, 2013, p.6). Anello, Hernandez and Khadem (2014) see transformative leadership as a “fundamental shift in worldview and a commitment to learning and service to the common good” (p. 35). Concerned educational leaders embrace this theory of leadership with families living in hardship when addressing equity issues faced by students. By looking at the organization, in this case the school, as an empowerment tool, possibilities to influence the lives of families for the better exist. Principals who utilize transformative leadership use influence to assist families living in poverty through supportive organizational structures at the school, altering traditional practices of school leadership. Transformative leadership recognizes problems within institutions and society experienced by marginalized people and embraces opportunities to make a difference for moral and ethical reasons (Anello, Hernandez, & Khadem, 2014). Challenges within the environment ground the actions of the school leaders and fundamentally address decision-making and actions focused on family improvement and assistance (Burghardt & Tolliver, 2009). Principals operate from an authority promoting the use of ethical principles and moral values within decision-making at their schools know a shift of power improves lives.

Within the context of this study, personal ideology supporting transformative leadership influences the actions of the principal towards increased equity practices with parent involvement. Delpit (1990) reminds us “those with power are frequently least aware of-or least willing to acknowledge its existence. Those with less power are often more aware of its existence” (p.87). Greenleaf (1991) urges leaders to use their power to better the situation of those without authority since by working to serve others communities improve. Transformative
leadership theory within schools focuses on work that influences at-risk children’s standing in society, looking towards an improved future outcome. Shields (2013) shares eight tenets of transformative leadership theory, which fit within the context of schools engaging parents in partnership. The beliefs include:

- The mandate to make change focused on creating equity.
- The need to examine knowledge frameworks that support inequity and a direction to work towards justice.
- A focus on democracy and equality.
- The need to look at unequal power distribution, which would be those without voice in the schools.
- The support of both public and private good works.
- An awareness and utilization of the system of interconnectedness.
- Reflection on use of power.
- Exhibition of moral purpose.

Shields (2013) believes transformative leadership theory guides educational leaders in promoting schools for all children and equitable practices for parents and “it begins with awareness-- of the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of our society and of our school system” (p.11). Moral purpose requires educational leaders to advocate and plan for those less advantaged in our current systems. Transformative leadership brings change into the current conditions of oppression some families’ face, since educational leaders seeking change must operate schools open to the community, and forge partnerships with many for the betterment of children. Within transformative leadership theory, principals direct interactions with others in the school and community leading to change benefiting children and parents (Parrett & Budge,
Supports and scaffolds intentionally built link the powerful, in this case the principal, with the marginalized in a poverty environment. Trusting relationships, built from interactions at the school, result in an increase in actions to benefit children and families. The principal, being a change agent, promotes positive parental involvement and serves as a critical partner for families.

Educational leaders and parent involvement processes intertwine. Improvement with current conditions includes changing and improving current systems of operation. A call for action states:

What is needed is a new and more comprehensive approach to educational leadership, one that requires leaders to take a stand, embrace the chaos and ambiguity, focus on information sharing and relationships, and develop a strong sense of the core organizational vision. (Shields, 2013, p.11)

Casting a vision for improvement fuels steps of change. Government policy provides an impetus, but the actual steps to conduct parent involvement lay at the discretion of schools. A function of The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), passed by the United States Federal Government, places power back in the hands of individual states making decisions of operations and functionality (NAFSCE, 2017). In looking to build quality programs, educational leaders seek guidance from researchers who categorize what works. Research-based methods guide educational leaders through decision-making for best parent practices. A study follows of the practice of parent involvement.

**Theoretical Framework for Parent Involvement**

Epstein’s conceptual framework for parent involvement stands as the most reviewed, referenced, and utilized model in the area of parent involvement research (Jordan, Orozco, &
Averett, 2002). Epstein (1992) provides a theoretical framework representing three overlapping spheres of influence when examining parent involvement with the three spheres, identified as school, family, and community, centering school leaders into best practices for parent involvement (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Epstein’s Spheres of Influence for Parent Involvement](image)

When the three groups work together, outcomes for students and families improve and school leaders engaging in the power of collaborative practice see results. Henderson and Mapp (2002) reiterate parent involvement benefits students academically, as shown by improved performances on measures of progress. Epstein (2001), as an expert in topic, goes further to develop guidelines for schools on methods of operation and planning when considering parents’ needs in effectively operating within school settings.

School supports, intentionally developed and addressed, provide an anchor for work with parents. For meaningful interactions to occur, school leaders set the expectations and cast the vision to the faculty, families, and community (Parsons and Harding, 2012). When detailing levels of parent engagement a wide range of involvement exists with Epstein’s framework
encapsulating six types of parent involvement seen in schools (see Table 1). Interactions include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community with schools addressing all six areas to establish strong partnerships.

Sanders (2008) believes meaningful interactions grow for students, the school, and the community by specifically addressing these specific areas of parent involvement, which delineate what parents’ need. By being more responsive to parents within the school environment and within the community, positive interactions grow and structures of operation become supportive.

Table 1

*Epstein’s Six Types of Parental Involvement with Description*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1: Parenting</td>
<td>Help families establish a home environment conducive to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2: Communicating</td>
<td>Design effective home to school and school to home communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3: Volunteering</td>
<td>Recruit and organize parent help and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4: Learning at Home</td>
<td>Provide information and ideas on how to help at home with homework and curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 5: Decision-Making</td>
<td>Include parents in school decision making, developing parent leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 6: Collaborating with the Community</td>
<td>Identify and integrate resources from the school and the community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A reoccurring theme throughout Epstein’s framework details how schools assist parents to promote student success. To effectively direct a school to commit to these standards of parent involvement, an educational leader provides the direction to the staff and shares a vision of inclusion, unity, and partnership (Baker et al., 2016). A principal builds bridges into the community to parents, but also sets roadblocks or barriers when ideas work counter to their
vision (Povey et al, 2002). Educational policy promotes the principal to parent partnership, and transformational leadership calls the leader to action.

**Political Context**

In this section, reference to older documents establishes the progression of American Education’s history with parent involvement, framed with political decision-making, government involvement and written policy. Participation in the educational process for marginalized populations reflects an absence of power and significant struggle for equity. The political context begins with the relationship between marginalized populations in early American schooling, featuring families pursuing religious freedom, and goes further over time to include inequity-involving race, social class, and immigrant status. Parental involvement in schooling shows changes over time reflecting power shifts among participants (Jeynes, 2011). Family values, faith-based beliefs, and governmental policy evolved into structures of parental involvement visible in today’s twenty-first century schools (Hiner, 1988).

Historically, American parents’ directed children’s learning, as seen with the Puritans influencing early education practices, believing the Bible commanded learning. Puritans built the first American schools and take credit for passing the first compulsory educational laws (McClellan & Reese, 1988). Here begins the role of government and education dictating parent actions in America. The Massachusetts Compulsory School Law (1642) required the head of every household to teach all the children in one’s home, both boys and girls (Hiner, 1988). Ultimate responsibility for education rests with the family, respects the family’s religious values, and guarantees parent participation in learning. Over time, other newcomers to America fare worse in the educational system.

As accessibility to learning broadens the base of students attending schools in America,
immigrant parents arriving from outside the United States seek public education opportunities for their children. Policy for immigrant children plays out within schools and communities, with Proposition 187 introduced in California to serve as a de-incentive for illegal families entering the United States to receive free education for their children (Cortez & Romero, 1996). A divisive culture for immigrants in the country still appears today further illustrating critical theory within our schools (Bohman, 2016). Concern exists that giving to others lessens what the group in power holds in possession. Representative Gallegly, of California, expresses:

Illegal immigrants in our schools have an extremely detrimental effect on the quality of education we can provide to the legal residents. When illegal residents sit down in classrooms, the desks, the textbooks, the blackboards in effect become stolen property.

(Cortez & Romero, 1996, p. 3)

Historically, schools play the role of socializing immigrants and assisting students to merge to common cultural norms, leaving behind the customs and language of their parents’ countries (Garte, 2017). A strong xenophobic reaction happened in the 19th century with the rise of the Common School, which discouraged instruction in languages other than English occurring in communities with immigrants.

No longer a function for a select few, Common Schools provided increased opportunity for formal schooling for many children, previously overlooked and stuck in a lower social class; however, Common Schools assimilate children into the predominant values of the ruling class. Awareness of financial hardships represents early social change agents fostering positive impact in schooling for marginalized populations. Jeynes (2011) reports in the 1800’s student financial hardships received supportive funding at The New York Free School Society, a well-known school that used a sliding scale for children to attend classes. The school articulated a vision of
partnership, with parents and school working together to improve the morality of children, but determining which set of morals and values taught falls to those in power positions. In accepting an opportunity for a reduced cost education, children join the socialization process of those in control. The work within the school mirrored partnerships beyond the schoolhouse doors and reached into the community in service to others. Pestalozzi, an early educational reformer concerned with the conditions of the poor, influenced the function of schools by addressing relationships needed for parents and teachers to work together (Berger, 1991). Sending children to the care of strangers felt foreign, and parents’ suspicions arose at this practice. Pestalozzi called for schools to operate as a refuge for children and for teachers to function like parents with acceptance and security; with time, he believed children would learn at an advance pace in this setting (Jeynes, 2011). Establishing a practice of encouraging relationships with teachers and parents shows a mutual respect and partnership for children’s benefit.

With urbanization and industrialization in America, parents’ participated less in their child’s education. As teacher preparation became more standardized, teachers as professionals become the authority in schooling, and the relationship piece of partnering with parents suffered a set back. Connections with parents wane during this time, as prevailing thoughts believed teachers know more about education than parents, with unequal power structures existing in schools among adults (Anfara & Mertens, 2008). This belief allowed parents to think teachers need little assistance from the home and a separation occurred between families and educators. A turning point occurred in 1963, when the divorce rate in America grew after shrinking for the previous 14 years; changing family structures took a toll on the time available for child rearing, because more women entered the workforce (Jeynes, 2011).
In 1966, The Coleman Report, commissioned by President Lyndon Johnson, published startling findings after investigating American schools for fairness and segregation practices. A decade after Brown vs. Brown brings marginalization of students to the forefront; questions about schools in America still needed answering (Garte, 2017). The Coleman Report, also called the Equality of Educational Opportunity, showed a discrepancy between achievement levels for students of different races. This report marked the first time evidence about achievement differences between blacks and whites on a broad scale became public knowledge. Through the published report, an unexpected finding reveals family factors and structure predict school achievement, previously unrecognized as a significant contribution (Coleman et al., 1966). During this time equality for students found a growing voice supported by research, as separate but equal schools draw negative attention, and desegregation battles for minority children continued.

Within the United States, development of pre-kindergarten occurred for children living in reduced circumstances. In 1965, Project Head Start began in connection with Lyndon Johnson’s government initiative for The War on Poverty (Jeynes, 2011). Head Start targeted children living in at-risk environments, and included a commitment to parent involvement in educational decision-making and programming, further illustrating an ongoing association between parent involvement and government legislation (Anselmo, 1977). Early research on the benefit of Head Start by Grotberg (1969) showed IQ gains for children with parents who actively participated in the program. This contrasted with children whose parents chose lower levels of participation in the program and found smaller achievement gains. Support for parent involvement in schools grew with research, while funding for Head Start fell to the government to provide. Offering assistance to families with young children in marginalized populations socialized and impacted
the future of America.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education, at the direction of the United States Department of Education (1983), published another document investigating schools. A Nation at Risk criticized low achievement levels of American students and disparaged ineffective teachers in public schools. In this new era of accountability, a call for increasing rigor in schools occurred and parents lose trust in the second-rate education offered to their children. Parent expertise as first teacher magnified when schools proved unworthy of the task (U.S.D.O.E., 1983). Jeynes (2011) reported a 14-year decline in SAT scores correlated with changing family structures occurred, further supporting the influence of parents in education. Did schools fail the community, or did changing family dynamics prove detrimental for students as The Coleman Report magnified decades earlier? Parent involvement theory and research therefore became more visible in the 1980s to address three areas of concern for schools: how to support single parents to become involved in their child’s education, how to facilitate involvement for two parent families, that may not know how to support education, and how to grow the capabilities of teachers to work with parents in partnership. Parent involvement stands as an established idea; however, constraints of modern day families’ participation in an era of increased work demands and changing family structures played a role in the implementation at schools.

In the 1990’s, accountability in public education placed a lens on achievement of individual schools. The Bush era generates educational reform with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandating success for all students, specifically focusing on at-risk student population performance. Increasing parent involvement became one of six areas of reform put forth by NCLB and the Federal Government (Meece & Eccles, 2010). Data and statistics fuel headlines called for changes in student achievement to happen within schools. As the call for increased
parental involvement occurs, a greater emphasis on tests scores and accountability measures happen. Chin and Newman (2002) surmise the need for parent involvement coincided with managing an increased burden of results for students. Parent involvement assisted schools to meet higher academic goals, and multiple studies support the simple truth that parent involvement results in higher levels of student attainment academically (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

The funding and support of parent involvement initiatives through the government occurs inconsistently. The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement reported on changes due to new legislation with The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) passed under the Obama Administration. Statewide Family Engagement Centers replace Parental Information Resource Centers (PIRCs) with $10 million in allocations added to the budgets. This move highlights an inclusive name change, while the purpose of the centers basically stayed the same. Until PIRCs lost funding in 2011, a larger allotment of $40 million covered the costs of operating; between 2012 and 2015 allotments stood at zero (NAFSCE, 2015). In the beginning of the 21st century, educators speaking and writing about parent involvement showed a changing viewpoint of participation centered on relationships, connecting in settings designated to assist families. Bringing families, educational leaders, and government representatives together creates challenges and opportunities for partnerships, respecting every voice involved. Unfunded mandates and inconsistent budgeting in parent involvement initiatives brings issues for school leaders looking to make a difference with parents. Former U.S. Attorney General, Janet Reno, expressed her views on how government legislates for marginalized parents:

Washington (D.C.) doesn’t understand the communities of America…. it doesn’t understand the people, the problem, and the nature of the school system, thus it becomes
important that throughout America we begin to reweave the fabric of community... and make true partnerships, we can make that incredible difference. (Cortez & Romero, 1997, p. 4)

Finding a way to engage families in partnership with education happens when collaborative structures respect all students regardless of race, immigration status, and social class to facilitate inclusive practices in local schools. Building bridges of understanding among all parties and pursuing actions to assist families provides promise of improvements for children.

**Guiding Research**

Within research studying the relationship of parents and schools, words used to describe parent involvement evolve and change. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) showcase new language as parent involvement gives way to parent engagement with their child’s learning. In moving towards new terminology, the focus shifts from the parents’ presence at schools, otherwise known as parent participation, to parent and child engaging together, focused on the child’s learning and motivation. Parent expectations for school success and values for learning become topics of interest for school leaders. The parent takes a shared role as a partner in educating the child with the school, otherwise known as parent partnership. Pomerantz, Moorman and Litwack (2007) discuss parent involvement in two spheres: traditionally seen within the school focused on attendance of events and conferences, and within a new role, outside of the school, supporting academic practices, and communicating values. Epstein (1992) anchors parent involvement thinking, and now promotes a partnership including parent and teacher with shared responsibility for academic achievement for the child. A school, family, and community partnership emphasizes shared responsibility for children learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Meaningful interactions grow for families, the school, and the community
with bridges of support specifically addressing parent partnerships established at school and within the home. The following section of research reviews ideas, beliefs, and trends impacting the field of parent involvement within schools.

**Social Capital and Relationships**

Social capital looks at the strength of connections within a network of people, seeing usefulness in building relationships. Stevens & Patel (2015) suggest value in looking at individual social capital, referring to the teacher/parent relationship, and collective social capital, which relates to opportunities created by the school for parents to participate with fellow parents, in a public, peer group. Noguera (2011) illustrates weak social connectedness due to racial, economic, and class challenges in poverty communities, as detrimental to schools. Middle class parents, functioning as the prevailing social class, typically do not experience low social capital within their educational environments (Noguera, 2011). Social networks, purposefully pursued in at-risk environments, become growth magnets for the school community and positively influence connections formed for support. Generativity, within social capital networks, benefits schools, and promotes cultural traditions of operating, assisting families in building connections with others. Effective school leaders utilize social capital in promoting parent involvement, allowing parents to lead other parents.

Social connectedness becomes a key ingredient of collaborative parent groups in schools looking to grow parent involvement. Groups nurture and support each other individually as parents, and collectively as the community served by the school. Almeda-Lawson, (2014) shares Collective Parent Engagement (CPE) provided training for 16 parents to aid and assist other parents within a Title 1 Elementary School, looking for the impact of peer group assistance. After completion of a 40-hour outreach course, trained parents connected with other parents to
help build parent capacity in others. The researcher discovered that parents who worked together helped each other make improvements on children’s educational outcomes in the community, not just their own child’s performance, with self-reported parent empowerment gains by all participants (Almeda-Lawson, 2014). Bracke and Corts (2012) saw an increase in participation when parents perceived other parents participated. Momentum for parent participation increased with wanting to be a part of a social group. Parents perceived as not involved by the school staff, had a lower sense of other parents’ involvement at the school, leading to the conclusion that a lack of awareness influences participation. Some parents may not understand the context of participation and involvement needed with sending a child to school, yet wanting to join others and seeking social connections helped parent involvement grow.

The power of parent relationships played out further in research examining a lack of participation by parents within schools. Bower and Griffin (2011) questioned why a specific elementary school studied showed low parent participation. Conclusions referenced a lack of social connectedness within the school parent population, and a dearth of social capital, both individual and collective. Observations by researchers at the school detail poor communication skills among parents, staff and educational leaders, language barriers, and un-comfortableness present at parent meetings. Communication issues became problems with a lack of cultural understandings between races. Utilizing social norms for participating at schools within the community may provide compelling leads on how to attract parents to the school. Exploring role construction and how parents believe functioning in the school occurs aids future growth of parent involvement (Bracke & Corts, 2012). Climate, the general attitude of people in the school, plays a role in attracting and drawing families into the building (Gruenert & Whittaker, 2015). Reports of improved school climate commonly occur in many parent involvement studies, when
emphasis on growing relationships between staff and families occurs.

Elements of trust encourage parents to get involved in their child’s education (Henderson et al., 2007). A high trust school built with respect, competence, integrity, and personal regard grows relationships. Fullan (2012) details school leaders’ actions in establishing trust in education communities through behaviors and modeling observed by the community. One way to show trust suggests that ideas generated by parents for school improvements need to be used at the school (Povey et al., 2016). Consequently, one way to destroy trust happens when parents participate, suggesting ideas at the school, but over time, none of the ideas prove useful or show implementation. Assisting parents in finding their voice at school places parents in a democratic process with school leaders sharing power. Some ideas supporting school democracy include joining councils, committees, Parent Teacher Organizations, or a group writing a parent teacher compact (Henderson et al., 2007). When parents take the time to participate in a group, collaborative efforts with school staff direct the school and impact children’s education. When the principal supports the process, trust further becomes established with school leadership bringing a critical connection. Leadership addresses equity issues within individual schools, looking for bias and sensitivity to division.

Rothengast (2016) mentions an environment of high staff turn over, leadership instability, and low morale within the elementary school where she became principal. Elevated levels of distrust existed among all groups at the school. As supportive networks grew, she increased familiarity with parents and staff while nurturing trusting relationships. Changing perceptions of parents occurred with the school partnering with academic and non-academic needs, bringing assistance to families. In this instance, transformative leadership practices impacted parent involvement as families connected to community services through the school. This principal
credited the hiring of a community school coordinator as a tipping point for the school, and a catalyst for establishing trusting relationships. The new coordinator led from a positive approach, celebrating, and growing collaborative practice with parents. A change in the interactions at school happened when parents felt valued and participated in decision-making, while improvements took time, none happened in isolation. Parents felt respected and a positive climate influenced increased parent involvement. The hallmark of the most successful parent involvement programs show parents feeling welcome, and an emphasis on school climate (Mapp et al., 2008). Parents feel whether invited participation at schools genuinely exists, and whether parent opinions matter from the moment they walk in the door. Parents need to feel love and kindness at their school (Jeynes, 2005). The feelings generated by all stakeholder groups within the school matter in elements of parent involvement, influencing the extent to the success seen on school campuses.

**Parent Capacity**

Jeynes (2005) completed multiple, ongoing meta-analyses on parent involvement and detailed changing views of what matters most for effective parent involvement. Maintaining high expectations for one’s child within the education system stands as a pivotal belief. The effect size for parent expectations in learning stands seven times greater than a parent attending a school function (Jeynes, 2005). Two powerful parent involvement practices include talking to children about the work completed at school, and operating with a parenting style of support of the school. Parents need to know and understand the influence on academic success families’ hold. Deplanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) reported a strong staff belief stating parents’ presence mattered little at the school, as long as parents supported students doing homework at home. Supporting school practices with parenting outside of school aids academic growth of
students. Knowing how to support the school brings an element of parent capacity into focus for schools looking to foster relationships and partnerships with families.

Parent education programs become a tool for increasing parent awareness of the power held in the family for teaching children. Thiers (2017) brings to light an awareness of parents’ functioning with role construction in education, showing how a personal view held by parents as educators develops and carries importance in education. Strong associations of parent involvement and academic success occur when the parent takes on the role of teacher at home and communicates expectations for learning at school. To accomplish this role, many parents need tools to assist the process, and teaching parents becomes a key strategy incorporated by schools. Schaefer (1971) conducts one of the earliest studies on the impact of building parent capacity through parent involvement in prekindergarten classes, and attributes positive gains in academic functioning to a change in parent perceptions of the role played in teaching and learning. Opening the mind to possible interactions between parent and child within the home broadens opportunity and increases academic achievement. Schools fulfill this key step when educational leaders intentionally build parent capacity by opening doors for adult learning and provide opportunities to participate.

Cattanach (2013) details several Hispanic families participating in a course designed to impact education and health, a response of transformative leadership led by the school system. Looking beyond current conditions of families and providing for improvement in daily functioning benefits all stakeholders with schools recognizing improved living conditions impacting academics. Parents, who took the classes, reported an improvement of individual children functioning within the school. Another benefit of the classes included an improved relationship between child and parent through addressing shared expectations. Being able to
conduct the class became possible with a community partnership with The Concilio, a Dallas-based non-profit organization assisting Hispanic Families. Parent workshops give many families the tools necessary to make changes, and schools need to consider how to provide the experiences for families struggling with finances, and little disposable income.

Schools within poverty environments operate with constrained and limited budgets, but through connecting to community resources, the work of supporting parents who want to become involved with their children’s education becomes affordable. Transformative leadership, demonstrated by school leaders, connects community resources to parents who need financial supports and opportunities for building capacity. Georgis, Gokiert, Ford, and Ali (2014) worked with refugee parents who recently arrived to Canadian Schools in Alberta. Parents and students, new to the country, received non-traditional supports such as after school activities provided by community agencies without charge. Traditional supports such as daily English language classes and a monthly parent meeting conducted by a cultural broker helped the newcomers navigate new systems. This ethnographic approach used interviews and focus groups to collect information and analyzed the results of parent participants. The impact of the assigned support person, called the cultural broker, made a significant difference to parents. When transformative leadership by school leaders combined with a parent involvement goal directs change, the overall responsiveness to the needs of the parents strengthens. Addressing family needs, and aligning community resources showcase work done for those most in need by educational leaders who look beyond current academic functioning to structures in place within students’ homes.

**Barriers to Participation**

School improvement happens when removal of barriers of participation for parents occurs within the school setting. When all parents feel welcome and seek involvement in their
child’s education, then achievement levels truly grow at schools (Georgis et al., 2014). School leaders, practicing transformative leadership, need awareness of roadblocks and obstacles for those lacking power at the school, since recognition of barriers brings changes in operations. Goslin (2012) believes that a school leader signals his or her beliefs and values to their staff, and showcases how interactions should occur within the school community. A staff member within the study recognized without the principal’s support, change would not occur and status quo continues (Goslin, 2012). Actions of the principal speak louder than words, and all eyes note how the vision frames actions and what behaviors follow in accordance with parent involvement.

