Understanding the Parent in Parent Involvement:

A Case Study

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved November 2017 by the
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December 2017
ABSTRACT

Parent involvement is a concept that describes the ways schools attempt to connect with parents for the educational benefit and support of students. Schools engage in strategies and invest in programs to increase parents’ involvement at and with the school, employ personnel to support parents, and develop workshops aimed at supporting parents’ understanding of academic content as well as to develop partnerships between parents and teachers.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how parents viewed themselves as partners with their children’s teachers and what they believed their roles were in their children’s education. This qualitative study was conducted through interviews with parents who were recommended by school staff as having above-average or below-average involvement. Ten parents in a low-income public school in the southwestern United States were selected for an initial interview, and four of those ten were chosen as focal parents for additional rounds of interviews. All three rounds of interviews took place over a four month period in the spring. The interviews were used to document and analyze how parents viewed themselves and the roles they have in their children’s schooling.

The findings from this study illustrate the similarities in behavior, attitude, and self-view between parents recommended by school staff as having above-average and below-average involvement. Additionally, this analysis describes how effective partnerships between home and school (including current teachers, former teachers, and school support staff) can help support parents as lifelong advocates for their children, whether they agree with school decisions or not. When parents are intentionally made to
feel vital as partners in their children’s schooling, their confidence in their ability to support their children’s education is strengthened.
DEDICATION

To my mother, Claire, and my father, Jim, who have never stopped believing in me and modeled for their daughters the importance of compassion, honoring commitments, the value of a sense of humor, and how to use privilege as a way to provide opportunities for others.

To my children, Jackson and Bridget, who have been patient, flexible, wildly encouraging, and beautifully resilient through this professional and personal endeavor.

To Andrew, who supported me through the start of my professional journey, never questioning why I needed to continue to learn and grow.

To my partner in this world, my love, Aaron, for providing me the time and space to complete this study, and for showing me what it means to love and be loved with one’s whole heart. This would not have happened without your support and encouragement.

Finally, to the parents at the school I loved so dearly, I thank you for your time and honesty with me, and the innumerable sacrifices you have made to provide your children the most enriching educational experience you could hope for. You are inspiring.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Jeanne Powers, my committee chair and mentor, for her tireless support through this dissertation process. Despite obstacles and the need for more than one restart, Dr. Powers remained determined to see me through this process. Her direction, expertise, and eloquent feedback helped to remind me of my task and remain focused throughout the course of writing and completing my dissertation. I would like to thank Dr. Carl Hermanns for his thoughtful feedback and guidance to help make my study relevant and relatable. Dr. Nancy Uxa, once an administrator from whom I learned the most about being kind-hearted and tenacious for the sake of children, who, as a committee member balanced providing me support and relentless prodding in the most graceful of ways. I feel honored to have studied with each of you during this process of my doctoral dissertation.

I would like to thank the members of my doctoral cohort at ASU, the DELTA IX group of educators. From our international travels in the name of global education studies, to supportive networks of colleagues who understand this level of higher education like none else, to the most tireless of cheerleaders, even years after their own achievements have been reached, I am grateful for it all.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

If one asks a parent what it means to “be involved,” one is likely to get a different response than if one asks a teacher. But at most schools, teachers and school staff are not asking parents this question, so they do not know if there are inconsistent understandings between how schools view parental involvement and how parents view being involved at their children’s schools. A related issue is that the cultural beliefs and values of the families served by a school may differ from those of the teachers (Turney & Kao, 2009; Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, 1992; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahativanichcha, 2001). A working-class parent may have a different understanding of “involvement” than the teacher, and see the school and home as separate entities, each responsible for their own role in the child’s life, exclusive of one another. For example, a working-class parent may view parent involvement as sending a compliant and respectful child to school so teachers can do their jobs (Valdés, 1996). Teachers may view parental involvement as attending all or most of the school functions, ensuring accurate completion of homework assignments, or being available to support the teacher in any way the teacher may communicate to parents. These differences in cultural beliefs and values may be manifested in an absence of the type of involvement that some school personnel often assume is the most valuable, i.e., the active participation that parents show at school such as being physically present before or after school for the teacher to contact if needed and at school events and volunteering in the school or classroom (Lareau, 2000).
This study focuses primarily on one of the major partners in involvement, the parents. While the school as an institution will be the context for this study, policy and program elements will not be under scrutiny. Instead I will analyze parents’ understanding of involvement.

