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UNDERSTANDING PARENT-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF
CHILDREN RECEIVING TITLE 1 SERVICES

By

Holly B. Muscoe

THESIS

Submitted to
Northern Michigan University
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For the degree of

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SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

UNDERSTANDING PARENT-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION AND
INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN RECEIVING TITLE I SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING PARENT-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN RECEIVING TITLE 1 SERVICES

By

Holly B. Muscoe

This qualitative, phenomenological research study was designed to gain an understanding of the experiences of parents of elementary school children receiving Title 1 services with a specific focus on parent-school communication and involvement. This study includes information gleaned from six interviews with parents of elementary students receiving Title 1 services from three separate elementary schools within the Northern Lakes School District (pseudonym), located in the Upper Midwest. Participant responses revealed the following themes:

1. Parental expectation of responsive two-way communication
2. Preference for frequent communication regarding student learning and progress
3. Communication to inform home-based school involvement
4. Parent interviews allow for reflection and making sense of experience

The study's findings could allow educators to improve parent communication and involvement plans that will be more accommodating to the needs of parents.

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This thesis follows the format prescribed by the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), Seventh Edition.

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Operational Definition Of Terms

Parent involvement: All acts of engaging with school including: meeting with teacher or other school staff members, engaging in school activities on school site or with child at home, and/or participating in school facilitated activities and events.

Title 1: Defined by the U.S. Department of Education as “Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards” (2018).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The high stakes testing environment of schooling in modern times has school districts grasping for ways to increase student achievement. One approach reviewed in the literature is to increase parent involvement. The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) requires schools to implement meaningful outreach and programs to involve parents in order to receive funds. The U.S. Department of Education (2004) justifies this requirement with claims that students with involved parents do better in school. Smith et al., (2019) found that this improvement in youth outcome applies to both elementary and middle school students. Epstein (1995) asserts that when families and schools work together, the programs and opportunities will improve. Effective communication between school professionals and families is a factor in a student's academic success (Natale & Lubniewski, 2018). When school and home are mutually supported and reinforced, children feel more secure and can then internalize desired behaviors (Ozcinar & Ekizoglu, 2013). A review of literature conducted by Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, and Doan Holbein found that parental involvement has a positive effect on student motivation (2005). While regulations regarding parent involvement are written and research sheds light on positive outcomes of this involvement, one must consider the multifaceted nature of the matter in hand. Parent perception, teacher perception, effective communication methods, partnership models and methods of communications have been and should be studied further to help educators make choices in effective approaches to increase parent involvement. Specifically, if elementary educators are to utilize parent involvement as a means for increasing student achievement, they need research-based decision-making to increase parent involvement. I aimed to expand this area of study by gaining an understanding of the experiences of parents of elementary school children

receiving Title 1 services with a specific focus on parent-school communication and involvement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain understanding of the experiences of parents of children receiving Title 1 services at three elementary schools with a specific focus on school communication and parent involvement. The findings from this study could be used to improve communication and involvement plans that will be more accommodating to the needs of parents.

Research Question

What has the experience of parents of children receiving Title 1 services at three elementary schools been with a specific focus on school communication and parent involvement?

Theoretical Framework

In the literature, three specific models emerge to form a foundation necessary to understand the complexity involved when considering parental involvement. Epstein's model helps one understand the partnership potential between families and the school, role theory aides in understanding parent perception, and media richness theory allows educators to approach communication in appropriate ways to meet the needs of the families that they serve.

Epstein's (1995) theoretical model recognizes schools, families, and communities as spheres of influence for each child. These spheres can be viewed as overlapping or operating separately, pulled together or pushed apart by the actions of those within the spheres. It is when these spheres intersect that parent-school partnership can best meet student needs. Epstein goes on to build a framework in which the overlapping of spheres serve as a foundation for developing six types of involvement which include: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (1995). For this study,

the expected results of which have the potential to increase student skills, abilities, and test scores; increased parental knowledge of how to support children at home; and give teachers more understanding of families and their unique needs so that they can offer equitable support (Epstein, 1995).