Kraft et al. (2015) studied six high-need, urban schools, reviewing the interactions and involvement of parents with children at the schools. Researchers attributed the school principal with a critical role in establishing an environment responsive to family needs and open for students, staff, and parents, therefore eliminating barriers to parent involvement. Principals facilitated parent and student support with deliberate actions within the community by operating from a moral purpose, a key element of transformative leadership. Frequent interaction between parents and school showcased a positive, established home-school relationship with parents actively involved in their children’s education, working to shape the school’s setting even in the face of significant financial hardships in the community. Teachers given more opportunities to collaborate with each other, used teamwork to address the uncertainties encountered in the classrooms and in the surrounding neighborhoods. A call for further research articulated a need for more case studies of successful environments featuring high-need students living in poverty environments. Important to note in research, “Case studies that are available often focus on the shortcomings of these schools or on the successes of a special teacher, who triumphs despite her school” (Kraft et al., 2015, p. 782). This case study ignores deficit thinking and focuses on
successful strategies designed to mitigate adverse circumstances.

By examining successful school settings, which build networks of support, learning for other educational leaders in high-need areas occurs. Challenges exist for principals who strive to make gains with parent involvement in communities facing financial hardships; school leaders note transformative leadership holds promising pathways to success. Problems faced in poverty environments involve barriers of perceptions, as well as reasons situated in financial, social, and emotional realities. When schools focus on difficulties and dwell on deficits little progress happens with academic outcomes (Miedel & Reynolds, 2000). A strengths-based perspective supports a challenging work environment addressing deficit orientations held by school personnel that project towards families from different cultures and contexts (Foote et al., 2013). A need for success stories showing intentional practice with parent involvement motivates and inspires educational leadership to accomplish greater gains and negate barriers to participation.

Closing an academic achievement gap with Black and Latino children within the last thirty years in the United States in poverty communities stalled, even with policy such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) addressing disparities (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Lack of results influences parent perception of the school, encouraging distrust, and raising barriers. Difficulty appears in making gains to address the gap when resources in America separate across racial lines, with a lack of equity present in school systems. To address the disparity and poverty issues, many educational leaders provide additional learning time through before and after school programs, increasing focused instructional times, and adding resources to gain ground for poor children. High performing, high-poverty schools provide strong examples of how to bridge the achievement gap, although examples seem few and far between in research. Definitively, educational leaders need to address the “normalization of failure,” which makes it acceptable to
overlook unacceptable results (Boykin et al., 2011, p.33). Schools looking to make a difference with academics pursue partnerships with families to address educational barriers.

Poverty, a growing barrier in the United States, impacts educational outcomes for many children. Levin and Riffel (2000) report low socioeconomic status as the single most relevant determinant of negative educational outcomes for families. Low-income students demonstrate less preparation for school, with basic needs unmet, and more likelihood to display behavior difficulties and special education needs. Responding and addressing needs brought on by poverty became a necessary step for the school systems studied. Responses varied greatly and depended on the individual school’s ideas, and the philosophy of the school leader addressing student needs. Boykin and Noguera (2011) credit school leaders with forming parent partnerships in high poverty environments as impactful change-agents to school improvement, as principals who forged relationships with the parent population, and provided a variety of supports saw academic gains with school achievement. To accomplish the goal of increased performance, changing traditional practice of school leadership centered solely on academics, and focusing on serving the community of students and their families, addressing needs beyond the school setting brought about change.

Barriers exist to parent involvement within schools, and a growing awareness of multiple barriers benefits educators who must see the school from a parent perspective. Bracke and Corts (2012) share parents’ past personal experiences with schools shaping current perceptions in their children’s school, limiting participation. Parents identify the school environment as unwelcoming; this becomes a challenge for school leaders to entice parents to participate who never want to attend. Schools strive to build partnerships with families, but parents ignore invitations held back by memories of past experiences. Baek and Bullock (2015) noted
collaboration among families and schools reduced risk factors for students with identified emotional and academic needs of troubled students. The study documented improved parenting within the home as a benefit from participating with the school, but parents may need support and encouragement to initially attend. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) state parent absences do not mean low involvement in the educational mission for their child. Key involvement may happen at home even with family members not setting foot at the school.

Family structures bring challenges and create barriers to participation at school. Two-parent households find shared school and financial responsibilities easier to manage, since single-family structures, by nature, have more tasks assigned to one adult. In the meta-analyses study, Jeynes (2005) asserts insensitiveness exists when we limit talk about the trials this brings to a single parent. Chinn and Newman (2002) researched the difficulties twelve families of varying structures faced navigating school in New York City. The findings showed poor children start school with significant academic holes that parents struggle to fill. Some parents lack an awareness that academic deficits exist for their child since fewer resources exist at home, whether financial or emotional. The beginning of public school, when families showed unfamiliarity with expectations, placed many low-income students at-risk. Chin and Newman (2002) equate children of the poor with inequity, leading to deficit thinking by educators. Schools intend to be an equalizer in society, providing opportunities; however, home life continues to exert a challenge on performance of students. Principals operating within transformative leadership practices make a difference for students by reaching into the homes and partnering with parents. Through interviews and field study, the researchers heard the stresses of families as they struggled to meet bills and support children who failed at school. Families’ felt like time prevented them from doing an adequate job supporting children in
learning while holding a job, necessary for living expenses. Chinn and Newman (2002) report about the circumstances of parents who use to be regular participators in volunteer work at the school and active on the PTA while on welfare. The mothers found jobs, which improved the family finances, but removed them from involvement in their children’s education by being less physically present at the school. A line between involvement and employment exists, with no time to attend school functions; time becomes a barrier for many families.

Language barriers prevent some parents from participating at their children’s school and exist as a roadblock to parent involvement. Additionally, past cultural customs in the home country may discourage participation by parents who emigrated from countries without school partnerships in place. A lack of awareness prompts some parents to not enforce new expectations of schoolwork, such as homework completion at home expected in American schools, therefore sharing customs of operation must occur with newcomers (Schneider, Martinez & Owens, 2006). Cattanach (2013) reports language issues stop some parents from coming into school when communicating with school officials brings barriers to shared understandings. Parents illiterate in their first language, felt greater intimidation by the school setting and questioned how to participate with the school. An awareness of cultural barriers for immigrants by school leaders brings opportunity for change as school environments facilitate partnerships.

A first solution to address cultural barriers lies with translating flyers from English to the native language of the parents; however, parent involvement becomes more than language printed on paper, revolving around the context and welcome offered by the school to families of other cultures. Grand Prairie Independent School District invested proactively into parent engagement with a predominantly poor Hispanic parent population (Cattanach, 2013). Support included a district parent involvement center, a parent liaison, and classes for parents to learn
Parents accessed community resources managed by a social worker. After instituting changes benefiting families living conditions, academic proficiency for Hispanic students in the district grew significantly in Science and Math. Students in this district outperformed their regional and state counterparts in every subject area. The District attributed the academic success to parent engagement activities at the schools (Cattanach, 2013). Addressing family needs grew academic performance of students.

Educational leaders promote the capacity of teachers to connect with parent populations, since teacher perceptions may limit engagement with foreign-born parents. The students educated today in American public schools come from more diverse backgrounds, while the majority of teachers continue to appear predominantly white and middle-class (Howard, 1999). One of the most powerful practices in building connectedness involves visiting the homes of children served at the school, and interacting with the families (Jeynes 2010). Adkins-Sharif (2017) speaks about the connections formed when teachers visit families in the school community. Home visits, a thing of the past, makes a resurgence given the opportunity for increasing connections. Moving beyond the school for meetings promotes trust, and opens families and teachers to an improved relationship when educators travel to student homes.

Reece, Staudt, and Ogle (2013) researched a Neighborhood Project designed to build parents’ knowledge, skills, and confidence with schooling. This study, located within a housing project, encouraged parents to join in partnership with the local school. Parents who participated talked about the deciding factors to get involved. Staff of the school walked to the doors of the families and issued invitations directly to parents to participate. This door-to-door canvassing motivated parent attendance, and built connections facilitating parent involvement. Participants described the staff as “personable and professional, friendly, and genuinely caring (Reece et al.,
2013, p.217). Important lessons learned during the study focused on relationship building between teachers and parents. Value in the relationship built between staff and parents grew parent involvement and began with the connection that grew when staff came to parents’ homes.

Growing relationships across rapidly changing, diverse student population in America’s schools takes knowledge of cultural differences to address barriers to participation (Howard, 1999). Shiffman (2005) commends teachers in a predominantly low income Tennessee school who facilitated nonthreatening two-way conversations with parents. Teachers displayed flexibility when scheduling conferences, and helped parents remain consistently involved in their child’s education. A lack of teacher judgment directed towards families built bridges and connections of parent involvement. Beginning teachers, who lacked experience with teaching, displayed limited understanding for family circumstances and culture. Foote et al. (2013) stated many beginning teachers framed their teaching experiences based on their childhood experiences, which differed greatly from the children served in this low-income area. A fragmented awareness for the challenges experienced by the families and students existed by school staff in this community. Recommendations showed school leaders must intentionally teach teachers how to interact and support families with challenges.

Teacher’s attitudes and perceptions should not be the barriers to parent partnerships formed within schools, yet this barrier exists in some school settings. Ramirez (2001) noted teacher opposition to relationships with parents in his research, with teachers and administrators often expressing negative associations regarding interactions dealing with parents’ questions and concerns. Stereotypes concerning lower socioeconomic parents prevalently appeared in teacher interviews conducted at the school. Many teachers doubted the ability of parents to contribute to curriculum decisions or participate on school leadership committees. Parents felt a fine line
existed at the school between being concerned and a problem parent. Parents noted difficulty-negotiating relationships with school personnel and in return, teachers felt parent communication to be extra work and of little benefit to the child.

Teachers receive little formalized instruction on working with parents, and may have little practical experience in building connections with parents who represent different social classes and races. Thiers (2017) sees this absence of training strongly impacting parent involvement within schools. When teachers view communication with parents not as a relaying of information, but as an exchange of ideas related to the support of the child, the communication value increases for parents. Teachers learn a lot from parents by listening to what they say about their children, as families know the child best (Foote et al., 2013). Wong (2015) who studied communication between teachers and parents stated parents reported taking clues for interactions from teacher communications. Barriers to interactions identified the greatest roadblock referenced by both teachers and parents as time constraints with the second greatest parent rated barrier as knowledge of school expectations. Teachers frequently assumed parents knew the expectation and course of action, when parents appeared oblivious to school operations.

Principals also show a lack of awareness in how their actions influence parent participation, therefore building a barrier to parent involvement at school. Povey et al. (2016) found principal leadership, displayed with expectations and attitudes to parents impacted school climate, influenced staff, and ultimately predicted whether parents engaged with the school. Discrepancies revealed two distinct perceptions of interactions, principals self-reported on themselves, while parent organization leaders viewed and judged principal actions as well with neither side matching for accuracy. Barriers from school leaders appear hardest to overcome, stopping parents from participating at the school and strongly influencing staff behavior.
Educational leadership must find ways of recognizing and addressing pervasive problems of functioning, beginning with understanding how actions of school leaders sway parents away from the school.

**Social Justice and Moral Purpose**

Archambault and Garon (2011) studied school leaders who worked within poverty environments and how challenges addressed happen through a lens of moral purpose. Leaders struggling to make gains revealed prejudices, false beliefs, deficit thinking and lowered expectations in interviews conducted with researchers. Raising teacher capacity for parent involvement and teaching the staff about poverty issues and concerns became important steps noted by successful school leaders. Principals felt called to address the basic needs of the students outside of the school, a key function of transformative leadership (Shields, 2013). Often education felt like the second priority of schools, when leaders confronted the lack of equity within the homes of students. Transformative leadership practices, present to varying degrees within the schools, focused educators on assisting with families’ needs. An understanding existed for school leaders that privileges and discriminations in the community occurred, this came as a prerequisite of understanding before supportive actions by the school leaders transpired for families.

Principal’s understanding of the circumstances of the students served within the school must exist before change occurs. A school leader sets the tone and vision for how the entire school operates against hardships within the community. Goslin (2012) examines how principals influence school operations by demonstrating personal belief systems anchored in social justice. Fullan (2014) expands thinking of school leaders into a moral purpose that principals share with the community, working for social change. School leaders tempered instructional leadership with
transformative leadership, being careful to not overextend in either area. Hulley and Dier (2005) expand the moral purpose of leadership sparked by Fullan. At turn around schools studied, credit for changes went to developing relationships, focusing and sharing knowledge of instructional competencies, and offering more to students as schools became harbors of hope. Building positive home-school relations became a tenet of success with successful principals establishing clear-cut stances on values and vision to all stakeholders.

Parsons and Harding (2011) detail essential actions for principals wishing to take a stand for moral purpose in schools. Actions include setting a positive vision to staff and focusing on small gestures to parents in schools grappling with challenges brought on by a lack of equity in the community. A culture of belonging and feeling like part of a family unit accelerated change in one school studied that made gains with parents and academic effectiveness (Parsons & Harding, 2011). Within this at-risk environment, technology tools communicated good things going on at the school to all stakeholders. A charge placed to school leaders directs action not to look down on circumstances, but instead to look outward into the community and make a difference for others by delivering a message of hope.

**Parent Liaisons**

Knowing special factors, challenges, and considerations present within a poverty setting assists leaders when building parent involvement. Within high-risk neighborhoods, staff turnover happens more frequently at schools (Chin & Newman, 2002). One promising change lies in dedicated personnel guiding parents through the school process, managing a parent resource center, and fostering a school relationship with families. Funding this position denotes a new era of support, prioritizing assistance for parents within schools. Henderson et al. (2007) identify the role and the significance this person carries within the community. Although referred to with
several varying titles, a parent liaison takes responsibility for parents of students at school.

The Georgia Department of Education (GA DOE) embraced the role of a parent involvement coordinator serving as a dedicated school staff member working with parents within the state’s public elementary schools. The GA DOE reports approximately 900 parent involvement coordinators engage families in Title 1 funded school districts and schools, with a focus on assisting parents to help children with academic work (Georgia DOE, 2016). The role includes responsibilities in a variety of tasks proven to impact parent involvement. Parent involvement coordinators, also called PICs, offer information sessions and classes to families within the school. PICs pay attention to basic necessities and link parents to needed community resources when necessary. Assisting parents in navigating the school system, and assuring that children access the resources required also figure in the job description.

A parent support role exists in Chicago where parents of young children access the Chicago Child-Parent Centers. Miedel and Reynolds (1999) studied the impact on 700 parents who used the resource for both educational and family supports, and reported improved school success for families who started involvement with early childhood programming associated with the Chicago Longitudinal Study. Staffing at the centers included a parent resource teacher who leads parent activities at the center and within the community. At the center, parents work on projects, socialize with other parents, learn about relationships and parenting, find out about community resources, and sign up to take courses. Parents joined in educational planning by linking to a school advisory group. “Direct family participation in a program is expected to promote a family-school partnership that increases both the parent’s and child’s commitment to school, thus leading to more positive child outcomes” (Miedel & Newman, 1999, p.396). Benefits for children and parents increased from involvement with parent resource teachers at the
Chicago Child-Parent Centers.

Researchers note how unique a parent resource teacher seems to the community with conclusions suggesting this position shows promising innovation within the parent support network. Miedel and Newman (1999) encourage further study of this position, since positive findings resulted with the inclusion of a school employed parent leader. Epstein and Becker (1982) found wide spread variance in the perceived significance the parent involvement coordinator played within schools, attributing the success or failure to the organizational structures of the job, qualifications in schooling, and communication skills demonstrated. The researchers suggested further study into these issues, since questions of mixed results raised issues to explore.

Dedicated centers for parent partnerships play a part of innovative solutions to build partnerships, and prove to be an inviting setting for parents seeking assistance, housing staff ready to assist parents. One suburban Dallas school district placed parent outreach centers within 37 schools. The Director for Student and Family Engagement believed the centers to be one of the most effective initiatives for family engagement (Cattanach, 2013). The centers provide classes for adults and assisted parents with acquiring English skills. Although designating a parent resource room shows support, assigning a spot with resources in school does not bridge relationships. As Rothengast (2016) noted, her under utilized resource center functioned with a climate of negativity. To this principal, the tipping point happened when a positive, inviting parent coordinator worked in the role to serve families.

Sanders (2008) studied the impact of a parent liaison in districts that developed and implemented a structured liaison approach. All schools involved carried membership in the
National Network of Partnership Schools, a group focused on building capacity through family, school, and community partnering. Recommendations of practice include ensuring funding, identifying and training qualified personnel, and providing adequate support for parent liaisons (Sanders, 2008). An essential planning element in adoption includes asking how parent liaisons receive professional support by school leaders. Financial supports and professional development factor as critical elements for parent liaisons. Without both items, the success rate for parent liaisons and parent involvement appears varied in schools.

Ferrara (2015) recommends training and becoming more intentional with the personnel dedicated to assisting parents. In this study, the investment in training and time helped align the parent liaison with the educational leader at the school uniting the school with purpose focused on parents. Although training occurred when the non-certified parent liaison secured the part-time job, over time levels of individual effectiveness varied in the parent liaison position. Personnel in the parent support role felt contact with others in the same role built capacity for the work through sharing experiences and served as on-going professional development for the work. The employees who served in the parent liaison role communicated the relationship with the school administrator accounted for the majority of their success (Ferrara, 2015). When supported by school leadership and given meaningful tasks to complete, the parent liaison made a difference with at-risk students and their families at the school.

**Summary**

Parent involvement in education benefits children, but securing parent involvement challenges schools, especially in at-risk environments. Many reasons prevent partnerships from forming between schools and families including those centered on established barriers, such as
race, social class, and immigration status. American history shows a political context for parent participation combating marginalization and a lack of equity through government policy. Politicians, in the pursuit of change for communities, legislate action, directing schools to increase parent partnerships. Unfortunately, issues of marginalization still deserve attention by today’s educational leaders. Striving for change and attempting to manage the status quo becomes the collaborative work of stakeholders. Value in pursuing parent involvement exists with proven results seen in student’s academic outcomes when parents participate in the education process. Forming partnerships, a complex task, involves establishing relationships with parents and initiating a foundation of trustful interactions with many leaders asking for guidance.

Understanding parent involvement research shows work completed by schools to build parent capacity through workshops and classes, in addition to providing resources for parenting. Teachers also need help preparing for parent involvement, combating stereotypes and awkwardness in developing relationships with parents. The vision of an educational leader at a school sets the stage for how the staff interacts in securing parent involvement and impacts the school’s climate. Operating with transformative leadership practices charges a principal to combat barriers and stand up for families in poverty, modeling for staff interactions with parents. Opening the doors of the school for reasons beyond academics to help the parent population involves focusing on serving families for moral purposes and in the end, actually proves to improve test scores. Social justice influences the actions principals make for families, when school leadership views the influence of the position of principal impacting family lives in the community. Bringing groups of people together at the school supports Epstein’s Parent Involvement Theory (1992), using the school as a connective hub in the community to benefit
families. When groups of parents work together at schools, social capital flourishes and the encouragement and purpose of parents assist the group in forming a strong community.

Another key person influences school operations, when a parent liaison cultivates parent relationships with the school, dedicated to serving parents. An underexplored topic in literature features an individual staff member or teacher who builds capacity for parent involvement with all stakeholders, through a specific assignment. This school employee commits to building and exercising social capital among families to maximize parent involvement at the school. Some research touts the advantages of having a parent resource center, but few look at the qualifications of the person serving in the role of parent involvement or the impact the parent coordinator generates interacting with families within the room. When a parent liaison and principal work closely together, aligned with school improvement goals, an intentionality of practice impacts parent involvement. Few existing studies explore the collaborative practice and alignment of parent liaisons and educational leaders within the work of parental involvement.

This limited area of knowledge deserves attention in research with the benefit being increasing parent involvement at school. Adding the element of transformative leadership practiced by the school leader in conjunction with collaboration with the parent involvement coordinator further amplifies the importance of the work in serving parents. Researching the effectiveness of the Georgia outlay of funding promotes strong fiscal management practices for school systems and state leaders. Knowledge of the effectiveness of the parent involvement coordinator program assists decision-making when determining if further financial investments should sustain the design. This understudied area shows promise with influencing the future of parent, family, and community partnership studies and deserves further exploration.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In methodology, the research design used for the study details information of intention and operation. Both Kennesaw State University and the county school system where Baxter Elementary sits received and approved submissions of Institutional Review Board materials regarding the nature and process of the research prior to the study beginning. Material provided in this section includes the applied approach, chosen research question, selected informants, data gathering methods, and data analysis strategies. In sharing the structure, I express my worldview, revealing my personal philosophical leanings and epistemology, which assists the understanding of design in the research. Finally, strategies to ensure trustworthiness and ethical principles paint a picture of my commitment to a principled study within the research.

Research Design: Approach

The chosen design must suit the research project, beginning with the problem, and asking what learning focuses the work. By beginning with the question, a design selection fits the study (DeVaus, 2001). As the researcher in the proposed social science work, I ask how a complex, layered environment effectively functions and draws parents into partnership. Questions occur about change, and how the school improved over time. What currently brings Baxter Elementary success, when previously the school struggled? A qualitative study captures the in-depth understanding needed while addressing the research question. I seek an explanation featuring the relationships and the interactions of educators and parents. A large look into a specific, defined area with multiple views gains a trustworthy analysis when asking questions to deepen
understandings. A case study research design provides an anchor to the analysis of work, which gains a greater knowledge of family engagement in a high-need school.

I considered other methods of research design, and spoke with two highly regarded professors. These experts from Kennesaw State University, connected to the educational leadership department, listen to my aspirations in study (Jorrin Abellan, personal communication, September 14, 2016; Koz, personal communication, September 21, 2016). The interactions reinforce and strengthen my academic journey as I discount other means of research design. I hesitated slightly over selecting action research, but realize I try not to change anything, but rather to understand what currently exists. In seeking to understand how parents, or in this case, a broader term, families, engage within the school, a case study emerges. Stake (1995) as an expert in the field of case study, serves as the authority I reference in planning the research. Evidence examined assists the researcher in constructing and analyzing events. By using this design, I promote a high degree of professional scholarship given the multitude of sources used in constructing the view of this school.

Within case study realities seen, deconstructed, and constructed again permit understanding to develop (Stake, 1995). A case study provides a comprehensive investigation of a bounded system, with definition, assisting the reader in understanding the environment where the action occurs (Creswell, 2012). A reader of this type of research asks questions hoping to find connections or parallels within their own context of understanding. A choice happens in defining and bounding the exploration; options include binding by time, place, and physical boundary. Delineating and limiting the study assists in a quality examination of an encapsulated activity, event, or program. Thorough, defined qualitative case studies allow researchers the
ability to explore or describe phenomenon in context using a variety of sources, which serve as evidence obtained through observation (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Gathering information for this work involves using multiple pieces of evidence ensuring a high degree of dependability. The descriptive and reflective process focuses on looking for meaning, assisting readers to develop perspective. In this analysis, data accessed from observations, in-depth interviews, field notes and varied artifacts inform the study. Using all these bits generates a rich layered examination, which then connects together through identified common themes. Stake (1995) embraces the process of connecting the evidence by the researcher looking for shared refrains. From those common points, the structure of analysis happens, and leads the researcher to discovery and knowledge. By using the evidence as the motivation for discovering themes, a trustworthy picture emerges of the environment, then a triangulation occurs. The use of case study fits the goals of the report, in developing an understanding of the phenomena of a successful school setting earning statewide recognition for parent involvement. The research design of case study lends itself to the outcomes the researcher hopes to accomplish.