There is evidence that suggests that parent-school partnerships can have a positive effect on student achievement (Morrison, Gutman, & McLoyd, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006; McNeal, 1999), can influence the importance parents, students, and teachers place on educational growth, both individually and as a group (Barone, 2011; Keyes, 2002; McNamara Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003), and expand the community of individuals collaborating for the overall well-being of the child (Carolan-Silva, 2011; Sheldon, 2003).

A parent’s involvement in their child’s schooling can vary over time for several reasons. For example, a child may have an academic challenge that needs to be met (e.g., academic remediation or enrichment), a behavioral problem that prompts the school to contact the parent to request assistance or alert the parent of disciplinary action, a recent medical diagnosis that requires attention during the school day, or a teacher whose consistent communication keeps the parent involved in what is happening at school. Any of these events can cause a parent to increase her involvement. Conversely, the same events may cause a parent to withdraw from the school based on a feeling of helplessness or confusion if she feels the school is responsible to deal with the situation, if she finds the teacher is frustrating or is not providing ability-relevant material, or if she would prefer a more consolidated update on classroom-related news instead of daily notices. The evolution of a parent’s sense of self regarding involvement over time is interesting,
and the focus of this study. I wanted to know about possible trajectories of parent involvement over time, and the factors that shape those trajectories. Do some factors contribute to a parent becoming more involved in school or home-based activities more than others? Are there reasons that cause parents to withdraw from school-based activities?

**Statement of the Problem**

In this study, I inquire about how parents view their involvement in their children’s schooling and parents’ perceptions of their involvement over time. I focused on parents in a high-poverty school who were identified by classroom teachers and classified school staff as having either above-average or below-average involvement. Through interviews, I sought to discover parents’ perspectives of their involvement in their children’s school and to understand how they viewed the school’s efforts to engage them. I focused on the factors that may have contributed to any changes in parents’ involvement, as well as listening for any value statements parents might associate with involvement.

From a teacher’s perspective, there are examples of involvement that are of a higher quality than others and that have a more significant impact on student achievement than other types (Lareau, 2000). For example, supporting children’s school readiness, overall parent presence at school, attending special school events, and complying with teacher requests are the most visible to teachers. As a result, teachers often associate these with higher levels of value and parental concern on for their children. However, when teachers and parents do not communicate about the purpose behind types of parent involvement, which can lead to misunderstandings and perceived ill intent.
Purpose of the Study

Many researchers have identified the types of involvement parents exhibit (Calabrese Barton, Drake, Perez, St Louis, & George, 2004; Cullingford & Morrison, 1999; Carolan-Silva, 2011; Simpson Baird, 2015; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005), programs or situations that have either fostered an increase in involvement (Jeynes, 2005; Barone, 2011; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001) or programs that have been less effective in helping parents become involved (Bower & Griffin, 2011), the involvement practices of immigrants (Ramirez, 2003; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Simpson Baird, 2015; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014; Turney & Kao, 2009; Valdés, 1996), and the role that social class plays in parent involvement, without intervention (Lareau, 2000; Lewis & Forman, 2002). What the research shows is that with a specific program or in certain social groups or even situationally, parent involvement can vary or can change. What the research does not represent thoroughly is variation in individual parents’ involvement over time. While a program or situation can be a catalyst for a change in a parent’s involvement during the program, it is unclear whether shifts in involvement will change future behavior. This study seeks to understand what involvement means to parents, the trajectory of parents’ involvement, and the factors that influence how parents engage with their children’s school over time.

Definition of Terms and Abbreviations Used

- Parent: Refers to the primary guardian(s) for a child;
- Parent involvement: Refers to the many ways in which a parent interacts with the school that may include but is not limited to:
o Parent attendance at school events such as assemblies and festivals;

o Parent attendance at academic events such as parent-teacher conferences;

o Volunteering in the classroom;

o Parents initiating or responding to phone, email, or written communication with the school;

o Organizing a child’s work at home (e.g. homework station at home);

o Discussing or helping with homework at home;

- Parent presence: Refers to parents physically being at school for non-mandatory, non-invitational meetings or events (dropping off or picking up children, attending a majority of events organized by the teacher or school, volunteering in the classroom or at the school, etc.)