Media richness theory (MRT), also called information richness theory, can help educators understand the forms of media that parents select to communicate with teachers. MRT ranks communication “in order from high to low richness, the basic media classifications are (1) face-to-face; (2) telephone; (3) personal written documents such as e-mails, letters, or memos; and (4) impersonal documents such as rules and bulletins” (Daft, 2013, p. 369). MRT suggests that communication that involves more complex ideas is better suited for a rich media, where simple and direct messages are best relayed through a low richness form of media (Daft, 2013). This theory has the potential to assist teachers in communication mode selection when addressing families in order to involve them in their children’s education.

Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey (2013) cite role theory as a consideration when examining parent engagement. Role theory proposes that individuals understand their roles within the context of relationships (Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). Both teachers and parents may differ in their perceptions of what their own roles are or what the other’s role should be within the academic lives of children. Whitaker and Hoover-Dempsey suggest that schools must communicate regularly to establish an expectation of involvement, involve parents through student invitation, and require teachers to communicate positively in a way that expresses value in parent engagement (2013).

The theoretical models offer potential insight into the complex nature of parent involvement. The spheres of influence, richness of media, and perception of roles are all areas to

explore when examining parent communication and involvement. This phenomenological study has the potential to expand understanding of how these theories are applied and how they may intersect.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature presents many studies that demonstrate that parent involvement has positive effects on student achievement. This involvement is dependent upon parent-school communication and a team approach to this work improves results (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004). Ozcinar and Ekizoglu (2013) state that schools need to solve communication problems as they stand in the way of building successful relationships with parents (Ozcinar & Ekizoglu, 2013). Understanding and acknowledging both parent perceptions and teacher perceptions in this area provides guidance when making efforts to improve involvement through communication. When specifically examining parents who have students participating in a Title 1 supported intervention program, schools must acknowledge preferred methods as well as the barriers that exist. While current literature shows promise with electronic communication and involvement efforts (Laho, 2019; Natale & Lubniewski, 2018; Ozcinar & Ekizoglu, 2013), studies need to expand this research and explore its success in various populations.

Types of Involvement

Parent involvement is varied as it appears in the literature. Parent involvement can include traditional forms such as attendance at parent-teacher conferences, open houses, or events; volunteering in the classroom; fundraising; and supporting academics from home. Modern times have allowed for many of these forms to be supported electronically. One such method is the Blog-Based Parent Involvement Approach (BPIA) studied by Ozcinar and Ekizoglu in which they have presented findings that this web-based strategy is a successful way to both communicate and involve parents in their children's' education (2013). Regardless of

form, Pemberton and Miller (2015) argue that educators must begin to acknowledge that it is not quantity, but quality that schools need to address.

Communication

Parent involvement certainly begins with communication. Epstein's model lists sample practices of communication which include: conferences, sharing of student work, report cards, regular schedule of communications via telephone or written forms, and easy to understand information on schools, policies, activities, programs, etc. Ozcinar and Ekizoglu (2013) state that ineffective communication between home and school can negatively influence parental involvement. On the other hand; Houri, Thayer, and Cook (2019) found that when teachers sent one personalized letter to families, the behavioral and relational engagement of families increased. Further, Adams and Christenson (2000) explain that improving home-school communication is a leading way to build trust in the family-school relationship. When considering parent involvement within the elementary school, it is imperative to make research-supported choices when selecting communication modes in order to increase effectiveness.

Studies have shown that both parents and teachers primarily use email as a preferred method of parent-teacher communication (Natale & Lubniewski, 2018; Laho, 2019; Thompson & Mazer, 2012). As technology has improved, more sophisticated communication platforms exist such as smartphone use which allows for more forms of communication which include text messaging, email access on the go, video conferencing, social media, or even prerecorded video communication. This new convenience has presented potential gaps in the media richness theory; however, because parents are now selecting convenience over richness (Thompson, et. Al., 2015). Thompson et al. (2015) suggest that this is a recent trend and warrants further research to study emerging forms of convenient communication modes.

Some parents still prefer face-to-face communication as it offers additional cues that written forms cannot express (Thompson et al, 2015). However, this form of communication along with the ability to become involved is met with many potential barriers which include transportation, work conflicts, and caring for others at home (Mapp, 2003). Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity for face-to-face communication has been interrupted and even diminished at times which can make other forms of communication a necessity regardless of preference.