“A case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p.xi). When a qualitative researcher wants to understand a complex situation, the leader consulted, Stake, sets precedence. His construction of research using this model, offers guidance on building a high quality study for those who want to understand functions within a bounded time or place. A key element of this design focuses close association between the researcher and the participants, as an essential interaction within the research bringing deeper understanding. This collaboration predicates participants telling their stories to the researcher, and results in deeper understandings for those involved (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Through observation, interviews, field notes, and artifacts an
authentic story emerges of a genuine school focused on families and parent involvement. In this instance, a single instrumental case study allows for deeper examination of the process within a pre-determined, defined area (Stake, 1995). This instrumental case study illuminates parent engagement practices and the partnership between the parent involvement coordinator and the principal, as well as the interactions of the parents with the parent involvement coordinator. This particular place and specific lens allows the researcher to examine one predetermined school, in order to find the answer to an overarching compelling research question.

Within the case study, a choice presents itself on how to define and bound the exploration. This case study bounds by a defined location, as Baxter Elementary School, a pseudonym for a large Title 1 elementary school, sits outside a large city. This school serves slightly more than a thousand school children with almost half of the student body receiving a free or reduced lunch. The economic designation of free and reduced lunch determines a school’s disadvantaged population with the qualifications for financial assistance set by the Federal Government’s guidelines for assistance for families based on yearly income (USDA, 2017). The demographic detail included within the case study must accurately portray a picture of the student body attending the school. The detail represents the hardships encountered by families with children enrolled at this elementary school. This research design, case study, provides multiple pieces of information, and through the process of analysis, leads the researcher to create meaning for readers (Stake, 1995). The details provide assistance to the reader in visualizing and understanding the context encountered by the staff, students, and families associated with the school. Knowing the factual details of the school provides essential background for readers that wish to understand the phenomena enclosed within the school context.

Within a case study, multiple contexts exist and must be defined for the readers thereby
assisting with understanding and painting a rich picture. A context, defined as background, fits into interpretation. Knowing this information assists individuals who have not visited the school with understanding the many layers of circumstance within the setting. When trying to make sense of the examination, a thorough understanding of the physical location provides context and a framework of reference. Additionally, the storied history provides a compelling picture of the community facing challenges and stresses starting with the inception of the school in the 1930s and continuing to the modern day. By telling the story, a deeper understanding of the current situation emerges and assists the reader of the study.

In using the case study research design model, elements of the study strongly focus on the multiple contexts existing within Baxter Elementary. Deconstructing occurs by the researcher who looks at the phenomena and pulls apart the layers in order to gain a deeper understanding of the strengths and struggles in the environment. By reconstructing the phenomena of the school, an analysis of how things fit together and function emerges. Readers witness and understand the issues at play within the case study through the sharing of varied contexts. Similarities between Baxter and other school settings aid the reader looking for answers to questions of operation and actions of school leadership. In sharing the thick descriptions, context and culture revealed by using the case study model, shows a true picture of the work of parent involvement and the roles of the key participants for the reader. Capturing multiple descriptions ensures a high quality research design and guarantees attention to detail with numerous data sources examined.

**Reasons to Study: Justification**

Baxter Elementary’s parent involvement program becomes a highly desirable topic to study due to recent events at the school showcasing a turn around in student achievement and
parent participation. Five state level awards received in the past three years, illustrate the success of the school, in stark contrast to past lack luster performances. Turn-around schools serve as a compelling topic when educational leaders try to pinpoint how events changed the school (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Baxter Elementary deserves further examination to fully understand what actions brought about the success with academics and parent involvement. In the early 2000’s Baxter’s performance depicted trouble, and the school appeared on the needs improvement list for Title 1 schools, a designation for schools performing below a minimum standard of academic practice. Fast-forward several years and a different level of performance, punctuated with accolades exists. The school now receives recognition on the state level for interactions with families, strong parent leadership, and growing academic progress and performance. Anyone looking at this change of events wants to know what happened to influence a change in results at the school. Studying the results of a successful school setting brings knowledge to other school leaders. Parent involvement and academic achievement share an association (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Current financial hardships in the student population increased while awards and recognitions for the school grew. In examining change within the setting, questions arise concerning what occurred at the school predating new results, especially in a documented landscape of increased student economic need.

Research Question and Issues

According to Stake, “Perhaps the most difficult task of the researcher is to design good questions, research questions, that will, direct the looking and the thinking enough and not too much” (Stake, 1995, p.15). A research question guides this study, and from that question, further tensions delve into the professional practice of the parent involvement coordinator. These tensions, or issues, promote further examination and serve as a natural rise after constructing a
question giving direction to the case study. The following question lies at the heart of the case study:

- How and to what extent does the parent involvement coordinator impact parent engagement within the school community?

Issues lend themselves to exploration resulting from the research question and help to provide structure to the study (Stake, 1995). Issues as tensions existing within the study, imply struggle. When exploring a case study, a researcher must consider what issues need addressing within the research. Moving from the primary question, the following tensions feature in the research:

- What steps does the parent involvement coordinator take to impact all stakeholders involved?
- How and to what extent does the PIC remove barriers that prohibit and limit families from participation?
- How and to what extent did the work of the principal and PIC align to create a shared vision for the community?

**Role of the Researcher**

Important to note in this research study, I serve as sole researcher, integrated into the work of the school. I function as a true insider with this case study due to my role for the past seven years as principal of Baxter Elementary. In relaying the research, my voice adds description and narrative through first person renditions. I engage in reflection of educational leadership practice, maintained field notes as a piece of data, and added my background knowledge to the process of examination. My ability to reflect on past decision-making
instrumentally builds understanding of the case study context. Prior to serving as principal of Baxter Elementary, I worked as a teacher and instructional coach at the school for six years and witnessed the hardships and difficulties encountered in the community by the people who live here. Revealing the work done to support the families at the school focuses on collaborative practice and transformational leadership practices illustrating the school environment.

Within my role, I question and examine how educational leadership supports and grows family engagement at a high-poverty school through hiring and supporting a parent liaison. The school employs a parent involvement coordinator or PIC who functions in a defined role engaging families in the education process for their children. This role, expanded over time, stands at the center of the case study. The alignment and function of the parent involvement coordinator with the principal plays a critical role within the case study. Principal stories serve as a slice of humanity shared to grow the expertise of educational leaders looking for direction, inspiration, and community. By sharing my own approach within the research design, I hope to add a layer to the case study as a participant who influences and impacts parent engagement in the school setting. I believe the positive impact of being a participant observer and researcher outweighs any concerns or limitations with my own involvement in the work.

**Research Design: Worldview**

The theoretical lens employed by the researcher conveys a philosophical leaning, which shows how all researchers connect ideologically to their studies (Creswell, 2012). In examining the personal view employed by myself, the sole researcher, I reflect upon my internal belief system. Knowing myself, I then analyze what guides my actions and how I view the world around me; this epistemological view exposes my own thoughts of how knowledge and reality
interact in the world. Within my view of reality, also known as ontology, my worldview becomes revealed (Merriam, 2009). This functional analysis for a qualitative researcher requires a reflective stance upon events, surroundings, and observations. By observing social behavior and making sense of the interactions, I believe my worldview reveals an educational professional transforming school due to social injustice, focusing on social policy in high-need environments.

The worldview I espouse grew during the last century, during the 1980s and 1990s. At that time in my career, I began my work as a teacher in a county with one of the highest adult illiteracy rates in Maryland. The school served the working poor, and had a preponderance of waterman’s children attending and learning on the Eastern Shore. A waterman, a fisherman on the Chesapeake Bay, harvests crabs for a living and makes a modest living. As a young teacher, drawn to schools with issues of poverty, and neighborhoods situated in high crime, I saw my ability to make a difference for families. I viewed my work with the children in these schools with moral purpose, designed to assist those who had many barriers to surmount. Of critical importance to me personally stood marginalized people within our society who struggle with oppression, loss of power, social injustice, and discrimination. My primary motivation in teaching served to assist those who appeared to lack the ability to take control of their situation, with my support going beyond the student to include the family. I saw people that plainly needed help to better their current circumstances, and I thought education served as a valuable turnaround resource. Mertens (2010) defines this viewpoint as a transformative worldview, carrying a political agenda to confront social oppression. Many hear the call for action needed for the marginalized, and in my worldview, I believe political steps become necessary and serve as an outcome supported by research.

Research with a transformative worldview provides a voice for those who seem
voiceless, ignored by the powerful (Shields, 2013). I believe this research inquiry leads to social change within our government structures, and influences the choices made by those elected who hold public office. As an elementary school principal, I connected with several people in political office within my community, and these associations assist the work I do for my community. I frequently invite these leaders to school to interact with my students and families to aid politicians in understanding the needs of our shared school and community. Recommendations on how to proceed for political and social change become outcomes from research projects. Referencing my work when discussing future needs of the community with the commissioners and business leaders makes sense when education squarely lies as an opportunity for disenfranchised populations.

A transformative worldview looks to advance an agenda of assistance towards the marginalized individuals who makeup the population of a Title 1 Elementary school, those students and families live at the heart of this study. Throughout my career as an elementary school educator, I gravitated towards the needs of schools and communities that serve those who struggle with financial hardships. Stress seems readily apparent in a situation where a scarcity of money as a resource exists. The lack of money blocks opportunity and prosperity, bringing dire consequences for families. Children living in poverty often have parents who sacrifice preventative healthcare measures, causing poor attendance at school due to illness, which limits better educational outcomes (Jensen, 2009). Additionally, students without financial resources experience a diet that lacking key nutrients, since the cost of eating well stresses family budgets. Tools for school become unattainable when families struggle financially and cannot afford additional purchases for education. Foundationally, the lack of money results in inequity for those struggling to live a life without resources.
Personally knowing the needs of families within this context, and assisting the family unit to a place of equality, drives me today as a school leader. I embrace a pedagogy of hope, just as Freire (1994) recognized the needs of the disadvantaged and believes educators within schools have a duty to confront marginalization. This drive to social justice energizes and invigorates my work.

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. (Freire, 1970, p. 54)

I believe that no young child deserves less opportunity for their present or future based on the zip code of their residence. What emerges becomes a collection of children who cannot escape the poverty in their community with the strengths and weaknesses reflecting in the school environment. In this era of accountability, I ask did the school fail, or did a larger more sinister event occur as a country when we turned our backs on communities struggling with economic hardship and left marginalized people to flounder?

Poverty from the neighborhood enters the doors of a school every morning, and those who espouse a transformative worldview embrace the need to help those students and families who come to their school to find a better way of life. Elementary school for these children must become a place of hope and propel families towards increased promise with actions at the school striving to create equality. In that light, schools serving marginalized families bring a focus for equality forward into the spotlight and illuminate the unjustness that exists for those without wealth. Freire (2000) views the lives of people who face challenges, studying the struggles engaged in to find humanization, believing that education brings freedom to the powerless. In my
belief system, looking at the existing opportunities for parents serves as a critical reminder in impacting social mobility for their children. I see families, which may have adult members who failed to graduate from high school experiencing difficulty-navigating school with their children. Additionally, I see grandparents raising grandchildren, with limited knowledge of modern-day school expectations. These circumstances influence a child’s performance, future, and herein wage capabilities in their lifetime. White generational poverty, an issue readily apparent in the context of this study, exists at Baxter Elementary today. Distinctions among types of poverty based on circumstances of the oppressed exist. Recognition of two types of identified poverty prevail in this case study, with one segment of poverty at the school including Hispanic and English Language Learners, accounting for 18 percent of the student population at Baxter Elementary. Although some newly arrived families from Mexico exist and live within the setting of this school, a larger marginalized population includes families of children who lived in the surrounding area for generations.

White generational poverty, present at Baxter Elementary, mirrors diminished economic opportunities and limited outcomes. Stewman (2014) discusses the impact of this type of poverty on students and families:

Students living in generational poverty often exist in survival mode. They endure stressors such as abuse, hunger, and early-imposed responsibilities for younger siblings. They lack goal-setting skills that will help them plan ahead…Families living in generational poverty often do not have the resources to provide educational support in the form of books, tutors, homework help, or Internet service (p.19).

This frames the historical context of the bigger group of participants as the local high school’s graduation rate displays a diminished return with the graduation rate set as the lowest in the
county. Freire (2000) views the lives of oppressed people and notes the struggle to recover lost humanity within the context of dealing with poverty. In the case study, finding a way for the oppressed to liberate themselves benefits the oppressors as well, since financial opportunity improves the community with an increased tax base. If the citizens experiencing economic hardships no longer identify themselves as poor, but instead have a reliable financial income, economic outcomes for the progeny of these families provide greater opportunities for generations to come. Economically disadvantaged families in this struggle must see their limited situation within the school setting as a means and opportunity for transformation. Freire (2000) promotes confronting the culture of domination in order to create change, only by realizing a need exists, will freedom and humanization happen. Recognizing the discordance becomes the first step in fixing the problem experienced by the oppressed.

Like Freire, the work of Marx supports and espouses a transformative worldview. Marx encourages those who suffer to find a way over oppression, and to use strategies to challenge and subvert the barriers that exist (Creswell, 2013). Marx wants the oppressed to rise above the difficulties impeding them. In Marx’s epistemology, the difficulties exist based on socioeconomic situations creating uneven power distribution. Researchers who share a transformative worldview look to Marx’s writing as inspiration and see application to those living in poverty around the world. Although one author does not get sole credit for this worldview, social situations and issues of equity inspire many educators to take a stance against oppression. This worldview holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression at whatever levels it occurs (Mertens, 2010). In my worldview, the stigma and barriers brought through childhood poverty need to be addressed and eliminated for future opportunities and equity to occur in generations to come.
Study Setting

In planning to conduct a case study many aspects of the setting need consideration for a solid construction. A plan of the study included in the following graphic details the composition with Baxter Elementary, a pseudonym, becoming the setting for the case study. (see Figure 2)

Figure 2: Case Study Plan

Figure 2: The construction of the case study including critical elements, issues, and activities
Through the work of local business leaders who rallied together, this 86-year old school, situated on the outskirts of a large city in an economically challenged area, became the first formal school built in the county. Previously, children who wanted an education left home and lived in other towns to acquire an education. Originally built as a high school, Baxter became repurposed to serve elementary school children as the population grew in the county and more schools emerged. With time, growth and economics changed in the community, Baxter remained a constant, the name and the building stable in a changing landscape. With a preponderance of chicken houses and small scale farming, the community evolved further as a chicken processing plant opened, and a highway appeared providing access for the citizens to jobs in local towns and cities. Within a five-mile radius, six churches serve the community. Values in the town reflect a strong faith-based contingent, yet crime, prevalent with drug use, exists as an ever-pressing concern.

The school, remodeled and extended over time, serves over a thousand school age children. Although some signs of age can be seen in the building, care to present an inviting environment makes a warm and welcoming facility, recently updated with paint and positive messaging written throughout. School leadership, prior to my stint as principal, showed a history of turnover. In the course of twelve years, six principals served Baxter, with three leaving to retire. For the last seven years I serve Baxter Elementary as principal, before that I worked as a teacher, and then an instructional coach closely aligned with the teachers. I left the school for four years and went on to work as an assistant principal before returning as the school leader. I am a part of the community, although not born here, I often say, “These are my people.” The families remind me of my aunts, uncles, and cousins, they became neighbors and friends in my community. Both of my parents grew up in strained circumstances, my mother being one of nine
children, while my father lived in a coalmining town where the mine shut down. As a child, I saw struggle, but I also saw perseverance and the power of a helping hand among neighbors. Education answered many questions for marginalized people.

Data at Baxter shows 46% of the students currently rated as economically disadvantaged with a special education population at 21% of the student body. Demographics of the school represent the student body as 79% Caucasian, 18% Hispanic and 3% other. Transiency, often a concern with high-need schools, impact Baxter little since most families stay pretty consistently year round in homes and trailers located in the community for years. The school employs 117 employees, and all certified teachers list credentials of high qualifications in their fields. Historical performance shows Baxter being on the state needs improvement list for Title 1 Schools during my first year as a teacher at the school. Three years ago, Baxter started to receive recognitions for improved performance and progress with student achievement. Other recognitions earned by the school include parent leadership awards and exemplary family practices. For the past seven years, a parent involvement coordinator served at the school to support parent engagement practices and solicit increased involvement in education from families.

**Data Collection**

A key feature in case study focuses on data collection from multiple sources. The following section details plans for how multiple sources inform the meaning derived within the setting of the school. As the primary researcher, I embrace Stake’s detail to make a “commitment to interpretation” and examine interactions within contexts (Stake, 1995). Looking at how the evidence exists side-by-side promotes increased understanding. Four types of data intended for use in this study include observation of events, interviews with parent involvement coordinators
and parents, artifact examination, and field notes by the researcher. By using all types of data, a rich picture of the actual environment and interactions with people emerges for study leading to answers for the research questions.

**Observation**

Participant observation entails scrutiny of the environment, recording of details seen, and interpretation of the event within the context by the researcher. The researcher attempts to understand the roles of those observed and the impact of the observation in the context of the case. Purposefully collecting observation assists case study researchers who try to make sense of a place while focusing on specific questions. Researchers watch the setting to gain understandings of how those within the bounded case interact together. As the researcher, I make sense of what occurs through the lens of my past experiences serving in at-risk environments in public education. When possible, I build connections to literature and experts in the field and link this for the reader gaining credible interpretation as I see and interpret within a transformative worldview. As the observer, I plan to record observation notes using my computer on four events where the parent involvement coordinator plays a pivotal role. There exists several opportunities to observe the interactions of parents, the parent involvement coordinator, and myself, the principal at Baxter Elementary.

**Interview**

Interview, another type of data source, plays a pivotal role in this case study. I conducted a detailed interview with the current parent involvement coordinator investigating the primary research question, through predesigned questions. In interviewing the current parent involvement coordinator information shared about professional practice comes to light. Questions asked spark conversations to reveal purpose, perception, and impact. An Anticipated
Data Reduction Chart (see Table 2) guided the interview and assisted in focusing the questions.

Table 2

Anticipated Data Reduction for Parent Involvement Coordinator at Baxter Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Anticipated Data Reduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does the parent involvement coordinator (PIC) impact parent engagement within a school community?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Particular context of your study</strong></td>
<td>Baxter Elementary School, a Title 1, Award winning public elementary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue 1: Working within Your Population: Influencing parent capacity, participation, and partnership</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic: Classes and Meetings</strong></td>
<td>Information Question 1: How does the PIC create learning opportunities for parents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: What parent responses are seen to the menu of offerings?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: How has this changed over time?</td>
<td>Codes/categories to analyze data:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic: Growing Parent Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Information Question 1: How do you encourage parents to voice opinions and get involved in the school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: How have you used parent advisory groups to build confidence, community, and the school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: How do you use your state level parent leadership award winner and other active parents to grow other parents in involvement?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic: Social Capital</strong></td>
<td>Information Question 1: How has the APTT program influenced involvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: What other instances of social capital, groups supporting and encouraging each other, do you encounter within your role?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: What impact do you see from collective parent groups?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic: Volunteers</strong></td>
<td>Information Question 1: How do you organize parents to support the school’s needs as seen in school improvement plans?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: What benefits and limitations do you see from a volunteer program run by the PIC?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: How does helping other children help the volunteer families within the school?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue 2: Same Vision: Aligning with the Principal for shared direction and school improvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic: Goals/Plan</strong></td>
<td>Information Question 1: How have you articulated, developed, and decided your goals and plans with the principal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: How do you share your concerns about barriers and limitations with the principal?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: How has the principal supported your work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topic: Collaborative Activities</strong></td>
<td>Information Question 1: How did you build a partnership with the principal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: What do you and the principal do together?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: How do you share the principal’s vision with others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Topic: Trust

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Question 1: What is the history of the role you are filling?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: How have you built and maintained trust from stakeholders and staff?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: How do you facilitate conversations where parents share concerns, weaknesses, and/or failings?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Topic: Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Question 1: How do you measure success in your role?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: What pieces of accountability are used within the school that relate to parent partnerships?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: How does the State Department of Education, which supports a PIC network, measure success within your role?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Issue 3: Expense and Time: Using tools and social media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic: Parent Resource Center (PRC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 1: What design framework have you implemented in the PRC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: Can you describe the usage of the tools and the needs of the parents you encounter within the PRC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: How do you use your tools within PRC to influence and build partnerships with families and staff?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Topic: Social Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Question 1: How does your message in social media, influence participation of parents and principal?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: How do the tools build parent capacity and partnership?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: What connections grow through social media?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Topic: Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Question 1: What skills must a PIC possess in order to do the job effectively?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Question 2: How have your relationship skills been tested in your role as PIC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Question n: How do you and the principal grow together?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Anticipated Data Reduction Chart examines three issues within the case study.

Additionally, interviews of two past parent involvement coordinators at Baxter Elementary provided a historical perspective, bringing voices to add to the dimension of change at the school. How the position evolved and altered over time creates perspective of change and assists with the investigation of research questions. During the past seven years, four parent involvement coordinators (PICs) worked at Baxter. Of the four PICs, one left the school, two moved into classroom teaching positions, and one currently holds the position. An interview with two employees who previously held the position, who stayed at the school, provided information
and context on how the job began and grew to its current level. Building a historical look at the position of PIC, through participants who held the position supports the study into the impact of the position at Baxter Elementary.

Eight Baxter parents completed interviews through invitation to participate adding their voices to the collection of evidence and stories told. The adults participating in the interview process represent the diversity in families at the school and included caregivers, mothers, grandmothers, and guardians. Opportunity to participate in interviews included four parents who volunteer and serve in leadership positions at the school, and four parents who articulated barriers to participation to school employees that limit their ability to engage in the school setting. By combining the contrasting viewpoints of both sets of parents, I believe a rich view of the parent perspective gains credible evidence and authenticity. Hearing parents answer questions brings a necessary element during an investigation of the support position of parent involvement coordinator. Parent voice informed the effectiveness of the position within Baxter Elementary.

**Artifacts**

Examining artifacts within the case study serves a prime importance in investigating the impact and effectiveness of the school to engage parents. The parent involvement coordinator used many tools to build her relationships with parents in the community. Her methods of communication need study and interpretation when answering the question of impact in the parent involvement coordinator position. Posting online videos of explanation and support on web based platforms functions as one tool. The platforms include Facebook, the school web page, and Twitter. Those postings serve as key pieces of evidence in examining the relationship that exists between the parent involvement coordinator and the community she guides. Using
video artifacts provides an opportunity for repeated viewing and deep thinking about the message and construction carried in digital artifacts. The videos showcase a unique communication tool in which parents receive a message directly from the parent involvement coordinator while situated outside of the school building. The parent involvement coordinator communicates in English, uses props, and invites guests to participate in her planned message. This novel approach incorporates 21st century options for communication and functions as a key piece of evidence when examining parent involvement practices.

The parent involvement coordinator also generates written communication to parents. Notes contributing to telling the story of the relationships the PIC engages in with parents, teachers, and the principal become analyzed for purpose and significance. In piecing together the story of collaboration, studying the artifacts from the work completed by the PIC in the parent resource room adds flavor to the case study. Examination of documents that support the parent resource room show connections and deserve further study. Included in this section, but not limited to sign in sheets, invitations, surveys, agendas, inventory sheets, advisory notes, and workshop sign in sheets. Using artifacts, describing the function and cataloging the significance add a depth of understanding to the work of parent engagement at the school.

The communication shared by the Parent Involvement Coordinator and Principal also figures as a piece of the artifacts of study. These items of communication take the format of written messages, emails, agendas, or video postings completed together, highlighting our connection. My perspective of the work of Baxter school leadership and the family engagement process provides a critical piece to include in the study and aids interpretation of multiple artifacts. I include my personal reflection when examining the pieces for meaning and impact at the school. Essential in qualitative work, interpretation by the researcher provides context and
contains elements of knowledge, description, and significance. As the principal of the school in the study, I serve as a guide to interpretation, establishing connections and links within the study to relevancy when answering the research questions.

**Field Notes**

Field notes taken throughout the time period of gathering research occur after interviews, observation, and artifact examination. Field Notes capture the reflective nature of the case study and assist the primary researcher, who attempts to understand events within the environment using reflective writing. The use of Google Documents serves as the recording location for the writing. The format, a record sequentially written in a diary style, reflects events occurring during the research process between the parent involvement coordinator, parents, teachers, and myself, the principal. At times, revealing and recording personal background knowledge becomes necessary in consideration of what occurs in the school environment. By adding a historical perspective from the school leader, interpretation of the current environment gains weight and depth, aiding in addressing the research questions.