- Participation: Refers to parent attendance at events organized by the school (i.e. conferences, parenting classes, carnivals, awards assemblies, holiday concerts);

- SES: Socio-economic status;

Parent involvement and parent engagement are terms that are used throughout the literature, sometimes interchangeably. In many cases, involvement is an umbrella term for the connection between teachers and parents. Across most of the literature, the term “involvement” spans a spectrum of physical presence or visible participation that can include such activities as (but not limited to) parents signing homework charts, attending parent-teacher conferences to review report cards, responding to teacher requests, volunteering in the classroom, contacting the teacher with a specific comment, and meeting with the principal regarding a teacher change. Recent research tends to use the term “engagement” in place of the word “involvement.” Notably, four studies distinguish
between the terms involvement and engagement. Baker, Wise, Kelley, and Skiba (2016) describe involvement as physical presence at school, and engagement as how parents are involved with the school. Calabrese Barton et al. (2004) differentiate involvement from engagement claiming that involvement is parents doing what the school suggests, and engagement is what parents can do when activating their social capital. For the purposes of this study, social capital will refer to the networks of people and available resources to which parents have access. Finn (1998) views involvement as interaction with the school at school, and engagement as interaction with the child at home about school. Simpson Baird (2015) makes the distinction that the term involvement is related to the practices schools employ to bring parents to the school, while the term engagement is used when parents and schools collaborate around students’ needs.

For the purpose of this study, I will use the term involvement regularly to indicate interactions between home and school as well as school and home, will mention the term participation when parents are taking part in an activity initiated by the school, and the terms engaged or engagement to highlight the act of active involvement with a teacher.

**Significance of the Study**

By better understanding parents’ views on their relationships with schools, school administration and staff can adjust programs and interactions with parents to increase the effectiveness of strategies to involve parents. Teachers might learn which activities or practices are most effective in fostering and sustaining partnerships with parents, as well as which activities may alienate parents. Researchers will have deeper understanding of how parent involvement looks over time. This different view that draws on parents’ reflections on their involvement in their children’s schools, can help practitioners and
researchers make adjustments to current programs and practices and to better understand how they can foster sustained parental involvement beyond a single year or beyond the scope of a specific intervention.

**Summary**

Parents and schools may have different understandings of what an involved parent is. When school staff and faculty can better understand the impact of the school’s efforts to engage parents, some efforts will be seen as more effective than others.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the field of education, there are two main views of the purposes of parent involvement: school as expert, responsible to teach parents (Barone, 2011; Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Peña, 2000; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001), and equal partnership between home and school (Baker et al., 2016; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Poza et al., 2014; Ramirez, 2003; Simpson Baird, 2015; Valdés, 1996). Both perspectives value parent-school relationships, but they differ in their assumptions about the importance of parents’ knowledge and perspectives.

The defenders of school-as-expert may recognize that parents have significant input, but the school-led training (Barone, 2011) or parent involvement models (Epstein, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Keyes, 2002) are created to provide guidance for parents on how the school expects parents to be involved. The equal partnership supporters may recognize that parents require guidance about how to become involved in ways that are expected at school, but is focused on first meeting the immediate needs that parents have (Lopez et al., 2001), developing a relationship with parents to foster continued ownership of the educational process beyond a single school year (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009), or the involvement of the community as supports to families (Carolan-Silva, 2011; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; MacNamara et al., 2003; Poza et al., 2014; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Other divisions among researchers center around the extent to which the students’ achievement is related to parent involvement and who should initiate
the interaction between home and school (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Calabrese Barton, et al., 2004; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lareau, 2000).

In this review of the literature, I begin by discussing the relevance and roles of race, ethnicity, language, and class as they relate to parent involvement in schools. These terms are sometimes interrelated or connected in the research, but for the purposes of this paper, I will explain them in three sections: race/ethnicity, language, and class. Another element I will address is the role of social capital in parental involvement. I will examine how parents build and maintain social capital both as parents of school children and in the community, as well as what they do with the social capital they have. A third element I will explain is role construction (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), or how parents’ sense of self and purpose influence how they interact with their children’s school. Finally, I will explore how communication between home and school can bring together or divide parents and school.