Parent Perception

Teachers and school professionals can make more informed decisions when interacting with parents when they understand parent perception. This knowledge can guide staff to approach families in a way that is effective and meaningful. It is especially important to acknowledge that these perceptions may be very different from their own. Parent perceptions of their own involvement has been shown to be directly related to the school's expectations of involvement, school culture, and invitation (Mapp, 2003; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). Parents who experienced a positive relationship and experience with their students' school could negate any negative school experiences within their own schooling history (Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). Mapp (2003) suggests that parent's perceptions of involvement may include ways not typically recognized by school staff and that schools need to recognize this especially when working with families of diverse backgrounds. To improve relationships, parents want to be informed (Adams, & Christenson, 2000). Santiago et.al., and Moore (2016) found that elementary school parent trust was predictive of parent educational involvement.

Teacher Perception

Understanding teacher perception within the elementary school is also an important factor to consider. Herman and Reinke (2017) found that teacher perception of parents likely affects their student interactions and that improvements made to their perceptions of parent involvement leads to positive academic outcomes for students. Pemberton and Miller (2015) found that teachers viewed lack of parental involvement as the primary reason for low academic achievement and that they had a lack of trust regarding family intentions. This study incorporated an intervention that provided student tutoring and increased parent-teacher communication that resulted in decreased teacher doubt and mistrust allowing for a stronger partnership and even reading achievement that was equal to or better than before intervention. Both studies demonstrate that when teachers have a deficit view of parents and families it may result in negative effects on student achievement, a primary goal of education.

Conclusion

The research shows that effective parent communication and involvement are shown to positively impact student success in school. The research also suggests that both parent communication and parent involvement are complex, multi-faceted endeavors that require further exploration. As Epstein's model suggests, it is the overlapping of spheres of influence (schools, families, and communities) that lead to increased success for students (1995). The intention of this study was to examine the experiences of parents of children receiving Title 1 services in order to harvest knowledge so that information gleaned could be used to make parent communication and involvement plans that are more accommodating to the needs of families.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The methodological approach of this study is phenomenological qualitative research. Patten (2007) states that the phenomenological approach examines participant perceptions to gain knowledge. It is important that this type of research is very open-ended so participants are not directed into answers and views are not restricted (Creswell, 2012). Like Moustakas (1994) explains, this study aims to understand what the experience means to the participants after they provide thorough descriptions of it. The central phenomenon explored in this study is the experience of parents with students receiving Title 1 services. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand the experience of parent participants to gain insight into school communication and involvement. The study had an emerging design as questions were altered based upon participant responses during the interviews.

Participants

Participants of this study included six parents of elementary students who have received Title 1 services. The participants were selected from three elementary schools located within a public school district located in the Upper Midwest (Table 1).

Table 1: Research Locations: Elementary Schools within the Northern Lakes School District (pseudonyms assigned for confidentiality)

Elementary School	Total School Population	Total Title 1 Students Served
Pine Grove Elementary	277	53 students
Woodland Hills Elementary	362	67 students
Lake Heights Elementary	373	79 students

Procedure

A research application was sent and approved via email to the Northern Lakes School District superintendent. A spreadsheet of parents of children currently receiving Title 1 services within the district was procured. Then participants from three Title 1 Schools within the Northern Lakes School District were selected through a stratified random sampling procedure. First, the populations of students receiving Title 1 services were divided into schools: Pine Grove Elementary, Woodland Hills Elementary, and Lake Heights Elementary. Three students were randomly selected from Pine Grove Elementary and Woodland Hills Elementary respectively and four students were randomly selected from Lake Heights Elementary. Participant recruitment was completed via telephone call using a prewritten script (Appendix B) until a total of six parents were interviewed for this study. Prior to conducting each interview, the participants were emailed the document (Appendix C) to sign and return electronically.

Data Collection

Participant interviews were conducted via Zoom. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions (Appendix D) with probing questions as needed. The emerging design in the study allowed the researcher to pose additional questions during interviews. Each interview was recorded for later transcription. The interviews ranged from approximately 22 minutes to 49 minutes in length.