**Data Analysis**

In this section, I detail four strategies impacting the examination of evidence. Generalization, one pertinent data analysis strategy, focuses on data examined in case study building to connections of thought. I recognize that in this case study construction of many generalizations from one setting may instead result in particularization. Generalizations usually form from multiple examples, but a particularization can originate from a small piece of evidence. Stake (1995) looks at particularization as a piece of generalization, and uses it to define what exists within a case study. As the researcher, I employ particularization to assist with the assessment of data. Interpretation, another strategy, takes a generalization and applies
meaning. In qualitative research, “an interpreter from the field is placed to observe the workings of a case, recording objectively what is happening but simultaneously examining its’ meaning and substantiating the meaning” (Stake, 1995, p. 9). Interpretation results from my past experiences and follows through my identified conceptual and theoretical lenses.

Comparison serves as the third data analysis strategy used. Comparing past to present shows a quick outcome in data analysis, but importance within data analysis looks further into an expression of feelings and experience. By comparing events, possibility to draw significance, results emerge and an impact interpreted within educational leadership studies shows. As a principal, my intentionality and focus changed with experience within the position of leadership. I bring this knowledge into my research study reflecting and comparing on decision-making at Baxter Elementary on parent involvement. In using this strategy, I use description and detail a process for the reader to clearly represent the context that exists between two elements.

Coding serves as a final strategy. When coding functions as a strategy, the researcher looks for what presents itself as repeated themes with the loudest, most reoccurring voice. Stake (1995) provides direction for finding common themes from rereading bits of information collected in the process of interviews, observation, and examination of artifacts. Qualitative software assists with the coding process when analyzing all sources of data collectively. A plan to use NVivo as a software tool provides assistance to the process. Employing these four data strategies will influence the interpretation of findings and the ultimate recommendations when examining parental involvement at Baxter Elementary.

**Strategies for Trustworthiness**

The strategies implemented to assure the trustworthiness of the study qualify the process of understanding. Verification of information gained from interviews happens when the
transcribed interviews go back to interviewees for approval. Objectivity serves as a goal in investigation for researchers and I work to achieve neutrality. To do so, requires I admit my biases and attitudes, reference my likes and dislikes, and announce the role I play in the construction of the study. Herein noted in the study, I hired all parent involvement coordinators. I work with the parents and caregivers at the school, and play a primary role within the school as the principal of Baxter. This reality I admit as I strive to remain objective as a researcher. In accounting for the existing power dynamic, I reference Anyan (2013) who notes power frequently shifts in interviews between interviewer and interviewee during data collection. All participants had the ability to accept or defer participation in the study and signed consent to engage with the research study. Subjects chose the degree of cooperation and participation to share, in return the interviewer courts and establishes rapport to establish a feeling of trust. I worked to establish trust during interviews with all people interviewed.

Miles and Huberman (1994) encourage questioning by the researcher to ensure a high quality study. In following these steps, I confirm neutrality, while admitting my own bias freely. By assembling a dependable, consistent approach to the study, I listen to the outcome while judging for truth (Miles & Huberman, 1994). External validity becomes another concern. As the researcher, I ask myself how far the generalizations and particularizations apply to the base of knowledge regarding parent involvement. Does this study relate to a limited context, or can it transfer to a larger context? A final consideration for trustworthiness looks at how the study imparts an impact on the participants.

**Ethical Principles**

Great responsibility rests on the qualitative researcher to represent stories authentically. Participants give permission to share their history (Creswell, 2012). Validation throughout the
project ensures accuracy for sharing the words, feelings, and motives of the participants.

Opportunity for all interviewees to validate the transcription of the interview for accuracy substantiates the words. Ethical principles drive this study and anchor the work of school leaders.

As an educator, I maintain professional standards of practice through the state ethics board. It becomes my intention to apply them within research work as well.

**Summary**

As a doctoral candidate in educational leadership, I conducted research and studied inequity within schools in the course of my work. This compelling topic became more important as I looked at school settings and the disparities existing in my own environment with the families I serve. This case study assists the understanding and deepens the academic foundation for those who work with schools and parents living in lower economic circumstances. A case study represents multiple views, uses multiple data sources, and attempts to make sense of a complex environment through principled interpretation. It offers examples of what works in a defined area, and what maintains the status quo, failing to bring results. By examining successful environments, such as Baxter Elementary, the learning becomes meaningful to others on a journey of school leadership in high-risk areas.

At Baxter, the stressors grew, since the number of students designated as economically disadvantaged increased over the past seven years. Ironically, the successes for the school multiplied while the context reflected increased hardships. A current momentum of success plays out at the school, prompting questions by observers and school leaders. I believe learning happens in a situation such as this, with reflection guiding the research process. What intentionally done or indirectly sparked caused a turn-around? Did leadership combining with collaboration create a change? How has the parent involvement coordinator position become a
change-agent for families? Did priorities align for parent involvement? Questions promote
opportunity for study at the school. Sharing the story with others invites company on the journey
of discovery and aids understanding for all educational leaders who look to make a difference in
school environments for parents.

As data collection grows and interpretations happen through careful examination,
findings of research become the next step in the process of making sense of the school
environment. Looking at the changes occurring within the school provides opportunity for
themes to surface in the research. I invite readers to relish the findings in the case study process.

Denzin and Lincoln (2002) share that qualitative research activity locates the observer in the
world studied, providing a set of interpretive practices to make the world visible to the reader.
Sharing those findings brings light to the school and merit to the research while answering the
questions. This piece of knowledge emerges in the next chapter through an examination of the
discoveries.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

In this section, interpretation of the research findings addresses the questions fueling the case study. Information gleamed and analyzed from multiple data sources leads to the findings of the study. Interviews, observation, artifacts, and field notes uploaded to NVivo, a qualitative software platform, inform the coding process. NVivo, specifically designed for qualitative researchers in the social science fields, assists researchers with building connections (McNiff, 2016). Through sifting the data collection, themes, otherwise known as nodes, appear within the study. This section pursues the answers to the major research question:

- How and to what extent does the Parent Involvement Coordinator impact parent engagement within the school community?

This section also explores three sub questions, referred to as tensions in the work.

- What steps does the parent involvement coordinator take to impact all stakeholders involved?
- How and to what extent does the PIC remove barriers that prohibit and limit families from participation?
- How and to what extent did the work of the principal and PIC align to create a shared vision for the community?

The finding section offers the most compelling results shared here in detail.

Data Collection
Over the course of five months data collected within the school setting of Baxter Elementary, followed an established plan of methodology. Care to mine multiple sources of information happened within the school presenting a wide view of the work of the parent involvement coordinator and the impact seen on the school and community from this position. Stake (1995) said, “All researchers have great privilege and obligation: The privilege to pay attention to what they consider worthy of attention and the obligation to make conclusions drawn from those choices meaningful to colleagues and clients” (p. 49). In completing the collection, a reflective stance guided the gathering process. Interviews conducted, recorded, and transcribed included eight parents and three parent involvement coordinators. Additionally, observations provided opportunity for the researcher to reflect and analyze upon parent involvement at four events held at the school focused on the parent involvement coordinator and the parents she serves.

Other data sources also added to the collection and inform the questions studied promoting a rich perspective. Seventeen artifacts supplement the data collection process, providing meaning to the study. Artifacts examined, described, and evaluated add significant weight to the research body and inform the research. Careful consideration of documents and videos used by the PIC became a part of the artifact study. Field notes kept by myself, the principal and the primary researcher assist with the process of deciphering and understanding events experienced during the research process, providing background information and context to the work. Making sense of the information and processing pieces developed over time with the use of NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package produced by QSR International, available to doctoral students by Kennesaw State University.

Coding
The process of coding involved data analysis of the research gained through observation, interviews, artifact examination, and field notes. All data files collected uploaded to NVivo for analysis. The following diagram shows the concentration of nodes in the study. (see Figure 3)

Figure 3: Nodes Discovered

![Diagram showing nodes: Capacity Building, Principal Partnership, PIC Impact, Social Capital, Supportive Communication.]

Figure 3: The study of data yielded four themes of impact in the parent involvement coordinator professional practice.

Nodes established themes for files, and themes rose from examining the artifacts, observations, field notes, and interviews within the platform. Upon repeated use, sifting the information into categories happened, linking across documents through the examination process. Stake (2010) shares his approach to data analysis.
Research involves both analysis (the taking things apart) and synthesis (the putting things together). We gather data. We increase our experience. We look closely at the patches of collected data, the parts of our experience. That is we analyze. And we put the parts together, often in different ways than before. We synthesize. (p. 133)

Upon repeated use, sifting the information into succinct categories happened, linking across documents through the examination process. Denzin and Lincoln (2002) discuss the process of finding themes in units of study with knowledge being a social construction. Reading and rereading text provided interactions with the interviewees again; I listened to the loudest notes emerging from the dialogue and found the nodes.

**Parent Involvement Coordinator (PIC) Impact**

While examining the primary research question, themes appeared through the coding process. Discussed here in detail, the themes showcase the impact of the PIC on the school community and organize the findings for the reader. This section examines the primary research question and looks at the evidence within four categories: Supportive communication, capacity building, principal partnership, and social capital. The question follows:

- How and to what extent does the Parent Involvement Coordinator impact parent engagement within the school community?

**Supportive Communication**
A view of supportive communication. Tina, the parent involvement coordinator at Baxter Elementary, stands by the front door as a sizeable throng of parents and children stream into the school. A large crowd is expected tonight for Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT), an initiative that places teachers and parents into partnership targeting a goal that will help improve academic progress for students. Tina is the mastermind of tonight’s event, having handled the invitations, assignments, and data folders for all teacher, parents and students. A child runs in the open door and hugs Tina who stands just inside the doorway, beside me, the principal. A mom follows behind her. Tina greets them by name and thanks them for coming tonight, asking about the woman’s mother who was recently ill.

I marvel that Tina knows about the mom’s mother, but Tina picks up on little things, so it shouldn’t be a surprise to me. The mom expresses worry that she might be late for the meeting; she still is wearing the uniform shirt from her job at a fast food restaurant. Tina assures her that everything is fine, and welcomes the mom into the school with a big smile. Tina reminds the mom to sign the child in for one of two activities, which are offered tonight for kids. She describes the two choices to the mother and daughter. There is a dojo giving a free karate lesson in the gym, or a sing along led by the music teacher in the cafeteria. The dojo owner, who owns a business in our community, is offering a complimentary class tonight. He hopes to interest families into signing up for classes and I rely on him to support the parent classes by assisting with the childcare, free of charge to the school. Our friendship makes tonight possible for parents who need babysitting while the adults work together.

Tina’s words to the mom, describing the two activities and letting the daughter choose, seem like a nicer way to say, “No children allowed in the room during the parent meeting.” Tina
is smart like that with her words. The daughter decides to go to the sing along and the mother heads off to the classroom where her daughter’s teacher and the other parents are waiting to begin an hour of collective partnership. The class for parents will start with an icebreaker that Tina planned for all the teachers to lead. She calls it “turn and talk.” Parents will get to know each other and share by passing a beach ball around in a circle. The parking lot is jam packed, and the evening is off to a great start.

Findings. Tina, the current parent involvement coordinator, demonstrates expertise in how she engages the parent population and stakeholders who support the school’s work. Swick and Graves (1993) discovered parents need responsive, supportive communication in school settings since closeness and mutuality help to build meaningful partnerships. When investigating parent engagement at Baxter, evidence shows the parent involvement coordinator communicating in three formats: verbal interactions, written messages, and posted video recordings. Parents, who praise the PIC, detail the supportive communication she established with them. One parent said:

She is amazing. I go to Tina if I have a question about anything as far as learning goes. If I am having trouble, or if I need a better method, or I feel like I am pushing, and I never want to discourage him. Is there a way I can go about this differently? She is the person I go to.

The parent involvement coordinator’s connections, strengthened through communication, solidly establish relationships with individual parents. Crites (2008) articulates how a sense of belonging, established through a one to one relationship between a staff member and parents in a school setting assists parent involvement. Another mother interviewed expressed, “I never used
Tina’s services as a Parent Involvement Coordinator, since my daughter didn’t need academic help, but I passed Tina’s contact information on to other people who could benefit from the connection.”

Parents knew about the parent involvement coordinator position at Baxter, and could articulate responsibilities and contributions made to the parents from this staff member. Evidence shows Tina, the current parent involvement coordinator, maintains ongoing supportive contact with parents at the school helping them to engage in student learning. Tammy, a grandmother raising her two young grandsons all by herself sheds a light on her impact.

That’s one lady I can say is wonderful for this school and for these children. Cause you can tell she really cares for these children. And I just mean it busts my heart (sic) every time I see her. And I am like I just love you Miss Tina. You’re just wonderful.

Tammy received direct assistance from Tina in learning how to practice reading at home with her grandson who is in first grade. Prior to her session with the PIC, Tammy did not understand how to build reading fluency, which the classroom teacher set as a goal for her grandson. Tammy shared her pain that her own daughter left high school as a non-reader after being served for many years in special education during the interview session. After her daughter passed away from a drug overdose, Tammy holds the responsibility to raise her grandchildren. The PIC sat with Tammy, one on one, and modeled building speed while reading passages provided from the parent resource center. Tina showed how to practice for small amounts at home with an egg timer to build fluency, giving Tammy an egg timer to take home. The grandmother appreciated the support from the PIC and marveled at how easy completing the practice at home happens. She shared, “The games she gives me to teach him are wonderful.”
As researcher, I witnessed how a parent involvement coordinator made personal connections, showed empathy, and formed ongoing relationships to assist with the work of engaging parents demonstrating support to the parent population. Jeynes (2011) states supportive communication matters; “We might start by treating parents with kindness and respect, which may be more important than the specific guidelines and tutelage (schools) offer to parents” (p. 10). When interacting with parents, the Baxter PIC demonstrated supportive communication addressing concerns and questions brought to her by parents before offering solutions. One mother expressed to the PIC the difficulty she experienced helping her son with math homework, but after assistance from Tina, she felt capable. “You know it’s a little difficult for parents to grasp it. Having it broken down and explained to you, and how it levels up every year was really, really helpful.” Another mother agreed and shared:

Actually we (the PIC and mother) have sat down and gone over different math and reading skills, which would be appropriate for each child according to their age level and where they should be at, and where we should keep them going.

Having the personalized help proves valuable to the mom who wants to provide remediation for one of her children while challenging the other two. Children present unique issues, and the tailored response addresses differing needs for parents.

In trying to decipher the reason this works, I look collectively to the four PICS who held the position at Baxter. All had powerful communication skills with adults soothing, reassuring, coaxing, and cajoling while providing coaching to parents. A former PIC shared, “I think once you have your own children, you just understand, and you are empathetic. And you can speak to someone with a little bit more knowledge.” Anfara & Mertens (2008) believe that children with
involved families do better in school; the challenge lies in building the connection to the parents. How a staff member responds to parent questions encourages or discourages involvement by the parent, so the communication skills displayed by the PIC impact the developing and maintaining of relationships. Established parenting knowledge and being able to tell parent stories assists the process for a parent involvement coordinator with interactions designed to support. When Tina worked with a parent one on one, she allied the mom’s fears by assuring her that her own second grade daughter did the same thing as the mother’s son while reading. Supportive communication plays a strong role in the PICs’ work in building a trusting relationship with parents.

On the evening of Academic Parent Teacher Teams observation, the PIC answers questions asked by translators and volunteers entering the building to assist with the programming, all while greeting parents arriving at the school for the teacher meeting. She multi tasks and prioritizes with a positive, welcoming demeanor. Authoritative, formal structures of communication build walls between educators and families; the PIC modeled bridging to where parents operate with her kind conversations. Kraft (2017) believes the time dedicated to engaging parents in conversations about specific circumstances and learning benefits educators and students. During the Academic Parent Teacher Team meeting, the PIC’s attention to detail and planning impacts the success of the evening as she communicates the structure of events for over 500 people. Tina listens to the parent population’s articulated barriers to participation and works to dispel them, providing necessary support as needed. She places translators in classrooms with parents who speak Spanish and arranges for a sign language translator for a deaf mother providing accessibility to the meeting. The parent involvement coordinator organizes the volunteer services of community members and high school volunteers to support free childcare, eliminating excuses for a lack of participation. Listening to parents and responding to problems
evidences her ongoing support for families. She assigns school staff to specific locations and includes written directions for their responsibilities. Multiple people ask her questions throughout the formal observation, as she coordinates the event she answers and directs them to tasks. The evening becomes a success when the final count shows Baxter parents participated, far exceeding the state average of parent participation for Academic Parent Teacher Team Meetings (Federal Programs Division, 2017).

Table 3

APTT Participation Data

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<thead>
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<th>Parent Participation in Three Meetings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State Average</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baxter Average</td>
<td>72%</td>
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Note: Parents participate when they attend three 75-minute classroom team meetings with the teacher.

As a parent involvement coordinator, Tina looks for opportunities, connections take time to foster and plan. Kraft (2017) shares that low rates of teacher parent communication happen due to implementation barriers with outdated information, a lack of a school wide policy encouraging connections, and an absence of times for non-instructional phone calls or emails for teachers. Tina fills the gap funneling information, educating people about resources, and sharing free materials to those in our community. Tina delivers a message of accessibility at the school and her interactions remove barriers and provide reassurance to participants. She anticipates questions parents have about the school, learning and procedures. Parents know Tina provides
assistance and connects them to answers and supplies with repeated connections; families rely on her help to provide materials from the parent resource room.

A foster mother praises Tina’s resources, “I checked out some books, because in our house with teenagers we did not have very many younger level books… Books for his level that would help him grow.” Observation showed Tina establishing common ground before exchanging academic information and resources, building a foundation of mutual respect with parents. Allison missed the first meeting for Academic Parent Teacher Teams, so Tina provided a one on one make up session in the Parent Resource Room. When meeting, they began the conference talking about spring break. Allison shared her family moved houses and the difficulties of moving for the family. Tina sympathized and reassured Allison, telling her “You are such a good mom.” They connect like friends before Tina pulled out the bags she prepared for Allison’s kids and started to go over the personalized graphs on performance, talking about the progress made by Allison’s youngest in sight words. Tina explained and demonstrated how to play the educational games at the new house.

Connections established over shared lives assist the PIC in forming bonds with parents. Hoerr (2017) believes we must view less formal connections as chances to develop relationships and show that we care for families. Parents believe the PIC authentically engages with families. Tina reflects about the challenges of communication with parents. When asked how she gets parent to join in a dialogue, voice opinions, and get involved at the school, she mentions asking for feedback.

I think a big part of that is like putting that out there that we want their feedback. We use Facebook to post saying we need your feedback. We will visit the car line with chocolate
and say your feedback is sweet to us. So we are giving a lot of opportunities there. Our icebreaker, we always do an icebreaker at our APTT meetings, is actually a success and wish, which is actually good feedback right there. What did you find successful, what do you wish we could fix or tweak?

Listening and acting on feedback builds the parent school relationship at Baxter Elementary. The conversation engaged in with parents demonstrates a respect for opinions of stakeholders.

Nationally, public school parents report a dearth of communication with the schools, criticizing the quality and frequency with over half calling the exchanges and interactions not very satisfying (Noel, 2016). Communication at Baxter displays an exchange of ideas between parents and educators. Two-way communication creates traction for increased participation with Tina coordinating a parent advisory group, inviting anyone with interest to her meetings. Cultivating parents to share opinions happens with sincerity, trust, and an occasion to speak about topics that matter to parents. Surveys also provide opportunity to give feedback to the school and communicate the perceptions and needs from families. Elizabeth, a mom, shared, “I like the surveys. Simply because I feel like when they send those out, I can quickly type in something…just voice my opinion.” Several parents mentioned the ease of responding in completing questionnaires distributed at Baxter. The PIC made sure the surveys offered include multiple languages and formats. Tina creates QR Codes for the surveys and places them in the cafeteria on the tables where parents who come to eat lunch with their children sit. A parent pulls out a phone and snaps a picture leading to the survey. The 2017 spring Title 1 Survey showed communication at the Baxter Elementary School rated highly by parents (see Table 4). This
result falls in stark contrast to prevailing data in public schools, which criticizes communication perceptions of parents within our nation’s schools (Noel, 2016).

Table 4

*Parent Response Rating the Communication at Baxter*

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<tr>
<th>2017 Parent Title 1 Survey</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I receive timely and regular communication</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school has opportunity for me to meet and speak with the staff</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel welcome and accepted at my child’s school</td>
<td>82%</td>
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*Note.* Responses indicate positive perception. Communication scores are the highest rated on the Baxter survey, with average positive responses on all statements on the survey set at 77%.

An innovative method of communication to parents includes the PIC posting videos once a week in a program called Facebook Friday. During one of our weekly collaboration meetings, I showed Tina a posting from another school using a live chat on Facebook to introduce new programming. We discussed how the video eliminated reading paperwork sent home from school, which sometimes gets lost in the bottom of children’s book bags. We imagined parents listening while making dinner and seeing some familiar faces on the video providing a connection to the viewers with people at the school. Tina and I talked about creating excitement for our parent partnership with Academic Parent Teacher Teams and wrote a script for our video. We filmed a brief video using a cell phone, and discuss and define the new school partnership with parents through APTT. The response from parents encourages us to continue with new
topics of interest to parents. During an interview a mother responded when asked about the videos, “I like watching them to see the people.”

This method of communication expands into a weekly posting on topics of interest for parents. Subjects covered include taking standardized tests, riding the school bus, and navigating Open House at Baxter. At times, the purpose of the video educates, but it also establishes connections helping to form bonds with familiarity as the video introduces key players at the school to the community. Thiers (2017) believes schools must cultivate relationships with families, going out of their way to demonstrate a trusting, respectful relationship. The PIC makes it a point to showcase the school in a positive light. Tina shares how she perceives the video.

We are either building capacity with parents that are watching that or we’re helping to change that stigma that is sometimes associated with Title 1 by putting good press out there about your school…APTT has been a huge topic. We have had 1300 views when we have done a recap. We talk about how the night went, so people know if we do more shows educating people about APTT, they are going to watch and tune in because people want to know.

During a weekly meeting, I asked Tina to post a video with the cafeteria manager discussing the lunch program, and as a point of discussion, mention how to apply for Free and Reduced Lunch, something important to many in our parent population. Addressing issues of financial help falls into a transformative leadership practice supported at the school. Shields (2013) believes that school leaders set the tone for supportive practices for families motivated by moral purpose. Sergiovanni (1999) commends school leaders operating with moral authority to improve the communities they serve. Tina and I use the video as an opportunity to provide links
to the application and connections to resources for our families who struggle financially. Tina puts a face on important people in the school, and shows how approachable the school staff operates for families who hesitate to make contact. My contribution to the messaging looks for ways to ease burdens for families, offering solutions. On video, Tina asks questions for parents and helps families connect with the staff. Communication includes answers to frequent questions parents may ask about Baxter. Facebook Friday includes at least one guest on the show besides Tina. Past involvement shows faculty, transportation leaders, cafeteria supervisors, and even the superintendent featured on the recorded program talking directly to the Baxter parent population. A mother shared, “It helps us feel connected to the school and I try to stay as connected as I can, even when I can’t be here.”

In examining a video post for significance, the simplicity of approach appeals to parents who reference the ease and enjoyment in watching the videos at home. One mother shared she watched the videos with her kids, “The kids like it too. Like they’ll come home and say mama did they post the video? Cause they want to see whose on it this week.” No literacy level exists for reading and translating the message; reading levels discourage participation and can serve as a barrier to information. Being able to see body language and facial expressions aids in understanding the communication by the viewer. Video messages occur without a need for transportation, another barrier that often limits participation at the school. The PIC becomes a familiar friend when parents view weekly videos over time, establishing supportive communication. Tina says:

Well it goes back to trust, it goes back to the story of your favorite newscaster. You don’t know your favorite newscaster, but because you watch that person each day, you feel you
do. And so that’s where the connection comes. Where I see people I never would have
seen, because they have seen me and so they feel like they know me.