**Race/Ethnicity and Parent Involvement**

To best recognize elements of the different cultural groups that make up a school community, one should know the whole stories of the students and families that attend the school. In some schools, the racial/ethnic backgrounds of the parents differ from that of the certified teaching and administrative staff (Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Doucet, 2011; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lightfoot, 2004; Poza et al., 2014; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). This can become a challenge when the teaching staff does not intentionally recognize the elements of their students’ cultures, and how cultural differences may shape parents’ understanding of parent involvement at school. For example, Anglo families (referred to as European American families in the Lee and
Bowen study in 2006) tend to participate more at school than parents from other racial/ethnic groups; therefore they are often more visible to teachers (Lee & Bowen, 2006). This can lead teachers to erroneously assume that Anglo families are more involved than non-Anglo families.

Though many parent involvement programs are intended to strengthen the home-school connection, an unintentional effect may be the imposition of Anglo values on non-Anglo communities, which is a form of domination (Baquedano-Lopez, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Peña, 2011; Valdés, 1996). When members of one cultural group dominate another during interactions, the dominant group places a greater merit in their own beliefs and values over those of the non-dominant group. Namely, when Anglo teachers dominate interactions with non-Anglo parents, they are asserting themselves as experts, and while this might prove true in some academic contexts, it overshadows the likelihood that the parent also has expert knowledge about her/his child. Lightfoot (2004) cautions researchers to be cognizant of the language of judgment they use in parent involvement research, so that educational practitioners do not view a parenting model that differs from what the school expects as “worse” than another parenting model. This reinforces the assumption that dominant (Anglo) school cultures have something that non-dominant (in this case non-Anglo) parents’ cultures lack and is worth having, and it is the responsibility of school personnel to guide parents instead of partner with them.

One of the most effective ways for teachers and administrators to better understand their students and their home situations is to conduct home visits (Cassity & Harris, 2000; Lopez et al., 2001; Ramirez, 2003; Walker et al., 2011). This provides time for the parent to explain to the teacher some of what she knows about the child outside of
the school setting, and for the teacher (or administrator) to learn about the student in another context. An additional benefit to this exchange that will be expanded upon later in this study is such visits may provide a foundation for the teacher and parent to develop a relationship based on mutual respect.

**Language and Parent Involvement**

The primary language that families speak at home can significantly contribute to or hinder the effectiveness of the communication between teachers and parents related to parent involvement. This is especially apparent when the parents and teachers are unable to communicate proficiently in a common language. This inability to communicate without a translator removes the ease of an unplanned phone call, email, or visit with the teacher. The parent or teacher must be prepared for any interaction with a translator who will have sufficient vocabulary and language proficiency to communicate effectively. When schools do not make adequate attempts to consider language needs of the communities they serve, some parents might view the lack of translation as a slight or that the school does not deem parents as true partners who deserve to be kept informed (Peña, 2000). Additionally, there are cultural concepts embedded in language that can increase possible gaps in understanding (Simpson Baird, 2015).

The concept of *educación* (Valdés, 1996) in Spanish or *éducation* (Doucet, 2011) in French/Haitian Creole, encompasses the moral development and character shaping which are the responsibility of the parent with a secondary emphasis on academic development through school. A common challenge with these cognates, which look similar to the term “education” in English, is that they do not have a direct English equivalent. In English, education tends to refer primarily to schooling, training, or
instruction. These differences in meanings can contribute to misunderstandings in communication regarding schooling, specifically when determining the role parents play in their children’s schooling. Therefore, some parents not proficient in English, who understand educación or éducation, may assume the primary responsibility of a parent is to send well-behaved children to school and that teachers are responsible to provide students with academic knowledge and training (Carolan-Silva, 1991; Lareau, 2000; Lau, Li & Rao, 2011; Valdés, 1996). This can lead to unintentional misunderstandings, unknown to both parties, where parents view their roles differently from how teachers view the role of parents.