Data Analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed. Following Creswell's recommendations, I, the researcher, read through interviews to gain a general sense of the entirety. Then I reread each interview to find underlying meaning. It is from thorough readings and rereading of interviews that I began to find the essence of the phenomena. Finally, I went back through the transcribed

interviews to place brackets around segments of text to begin assigning codes (2012). I used *in vivo* codes with a lean coding process. By using *in vivo* codes, I generated codes from the actual words and phrases of participants (Creswell, 2012). Rather than assigning a code or multiple codes for each sentence, the lean coding process of generating only 15-20 codes allowed me to reduce them to generate themes (Creswell, 2012).

During the interviews and analysis, it is important to note that researcher bias was addressed thoroughly. I acknowledge and disclose that I have been connected to this work throughout my career, spending 18 years within the elementary school setting. As a classroom teacher for 17 years, I worked with parents whose children received Title 1 services and the schools' Title 1 teachers. My 18th year was spent as a Title 1 teacher. I worked to reduce bias in this study. As Moustakas (1994) suggests with Transcendental Research, I began the work with Epoche as I set aside my knowledge, judgments, and understandings aside. Further, I reduced bias within my writing. As Maggio (as cited in Creswell, 2012) suggests, I tested for discriminatory language by substituting her own group for the groups involved in the research, imagining that I was a member of the research group, and revised writing if I felt offended or excluded. I made certain that the terms are specific and clear, free of bias to reduce bias in the writing (Creswell, 2012).

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This qualitative, phenomenological research study was designed to gain an understanding of the experiences of parents of elementary school children receiving Title 1 services with a specific focus on parent-school communication and involvement. The results of this study revealed four themes: (a) parental expectation of responsive two-way communication; (b) preference for frequent communication regarding student learning and progress; (c) communication to inform at home-based school involvement; and (d) parent interviews allow for reflection and making sense of experience.

Parental Expectation of Responsive Two-Way Communication

In all six interviews, participants shared stories in which they were appreciative of opportunities for two-way communication with the teacher. This form of communication is more responsive and interactive. In this study, participants experienced two-way responsive communication through phone calls, Zoom meetings, face-to-face interactions, texting, emailing, and the Bloomz app. In many instances, this two-way communication made parents feel validated. To validate, as Merriam-Webster defines, *means to recognize, establish, or illustrate the worthiness or legitimacy of*. When asked about school communication that had gone well for her, one participant stated that her child's teacher used "back and forth" communication when she had questions about homework and that "She's always available. She'll always text me" (Participant #4, Zoom interview, March 25, 2022). Face-to-face parent-teacher conferences were also referenced as a validating two-way communication option. Participant #2 states:

I felt like it was, like they were supportive and you know, they listened to me and I listened to them and there were a couple of times where I, because I felt like my daughter might have been struggling. She was struggling, um, then I called, like, and asked the

teacher if we could have, like, just a meeting just to kind of, um, like just to check in, you know. I had a couple of and those were always really great and good and the teachers were receptive before Covid. (Zoom interview, August 13, 2022)

Technology has expanded possibilities for responsive two-way communication through digital apps. During the interview, Participant #3 said,

This year I communicated a lot on the Bloomz app with my son's teacher, definitely texting back and forth so there was communication every single day. (Zoom interview, August 16, 2021)

Besides feeling validated, participants shared that responsive two-way communication led to resolution of any difficulties or problems their children were experiencing in school. One participant shared that phone calls were her preferred form of communication so she could get "immediate resolution" and "feedback right away" (Participant #1, Zoom interview, August 10, 2021). Participant #2 shared that the lack of responsive two-way communication after her daughter experienced a physical altercation with another student ultimately led to enrolling her child in another school (Zoom interview, August, 13, 2021).

In comparison, participant interviews revealed times in which they were left invalidated due to one-way nonresponsive communication. Participant #1 shared her feelings of being "ignored" when her child's teacher "would never communicate" in her child's home-school planner, even when she wrote notes directed to the teacher (Zoom interview, August 10, 2021). Participant #2 revealed that within the Bloomz app, she asked questions regarding a serious incident at school, but she never received responses to and thought the situation deserved an immediate phone call (Zoom interview, August 13, 2021). Participant #1 shared that her face-to-

face volunteer experiences in the school made her “questioned herself” when teachers did not communicate to her at all while she was there.