Meanwhile, in the Baxter community, neighbors watch and offer comments and likes through the
platform. Tina monitors all comments posted to the website and responds to questions asked
online, building ongoing conversation. Typically, she thanks individuals for asking a question
before answering. Parents get quick responses to questions clearing up confusion and providing
direction. One parent asked about the price of student agendas for her new kindergarten student,
wanting to make sure she brought enough cash before she attended Open House. Tina responded
that the use of school agendas only happens in third, fourth, and fifth grade. No cash needed for
Open House, reducing a parent’s stress about a financial obligation at the school.

Evidence of Tina’s Facebook Friday indicates thousands of people watch and share the
links. Kraft (2017) sees digital technology as a necessary component of school communication
in the 21st century. The first video made featured Tina and I discussing the upcoming APTT
Night with 856 views, but the second video, a recap of the evening that included a couple parents
who participated in the evening as guests discussing the workshop exceeded 1,100 views. During
parent interviews, all eight interviewees mentioned Facebook Friday delivering messages for
parents. Several parents in leadership positions at Baxter appeared on videos with Tina. Deidre,
who leads a male volunteer group at the school, shared the impact of being on the video.

I think as far as the whole aspect of the social part, versus a piece of paper coming home,
I think certain people get more from looking at and seeing a face and not necessarily a
name. You can see me. You can put the face with the name and maybe receive the
message much differently than if I just sent you home a piece of paper that says this is what we did-wow (sarcasm).

Using parents in her message helps Tina build a supportive community at the school. A parent mentioned viewing the messages helps her stay informed with what goes on at Baxter. She shared:

I mean, I can hear that you really need volunteers, and I seen the one with Nurse Amanda about how to prevent stuff, and it just helps to know with what’s going on in school. So we can do stuff at home to encourage the stuff at school.

The influence of online posting builds an online community for parents with the school. Multiple parents’ talk about watching the show and the impact the video provides connecting them to the school. “I like that because it is something you can watch, and see different faces,” one mother shared. Seeing body language and expressions assists understanding while the familiarization builds with school personnel sharing a positive school message.

Accessibility for the Internet service creates another barrier, but the school assists parents with limited funds to establish connectivity for educational purposes. Parents share with Tina, the parent involvement coordinator, their barriers and limitations faced, and the school responds with assistance through a hot spot or a chrome book. As the principal, I established funding for digital divide by speaking with businesses in my community that donate to this project. Tina knows a technology focus stands as a priority to connect families due to the use of online school platforms for learning occurring in the district and at our school. Students without access face limited opportunity for practice and study furthering the gap that exists for students
in poverty. Tammy now watches the weekly Facebook Friday video, since the PIC helped establish an Internet connection to her trailer demonstrating a supportive communication practice. Tammy’s grandsons go online to do homework assigned by their teachers and play educational games to work on reading skills.

During parent interviews, parents detailed the PIC’s personalized response and accessibility of service given to their families. Tina became an assistant to families who struggle to solve problems. The PIC recognizes teachers’ work hard, “I see a lot of people juggling a lot of teaching with this job. And there is only so much you can do with 8 or 9 hours in a day.” She believes the PIC role fills a hole in communication, successfully addressing individual parent concerns with supportive communication, which creates an ongoing opportunity to engage families. Tina’s location at the school within the parent resource room becomes not a one-size fits all shop; instead she functions within a place where the exchange of information brings forth a more custom response to family’s needs.

The PIC hears what parents’ need and responds accordingly. Parents revealed personal problems encountered within the school setting to Tina. Parents also reveal struggles encountered with learning that take place within the homes of Baxter students. Tina, as the parent involvement coordinator, is known to provide assistance with finding solutions while being a welcoming, supportive friend. Tina’s supportive communication established a following from parents who looked forward to the video postings and heard the conversations featuring two-way exchanges, which brought encouragement, empathy and support to families. Baxter’s support to families engaged with learning expands with Tina’s contributions.

**Capacity Building**
**A view of capacity building.** Next in the door of Baxter Elementary this evening comes the Robbins Family, husband Billy, wife Jan, and the kids. Tina greets them by name, saying “hi” to Bubba, the only boy in a sea of girls. Bubba has a colored Mohawk. As the principal, I love this family with five kids, the oldest who went to school here ten years ago. They were very angry when life circumstances threw them back into our school last year, after several years away. Dad’s felony conviction pops on our safety check during the day, and we escort him to meetings in the school for his son’s IEP. He wants to be involved, and I want him to be involved too. They came back to live with Jan’s mother following an eviction from rental housing on the south end of the county. When they left, I didn’t know them. I was a teacher at the school and never taught any of the kids. They left with problems galore and came back with even more hardships. Now they are some of our most vocal supporters, because things changed since they have been gone. We are helping them grow, and we see parents as a resource we build.

At a recent IEP meeting, they raved about the academic support, Tina, our PIC gives for the family. She pulls things from the parent resource room shelves for the parents to take and use at home to practice skills with Bubba and the girls. Tina sits with Jan one on one to show her how to play the games and answers questions about her children’s classwork. Tina takes her time with Jan, in return, Jan feels comfortable sharing what she needs with her. The family says they wouldn’t want to go anywhere else but Baxter. Neither parent is confident with the schoolwork, having not graduated from high school, but both mom and dad come to the Academic Parent Teacher Team meetings regularly. Tonight they are here on campus to give their input into an annual meeting, and to see the youngest, Sue, sing in the chorus.
Findings. The parent involvement coordinator’s work supports families’ engagement and knowledge of how school operates. Edwards (2016) believes schools need to concentrate on student learning, but expand and include learning for everyone in the child’s support system. Thiers (2017) notes parent role construction helps mothers and fathers understand how to support children at school, realizing parents make a difference with learning. The PIC works directly with families to build the capacity of parents by offering assistance in navigating the educational environment. Parents drop in to the parent resource center during school hours, or meet with the parent involvement coordinator by booking a personal appointment during the day. Tina frequently plans small group programming related to academic topics during the day. In reflection, she says, “Small group formalized programming does not get a large crowd due to barriers of time and transportation.” One of Tina’s parents suggested she film meetings and post it online, so that others can learn and access the information. In sharing work from another Title I Workshop on writing held at night, Tina coordinated the work of teachers to include QR codes attached to the writing that parents accessed. One mother stated, “…even though my husband didn’t get to attend, I scanned it, did a screen shot and took it home, and my husband got to look at it too.”

Personal meetings between parent and parent involvement coordinator draw more participants to the parent resource center. Tina helped a parent who needed explanations with challenging academics in a one to one meeting. Shania, a mother stated:

It’s (math) leveled, so if you have a child that is in third grade, you can come in and get help to teach your child how to cope. So it’s the teacher and the mom and the child…and
it’s interesting to see it from the teacher’s point of view, because you come home (from the classroom) with a sheet of paper and your like, hum…that makes no sense to me.

Tina also coordinates parent groups aimed at encouraging parent voice on campus. She wants to receive feedback from parents and cultivates families to feel secure in offering their opinions to the school, knowing that the participation fosters engagement. Tina solicits ongoing ideas for the school compact, an agreement between parents, teachers, and students. She asks parents how to spend the parent resource budget allotments, and then places stickers on resources purchased that say, “You asked for it, we bought it.” The stickers highlight an awareness that we value parent input at our school. Epstein (2001) believes parent participation in decision-making factors critically in developing strong parent involvement at schools. Encouraging participation in real matters of discussion and planning, builds capacity of parents at the school to become involved. Tina works to capture parent voice at the school since growing parents’ ability to speak up at school shows evidence of a strong relationship with families.

Two major responsibilities the PIC coordinates at Baxter build capacity for parents at school; Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT) meetings, encourage parents and teachers to work together in partnership throughout the year on a curriculum standard, and the school-wide volunteer program, Champs, where the PIC instructs volunteers on how to intervene for Baxter’s most at-risk students. The volunteer program attracts parents, grandparents, and retired teachers who participate twice a week for an hour or more working with individual children. When Tina instructs the group on how to work with students, she shares strategies and methods for making connections with children while practicing academic skills building capacity of the volunteers to help.
The use of a certified teacher as a parent involvement coordinator works as an asset that educators and parents at Baxter appreciate and value. All parent involvement coordinators at Baxter held teacher certification, impacting the approach taken to the job and the responses offered to parents. Tina, with 15 years of experience in teaching, leads academic problem solving with parents who stop by the parent resource room from a position of knowledge. She shared:

I think not all parent involvement coordinators have come from the classroom (in other schools) That’s helpful…this is a big job, so if you want to do it really well you really kind of need to be certified and give it all you got and be fulltime or close to fulltime.

Past PICs, who now teach classrooms, refer parents to the current PIC for assistance at our school. In watching Tina work one-on-one with a parent, I observe her deftness in directing a mom toward next steps of response with her son. Levin and Riffel (2000) believe high poverty communities must work more closely with parents to address academic and social issues. The suggestions and tips to parents reflect Tina’s teaching experience gained within elementary classrooms and builds confidence in the parents she works with at school. During an interview, one parent shared about the help received for her son in math, “She (Tina) actually showed us, myself and another parent, with a deck of cards, a math game, an adding and subtracting game.” This mom needed a way to engage her son to practice math facts at home and came to Tina for advice. The PIC listened to the mother’s concerns, provided options to the parent while inviting a dialogue to solve issues and challenges. Understanding how to complete homework at home becomes a frequent example needing to be addressed by the PIC.
Originally, as the educational leader of Baxter, my support wavered in using a certified teacher in the PIC position, especially one of my best teachers. I believed that teaching students within classrooms deserved the strongest focus of our attention. Stewman (2014) states:

Children living in generational poverty face a host of barriers negatively impacting their academic success. But schools can be the ultimate force to open doors of hope and possibility. School administrators must be mindful of the strain this has on teachers serving in schools with high concentrations of generational poverty (p. 21).

I now see a great benefit of employing a certified teacher who knows how to directly answer parents’ questions, who responds quickly to parents sharing concerns, directing parents into partnership with the school. This capacity support for parents helps classroom teachers, frequently pressed for time while teaching full-time, support families. Individual response to a parent assists in building the capacity of the parent population to hold a strong role in establishing learning at home (Thiers, 2017). The PIC coaches parents through problems, and bridges the gap to the classroom teacher solidifying involvement at the school. Capacity building for parents solves problems and improves student performance when parents share concerns with the PIC about academics.

During interviews, Elizabeth, a parent, referenced the math materials she received four years ago from a parent involvement coordinator at Baxter for her older daughter who struggled in class. Assistance makes a difference when parents need answers or tools to address an academic problem at school. Educators may assume parents know how to solve a deficit, when possible solutions lie outside of the parents’ working knowledge. Edwards (2016) calls for schools to demonstrate a more responsive climate for families in supporting family needs. In
building capacity of parents, skill becomes necessary to encourage all types of questions, and to place the parent on a footing of comfort and accessibility with the parent involvement coordinator. By taking the time to consider options together, the PIC strengthens the parents’ capacity to address current and future concerns.

Questions and concerns shared with the parent involvement coordinator showcase a range of school related topics. Some parents at the school want to challenge and push their children ahead of typical classwork. The PIC responded to that parental concern, and provided ways to coach parents through power struggles that arose when they worked at home with their children. Additionally, some parents come to the PIC with questions about parenting, and how to respond to a behavior or a lack of motivation. Tina shared, “You know it’s really all about student achievement.” Tina responds to questions based on her practical professional experience, and uses a collaborative network with counselors and social workers, other PICs and teachers, as well as me, her principal, to further her base of knowledge in response to questions.

An unexpected finding in this study includes the manner in which Tina assists and grows the capacity of teachers to be stronger partners with families. Edwards (2016) believes increasing changes seen in the student body at schools, representing diversity and underserved populations, deserve support. Educators need to acquire more understanding of the community and build relationships with families combatting marginalization. As the school leader, I found building capacity as a concept applies not just to parents, but also includes educators at Baxter Elementary. The PIC knows what parents need from teachers, yet understands the pressures and demands teachers face with their work that may limit participation in a meaningful parent relationship. Tina shares:
Well I think there is only so much teachers can do on their own, and they are busy people. And learning and teaching is always a priority but, there are other things that are going on, meetings, paperwork, emails.

The parent involvement coordinator’s support plays out across parents and teachers, as she works building the relationship structure, assisting teachers and parents equally. A teacher at Baxter expresses the value she finds with the PIC’s help in an email sent to Tina copying the principal, included in the artifacts examined.

I also really appreciate the advice and guidance to me personally on those particularly hard students when I just wasn’t sure of the best path to take to make sure they are getting the help they need. You are amazing and I am so thankful for you!

Teachers rave about an unexpected tool that encourages parents to use the parent resource room. A prescription pad serves as a popular item in use at the school, completed during parent teacher conferences by the teacher to assist parents in asking for tools from the parent resource room. During a parent teacher conference, a teacher fills out the prescription checking what type of material distributed from the parent resource room needs to be loaned to the parent to take home for practice. The PIC then completes the delivery of materials to the parent when the parent stops by the resource room, note in hand. A former PIC, Pamela, talks about the impact of the prescription pad, “We conducted in 4th grade student led conferences this year. And before every parent left our classroom we used the prescription pads (to) note something on there that that child could benefit from (in) the parent resource room.” Not only did the parent receive free materials, but they also got an opportunity to meet Tina, the parent involvement coordinator.
The 2017 Spring Title 1 Parent Survey asks parents an open-ended question regarding which resource most benefited students at Baxter Elementary School. The survey, examined as an artifact in the data collection, showed the two highest responses indicate academic materials for parents to use at home and a parent involvement coordinator. These statements reiterate the effectiveness of the parent involvement coordinator’s support in building parent capacity at the school. Additionally, on the Title 1 Survey to Staff at Baxter, opportunity to answer an open-ended question indicating the strongest benefit to their professional practice gave staff a chance to weigh in on what makes a difference at the school. The survey, examined through artifacts for significance in the data collection, shows teachers indicate the strongest benefit lies with three items: support for learning at home provided to parents, helping parents by providing resources, and helping parents understand homework. Both teachers and parents see the benefit and need for the parent involvement coordinator, a critical person at Baxter, to support children’s learning at school by building capacity.

**Principal Partnership**

**A view of principal partnership.** Tina and I sit at the conference table in my office. She brings a list of questions and topics that serve as our agenda for our weekly 30-minute weekly meeting. Tina has been posting a weekly 5-minute video to the parents about school topics and personnel. She shares how the Facebook page is “blowing up” over the meet and greet video with the kindergarten teachers she posted last Friday. She points out the questions in the comment section that she already answered. Last week I shared a strategy with her for answering questions I frequently rely on as a school leader, thanking the person for the question before answering. I find that it encourages dialogue and helps the parent feel at ease when sharing
something that they don’t know. I see that Tina used that strategy in her responses and we smile while chatting about our social media accounts, which are at an all time high for usage and participation. Thankfully, Tina helps manage the accounts as part of her responsibilities as the parent involvement coordinator. She knows kindergarten parents can be nervous. Everything is so new and unknown to them; they have a lot of question and she is there for them. Tina shared that she called one mom to check in on a child who had difficulty leaving the car in the morning, and that the mom really appreciated the connection, using it as a chance to ask a few questions about the lunchroom.

I stand up, ready to move on to my next meeting, but Tina asks one final question, pressing about her guests for the next month in her weekly video show. She shares some ideas for future videos; she needs to do a few pieces to gear up for Academic Parent Teacher Teams, the big parent teacher partnership meetings, just around the corner. Last time we talked about this on Facebook, I was the special guest with her speaking about the importance of attending the meetings. “What do you want to do?” I ask her. She is my expert, and she hesitates. “I would really like to have the superintendent of schools be on my video. He could tell our parents how important the partnerships are, and that APTT is a great way to get involved at school.” I smile, because I can already see Tina’s neck turning a little pink. She is nervous and will need my help to ask.

I give her a couple options on how to approach him, how to be specific, but allow for his busy schedule. As she sits at the table, we compose an email and she sends it to the superintendent. Later that day she rushes back into my office to tell me that he accepted one of the times that she offered. She is bursting with pride. “He was happy to be asked to participate,”
she says. I know without my encouragement, Tina would have had trouble asking the superintendent to participate. After she records the video with him, I see how powerful the message is for the community. The school superintendent’s message to parents speaks directly to them encouraging participation at Baxter. I know that the partnership the PIC and I have made this happen, and I am glad that I take the time for Tina.

**Findings.** Williams and Chavkin (1986) cite the principal as the key decision-maker influencing parent partnerships within schools. Henderson et al. (2007) believes that school leaders play a significant role in promoting partnership by communicating school priorities and backing it up with resources. My level of support for the parent involvement coordinator position increased over the past seven years through my tenure as principal at Baxter establishing parent involvement as a priority. I reflect on my current levels of operation with the PIC, and look back at the decisions I made as the educational leader years ago with past PICS that limited their success. Having a strong partnership with the principal expands the influence of the parent involvement coordinator. Today Tina partners with the school leader who carries the most influence at the school with my backing and support her work becomes more successful.

When Tina first came to the school fifteen years ago, I occupied the classroom next to her as a fellow teacher, and served as her teacher mentor in first grade. I knew she had skills to connect with people, her demeanor showed kindness to others. She petitioned hard for the PIC job when it opened several years ago and interviewed with a panel showing her mettle for the position. Three years ago, I provided her the time to make a difference on her schedule as the new parent involvement coordinator. Tina kept one teaching block, and had six segments for parents taking assigned duty before and after school in the parent resource room assisting
families. This represented the largest commitment of time I ever made for parent support at the school and shows a commitment from the educational leader for parent involvement. Tina holds the PIC job longer than anyone else at Baxter; she tells me this work with parents’ became “her dream job.”

The PIC makes a difference with families and wants others to see the value of the work; Tina presents in conferences on the district, state, and national levels to other educators regarding her innovations and relationships with families. Serving as Tina’s mentor while we worked as teachers opened my eyes to the role of serving as her mentor as the principal, leading us into a partnership of practice. This new task, supporting the parent involvement coordinator role, feels right and I prioritize time for the collaboration. I reflect on my past experiences in Title 1 and how the role of mentor figures into the weekly collaboration meetings Tina and I hold. I realize partnership with Tina in the PIC position must happen for direction and goal setting, and my support brings increased success to the role as I offer advantages from the standpoint of the educational leader. Povey et al. (2016) believe principal support for parent engagement must happen for opportunities for increased engagement to occur. Our partnership builds support for parent involvement at the school with the PIC’s role leading to an expanded sphere of leadership with teachers, guiding their actions. I put my time and influence behind the PIC’s work and help her build connections, valuing the work she completes, assisting with insights and suggestions while listening to her concerns.

The original idea of staffing the parent involvement coordinator position came from district leadership translating a state department of education edict to position trained parent involvement coordinators within all Title 1 Schools. Boykin and Noguera (2011) share how
innovative changes bring promise in high-poverty areas facing questions on how to reach out to families. The principal “didn’t change who she served; she changed how they were served” (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 182). Four parent involvement coordinators held the position during my tenure as principal. My knowledge of the role seven years ago barely registered, and my actions aligned to parent involvement at the school randomly happened. My vision for the position looked small and the potential for success doubtful. Mary, the first PIC worked part-time at the school. Shelly and then Pamela, the next two parent involvement coordinators, taught almost full teaching schedules while juggling parent involvement responsibilities. Both focused on completing paperwork and juggling organizational responsibilities for programming while attracting parents to participate in activities. The following table provides historical summary detail regarding the PIC position.

Table 5

*Historical Summary of PIC Position*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PIC Years</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Part Time/ Full Time/Periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Part time work. Three periods for parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>Shelley</td>
<td>Full time work. Two periods for parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>Full time work. Two periods for parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2017</td>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Full time work. Six periods for parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The limitations I saw to the position at Baxter included a view of barriers to participation by parents: time, transportation and childcare being several roadblocks. Povey et al. (2016) found principal leadership sets the barometer on parent involvement; expectations and attitudes displayed to parents by school leaders ultimately predict whether parents engaged with a school.
I believed barriers existed and prevented the Baxter PIC role from taking hold with the parent population, so in turn after the first year, the results proved weak and my beliefs stood firm. Seven years ago, I neglected to think about barrier removal and how I as the school leader influence parent involvement at school with my actions and beliefs supporting the process.

Two current Baxter teachers provided historical perspective on the PIC position and the impact of the role on the community. Both served as PIC, and then moved on to other positions teaching within the school. Their point of view of the current PIC’s role and their own participation shows evolution of the position, providing insight and validity to the impact of a PIC at Baxter. As the principal, I first approached Shelly after Mary left. Shelly, a teacher with over 10 years experience and a mother to a young daughter, held the position for two years and demonstrated soft skills with parents and collaborative work with the district leadership, which supported the position and saw it as necessary, even while my support slowly developed. When asked what she knew about the work in the beginning Shelly says, “It was new to us at that time, so I was only the second one we had at the school. And I went to the (district) training and it was so exciting, and you wanted to do so much more than you ever could.”

In reflecting on my stance, I saw too great a need for academic remediation in my school to have a teacher “sitting around” waiting to help a parent if the person showed up at Baxter. I provided two periods for parent contact within the school day for Shelly, thinking that an adequate allotment for support, and suggested placing a non-certified person in the role. Goslin (2012) sees school leaders signaling beliefs, values, and how relationships with parents proceed within the schools. Tomlinson (2017) sees “principals who consistently change education practices for the better are vision-driven, process-oriented, and dedicated to serving those they
lead” (p.91). My understanding of the PIC role developed later with experience in witnessing the impact of a parent involvement coordinator. Other issues crowded my schedule, so Shelly and I rarely discussed parent involvement and data driven goals together. She received more direction from the district office than me. Shelly organized parent nights, and made sure the completion of parent compacts and paperwork for Title 1 purposes happened. After two years, Shelly went on to become a kindergarten teacher at Baxter, and a new PIC, Pamela stepped into the role.

Pamela brought strength of organization and a focus on results. Her expertise featured looking at numbers and tracking progress with students. From an educational leadership position, staffing becomes a critical skillset, and one of the most important duties a principal completes is hiring the right person for the job. I asked Pamela to take the job and increase the attendance at our parent workshops, giving her a target. She had a goal and a strong knowledge of support structures from her work as a seasoned intervention teacher. Pamela knew people and connected well in the community as a familiar face to the parents. She said, “I did my best to get parents to come into the building, just to kind of see what a parent resource room would look like. The big goal was purchasing a lot of supplies so that parents could check them out, and try to help their kids at home…A lot of the job involved paperwork and folders.”

As the principal, my original motivation for both Shelly and Pamela to fill the position focused on skillset with parent interactions. I witnessed both Shelly and Pamela’s grace and talent with communication. My own knowledge of what the position needed expanded from experience and observation of watching the work play out before me at Baxter. Boykin and Noguera (2011) support educational leaders focusing on families to see positive academic results, understanding the importance of parent support for learning. As a beginning principal,
my attention repeatedly settled into academics and the work teachers led within the classroom while I over looked family needs at home. Parrett and Budge (2012) see principals as a catalyst for the creations of conditions to make it possible to increase opportunities for families. The PIC job proved to be an innovation in the school setting designed to increase parent involvement. I learned more about my parent population as my experience grew as a school leader, and I saw the benefits of partnering with families in an at-risk environment.

The parent base at Baxter benefits from supportive structures intentionally placed at the school. Pamela, a past PIC at the school shared, “I want to say that our parent involvement coordinator now is doing a great job of reaching…reaching out further than I was able to do. If I had to do it again, I would probably beg for more time.” The decision-making processes of principals’ impacts the results achieved by the PIC. As my support for the parent involvement position grew, I increased the hours dedicated to attract and serve parents in the parent resource room. My decision on how much time to devote to the position impacted the progress with parent involvement. Pamela found it difficult to meet the needs of teaching and parent involvement coordinator while carrying responsibility for the parent resource room, which saw increased traffic under her guidance. She left the position after just one year and took a classroom position at the school.