When schools make efforts to intentionally invite parents to participate as critical stakeholders in their children’s education, traditional reasons for lack of participation at school (e.g., language barriers, lack of transportation or child care, feeling intimidated by school staff) are often dissipated (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Baker et al., 2016; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Parents who understand the norms of schooling in the United States are also more likely to have a presence at school when possible (e.g., volunteering in the classroom, incidental conversations with the teacher at morning drop-off, alerting the teacher of a change at home that may affect the child at school, etc.). Since these norms tend to be unstated or are assumed to be widely known by English-speaking teachers, parents who share language and cultural similarities with the teachers have more direct access or familiarity to this unstated set of practices and expectations (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Communication from the school is critical for parents to feel they are a vital part of the educational process (Epstein, 1986; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Nzinga-Johnson et al.,
When schools send home communication to parents, the native language(s) of the parents should be considered (Cassity & Harris, 2000; Peña, 2000; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Simpson Baird, 2015), as well as the individualization of the communication. Schools can send informational flyers, newsletters, and calendar items, but parents are often more interested in personalized forms of communication from teachers such as invitations to events, and communication regarding their own children or the activities in their children’s classrooms that are free from educational jargon (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Epstein, 1986; Peña, 2000; Walker et al., 2011).

**Social Class and Parent Involvement**

Class difference is a consistent topic in the literature related to differences in parent involvement (Lareau, 2000; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lewis & Forman, 2002). In Lareau’s (2000) examination of the effects of social class on education, she discovered differences in access to opportunities for children of different class backgrounds. She identified expectations that schools have about parents, which are often assumptions that middle-class parents have little problem matching, but of which working-class parents are often not aware. One example is advocacy and supplementary actions a parent might take for a child who is not working on grade level. Lareau found that middle-class parents were more likely to allocate outside resources to supplement schooling when a child was falling behind, something she did not document as consistently in the working-class families. Other assumptions include consistent communication between home and school for student academic progress, namely, that a parent will act as an academic guide for the student, and that school is only one part of a child’s academic development.
Additionally, Lareau (2000) found that while the school documents and other statements of school policies she studied assumed a partnership between schools in parents, the individual teachers in her study wanted parents to defer to their expertise instead. This dynamic assumes a leader and a follower. In the middle-class school she studied, the teachers and parents tended to take turns as leads in communication, but in the working-class school, parents rarely insisted upon a role change, and teachers did not offer the change in dynamic. A significant difference between the two classes of parents was the role of the parent. In the working-class school, Lareau observed that parents viewed school as the exclusive opportunity for education, and teachers as those who held the key to this opportunity.

While middle-class parents may assume they have an open invitation to the school and that their input and opinions are wanted, working-class parents may feel they are not invited or needed to be present at school to support their children’s education. This difference in understanding may set working-class parents at a disadvantage compared to their middle-class peers. Lareau’s (2000) foundational research on parent involvement showed that middle-class parents also tend to be better able to navigate the school system, which makes them appear more involved in ways that teachers seem to value.

Addressing parents’ differing needs is one way the school can customize parent involvement for individuals. In working-class communities, parents’ more immediate needs may be locating food, home, and clothing resources. When the school is able to respond to this need and help connect parents with the needed resources, parents are more likely to have extra energy to devote to participating at their children’s schools (Lopez et al., 2001).
Building Networks

Most parents have networks of people who can participate in a child’s life. These networks can be made up of immediate and extended family, neighbors, a religious community, friends, and parents of children’s friends, who can be called upon based on need. Different networks of people may be activated when a parent needs assistance with food or resource allocation (Lopez et al., 2001), when struggling with a child’s behavior, or for a parent’s developmental or academic concerns about a child. Before any networks are activated, the parent must first identify or accept a problem or challenge and decide which members of their social network can help to address the issue. Middle-class families are likely to have different networks that exist for isolated and specific purposes (McNamara Horvat et al., 2003). One factor that contributes to class-based differences in parents’ social networks is the enrollment of children in fee-based extracurricular activities (McNamara Horvat et al., 2003). While these activities are not available exclusively to middle-class families, the fees and time required for participation can be prohibitive to working-class families for whom time and budgets may be inflexible.

Children’s participation in activities outside of the school often provides opportunities for their parents to develop acquaintanceships that could later be used for networking purposes. Therefore, middle-class parents may have broader social networks that they can activate when problems with schooling occur. This finding supports Granovetter’s (1973) study proposing that “weak ties” (i.e., casual acquaintances) and “bridges” (the connection between weak ties) are how the most common avenue for parents to develop networks of support that will help them address their children’s educational needs. This acquaintance-based capital assumes a mostly middle-class perspective in which parents
assume an active role in the schooling of their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Lareau, 2000).