The responsive-two way communication allows for dialog between the teacher and parent. Interactive communication allows families and educators to work together, bringing the family and school spheres of influence together leading to common messaging and more influence on child learning and development as suggested by Epstein (1995).

Preference for Frequent Communication Regarding Student Progress

This study revealed a desire for more communication regarding student progress. Participant #3 shared that during an end of the year meeting regarding her child, staff told her that her child was not doing good in several areas (Zoom interview, August 16, 2021). She shared:

I just felt horrible and then I’m like, uh, you know, and to have, like, not have the understanding like, we’re already almost through the entire year and this is the first time I’m hearing about this? (Participant #3, Zoom interview, August, 16, 2021)

Another participant experienced a similar frustration by sharing she didn’t know how her daughter was doing last year until a phone call “literally right at the end of the school year.” (Participant #6, Zoom interview, April 26, 2022).

Contrasting with the experiences of Participant #3 and #6, Participant #5 was satisfied with communication in this regard, sharing that she had a couple of Zoom meetings to get different support for her child beyond the regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences (Zoom interview, April 21, 2022).

The data received in this study demonstrates that timely communication regarding student progress is desired and appreciated by parents. While parent-teacher conferences and

report cards share academic information on a predetermined schedule throughout the school year, parents expressed a desire for information to be shared as soon as student academic success declines.

Communication to Inform Home-Based School Involvement

Participants in this study all shared ways in which they were involved with school in a home-based form. Such activities include fundraisers, reading, spelling, math, speech, and homework. While trying to support schoolwork while at home, a few participants shared their struggles related to a lack of specific academic information needed to support students in what they were learning about. Participant #4 shared her challenges with helping her daughter with math:

And it's really hard and she gets frustrated because then I'm sitting there trying to find a video that I understand and then a couple of them to make sure I know, understand, and me trying to relay that to her when there's no book to follow. It's just these tear-out pages which is really frustrating. (Zoom interview, March 25, 2022)

Participant #1 shares her frustration saying, "I can't teach you if I don't know it myself." Further, when Participant #1 sought assistance from teacher, she was told to "try your best" and that she could "always look it up on YouTube."

Participant #6 shared a positive experience with communication regarding a school-wide learning experience that included a home-based expectation. She shared that she received "reinforcements from every direction" such as emails from the principal and clear communication of expectations from the teacher. The informational forms of communication provided Participant #6 with "nudge" to get back on track with work (Zoom interview, April 26, 2022).

Participant #3 shares a different perspective as she perceives home-based involvement to be something she is responsible for. “I take good pride in knowing that I love teaching my kids and I want them to have a good school experience” (Zoom interview, August 16, 2021). She makes games for studying as she feels this makes the experience more fun than traditional practices (Participant #3, Zoom interview, August 16, 2021).

All participants show a desire to support students with home-based involvement and five of six participants express the need for communication to support them in their efforts. This communication is necessary as participants do not feel equipped with the knowledge to do what is expected. The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted more instruction to families for home-based learning during periods of quarantine and shutdown during this study, and these related experiences illustrated a clear need for families to be more informed about content than in previous times.

Parent Interviews Allow for Reflection and Making Sense of Experience

One unexpected theme emerged during this study that relates directly to the interview process. During several interviews, participants shared realizations about their experiences that they had previously been unaware of. The interviews themselves allowed for reflection on what had taken place with regard to communication and school involvement, with most participants realizing the potential cause or a solution to negative experiences.

One participant, who felt frustrated with her communication and involvement experiences, shared reflections about COVID-19 near the end of the interview:

Yeah. I guess I didn't, I didn't realize it until talking to you just now how, like obviously I knew it changed things, but it is pretty significant. (Participant #2, Zoom interview, August 13, 2022)

Participant #6, who was frustrated with her lack of availability to participate in school-day activities due to her work schedule first shared that she didn't have a solution to this problem, only to offer one shortly after in which she thought if teachers would do special events outside of working hours, they could be compensated with time off (Zoom interview, March 25, 2022). Similarly, Participant #4 shared a potential solution to the challenges she faced with helping her daughter with math homework, expressing a desire for the school to schedule informational events outside of school hours (Zoom interview, March 25, 2022).