Tina, who taught kindergarten and served as the grade chair, petitioned hard for the PIC position when it opened. My practice with Tina differs from the previous three PICS at Baxter, due to our past association as teachers. Rothengast (2016) saw the addition of a positive parent liaison into the parent resource center at her school as a move that had an immediate impact on the school, creating a change felt by all stakeholders. Witnessing the power of collaboration
between the parent involvement coordinator and myself serves as a catalyst of action, a tipping point into successful practice with increased benefits for parent involvement. Tina believes our partnership makes her work successful. She shared:

One thing I see with other parent involvement coordinators (at other schools) is they have to go out and do the fundraisers, and they have to beg for money for their program to work. And that is one thing we are blessed here, because you (principal) do so much of that legwork…. And I think we are on the same mission.

Our mission is an alignment of purpose, working towards the same vision. Tina and I maintain a weekly meeting where we exchange ideas, solve problems, and share resources; our partnership carries a commitment to work together. We hold each other accountable for our work with parents. Tina says, “We are on the same page with where we go.” Sinek (2009) believes leadership responsibility moves beyond position at a school to caring for families well being. Values related to transformative leadership influence my decision-making at Baxter and the actions I support to involve parents.

I look at Tina as an expert in the field of parent engagement. She looks to me as her school leader, a principal who removes barriers while solving problems that get beyond her scope as a teacher leader. I set the direction for our work and lay out priorities of practice. Tina embraces her role as a critical change agent in the school, and a voice for parents. She brings her concerns to me, and I listen when she speaks. Together we plan and try solutions to promote engagement, removing barriers wherever they exist on our campus. I share my views of transformative leadership practice with Tina, wanting to make a difference for our families. Greenleaf (1991) believes leaders need to use their power to better the situation of those without
authority, working to serve others as servant leaders. Nurturing families at the school matters to me and I want to help families on many levels. We look for opportunities to assist our families, going beyond the line of traditional school partnership to offer a helping hand to those in need. As the school leader, I successfully solicit support for initiatives from people outside of the school working in our district office who need to know our needs. Some solutions entail my contacting leaders in our community, while other supports cost nothing but may be a change in practice, a gesture or kindness offered by the school. This past year the guidance counselors offered a class in conjunction with Tina and the social worker for parents to experience The Seven Mindsets, a character education curriculum, taught to our students. The class benefited parents who explored how to think positively as adults, something the children learned at school. Knowing the program and the messages shared at school helped parents connect with their children at home through discussion. Giving each parent a guidebook required asking for help in funding the donations. Tina worked collaboratively with the guidance counselors to invite parent participation in the program.

Tina, a certified teacher, works full-time, focused on parent engagement. Baxter earned the following awards for improvements in academics and operations during the past three years, coinciding with Tina’s tenure in the position as our partnership functioned:

- Family Friendly School, Selected from all Title 1 Schools in the state by application.
- Top 10% Most Progress, Selected from all Title 1 Schools in the state.
- Top 5% Academic Performance, Selected from all Title 1 Schools in the state.
- Governor’s Office Of Student Achievement, Silver Level, Academic Progress, Selected from all schools in the state.
Outstanding Parent Leader, Selected from all schools by application.

Can awards be symbols of parent involvement? I believe correlation exists, demonstrating the power of parent involvement in action and collaborative practice of the PIC and principal. When assessing changes over time, awards indicate a shift in prevailing practice and a change at the school. Burnette (2010) says turn-around schools model breakthrough changes in operations. A momentum in action at Baxter moves the school towards increased academic success, made possible through a principal’s belief system that parent involvement matters. Henderson and Mapp (2002) believe children do better in school when schools, families, and communities work together. The PIC and principal form an intentional partnership and use collaboration to work on shared goals by meeting regularly and talking about what matters for parent involvement. Devoting the time, articulating the targets, and making partnership a priority at the school bring recognizable results.

Social Capital

A view of social capital. I walk down the school hallway, I see Juanita, Jose’s grandma, outside of a classroom door with Rucker, a first grader, a list of sight words in her hand. They sit side by side. Rucker has a big smile on his face as Juanita praises him up one side and down the other. Rucker is learning his sight words, and Juanita has been helping him twice a week. Rucker is being raised by his grandma, while his mother serves her time. School is hard, and he soaks up the attention of a kind, caring adult.

I walk around the corner and I see Shania, another parent sitting with a third grade girl, backs against the wall and a book on her lap. Shania listens to the small third grade girl read
aloud. The girl is wearing her older sister’s sweater. I recognize it from yesterday, it falls over her wrists and she twists the ends while she reads. It’s slow going, but Shania encourages her with sweet words. This is the impact of the Champs program, volunteers stretched out around the school on Tuesday and Thursdays helping kids who struggle make progress towards their goals, lighting fires for learning and showing that the community cares.

**Findings.** Tina organizes parent volunteers to help the most at-risk students. Ferrera (2015) believes schools need to provide children from resource-weak families with experiences to mitigate missing pieces readily available in wealthier communities. Tina gives her group jobs to do and moves them around the school as teachers clamor for volunteer help for the students who struggle academically. The volunteer group calls themselves “The Champs,” short for champions. They designed their own volunteer t-shirts, and wear them like a team when they volunteer. Last month they ran a potluck lunch in the library, and next month they plan to hold a cookie swap. They became friends, working with the children of Baxter, and they all know Tina. Several parents mentioned the satisfaction gained from helping others at the school. As a parent, training as a volunteer brings another way to learn the skills to assist your own child with academic tasks. One mother mentions the satisfaction she gets from belonging to the group of volunteers helping children.

It’s just the impact, whether they have parents that work a lot and they are not able to spend as much time as they would like, or they just don’t have that support at home, whatever it is…you know, we’re there to fill that gap. I am just happy to be part of that.

“Personal relationships, trust of others, and networks of contacts with people in organizations, government, work and places of worship make up what researchers call social
capital” (Henderson et al, 2007, p. 200). The PIC connects people as friends bringing groups together at the school. Social capital looks at the strength within a network of people, seeing usefulness in building relationships and connecting parents together in groups (Stevens & Patel, 2015). Tina helps those on the fringe join into the group, forging connections. If our school crowned a homecoming queen, Tina wears the crown. Friendly, gracious, welcoming, Tina stands as a well-known figure at the school. All of the parents interviewed knew Tina, regardless of their level of involvement at Baxter. Tina starts a ripple of positive interactions, and those closest to her continue with the connections by inviting others to participate. One mother shared the power of attracting others while wearing her Champs T-shirt when volunteering:

I actually had one of our Watch Dog Dads (male volunteers) stop me in the hall. I graduated high school with him. And he said okay, I am counting on you because I know you can do it. My youngest one is starting pre-k next year, and my wife needs to come in and volunteer.

In observing Tina’s impact on the parent community, I watched her build groups of parents from acquaintances into friends. Parsons and Harding (2011) believe relationships nurtured and prioritized grow while trust builds at schools helping connections to strengthen. Tina knows many names in our parent community; using names helps connect you to others. She stands by the front door early in the morning and greets parents and children by name as they enter the school. It feels as though people visit her home, and she welcomes them inside. As the principal, I feel compelled to stand beside her. She pushes me, a natural introvert, to become more outgoing. Last year we attended a training session on customer service together. The lessons resonated with Tina who loves to make people feel comfortable at the school. In my busy
world, I would willingly skip some niceties Tina feels essential. “A warm welcome” stands as one of Tina’s essentials. Waiting by the front door when people arrive rates as one of her favorite moments. Gruenert and Whittaker (2015) know how school climate impacts parents’ perceptions of the educational environments determining their level of participation. Being able to gather groups on campus that see the school positively brings increased participation by parents. Tina uses her parent resource room as a landing pad for all people in the building. She positioned a coffee pot by the doorway and I fund the coffee from my general funds. It draws people in because free caffeine attracts crowds. Having coffee and a word with the parent involvement coordinator happens naturally, building a connection.

In interviews, many parents mentioned the connectedness visible between parents and families at the school, a feeling of encouragement resonating within school climate. A specific question during the interviews asked if parents witnessed other parents encouraging and helping each other at the school. Kim, a mother of one, shared:

I had a parent talk about her child, and how she wished there was more that she could do, and another parent was in there (library) and she said, it’s okay, you’re doing the best that you can, you’re just doing life.

The question of support leads to an exploration in elements of social capital and the climate of the school. All parents interviewed articulated the witnessing of support at the school amongst the parent population. I believe supportive practice flows from educational leadership at the top of the organization through the parent involvement coordinator to the way she interacts with parents. Climate, the general attitude of people in the school, plays a role in attracting and drawing families into the building (Grunert & Whittaker, 2015). The overall school climate
contributes to the ability to establish social capital with families and surfaces with an existing feeling at Baxter welcoming parents to the school.

Additionally, strong social capital emerges with the Academic Parent Teacher Team initiative at the school, led by Tina, the PIC. Parents attend three meetings during the year within their child’s classroom developing a partnership for a shared academic goal. Steve and Patel (2015) note that individual social capital appears within a positive parent/teacher relationship. The parents within the classroom go further establishing a collective social capital group, bonding over shared experiences, discussing parenting and learning more about school. By developing this shared group, social capital enlarges within the school. Inviting groups of parents into the classroom with the teacher during APTT evenings builds a group mindset at Baxter for parent involvement with school a priority, and educational support at home becomes a norm of how parents operate.

Baxter Elementary brings social capital into play by inviting parents to join into activities at the school. Some activities initiate sharing through the work of volunteering, while other activities build community through participation with parent workshops. By helping to connect adults to each other, social capital grows among parents and educators. A parent involvement coordinator facilitates the growth of networks at the school through purposeful planning of activities and taking advantage of meeting the people entering the school everyday. Parrett and Budge (2012) challenge school leaders to look for ways to bring networking into play in poverty areas where increased intention needs to develop this valuable resource for parents. Within this case study, the value of social capital plays out with increased parent groups visible at the school and a feeling of welcome in the hallways.
Examining the Tensions

Secondary questions, I reference as tensions, inform the next phase in the case study process. These tensions enlighten and address the work the parent involvement coordinator accomplishes in assisting others to participate and engage in the school. This step examines capacity building for all stakeholders, removal of barriers for parents, and aligning the parent involvement coordinator with the school leader for a shared vision. All questions relate to the work that the parent involvement coordinator does at Baxter Elementary. The specific questions follow:

- What steps does the parent involvement coordinator take to impact all stakeholders involved?
- How and to what extent does the PIC remove barriers that prohibit and limit families from participation?
- How and to what extent did the work of the principal and PIC align to create a shared vision for the community?

Impact on all Stakeholders

At a glance, the parent involvement coordinator role appears limited to capacity building with parents; however, reported evidence in the case study shows capacity building occurs with all stakeholders involved at the school. Three identities; parents, teachers, and the school leader, all benefit from the interactions with the certified staff parent involvement coordinator at Baxter Elementary. Tina shared,
You have to be able to listen to your parents but also your teachers, to your principal and all the stakeholders. But you have to put yourself in both shoes. Like mom, I understand where you are coming from, now let’s think about where the teacher might be coming from and why this could have happened.

In the following discussion, examples of how capacity building led by the parent involvement coordinator impacts all stakeholders.

Steps towards capacity building of parents and families begin with invitations from Tina to participate in planned events at the school. Jensen (2009) believes schools must build partnerships with parents, “Include parents and provide adult support and outreach. Build strong, long-term relationships, identify the most critical areas of need, and offer content that parents need most” (p.73). Planned events at Baxter occur before, during, and after school hours with multiple times offered for the same topic, to prevent parents missing an event due to scheduling conflicts. An ongoing flood of opportunity invites parents to become involved at the school with a calendar for the parent resource room arriving home in English and Spanish. The PIC sends home papers inviting parents to join in a meeting, a discussion, or a workshop centered on school related topics. At times, informal gatherings held for volunteers and visitors in the parent resource room over a coffee cup produce conversations and bonding. Hoerr (2017) encourages the use of informal gatherings to build and strengthen relationships between parents and educators through the establishment of trust. Other formal meetings held with parent advisory boards meet to discuss how the school functions and to provide feedback on the school’s compacts, agreements for operating between families, staff, and students.
Artifact examination details the work of parent involvement, showing attendance data from school events and increasing numbers of parent participation. Together, the PIC and I track participation of parents attending formal events at the school. Data collection shows success in attracting parent participation at Baxter with attendance numbers trending upward over the past two years (see Table 6). Personal invitations to participate make a difference in attending school

Table 6

Summary of Parent Attendance Data at Baxter Parent Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Number of Parents Present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>423 Families in attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>329 Families in attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>75 Families in attendance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Summary of parent attendance at Baxter Elementary from sign in logs maintained by the parent involvement coordinator.

Events. The PIC shows teachers how to issue those invites during a monthly faculty meeting, modeling how to engage families and encourage attendance. Howard (1999) looks at teaching teachers how to relate to a community struggling with poverty and growing diversity as a means of improving parent involvement. Educating teachers on how to maximize and build relationships supports the work of parent teacher partnerships.

The PIC shows parents that the school wants to participate in partnership, providing opportunities to engage in their child’s education. If parents seem unable to physically get to the
school, she presents ways for parents to facilitate learning at home. The parent involvement coordinator plans ways to use social media platforms to reach parents with information designed to increase understanding of school events, activities, and expectations. Videos planned, recorded, and posted revolve around educating parents to learn more about specific topics and systems of education in use at Baxter, video invites parents to become acquainted with the people who work at the school. Arlen shared during a parent interview how she suggested to Tina that a video demonstrating how to play the skill game taught at Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) be added to a social media platform.

My husband works a lot, and will never be able to come to the parent meeting, but I want him to see how to play the game with our daughter. I told Tina she should record the game and post it for him and other parents, so they will know how to do it.

By listening and acting on Arlen’s suggestion as well as on other ideas, the PIC demonstrates responsiveness to parents, creating an impact in the parent community.

Teaching parents how to volunteer and support all children at Baxter promotes a positive experience for participants in areas of social capital and parent capacity building, another valuable step in impacting parent confidence by the parent involvement coordinator. Shania articulated how walking into the parent resource room makes her feel connected to others at the school, and fueled a sense of belonging.

We have parent chats, and plan a coffee meeting. And it’s good to talk to other parents who might be experiencing something similar to what you may be doing. You can have a
15-minute coffee break with parents who are like you, or who live in the same community as you and we can talk about the needs and wants and whatever.

The informal connections unite parents who visit the school in a network of support.

Teachers feel the impact of the PIC in the school environment, as their own skill set for working with families expands and grows. As the position evolved, Tina took the initiative to grow teacher capacity for working with parents, something not addressed by previous PICs at the school. Knowledge of how to work with families living in at-risk environment proves critical in a school struggling with economic hardships. Capacity building of teachers occurs at the school, since Tina, a former classroom teacher understands teacher limitations and needs with parent communication. The PIC intentionally works to assist teachers in building relationships with parents by showcasing successful stories of interactions between parents and Baxter teachers. This affords tools for facilitation in the relationships, and provides collective and individual opportunities with teachers in learning experiences.

Tina showcased small actions by teachers that impacted families during monthly faculty meetings, training teachers on best practices of parent involvement. Gruenert and Whittaker (2015) state “Talking up successes makes people feel successful, whereas talking about overwhelming obstacles makes people want to give up” (p.165). By giving Tina a place on the agenda, I show the faculty the value of her message of parent involvement. For several months, Tina recognized teachers who referred parents to the afterschool family math sessions in the parent resource room. She asked for my support as the principal to provide a small gift card to reward the teacher who referred and reached out to parents the most. Setting up sessions for math teachers to support drop-in families in the parent resource room came about as Tina listened to
parents. Parents discussed their struggles with math homework and Tina planned supportive networks to grow capacity with the work. Involving parent and child together strengthens family relationships while building skills.

The partnership between the PIC and Principal rewarded teachers who went the extra step in offering options to parents. The incentive motivated and recognized some teachers to deliver invitations, while other teachers experienced a short educational opportunity focused on parent involvement during the faculty meeting by listening to strategies that grew relationships and met family needs. Sally, a teacher at Baxter, wrote Tina a thank you message, copying me, the principal, on the email. Sally stated:

We have some pretty tough situations in my (class) room, and you have gone above and beyond to try and reach each family and offer all the support you can…What is even more impressive to me is how you have taken the time to reach out to my families, one on one, from making phone calls, to working individually with them to make up their sessions and just genuinely being there offering every support possible.

As the expert in parent engagement, the PIC models practices teachers learn. She grows the capacity of the staff by sharing examples and modeling best practices in parent involvement.

Given the collaborative nature of our work, the parent involvement coordinator also impacts the school leader. The PIC serves as an expert in the field receiving advanced training on parent involvement provided by the state and district education offices. Principals in schools cover multiple initiatives without opportunity to attend all training sessions. A parent involvement coordinator stands as a voice for parents with the principal. The PIC asks critical
questions regarding how the work proceeds at Baxter, speaking for those without opportunity to enter the discussion. In voicing questions, plans for workshops, and proposed postings, the work of the school generates increased invitation and opportunity for parents. The PIC informs the principal how capacity building for all subgroups progresses, mentioning needs and barriers to be addressed for continued growth.

The PIC grows and influences my actions as the principal helping me recognize factors that prevent parents from participating at the school. Goodwin (2015) states, “When it comes to breaking through performance ceilings, empowering, collaborative leadership may be necessary” (p.73). As the expert, the PIC provides an ongoing update of our progress, alerting me to shifts and obstacles, which prevent attendance, involvement, and engagement. Recently we discussed meeting dates for the new school year, and she reminded me of difficulties parents experience with two evenings out of the home in the same week. Her pulse on the parent population keeps me informed and influences my decision-making when planning for parents. We talk about using raffles as an incentive for attending our parent events, and how parents enjoy winning movie tickets as a possible perk for showing up at the sessions. We plan fast meals or easy snacks on evenings when meetings coincide with the dinner hour, thinking about convenience for families. I fund food purchased for the school through my connections in the community. Setting aside a weekly time for meeting became a necessary step in the scheme of commitment for parent involvement in the world of a principal. Demands for my attention vary greatly, and I frequently pay attention to matters that rear up as emergencies. Tina stays committed as an advocate for the parents at the school, a constant keeping attention on building our family relationships on an ongoing basis.
I find my support for the PIC in our environment makes a difference, because my view of possible steps covers a larger territory. I assist Tina in securing community supports with my connections to resources and service organizations. Tomlinson (2017) sees partnerships between educators intent on transformative leadership originating from schools serving and leading from a moral authority, forming a community around shared values and a commitment to meeting the needs of others. I introduce Tina to the president of the local literacy organization, and our local politicians. By working together, we arrange connections for parents who want to pursue a GED or learn English at the school. I commit funds to the initiatives we prioritize, paying for a subscription to language acquisition software to be added to computers in the Parent Resource Room. We assist a family in acquiring a chrome book for their home, and discovered later the technology assisted the single mother, who pursued a job by applying online, secure employment. Earning an income becomes a possibility for one family due to the assistance at school. The PIC’s influence reaches far, impacting many, and moving us all towards best parent involvement practices at Baxter. Actions initiated by the parent involvement coordinator build into a movement of purpose with steps aligning parents, teachers, and the principal benefiting the children of Baxter.

**Removal of Barriers**

Barriers limiting successful parent participation and engagement receive intentional focus with a parent involvement coordinator at Baxter Elementary. Principals who remove barriers positively influence parent connections with teachers (Baker et al., 2016). Time, transportation, climate, and language serve as barriers schools struggle to address inhibiting participation and involvement. Hoerr (2017) states:
To be fair, schools often aren’t the most welcoming places. We limit parents’ access to certain times and specific spaces. I understand why we do that, but the message can unintentionally become that this is our house, family members are just visitors, and they shouldn’t make themselves too comfortable. (p. 89)

Digital artifacts catalogued in the case study detail how the parent involvement coordinator at Baxter addresses and removes barriers using five-minute videos produced to inform and engage parent participation at Baxter. The parent involvement coordinator in collaboration with the instructional technology specialist record and post the videos on the school webpage. This method of interaction eliminates barriers of time and transportation for parents. Bonilla-Silva (2014) calls for schools to address the needs of vulnerable students employing strategies to mitigate disparities and inequity. I support the practice of transformative leadership by the school to address inequity within the community. Anello et al. (2014) sees opportunities to help families that struggle, recommending that leaders embrace the idea of being “agents of transformation who are part of the solution, consciously contributing to the process of integration” (p. 31). One mother noted how Tina helped her get the Internet to her home. “At the beginning of the year, we didn’t have Internet to the home…and I would tell the teachers that when they had homework online, I just needed it sent home on paper. And then I went through Miss Tina.” Video messages eliminate low literacy levels as a barrier to understanding the message. The PIC, as host of the video, becomes a friendly face of the school, inviting and building a connection to the school. Tina created several of the artifacts in response to problems observed and frequent questions asked by parents at Baxter. Elizabeth, a parent, mentions how she enjoys watching the Facebook Friday show to get to know people who work at the school. This connection influences the
feeling of partnership established by the school, with school climate assisting a growing parent engagement.

Pena (2000) states that cultures wish for accessibility, invitation, and welcome from the school. Language functions as a barrier to participation at schools for families that speak a different language from the staff. The PIC at Baxter facilitates and lessens the impact of this obstacle in the school environment with intentional practice geared to address this barrier. During a planned observation, Tina facilitated the use of fourteen translators in the school. Thirteen of the translators were Spanish speakers brought in from a local translation agency to participate with parents and teachers in classrooms with clustered ELL populations, while one translator was an American Sign Language interpreter used for a hearing impaired mother who would have difficulty accessing the information in a crowded classroom without direct positioning for the reading of lips. Every written document the school provides is released in English and Spanish, a point of pride that Tina manages. The parent involvement coordinator looks for ways to address language barriers going beyond sending home documents written in English and Spanish. Tina coordinated the photograph in the lobby picturing our bilingual staff members, with the Spanish phrase written below, informing viewers that these staff members can assist with translations. Outside the front door, another posting in Spanish, visible from the sidewalk, lets guests know translators stand ready to assist on the inside of the school in the office. Signage shows the school prepared to address language barriers.

Another language obstacle for parents with children attending Baxter fixates on how teachers speak regarding systems, functions, and processes at school. Educators speak a school language of terms and jargon often unfamiliar to parents and families who want to support their
children. A barrier of unknown terms creates distance between parents and school personnel, who frequently speak to other school personnel with acronyms and words that unintentionally exclude parents from participation fully in the conversation. Tammy, a grandmother, detailed how Tina, the PIC, attended a student support team meeting with her when a discussion was held regarding retention for her grandson who was struggling in kindergarten. After the meeting, Tammy praised the teacher for “wanting the best for her grandson,” and working with him while he struggled with learning. The PIC’s participation in the event helped break down barriers of school jargon used during the conference to make the conference accessible for the grandmother, who wanted to be involved in the decision-making process.

Barriers exist in policies and procedures of operation that limit parent engagement impacting school climate. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) look at the strength of those managing changes influencing outcomes within the school setting for the better. The Baxter PIC looks for limitations placed unnecessarily on families, and works to adjust the way we function at the school in parent partnerships. A successful parent involvement coordinator knows the day-to-day operations of the school and how teachers operate within the school setting. The experience of being a past classroom teacher at Baxter adds credibility to Tina’s role as a parent involvement coordinator. Trina, a parent interviewed for the study said, “Tina told me to keep the material (I) checked out of the parent resource center as long as it was useful to me and my child.” The parent involvement coordinator uses minimal restrictions, limiting unnecessary rules saying, “I would rather have the materials sitting at the parent’s home, than sitting on my shelves in the parent resource room.”
Parents with past negative experiences in school may feel insecure at school. At times schools appear intimidating and unfamiliar to families with bad memories. A challenge at Baxter for teachers includes a community struggling with generational white poverty, which frequently associates with limited educational attainment. Stewman (2014) addresses generational poverty issues by fostering a culture of collaboration and partnership among educators and families pushing supportive practices. Parents’ positive perceptions of school grow with time at Baxter. Karen, a working mother with six children over the past fifteen years, attending Baxter, returned to school two years ago to complete her education. She sees Baxter reaching out more over the last few years, giving opportunities for parents to be involved with their children, helping set learning goals with parents, and providing supports to meet the goals. Karen states:

(In) talking to his teacher, communicating with her, she is constantly asking, is there something I can do to help. Is there something that you need from us? So I feel like even being able to express our needs for him, being in his special circumstances, that is also a way of communicating. Reaching out and putting input in as well.