Parent networks help individuals find camaraderie, provide access to peers with whom they can share experiences and talk about parenting, and can also help them advocate as a group for improvements at schools on behalf of their children. For working-class immigrant parents, the parents’ social networks are more likely related to survival in a new country, and success in the new country may be defined differently than that of the country of origin (Valdés, 1996). McNamara Horvat et al. (2003) support Lareau’s (2000) findings that middle-class parents, both native and immigrants, activate their social networks as a way to enhance their children’s opportunities at school and take advantage of group-motivated change, whereas native and immigrant working-class parents tend to activate social networks for need-based reasons such as adapting to a new culture or gaining access to basic resources (Poza et al., 2014; Simpson Baird, 2015).

Another aspect of parent networks to consider is that parents will become involved in their children’s education in ways in which they feel competent. Parents in a rural village in Paraguay, for example, developed community networks when they raised funds and gathered resources to have a local school constructed (Carolan-Silva, 2011), so children could stay in their community and not have to leave town to have access to education. When the construction was completed, school officials expected the community that had collaborated so successfully to build the school to continue their work by academically supporting the students after it was opened. Parents did not activate those same collective efforts toward supporting their children academically, in part because they did not feel confident in their abilities to support their children’s
schooling in this way. Moreover, Carolan-Silva found that parents credited academic success to children’s individual intelligence and motivation which they viewed as immutable characteristics and not something that could be strengthened. This assumption of predetermined ability can also reduce parents’ incentives to intervene in their children’s schooling.

**Role Construction**

In the context of parent involvement, role construction refers to parents’ sense of responsibility in the education of their children (Anderson & Minke, 2007). Role construction is developed through parents’ personal experiences in school, their comfort with academic work, and the extent to which they feel empowered to advocate for their children (Tveit, 2009). When parents believe in their abilities to advocate for their children at school, the school does not have to invite parents to become involved as they will become involved regardless. But when parents have a weak role construction as a critical component in the academic lives of their children, or if parents are unclear on what the school’s expectations for involvement are, some parents may await guidance or invitations from the school. Parents whose cultural beliefs, language, or class status differs from that of majority of teachers at the school a (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Tveit, 2009).

According to Morrison Gutman and McLoyd (2000), one aspect of role construction is the outlook of parents both toward their children at home and toward teachers about their children. Parents of high-achieving students tended to engage in discussions with the children as a means to problem solve with their child about school, whereas parents of low-achieving students tended to issue directives about their
children’s poor behavior or command a child to make more effort, without specific
guidance. When parents of high-achievers are intentional about the types of interactions
they have and the structures they provide for their children, they are nurturing their
children’s sense of purpose and relevance of education at home, which, when mirrored by
academic expectations at school, communicates that education should be a high priority.
This helps their children to construct clear roles of themselves as learners and reinforces
academic success as a purposeful outcome agreed upon by teachers and parents. On the
other hand, when parents of low-achievers only encourage their children to turn in
assignments and do not emphasize or highlight learning outside of the school, it implies
that learning is something exclusively done at school and that parents and teachers may
have different expectations of children. This inconsistency can allow children to develop
their own understandings of their goals as learners outside of the school setting.

Some programs teach parents how teachers would like them to support their
children’s learning at home by setting up homework stations, encouraging home reading
practices that include questioning and discussions that mirror school discussions, or
sending home videos that explain how a math concept was taught at school (Barone,
2011; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). When parents learn strategies to support academic
learning at home and feel prepared to provide this support, they may feel empowered to
have discussions with teachers about what is working and what is not. However, this is
still an inauthentic partnership because it is not based on a mutual and holistic
understanding of what the child needs (Baker et al., 2016). Instead, parents are merely
expected to follow directions provided by the school. These interactions can reinforce the
subordinate relationship between parents and teachers and other school personnel as parents learn how schools want and expect them to participate.

A main reason that parents tend to not be involved the way schools would like is that they often do not understand how schools would like parents to participate and what schools expect of parents (Barone, 2011; Lewis & Forman, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Simpson Baird, 2015). That said, schools must also ensure that their efforts to increase parent involvement meet the needs of their parent communities. Since no one form of parent involvement works for all parents in all situations, when schools draw upon a range of strategies tailored to parents’ different needs, it can show parents that schools value their individuality and that which makes them unique (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004).