Reflection has the potential to increase higher-level thinking and human ability to attach meaning to our experiences (Denton, 2011). The interview process itself allowed participants an opportunity to pause and participate in what could be considered a form of meditation. By focusing time and conversation on their experiences, participants were able to grow in their own understanding of what their experience had been, recalling what made it positive and expressing what could have made it challenging. In addition to growing in their understanding of what their experience had been, participants offered solutions based upon this increased understanding.

Conclusion

Although the participants in this study came from different schools and had worked with different teachers, four themes emerged from the interviews: (a) parental expectation of responsive two-way communication; (b) preference for frequent communication regarding student learning and progress; (c) communication to inform at home-based school involvement; and (d) parent interviews allow for reflection and making sense of experience. The information gathered in this study can be used to support parent-school communication and involvement plans. Additionally, all participants expressed gratitude for participating in the study that makes

one consider using interviews to customize these communication and involvement plans to align to individual needs.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview of Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of parents of elementary school children receiving Title 1 services with a specific focus on parent-school communication and involvement. Participant responses during interviews revealed the following themes:

1. Parental expectation of responsive two-way communication
2. Preference for frequent communication regarding student learning and progress
3. Communication to inform home-based school involvement
4. Parent interviews allow for reflection and making sense of experience

The desired outcome of this study is to understand the experience of parents of Title 1 students within three elementary schools so that school communication and involvement plans could be improved to be more accommodating for the needs of families.

Limitations

One limitation to this study is the small sampling size of six participants from a single school district. As Patten explains, qualitative research often requires more time than quantitative research (2007). Due to the length of interviews, my time available allowed me to conduct six total.

Another potential limitation to this study is the extended period of time it took to conduct the interviews, approximately eight and a half months due to COVID. During those months, school resumed with further COVID-19 pandemic impacts. Participants interviewed earlier in the study did not experience the same impacts as those who interviewed later in the study. These experiences could alter perceptions.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research on parent-school communication and involvement is found throughout the literature and continues to expand. This qualitative study offered themes that may be influenced by effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and could be studied further. In addition, the unexpected outcome of parental reflection that occurred due to the interview process warrants further study.

First, schools experienced shutdown in March 2020 through June 2020, and even after school doors reopened, students were subjected to periods of possible quarantine and other interruptions to instruction. These events have resulted in decreases in the achievement trajectory for some students. Research focused on teacher perceptions of this phenomena would be beneficial to understand the underlying beliefs that guide communication in this area. Additional research targeted to accelerating the learning of students affected by interrupted learning during the pandemic could be beneficial to students and offer families more information to support their children when they are informed of areas of academic need.

Next, the COVID-19 also caused a shift in the role of parents to become more of an instructor rather than academic supporter while students were out of school for extended periods of time. This study revealed the potential for parents to feel unequipped to successfully carry out these responsibilities. Strategies to prepare families for offering more instruction to their children should be studied to find the most effective methods. Knowledge gained could help schools implement plans to help families expand their home-based school involvement practices.

An area to explore further would be to clarify which school staff member the communication or involvement experience was with. In this study, the questions were asked broadly and did not identify specific teaching staff. In future studies, probing questions to

identify specific teachers, such as the classroom teacher or Title 1 teacher may offer additional insight.

Lastly, there is a need for studying the potential benefits of parent interviews within an elementary school setting with a specific focus on parent reflection that occurs within the interview. This study demonstrated that the reflection that occurred naturally throughout the interview process offered potential solutions to challenges. Interviews could lead to solutions that would otherwise go unrecognized.