The PIC’s visibility for parents becomes a point of comfort and familiarity when parents enter the school, because an available friend exists. Tina stands by the front door in the morning greeting parents by name while holding a clipboard labeled, “Free materials, ask me how.” Karen signed out materials from the parent resource room for her foster son who struggles with reading. A small gesture such as opening the door in the morning for a harried parent, or offering free materials to practice creates an impression of accessibility and partnership. Jeynes (2005)
believes thoughtful acts matter when working with parents. Kindness fosters relationships at school.

Gruenert and Whittaker (2015), experts on the impact of relationships on school functioning state “Teachers need to be proactive when they contact parents and maintain positive relationships with all of them. Those who are uncomfortable with this process are expected to ask colleagues for advice” (p. 73). The parent involvement coordinator serves as the person teachers ask for assistance with parent relationships at Baxter Elementary. Knowledge of how to maximize relationships with parents improves the functioning of the school community. Tina solves problems within interactions with parents, which play out as a major ingredient in the success she experiences in her position. She incorporates new ways of eliminating barriers, and demonstrates a flair for innovation, something not often reported in parent engagement studies.

Studies of parent involvement liaisons showcase a person in the role assisting parents, but few studies offer a liaison designing solutions and knocking down barriers for the parent population by using new ideas as solutions to age old problems. A ticket to the parent involvement coordinator’s success anchors her work in knowledge of how teaching and learning within the school environment functions. An understanding of how schools function from the perspective of teachers assists the PIC in working with parents. The following table (see Table 7) illustrates problem and solution mindset engaged in by the current parent involvement coordinator at Baxter constructed through evidence collected for this study. An impact on barriers shows removal and mitigation by the dedicated, certified parent involvement coordinator working in the school setting on several problems experienced by parents within the school setting.
Table 7

Problem/Solution Table Addressing Barriers at Baxter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Barrier: Parents have difficulty asking for materials at the parent resource center. They cannot describe what is wrong or needed.</td>
<td>The PIC created a prescription pad with specifics to be completed by the classroom teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time and Transportation: Parent cannot make a scheduled event at the school due to scheduling conflict or lack of transportation</td>
<td>The PIC posts a video of the event and provides make-up sessions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate: Parents feel intimidated by school. They may feel uncomfortable in the school setting.</td>
<td>The PIC attends meetings with parents providing information and assistance. She greets parents at the door and goes with them to the meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language: Parent cannot communicate with the teacher, a language barrier in English. Parents might have a disability preventing spoken language to be heard in a crowd.</td>
<td>The PIC provides translators in the home language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare: Parents have young children to care for and cannot afford a babysitter.</td>
<td>The PIC secures childcare providers offering free services at school events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunger: Meetings are scheduled during dinner hour after school. Parents and children arrive at the school without having eaten a meal.</td>
<td>The PIC and principal arrange snacks and quick meals provided for families at no charge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table includes actual practices engaged in by the PIC at Baxter Elementary to lessen the barriers to parent involvement.

Alignment with Principal

A view with alignment. The first time I learned Baxter Elementary won an academic award under my tenure as principal, I was standing next to Tina at a parent meeting that featured a guest speaker. It was early in the evening, about ten parents were sitting in the media center and an expert was leading a discussion on interpreting your child’s standardized test score report. The intended audience, families who wanted to understand what the numbers meant on the standardized paperwork sent home that week from Baxter, included mostly mothers and a few
children. Whenever I see children present I am happy, I know that moms are not paying for babysitters, and I am fine with that, actually relieved to not create a financial burden. Our events should not strain the family budget. Whenever possible, I provide the sitters to alleviate the pressure of childcare expenses. I took a moment after delivering the welcome to the moms to check my email on my cellphone, a bad habit to be sure, but a necessary one when you are juggling a school of a thousand students and over a hundred employees. I was trying to pin down a problem from earlier in the day; sometimes my days go on for a long time.

Since the topic of this evening’s workshop is test scores, it is only fitting to share that when you stack Baxter up against all the other elementary schools in our county comparing academic performance, we are at the bottom of a long list of schools. When you judge us against our past performances, we are making strong upward progress. I quickly opened an email from the Title 1 Director, not thinking I was about to hear great news. She was writing the superintendent and myself to share that Baxter won a Top 10% Progress Award, a recognition that had never happened at our school. The progress award recognizes the top 10% of Title 1 schools in the state that are trending upward over the course of three years of test scores. I was bursting with pride and so was Tina, who I believe is instrumental in the success story Baxter is experiencing.

**Findings.** Penny, Bender & Sebring (2000) characterize successful principals as beginning their work with a vision for the school, which they invite parents and teachers to participate in and shape over time. Gruenert and Whittaker (2015) state, “A strong vision works better when it can build upon past successes rather than elaborate on past failures” (p.31). My vision includes collaboration and support and extends beyond the physical boundary of our
school. In my role as the principal, I started a habit to meet weekly to discuss ideas, opportunities, and needs with the parent involvement coordinator, bringing an element of intentionality into our meetings. This practice never happened with previous PICs at Baxter, which impacted the trajectory of the work and the results achieved. I look at my motivation for our weekly meeting, and question if the past relationship where I served as mentor when we taught together influenced this practice of mentorship, or if my increasing knowledge of parent involvement acquired through graduate course work led me to this new custom. I know as our work aligned, we go farther together than separately.

At first, the PIC brought a list of questions into my office, which became our working agenda. In referencing an artifact of a meeting held in April of 2017, a list of questions and concerns, the meeting concerns decisions related to school operations and discussions supporting shared vision. Tina questions me on ways to collaborate with a local business owner who wants to give financially to the school, but plans to advertise the poverty present when advertising his event. We discuss how to maintain confidentiality and respect to the parent base, and what advertising conveys. Tina tells me about a mom, who revealed placement concerns at school while completing a parent input form for the new school year, sharing more with Tina than she wrote on the paper. I appreciate knowing the parent’s worries; it helps me make better student placements for children. We talk about the impact on the families when a teacher goes out on maternity leave, and how Tina’s support of the incoming long-term substitute teacher maintains family relationships. Tina fills a gap with parents while the teacher stays out caring for her baby. The long-term substitute, new to our school, needs support as well, since the substitute’s previous placements occurred in affluent areas. Understanding poverty requires training and assistance for teachers who lack background experience. A number of ESOL parents need
support in this classroom too, in order to participate in their children’s education. The 30-minute weekly meeting gives us time to touch base and be purposeful about cultivating our parent population. The time goes by quickly, and both Tina and I leave the meeting with tasks to complete before next week. I carry responsibility for getting raffle prizes for the final school meeting. We hold each other accountable.

Having served as Tina’s mentor years ago while operating as teachers opened me to the role of serving as her mentor in the PIC position. This critical element helps facilitate success in the PIC position, aligning the intentional direction from school leaders for parent involvement. I speak to Tina about my vision for the school, communicating priorities and willingness to support parents beyond traditional measures. Transformative leadership practices look for ways to impact families’ situations (Shields, 2013). Our school culture represents a mission of support to families, telling staff why we function and serve others becomes paramount in our shared vision (Gruenert & Whittaker, 2015). Creating supports with food and childcare function as two of my “go to strategies” at the school, but more develop through our work together, sharing ideas. As a principal embracing transformative leadership practices, I believe my commitment to the families our school serves impacts their life circumstances and aids their children towards improved life outcomes. Tomlinson (2017) sees transformative leadership as serving others stating:

Principals and teachers whom I think of as exemplary leaders are on a mission—one almost certainly focused on bettering the prospects of young people. These leaders are driven by the needs they see around them and a sense of both opportunity and obligation to make a difference. (p. 91)
I want to provide accessibility to educational opportunities. Pouring time and attention into parents promotes improved life circumstances for children. Levin and Riffel (2000) believe that working closely with parents in poverty environments benefits students. My support and ability to discuss our collaborative work leads to an expanded sphere of influence for parents at the school through the parent involvement coordinator. Together the PIC and I set a direction and intentionality that secures parent involvement.

The investment of face time with the parent involvement coordinator strengthens the alignment with the principal’s vision for the school. By sitting with Tina weekly, I provide her access to the priorities of practice we support as a school. She knows I fund transportation costs for a young mother who wants to attend a parent meeting, but has limited means. Tina knows I use local agencies to connect support for families needing medical help, food, or access to language software to support English learning in the parent resource room. The PIC knows these things because we discuss them together, building an understanding of the work we complete at the school. Scheduling the time to spend together means dedicating time on a principal’s calendar to meet when competing needs constantly appear.

In turn, Tina communicates about her ongoing work and any limitations in the schedule with me, her direct supervisor. In the past, I found it philosophically difficult to use a certified teacher in a parent support role when academic concerns pervasively existed. Now I see possibilities and the impact of building parent capacity to support their own children through a dedicated staff member. Parents learn about educational expectations at Baxter from the PIC. Through working with other PICs, I saw the need to expand the periods on Tina’s schedule for
further direct parent support. The change in structure of the position, providing time to do the job during the instructional day, maintains ongoing support for parents.

Multiple relationships exist at the school creating an inviting climate and impacting the parent population of over a thousand children. Parents interact and develop relationships spending the most time communicating with their child’s assigned classroom teacher, with support teachers, and additionally with the parent involvement coordinator. The PIC fills a gap with parents when the classroom teacher’s accessibility seems limited. To a lesser extent, on an infrequent basis, interactions between parents exist with the principal. Decisions I make in my office regarding policy, procedure, and operations at Baxter greatly impact all stakeholders at the school. In this circumstance, I direct the parent involvement coordinator as a goodwill ambassador to the parents, and ask the ambassador to carry our school’s message of inclusion and support forward. In turn, the PIC informs my knowledge of school climate.

Besides my own interactions with the parent population, the parent involvement coordinator also brings information to me on how parents operate, helping to steer my actions to strengthen our partnerships with families. The following figure (see Figure 4) shows the interplay of relationships within the school with the parent involvement coordinator situated squarely within the mix of stakeholders. This figure illustrates the connectedness of the parent involvement coordinator’s role and how the PIC functions with all stakeholders as a dependable fixture relating to strengthening relationships. By positioning a PIC within the community, opportunity for increased support of parents occurs. Unexpectedly, the school staff also feels the support from a dedicated parent involvement coordinator.
Summary

This chapter showcases the work of the parent involvement coordinator at Baxter, who bridges a gap between home and school, supports teachers, and invites parents to participate in the educational process of school. An effective PIC realizes that parent participation begins with small steps, kind actions that build to involvement in a welcoming climate of the school. The extent which individual involvement at Baxter happens depends on the barriers faced by families and the degree to which the PIC works to mitigate reasons for distance. The PIC demonstrates an awareness of issues faced by parents and plans innovative responses promoting connections. In a modern day school, social media plays a part of building connections with families. Parents contribute, find a voice, and help make decisions influencing the school environment. From that
moment, involvement occurs when parents realize educators hear their voices and parents contribute by forming partnerships with teachers.

As a necessity, parent involvement coordinators need the time to do the work, personalizing their connections with families and cultivating relationships with individuals. Support from educational leadership assists in navigating and prioritizing parent involvement at schools. Collaborative practice between principal and PIC make an impact for families trying to participate. In this study, I learned that several projects lend themselves to inviting parents to participate at school. Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) lead to shared responsibilities for teaching children, while a school-wide volunteer program promotes social capital and goodwill among parent groups. Given time and intention, parent involvement coordinators make a difference for families in educational settings. As a supportive friend or knowledgeable professional, a PIC provides the encouragement to parents to step inside the school and become involved in the school.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This study examines the impact of a parent involvement coordinator within Baxter Elementary, a turn-around school in an economically challenged environment, served by Title 1 funding. Within the last three years, Baxter witnessed an increase in positive recognitions for improved academic performance and increased parent participation. Questions arose as to why positive changes occurred at the school, when economic stressors and financial hardships for the community increased. Levin and Riffel (2000) believe that high poverty communities working closely with parents to address academic and social issues make a difference with students’ educational outcomes. The focus of the research explored in this case study centers on a certified teacher serving in a family support role, working with parents, growing capacity and involvement in education. Four parent involvement coordinators served the community at Baxter during the past seven years. The position of PIC began when I became principal at the school, but evolved and changed with time, becoming more responsive to the needs of the families served. As well as being the school leader, I also served as the primary researcher in this case.

Building parent school support systems not only increases student learning, but also expands learning for everyone in a child’s support system (Edwards, 2016). Principals practicing transformative leadership look to make a difference with the families they serve by securing supportive practices within the school environment. The parent involvement coordinator invites connections at the school centered on student learning, personalizing family experiences, and assisting parents in navigating barriers. This case study illustrates the interplay among all
participants. Parents, teachers, community members and school leader work together to the benefit of the students served in the school. Principals must understand how parent involvement grows or shrinks based on leadership practices within the school (Povey et al., 2016). Therefore, the main research question of the study asks:

- How and to what extent does the Parent Involvement Coordinator impact parent engagement within the school community?

Additional sub questions surround the work of the parent involvement coordinator.

- What steps does the parent involvement coordinator take to impact all stakeholders involved?
- How and to what extent does the PIC remove barriers that prohibit and limit families from participation?
- How and to what extent did the work of the principal and PIC align to create a shared vision for the community?

The conceptual framework for the study centers in critical theory and the political sociology of education. Marginalization and equity questions play out across America in public school settings and are broached within Baxter’s borders. Noguera (2011) argues that schools in poverty environments must respond to social and environmental issues for change to occur. A school response assists parents in functioning in the educational setting to understand existing structures. Additionally, the practice of transformational leadership centers this work. Anello et al. (2014) state this form of decision-making in a context of social change shows, “a fundamental shift in worldview and a commitment to learning and service to the common good” (p.35).
Rooted in social justice and equity issues, transformational leadership serves the population that needs supportive structures. Education becomes a political and ethical activity focused on the future. Greenleaf (1991) urges leaders to use their power to better the situations of those without authority. Supports and scaffolds built intentionally within the community link the powerful with the marginalized and assist those who struggle (Shields, 2013). Addressing family needs in poverty communities improves schools’ academic outcomes.

Epstein’s Theoretical Framework for parent involvement anchors the work of family engagement at Baxter Elementary by situating the interplay of three key groups working together (Epstein, 1992). Epstein shows three segments: Family, community, and school collaboratively connected when schools improve. Baxter Elementary shows gains on multiple levels of performance, deserving study as a turn-around school. Intentional practices seeking parent involvement must exist for schools to make gains. Before I worked with a dedicated parent involvement coordinator, I believed schools sole focus on academics produced results. My experience with parent involvement coordinators opened my eyes to the benefit of professionals working with parents to assist families to engage with the school.

The literature review in this case study showed the political context of parent involvement in America and how parent involvement connects to political legislation and mandates of parent participation in public schools. Participation by parents in schools progressed over time from an era where parents served as a child’s first teacher within the home, to a time when responsibility for education passed to teachers as trained professionals. Jeynes (2011) sees a shift in responsibility coinciding with American mothers going into the work force, and having less time for volunteering at schools. Partnerships with parents gained credibility with the
beginning of Head Start, which supported parent training to assist with education of children. Parent involvement rose again into the forefront when high stake accountability increased for schools, and a call for stronger academic performances of students happened (U.S.D.O.E., 1983). Developing partnerships features prominently in current practices with parent involvement.

In this final chapter of the study of a parent involvement coordinator in an at risk environment, the context of findings discovered through investigating the questions becomes articulated. Denzin and Lincoln (2002) look at qualitative researchers finding themes in research as part of a process of discovery within units of study. Understanding the context centers the answers to the questions studied. Descriptive details provide answers for the major and minor questions asked within the investigation. I share perceived limitations from the research while discussion of results presented for the reader leads to further implications for ongoing research. Recommendations for action as a result of the research offer school leaders next steps within their school settings. In viewing the entirety of work, a conclusion to the chapter encompasses the end to the study.

**Context of Findings**

Within the case study four themes appeared in the findings that balance the work and understanding of the parent involvement coordinator role at Baxter Elementary. Stake (2010) highlights how analysis and synthesis aid researchers in putting pieces together to build understanding. The themes discovered in this study include supportive communication, capacity building, principal partnership, and social capital. Tensions generated three smaller ideas: principal alignment, removal of barriers, and impact on all stakeholders. These smaller ideas fit under larger themes, strengthening the understanding of the dynamics of the parent involvement
coordinator position. The context of findings provides a description of the four themes found within the case study. An explanation of the themes follows to assist with comprehending results of the study.

**Theme One: Supportive Communication**

Swick and Graves (1993) determined parents need responsive, supportive communication in school settings. Multiple communication methods happen at Baxter Elementary designed to support and foster partnerships with parents. Messages from the school to parents arrive via email and also appear on papers within students’ gold communication folders. The parent involvement coordinator takes the lead to communicate in public venues by making postings online in web platforms, on Facebook, and Twitter. Crites (2008) articulates the power of a dedicated staff member establishing a sense of belonging through communication with a one to one relationship with parents increasing parent involvement. The PIC meets with groups of parents and also with individuals if necessary, carefully building a supportive communication structure for all families.

Video, another means of communication, relays and informs parents on many topics of interest from the school. Recorded video shared with parents helps build the families’ knowledge base of the school, and increases parent’s familiarity with the personnel who serve at the school. Noel et al. (2016) reports a predominantly dissatisfied reaction with communication shared from public schools in the United States to parents, and challenges schools to address the findings with better means of operating messaging between school and home. Video posting as a form of communication eliminates a necessary literacy level for parents to access information. All messaging going to parents from school permeates kindness and respect, and shows concern to
families within the community. A two-way dialogue encourages parent participation with surveys and opportunities to express opinions. The parent involvement coordinator frames a positive message for parents with assistance from the school leader.

**Theme Two: Capacity Building**

Capacity building happens at school with multiple groups and provides opportunity for skill sets to grow. Epstein (2001) in sharing a theoretical framework for parent involvement defines the groups as school, family, and community. Stewman (2014) states, “Children living in generational poverty face a host of barriers negatively impacting their academic success. But schools can be the ultimate force to open doors of hope and possibility” (p.21). In this context, capacity building occurs first with parents who receive exposure to opportunities, events, and interactions at Baxter Elementary led by a dedicated staff member at the school. Parents also access documents and videos online to build on knowledge offerings by the school without being present at the school. Capacity building through a digital context increases parent understanding of how the school functions. The supportive communication posted online helps foster an expanded capacity for parents. Parents also make personal appointments with the PIC to address questions of student learning. Additionally, classes and workshops engage parents in learning at the school.

Teachers grow capacity and build their expertise as they learn skills focused on how to work with families through the parent involvement coordinator. The PIC works with collective groups and individuals addressing professional learning related to parent involvement. Edwards (2016) found educators building more responsive climate for families within their schools designed to encourage partnerships with support. Many teachers in at-risk environments function
with limited experiences in working with people who live in poverty, and never learned methods to engage families (Thiers, 2017). The parent involvement coordinator leads learning for teachers and staff on best practices of working with families, encouraging small steps to build to a greater good. Teachers’ understanding of maintaining relationships grows with training and specific professional development. Transformational leadership practice looks to build capacity in those stakeholders that make up the school, reframing deficit thinking, and supporting the marginalized. A smaller tension, impact on all stakeholders, situates in the context of capacity building, as the PIC operates in a manner encouraging growth in ability across multiple groups of people served at the school.

**Theme Three: Principal Partnership**

Williams and Chavkin (1986) cite the principal as the key decision maker influencing parent partnerships within the school. A major theme of the study, principal partnership harnesses collaborative practice between the parent involvement coordinator and the principal of the school to address family needs. In partnership, the school leader and parent involvement coordinator influence and impact the dynamics of parents involved at the school by addressing issues and concerns within the school environment that present as barriers to parent involvement. Together the educators solve problems and invite parents to join into the school community, raising opportunities through a partnership designed to mitigate circumstances of marginalization. Boykin and Noguera (2011) shared how innovative supports in high poverty communities influence partnerships and service to families, with school leaders thinking about how service provided makes a difference. Thinking and designing responses to invite partnership at the school becomes a function of the pair who welcome families into the school community.
Two minor themes come into play within principal partnership; the first is an alignment of purpose by the parent involvement coordinator to the principal. This begins with the principal’s vision for the school cast to the community and faculty. Transformative Leadership looks to support those in need. Shields (2013) states, “… educational leaders must think differently about their roles, the ways they communicate with others, the topics of communication, and to address the misconceptions, myths, and deliberate misconstructions that so often appear…that inhibit equitable and meaningful learning” (p.7). Given the principal’s philosophical leanings towards transformative leadership at Baxter Elementary, the parent involvement coordinator also acts on issues of social and moral purpose, which present themselves through her interactions with families in the school setting. Understanding the direction of the school set by the school leader sets a tone for actively seeking parent participation and involvement at the school.

The second minor theme present and addressed by the partnership shows removal of barriers encountered by families who have children attending the school. Through partnership, barriers to participation addressed for families face three responses: identification, mitigation, and removal. Knowing where barriers exist becomes the first step in addressing existence in the school community. Sharing observed and encountered problems in the community regularly happens. Anello et al. (2014) sees opportunities to help families struggling, recommending school leaders become “agents of transformation who are part of the solution, consciously contributing to the process of integration” (p.31). The partnership of PIC and principal actively looks for what prevents parents from participation at the school and finds ways to stop the roadblocks to participation, therefore growing partnerships.
Theme Four: Social Capital

Ferrara (2015) looks to a parent involvement coordinator as a facilitator unlocking the wealth of social capital accessing “a source of wealth and power that is inherent in society based on one’s network of connections” (p.33). The final theme disclosed in the case study reveals the power of social capital within the school when grown intentionally by the parent involvement coordinator. Social capital promotes groups of adults coming together in an organization with common interests united in purpose and engaged with others in the community. In this case, parents collectively work to garner support for school programs and students through interactions with their peer groups. Within the school community, a united group of parents forms connections building a welcoming school climate, and inviting others to join into the organization.

Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) in use at Baxter to build a formal collaborative structure of support. The group composed of a team of parents and teachers work together on an academic goal. Parents, who work in partnership with their child’s teacher, join in to create a community of parents engaged in school, becoming a stronger system of support for other parents who have yet to engage in the community. Social capital builds networks of people, involves personal relationships, and impacts how organizations function (Henderson et al., 2007). By purposefully engaging through the school community with the intention of maximizing social capital, a feeling of belonging develops at the school. A parent involvement coordinator facilitating groups at the school, functions as a leader of social capital growth at Baxter Elementary.
Results: Questions and Answers

Research Question One: How and to what extent does the Parent Involvement Coordinator impact parent engagement within the school community?

The parent involvement coordinator significantly impacts the daily operation of the school through accessibility for parents and response to parent needs. Her supportive communication anchors her as the parent involvement leader at the school and grows parent engagement in our school community. Ferrera (2015) charges schools in resource weak communities to mitigate the inequity existing from poverty, with parent facilitators serving as a viable support for families. The PIC’s familiarity and visibility at Baxter gave each parent a welcoming friend positioned within the school to assist with problem solving and finding solutions to school concerns. The ongoing supportive communication she gives to parents helped them understand the school environment and the way the school functioned. Jeynes (2005) believes thoughtful acts matter when working with parents as kindness fosters positive relationships at school. Parents echoed the value felt with a PIC working at the school. One parent in the study shared:

She is amazing. I go to Tina if I have a question about anything as far as learning goes. If I am having trouble, or if I need a better method, or I feel like I am pushing, and I never want to discourage him. Is there a way I can go about this differently? She is the person I go to.