Conclusion

This study allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the experiences of parents of elementary school children receiving Title 1 services with a specific focus on parent-school communication and involvement. The interviews revealed an expectation for two-way communication that can be offered in a variety of formats. This two-way communication preference demonstrates that families wanted to take an active role as partners in their children's' education. This desire to be a partner is expanded further by the other themes that emerged: (a) preference for frequent communication regarding student learning and progress and (b) communication to inform at home-based school involvement. This desired communication could result in positive student learning impacts from improved follow up efforts at home. The results of this study are supported by Epstein's model. As parents shared their experiences, times in which things went well were when two spheres of influence, parents and school, came together and intersected. This contrasted with the experiences that parents perceived as not good. These negative experiences were times in which the spheres of influence, parents and school, were pushed apart. In addition, the process of actual interviewing itself presented itself as a beneficial practice for educators to explore further. The data collected in this study offers educators insights

that could inform communication and involvement plans in order to bring families and schools closer together as partners in moving students forward in their student's education.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval



Graduate Studies and Research
Marquette, MI 49855-5301
906-227-2300
www.nmu.edu/graduatestudies/

Memorandum

TO: Bethney Bergh
Holly Muscoe
School of Education, Leadership, & Public Service

DATE: May 30, 2022

FROM: Lisa Schade Eckert
Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

SUBJECT: IRB Proposal HS21-1204
IRB Approval Date 4/13/2021
Proposed Project Dates: **3/29/2021 – 3/29/2022**
“Understanding Parent-School Communication and Involvement of Low Socioeconomic Status, Single Parents with Children Receiving Title 1 Services”

Your proposal “Understanding Parent-School Communication and Involvement of Low Socioeconomic Status, Single Parents with Children Receiving Title 1 Services” has been approved by the NMU Institutional Review Board. Include your proposal number (HS21-1204) on all research materials and on any correspondence regarding this project.

- A. If a subject suffers an injury during research, or if there is an incident of non-compliance with IRB policies and procedures, you must take immediate action to assist the subject and notify the IRB chair (dereande@nmu.edu) and NMU’s IRB administrator (leckert@nmu.edu) within 48 hours. Additionally, you must complete an Unanticipated Problem or Adverse Event Form for Research Involving Human Subjects.

- B. Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant.
- C. If you find that modifications of investigators, methods, or procedures are necessary, you must submit a Project Modification Form for Research Involving Human Subjects before collecting data. Any changes or revisions to your approved research plan must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Until further guidance, per CDC guidelines, the PI is responsible for obtaining signatures on the COVID-19 Researcher Agreement and Release and COVID-19 Research Participant Agreement and Release forms for any in person research.

All forms can be found at the NMU Grants and Research website:

<http://www.nmu.edu/grantsandresearch/node/102>

APPENDIX B

Script to Use When Contacting Parents

Hi, my name is Holly Muscoe and I am calling to ask if you would be willing to participate in an educational research study. I am a former Title 1 teacher and am currently an early literacy coach. As I worked in Title 1, I realized how important the parent-school connection is and that is why I am conducting this study. I truly want to understand what your experience as a parent of a child who receives Title 1 services has been through a series of questions that will have a specific focus on parent-school communication and involvement. My hope is that what is learned from this study could be used to improve parent communication and involvement plans that will be more accommodating to the needs of parents.

The study would require you to participate in a recorded Zoom interview. If you participate, she is offering a \$20 Target gift card for your time. Is this something that you would consider?

If a participant is willing to participate: Thank you! Let's set a time that will work for you. Is there a specific day of the week and/or time of day that would work best? (schedule) To participate, I am going to need you to complete an informed consent document that will give you details of the study and a space for you to sign. Once I receive the signed copy, we are ready! Could you give me your email address so that I can send it to you right now?

If a participant is not willing to participate: Thank you for your time! I hope that you enjoy your summer!

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

Northern Michigan University.
School of Education, Leadership, and Public Service

PROJECT TITLE: *Understanding Parent-School Communication and Involvement of Parents with Children Receiving Title 1 Services*

IRB Approval Number: HS21-1204

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this study is to gain understanding of the experiences of parents of children receiving Title 1 services at an elementary school with a specific focus on parent-school communication and involvement.

What you will be asked to do in the study:

You will be asked to participate in an interview, which will include a series of questions about your experiences related to school communication and school involvement. The interview will be conducted via Zoom. The interview will be recorded and transcribed.