Parent perception showed supportive communication from the school came home. The Baxter PIC developed a presence on social media to facilitate messages to parents. Kraft (2017) sees digital technology as a necessary component of school communication in the 21st century.
Families noted a welcoming climate at the school, and the school was recognized for an outstanding parent-school partnership with a Family Friendly Award given to one of six schools in the state. The parent involvement coordinator knew that parents found value in personalized responsive information. Given the PIC’s expertise with teaching, she responds to parents equipped to address individual needs.

The PIC built capacity of all stakeholders to engage in educational partnership. Both parents and teachers at the school learned new skills under the direction of the parent involvement coordinator. The PIC invited parents into the school with specific purpose and programming available in the parent resource room and in other school venues. Jensen (2009) believes schools must build partnerships with parents, “Include parents and provide adult support and outreach. Build strong, long-term relationships, identify the most critical areas of need, and offer content that parents need most” (p. 73). Tina offered materials for parents to use at home, but first demonstrated the use of the materials at school with the parents. A grandmother shared, “The games she gives me to teach him (her grandson) are wonderful.” The PIC’s free checkouts from the parent resource room assisted parents to become involved in the education of their children with materials taken home for practice.

Academic gains made over time at the school, and performance awards earned at Baxter show a changing level of educational progress coinciding with the addition of the PIC position at the school. This case study brought to light that over time, parents came to depend on a familiar person situated within the school setting to assist families in navigating school expectations. Crites (2008) articulates how a sense of belonging between a dedicated staff member and parents aids families joining into the school environment. Parent attendance at
events at the school increased with a PIC spearheading invitations to parent involvement opportunities at the school. Teachers also accessed intentional instruction by the parent involvement coordinator in parent engagement strategies, as well as individual opportunities for support in navigating parent relationships. The PIC worked collaboratively with teachers and encouraged them to send parents to the parent resource room, enlarging the network of support for families at Baxter. She built the knowledge of the staff on how to interact effectively with parents, knowing that teachers learn skills to partner with parents with guidance.

In an effort to further increase parent engagement, the PIC sought solutions to barriers keeping families away from school. The collaboration of the principal and parent involvement coordinator looked for problems preventing participation for families. Kraft (2017) saw low levels of communication between parents and classroom teachers due to the absence of time dedicated to non-instructional phone calls and emails. The parent involvement coordinator position helped bridge barriers to parent involvement by recognizing when barriers presented themselves on campus and within the community. Tina shared, “…There is only so much teachers can do on their own, and they are busy people.” The PIC worked to adjust barriers within the school to parent participation. By working in unison with the principal, collaborative solutions addressed transportation issues, childcare, and language with a wide range of response.

Finally, the parent involvement coordinator utilized social capital to create a community of actively engaged parents at the school, who connected over friendship and support within meetings at the school. Swick and Graves (1993) know parents need responsive, supportive communication in school settings since closeness and mutuality help to build meaningful partnerships. Tina formed a strong base of parents who contributed by working together in a
volunteer organization for at risk students at Baxter. Epstein (2001) notes volunteering as a key feature designated within a framework of parent participation that fosters parent involvement in educational settings. The PIC also organized Academic Parent Teacher Teams to work in partnership on educational standards, creating communities of adults connected to the school that meet at the school and share their parenting stories in the classroom, supporting each other.

**Sub Research Question Two: What steps does the parent involvement coordinator take to impact all stakeholders involved?**

The PIC intentionally plans for capacity building at the school impacting all stakeholders. In looking to build capacity, she focuses first on parents, and then on the staff of the school. Capacity building happens in groups, but can also happen individually with one on one conferences with the parent involvement coordinator. The steps to increased capacity purposefully occur at Baxter Elementary. Thiers (2017) notes addressing role construction of how parents’ help children learn grows capacity for parent involvement in educational settings. Parents demonstrate varying needs, and the school adjusts to fill the needs revealed by the families. Some parents prefer group classes, others prefer an individual conference, and some prefer options to view a video posting at home. All ways of accessing information present acceptable options to gather support from the school. Edwards (2016) believes schools need to encourage learning for everyone in a child’s support system. A responsive school provides multiple options for parents to learn and Baxter Elementary delivers multiple opportunities for parents.

The PIC also taught the faculty how to successfully engage parents, instructing teachers in specific strategies and practices that work for parent engagement. When the Baxter PIC noted
effective practices during faculty meetings, she promoted repetition by staff members in future interactions. The PIC worked with individual teachers who experienced difficult situations, and needed direction on how to reach out to families. One teacher shared:

I really appreciate the advice and guidance to me personally on those particularly hard students when I just wasn’t sure of the best path to take to make sure they are getting the help they need. You are amazing and I am so thankful for you!

Hearing how the expert in parent involvement at the school engaged families helped less experienced teachers begin to make connections. The PIC modeled multiple ways to alleviate concerns brought about by potential barriers to participation.

Sub Research Question Three: How and to what extent does the PIC remove barriers that prohibit and limit families from participation?

The first step to removing barriers at the school lies in identifying where they exist. School personnel, focused on their tasks, may not see the perspectives of parents outside the school trying to navigate barriers. A parent involvement coordinator empathizes with the parent base, and assumes the perspective of families to identify concerns that limit participation. Stewman (2014) recognizes a host of barriers impacting children living in generational poverty and shares, “Schools can be the ultimate force to open doors of hope and possibility. School administrators must be mindful of the strain this has on teachers serving in schools with high concentration of generational poverty” (p.21). By listening and being accessible to parents, a parent involvement coordinator hears where barriers sit for families. Within this study several
barriers identified to participation include: Transportation, time, language, climate, hunger, opportunity, and childcare.

By focusing on an awareness of what stops families from participating, the parent involvement coordinator specifically addressed those challenges in the school setting. The Baxter PIC found innovative ways to address problems previously overlooked and ignored. Her use of video recording brought the workshop activities, and school personnel into the homes of the parents, therefore eliminating a need for transportation and addressing the barrier of a lack of means to get to the school. One mother shared her views on the online resources posted, “It helps us feel connected to the school and I try to stay as connected as I can, even when I can’t be there.” The Baxter PIC also offered multiple times for parents to attend functions and events at the school, eliminating a one-time only possibility for participation. Scheduling showed morning, afternoon, and evening opportunities for parents to connect with the PIC. One person working alone finds mitigation of circumstances encountered by families who seek to get involved difficult, stymied from circumstances beyond their control. In that instance, collaborative problem solving with the school leader helped address issues perceived as barriers at the school. The school leader’s access to funds helped solve problems of barriers of hunger, language, and childcare while also offering solutions to problems devised through contacts and privileges of operation as a school principal. Tomlinson (2017) recognizes partnerships of educators who serve and lead from a moral authority, forming a community around shared values and a commitment to meeting the needs of others. This behavior showcased the relationship established between the principal and parent involvement coordinator facilitating participation for families at Baxter Elementary.
By demonstrating an open and welcoming approach, the parent involvement coordinator heard where problems existed, countering the acknowledgement with solutions. In her third year of practice, parents brought concerns to the PIC, and a few parents even brought possible solutions. One parent shared:

My husband works a lot, and will never be able to come to the parent meeting, but I want him to see how to play the game with our daughter. I told Tina she should record the game and post it for him and other parents, so they will know how to do it.

Epstein (2001) looks at types of parent involvement within the school, and sees learning at home, decision-making at school and collaborating in the community as key functions to growing parent involvement. With parents actively participating at Baxter, evidence of signs of parent involvement exists. Knowing and trusting that the parent involvement coordinator partners with families, parents saw the PIC as a resource of value in the school to assist families with navigating school.

Sub Research Question Four: How and to what extent did the work of the principal and PIC align to create a shared vision for the community?

Intentional practice promotes positive results for students and families at Baxter Elementary. The parent involvement coordinator at the school shared during interview, “I feel like we (principal and PIC) are on the same mission.” The PIC and I, as the principal, unite in collaboration and form a partnership focused on parent involvement, taking steps to make our work a priority at the school. Goodwin (2015) states, “When it comes to breaking through performance ceilings, empowering, collaborative leadership may be necessary” (p.73). We
instituted a weekly meeting discussing barriers and concerns visible to the school staff and shared and noted by the PIC in her interactions with parents. Implementing solutions into our ongoing meeting became a part of our professional practice. Howard (1999) believes teaching teachers how to relate to a community struggling with poverty and growing diversity serves as a means of improving schools. I served as the principal at the school, setting a direction of purpose in our building. In the process of our partnership for parents with the PIC, I shared my views on transformative leadership with the parent involvement coordinator. Greenleaf (1977) states, “There really is a set of values, a sense of fairness, honesty, respect, and contribution that transcends culture” (p.4). As a practitioner of transformative leadership, I serve others to promote equity for children living in a poverty environment.

My belief system supports acting with a sense of moral purpose in the school community, going beyond the expected for those in our community who needed help, and providing service to families that struggle with life concerns exasperated by poverty concerns. One mother noted, “At the beginning of the year, we didn’t have Internet to the home…and I would tell the teachers that when they had homework online, I just needed it sent home on paper. And then I went through Miss Tina.” The PIC worked to make a connection for the family at no charge. Shapiro and Purpel (1998) see educators playing a key role in communities, and advise that leaders “must see their work as being in the eye of a vast social storm; education and teaching are inseparably linked to the crisis of the social order” (p. ix). By aligning and sharing my philosophy with the parent involvement coordinator, I provide insight into a course of action set to alleviate some burdens within our community experienced by families.
Together, the PIC and I worked to understand family circumstances, and looked for a way to provide stronger supportive connections from the school, questioning and challenging each other with purpose and intent. Sergiovanni (1999) commends schools to operate with moral authority and improve the communities served, looking at family needs. The school culture represents a mission of support to families, telling staff why we function and serve others becomes paramount in our shared vision, talking about the practice of parent involvement and how we perceive partnerships (Gruenert & Whittaker, 2015). Whether we provided resources, time, financial supports, or other assistance, we came from a place of concern for our people. We saw potential and placed no blame for the circumstances existing in our community. As collaborative partners, we serve as two people who care tremendously for families, operating with a sense of moral purpose taking time, energy, and enthusiasm to make parent involvement a priority. Noguera (2011) sees schools opening doors to fixing community problems becoming a part of the solution in plagued areas. The PIC and principal help families see the value of parent involvement at the school, passing across barriers and excuses with a true hand of friendship offered to families who had previously been invisible, uninvited, or dismissed. One mother shared with the principal:

This school is my heart, and I have watched it grow…seeing the direction it has gone in such a short amount of time, I know that you are a huge responsibility for that. Your building teams here and parents can see that…it is all about building each other up, and everybody succeeds. And I think that is the direction that every school should be going in.
Our purpose in parent involvement intentionally aligned the PIC and Principal to benefit the families purposefully served at Baxter Elementary.

**Implications**

Implications from this research show that a parent involvement coordinator in an at-risk school serves as an employee building relationships with parents, purposefully planning for parents to engage in the educational process. The PIC connects the parent population with the faculty of the school while also directly serving as a resource to parents answering questions and inviting participation at school. Prioritizing parent involvement by the school leader at Baxter coincided with a turnaround performance at the school measured with an increase in academic awards and an increased presence of parents attending formal and informal events. Principal actions, views and decision-making impact parent involvement. Parents report a welcoming climate and sought ways to become involved in partnership with their children’s teachers with an active parent involvement coordinator at the school. Viewing the results of this case study may encourage other principals to support an existing parent involvement coordinator position within their schools more purposefully with collaborative practice and alignment. Schools not funding the position may consider the impact a PIC creates in a school setting as a solution to parent involvement issues.

**Limitations of Findings**

Limitations to the research detail issues related to the size of the setting, the role of the primary researcher, and the numbers of parents participating. Articulating the limitations addresses concerns within the research while operating within a high standard of professional
practice. In designing this case study, notation of only one school setting used factor into the discoveries found within the investigation of the questions presented. One setting with four past parent involvement coordinators informed the work with one school leader. Expanding the work to include multiple schools incorporating the use of a parent involvement coordinator for the families within the school bring an element of generalization to the work as results appear over numerous school campuses. By expanding into multiple settings, a richer perspective of the work of parent involvement coordinators appears lending further credence to the discoveries of practice and impact. I believe this work sets the stage to look further into the relationship of parent involvement coordinators and school leaders.

An additional limitation to the study involves the principal being a part of the study at the school, while also serving as the primary researcher. Choosing to maintain a non-biased look into the structures and operations while also serving as the educational leader places the researcher in a critical role promoting a sharing of reflection and interpretation. This leads to judgments expressed from someone operating within the case study, providing a perspective on the environment derived through experience. Articulating this biasness factors into account when viewing the results of the study for the reader. Consideration to conduct research examining a collaborative relationship existing with an educational leader and parent involvement coordinator without functioning as a member of the school studied happened. I believe the opportunity to provide background and insight from the school leader’s perspective adds a richness of detail ultimately enhancing the case study for readers.

A final limitation of the study questions the limited number of parents interviewed for the study. Although eight parents participated in the opportunity to express themselves with
questions directed to gain insight into the working structure of the PIC at the school, many parents at the school with opinions and answers to questions failed to express their viewpoints to the primary researcher. Parents who were leaders participated in interviews with the principal and selection occurred based on their high involvement at the school. Other parents, who expressed barriers and limitations to the parent involvement coordinator, participated in the interview process as well, providing a contrasting level of participation. Although not all parents at the large school secured interviews, all parents participated in the opportunity to provide input to the study, since all parents at the school receive a yearly survey for Title 1, used as an artifact in the case study. Future studies might survey and interview a wider sample increasing the quantity and diversity of data.

**Discussion**

Prior to my tenure at Baxter, six principals in twelve years worked as leaders at the school, which earned a reputation highlighting deficits and challenges. On one of my first days of work as a teacher at Baxter sixteen years ago, I saw letters littered across the sidewalk by students leaving to get on the buses, offering parents an option of transferring to another school in the district since Baxter’s academic performance failed to meet the minimum standard for a Title 1 school. Creating a turn-around school happens with key steps assisting change, pinpointing the factors making a difference invites discussion on collaborative school environments. Parent involvement serves as a critical piece for change to occur. Often the families of struggling students are implicitly treated as part of the problem, when in actuality they function as part of the neglected solution (Adkins-Sharif, 2017). Building an environment of
partnership with the families we serve made a difference at this school and led to an improvement at the school seen with multiple awards earned in the past three years.

Finding the right person for the job of parent involvement coordinator and building collaborative practice with the school leaders brings positive results. A responsibility exists as principal to communicate the priorities of work and the direction to be taken, creating an alignment of purpose. As I grew in my understanding and influence of school leadership, I leveraged the parent involvement coordinator position and worked collaboratively with the PIC. In turn, her confidence and expertise grew as she built a network of parents involved at the school. Educational leaders need to plan for the success of the PIC position by identifying goals and priorities that the parent involvement coordinator focuses on while working with families. Placing a certified teacher facilitating parent involvement into direct contact with families provides a valuable resource, one readily available to answer questions and give support. Teachers teach all day and parent engagement often appears as an after thought. Finding time to engage all parents readily happens when it becomes a priority of service offered by the school with a dedicated professional.

**Recommendations for Further Studies**

Recommendations for further research conducted would examine the collaborative relationships of parent involvement coordinators and principals within additional at-risk school settings. Given the success seen in one environment, other schools should be studied for possible replication of findings. Taking time to study additional settings would strengthen the research results found in this study. The understudied field of parent involvement coordinators working in high-need environments would impact parent involvement studies and practitioner research.
Learning more about developing partnerships with parents and school leaders assists the journey that all schools take with developing parent involvement.

Further study needs to examine qualifications that make successful parent involvement coordinators. In looking at the success of Baxter’s PIC, questions appear on what skillsets make successful parent involvement coordinators. Are the results at Baxter based on a highly capable parent involvement coordinator, or are the results typical for schools that employ dedicated parent liaisons? In solidifying the impact of practice, being able to understand how a parent coordinator operates would assist school leaders who want to build strong partnerships with families. At Baxter, four parent involvement coordinators worked to engage parents. Taking the time to study the differences and success rates of individual parent involvement coordinators would build a stronger program for school leaders who want to develop effective parent programming.

**Recommendations for Actions in Schools**

The following six recommendations become the next steps for educational leaders leading schools focused on parent engagement.

1. Dedicate time on the principal’s schedule to plan and prioritize parent involvement by collaborating with other professionals within the school. Do not allow parent involvement to become an after thought, set it as a priority of practice.

2. Use digital tools to connect with families that show limited access to the school’s campus. By posting informative videos and positive messages online, capacity building and school knowledge increases for those unable to be physically present at the school.
3. Personalize the parent involvement experience. One size does not fit all. Parents want support for their child’s specific needs. Share individual student data with parents; provide next steps of action that fit the situation. Experience shows parents engage when information shared specifically relates to their child.

4. Develop genuine relationships with parents. Remember the golden rule and treat people, as you would want to be treated. Consider your school as your home. Invite people into your home with kindness. Cultivate a welcoming climate for all people who enter the school.

5. Give parents a voice in key matters. Shared decision-making promotes parent engagement. Begin by asking for opinions and provide multiple ways to speak, including surveys. School leaders need to demonstrate they have heard parent opinions.

6. Rename the parent involvement coordinator position at the school, to become the *family involvement coordinator*. Given the changing face of families in communities across the United States, experience shows that not only parents function with raising children. Others involved with supporting students include grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends. Many children come to school from unique homes, cared for by people who are not their parents. In that light, the parent resource room would also become the *family resource room*.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, schools combine groups of people connected to students and highlight a wide range of parent involvement practices within structures of operations. Taking time to reflect on policies and procedures gives school leaders perspective on how people feel in partnering
within the school setting. Within the community the school serves, marginalized populations must receive assistance to address equity issues, growing opportunities to succeed. In revisiting questions asked within the case study, answers revealed the power of using a dedicated certified teacher in the role of a parent involvement coordinator, and the positive influence this person delivers on the school environment impacting parent involvement. Employee selection for the position, learned over time, emphasized supportive communication as a necessary skill for the job. As the principal, I learned how to use a parent involvement coordinator at the school and the influence this position brings to professional practice at Baxter. Decisions about scheduling and time commitment for the PIC improved with my experience working in tandem. My support for the position grew, till I saw the magnitude of possibilities a PIC brought to a school when I made parent involvement a priority.

The relationship between the principal and the parent involvement coordinator finally came to a place of modeled collaboration and shared practice at Baxter Elementary. With the first parent involvement coordinator, a limited vision for the work at our school resulted due to my underdeveloped viewpoint. As the school leader, I needed to understand how the position influences families and impacts the parent community. Over time, the PIC and I developed a manner of collaborative professional practice that purposefully and intentionally assisted parents. Communication needs to happen frequently between the PIC and principal to share a vision of practice for a school and alignment for the work of engaging parents. Together, as a collaborative pair, we set parents as a priority, not as an after thought.

To my surprise, the PIC became a prime influencer of teachers’ professional practice with parent engagement at the school. Although originally oriented as a parent focused
employee, discovery of how the PIC helped teachers build bridges and connect with families appeared in the evidence. Modeling how to make connections and build relationships with parents, guardians and grandparents assisted all educators in strengthening relationships with parents at the school. By aligning a dedicated, certified employee to the families, our outreach flourished in the community. In the end, the real benefit of positioning a parent involvement coordinator goes to the children, our students, whose parents engaged with the school, and built partnerships with the teachers.
References


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Appendix A: Interview Questions for Past Parent Involvement Coordinators

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What did you do as the Parent Involvement Coordinator?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What did you expect going into the job? Did you get any guidelines?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What did you find to be effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anything you would do differently now?</td>
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Appendix B: Parent Interview Questions

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What learning opportunities exist for parents at Baxter Elementary?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What type of activities do you prefer to attend at Baxter Elementary?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How involved are you at the school? Has your participation changed over time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>When do you get an opportunity to voice your opinion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Do you serve on any parent advisory boards? If yes, what advice have you given?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Have you gotten any other parents to participate in any school activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>How has the APTT Program influenced parent involvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Have you witnessed parents supporting and encouraging each other at the school? Describe what you saw.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>If you volunteer, what benefits do you get from that activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Have you checked out any materials from the parent resource center?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Have you received any assistance from the parent involvement coordinator?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>If you watched the Facebook Friday show, what message did you receive from listening?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C: A Matrix of Parent Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Volunteer</th>
<th>Parent Leadership Role</th>
<th>Perceived Barriers</th>
<th>Attendance at APTT evening K-2 program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Room Mom PTA Officer</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Local School Council</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>PTA President</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Shania</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Local School Council Run Volunteer Group Champs</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>N/A child in 3rd grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Trina</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Medical issues limit participation</td>
<td>1 time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Grandparent working caring for grandchildren. Daughter deceased</td>
<td>0 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Working mom of six children, Foster mom of 2.</td>
<td>2 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Mother expressed child doesn’t need academic help</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
March 14, 2017

Polly Tennies

RE: Research Study Approval: *Leadership for Parent Involvement*

Dear Ms. Tennies:

This letter provides written approval for your above research study. As stated in your letter, participation should be considered voluntary and no students, staff members or schools will be identified in your report of the study. Your study sounds very interesting and I applaud your efforts of continued education. If I can provide additional information to support this approval, please be encouraged to contact me.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Disturbed and difficult to read]
March 10, 2017

To Whom it May Concern:

As chair of the dissertation committee for KSU doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership, Ms. Polly Tennies, I grant permission for her to do the study, *Leadership for Parent Involvement*. Ms. Tennies’ proposal for the study has been approved by her dissertation committee, and she has received approval by the KSU Institutional Review Board. It is my honor to direct this study.

Sincerely,

R. Ugena Whitlock, PhD
Chair, Department of Educational Research and
Professor of Curriculum & Instruction
Bagwell College of Education
Kennesaw State University
Email: rwhilto3@kennesaw.edu
Office: 470-578-6888
To: Polly Tennies  
Cc: irb; Ugena Whitlock  
Subject: Study 17-405: Leadership for Parent Involvement  
Polly Tennies  
Re: Your application dated 2/24/2017, Study #17-405: Leadership for Parent Involvement

Dear Ms. Tennies,

Your application has been reviewed by IRB members. Your study is eligible for expedited review under the FDA and DHHS (OHRP) designation of category 7 - Individual or group characteristics or behavior. This is to confirm that your application has been approved. The protocol approved is Audio recorded interviews with parents and observations to examine parental involvement and influencing participation and engagement in a poverty community. The consent procedure described is in effect.

NOTE: All surveys, recruitment flyers/emails, and consent forms must include the IRB study number noted above, prominently displayed on the first page of all materials. You are granted permission to conduct your study as described in your application effective immediately. The IRB calls your attention to the following obligations as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. The study is subject to continuing review on or before 9/14/2018. At least two weeks prior to that time, go to http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/progress-report-form.php to submit a progress report. Progress reports not received in a timely manner will result in expiration and closure of the study.

2. Any proposed changes to the approved study must be reported and approved prior to implementation. This is accomplished through submission of a progress report along with revised consent forms and survey instruments.

3. All records relating to conducted research, including signed consent documents, must be retained for at least three years following completion of the research. You are responsible for ensuring that all records are accessible for inspection by authorized representatives as needed. Should you leave or end your professional relationship with KSU for any reason, you are responsible for providing the IRB with information regarding the housing of research records and who will maintain control over the records during this period.

4. Unanticipated problems or adverse events relating to the research must be reported promptly to the IRB. See http://research.kennesaw.edu/irb/reporting-unanticipated-problems.php for definitions and reporting guidance.

5. A final progress report should be provided to the IRB at the closure of the study.

Contact the IRB at irb@kennesaw.edu or at (470) 578-2268 if you have any questions or require further information.

Sincerely,

Christine Ziegler, Ph.D.  
KSU Institutional Review Board Chair and Director

cc: rwhitlo3@kennesaw.edu