Time required:

Approximately 45 minutes

Risks and Benefits:

The risks of the study are minimal; however, you may feel uncomfortable, as you will be asked to address experiences that may not have gone well. All reasonable efforts will be made to keep your responses confidential.

The potential benefits of the study include providing you with an outlet to express your honest views and share your experiences in regard to school communication. Moreover, what is learned from this research could be used to improve parent-school communication and involvement plans that will be more accommodating to the needs of parents.

Incentive or Compensation:

You will receive a \$20 Target gift card for participating in this study. If you withdraw from study, the \$20 Target gift card will not be given.

Confidentiality:

You will have the option to keep your camera off during the Zoom recorded interview and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. Video recordings, transcription of interviews,

and data will be stored on my computer, password-protected for 7 years. Only I, the researcher, have access to these files.

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your information will be de-identified by an assigned pseudonym. Your name will not be used in any report or publication.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence or penalty.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

If you have any further questions regarding your rights as a participant in a research project you may contact Dr. Lisa Schade Eckert of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee of Northern Michigan University (906-227-2300) leckert@nmu.edu. Any questions you have regarding the nature of this research project will be answered by the principal researcher who can be contacted as follows: Bethney Bergh (906) 227-1864 or bbergh@nmu.edu

Agreement:

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign the form below. A signature will indicate agreement to participate.

Participant's Name: (Print) _____

Signature _____ (Date) _____

I understand that I will be [*audio or video recorded digitally*] by the researcher(s). These files will be kept by the researcher(s) on a password-protected computer. I understand that only the researcher(s) will have access to these files.

Video recording of study activities

Interviews may be video recorded to assist with the accuracy of your responses. Your camera may be turned off. You have the right to refuse the recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to video recording: Yes _____ No _____

Audio Recording of Study Activities

Interviews may be using audio recorded to assist with the accuracy of your responses. You have the right to refuse the audio recording. Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording: Yes _____ No _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Questions

Purpose of Study

Thank you so much for participating in this educational research study. Before we begin, I would like to share the purpose for the study. Through a series of questions I hope to gain an understanding of your experience as a parent of a child who receives Title 1 services. These questions will have a specific focus on parent-school communication and involvement. What is learned from this study could be used to improve communication and involvement plans that will be more accommodating to the needs of parents.

Researcher's Background in Education

I also want to share a bit about my background in education. This is my 18th year in education. I spent 17 years working in an elementary school teaching a variety of grade levels and even Title 1. I now serve as an early literacy coach supporting teachers in 13 districts. Throughout my career, I have realized the significance of the parent-school relationship and it is this realization that compelled me to work on this research project.

Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself (establish rapport)?
 - a. Demographic information may need to be added with probing questions:
 - i. Age, number of children, income, job status
2. Can you describe in your own words what your experience has been with having a child/children in school so far?
3. Can you tell me about any school communication experiences that have gone well for you?
 - a. Probing Questions (if needed)

- i. Why do you think (specific detail shared) made it a good experience for you?
 - ii. What made that a good experience?
4. Can you tell me about any school communication experiences that have not gone well for you?
 - a. Probing Questions (if needed)
 - i. Why was (specific detail shared) difficult/not good for you?
 - ii. What made that a difficult/not good experience?
5. What mode of communication do you find best suits your needs? Why?
6. Does this mode change based on the type of information coming from school?
7. Can you tell me a bit about your involvement with school?
 - a. Probing Questions (if needed)
 - i. Can you tell me about any experiences that you have been involved in by going to the school?
 - ii. Can you tell me about any experiences that you have been involved with school while at home?
8. What school involvement experiences have gone well for you?
 - a. Probing Question (if needed)
 - i. What, in your opinion, made it a good experience?
9. What school involvement experiences have not gone well for you?
 - a. Probing Question (if needed)
 - i. What, in your opinion, made it a bad experience?

10. What do you feel would help you be more involved with school, either at the school or from home?

a. Probing Question (if needed)

i. How would this help you?

11. Is there anything about school communication or involvement that we haven't talked about that you would like to discuss or share?