School-Centered Involvement

When parents are physically present at school, it is easier for teachers to view parents as “involved” (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Baker et al., 2016). Parents’ presence may allow for incidental discussion between parents and teachers, but this structure is not required for students’ academic success and has not proven to be a critical element for increasing student achievement (Finn, 1998). Rather, parental support at home has had a more significant impact on student achievement than parents’ presence at school (Lau et al., 2011). Being present at school is mostly a middle-class and Anglo practice (Lareau, 2000; Lee & Bowen, 2006) and is facilitated when families’ financial or work situations allow at least one parent to volunteer at school or spend time away from work to be at their children’s schools. In many native or immigrant working-class families, spending time away from an income-seeking venture is a luxury the parents cannot afford, or their
work schedules are often less flexible. Furthermore, Anglo middle-class parents may understand or be accustomed to the organizational structure of the school, so participation is not as an uncomfortable or intimidating venture (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Turney and Kao (2009) observe that “not all parents are equally equipped to participate at school” (p. 269). They make the point that barriers of shared understanding exist, such as cultural and linguistic obstacles, differing understandings of what constitutes success and expectations of parents in schools. Because of this misalignment between home and school, compounded by a lack of resources that often prevent their physical presence at school, it is no wonder the immigrant working-class parents in their study did not share school personnel’s views about what parent involvement should look like. School personnel must share information freely with parents, taking time to answer questions and intentionally welcoming parents to participate in the school (Poza et al., 2014).

Strong relationships between home and school encourage partnerships for the education and advocacy of children. Teachers tend to forge meaningful partnerships with parents when they make careful and consistent efforts to bridge their students’ homes and school. These efforts by teachers can help parents feel like they have a meaningful relationship with teachers and the school (Epstein, 1986).

A final point in the discussion of parent presence at school is regarding the depth of the obstacles in the lives of parents and the opportunities that the school has to strengthen the relationship of trust between home and school. When the primary concerns of parents are for survival (i.e., food, shelter, clothing), less immediately critical focus areas (e.g., parent presence at school, volunteering in the classroom) are likely to receive
less attention. However, when schools are able to organize the resources that disadvantaged parents require to meet their immediate needs, parents are more likely to be able to participate in ways that schools want or expect (Lopez et al., 2001).

**Home-Initiated Contact**

Lareau (2000) explored the differences in parent involvement between middle- and working-class parents and noted a sense of entitlement and advocacy that mainly appeared in middle-class families. Parents who initiated contact with their children’s schools felt a sense of partnership in the schooling of their child. This may be that they felt invited (Ramirez, 2003) or that they were necessary stakeholders in the educational process (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Parents wary of interactions with school personnel may begin by initially contacting their children’s teachers, and those first interactions may set the stage for subsequent interactions or the lack thereof (Calabrese Barton et al, 2004; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Cullingford & Morrison, 1999; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). For example, if a parent contacts their child’s teacher to request guidelines for helping the student at home, and the teacher is not quick to respond or responds in an impersonal or non-specific way, the parent may be less likely to reinitiate contact at a later time (Ramirez, 2003). One of the parent participants in my study had experienced this phenomenon; she requested accelerated work for her daughter, and it took several months for the school to produce worksheets she could do at home. Consistent with Ramirez’s (2003) findings, the focal parent in my study decided to score the math problems her daughter was provided herself instead of waiting again for the teacher and other school staff to respond. It is critical that teachers respond to parent-initiated communication in a timely and supportive manner to encourage ongoing communication. Parents may also
initiate contact with the school for support in locating resources such as social services, discounted school uniforms, access to food banks, etc. It is important to note that this type of communication is most likely to occur when schools have reached out to parents first to develop trust, and once that trust has been established, parents feel they can rely on the school as a connection to available resources (Lopez et al., 2001).

**Intentionally Uninvolved Parents**

While less documented in the research literature, some studies suggest that parents might intentionally disconnect from their children’s schools (Doucet, 2011; Peña, 2000; Simpson Baird, 2015). Teachers often attribute a lack of involvement to parents’ disinterest in their children’s schooling. Some researchers, however, have characterized this as intentional disconnectedness (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004; Doucet, 2011; Valdés, 1996). When parents feel that schools are not actively requesting input from the family, or eliciting information about the students’ home cultures, parents may feel slighted, and what teachers may view as lack of involvement may actually be a silent protest against school practices.

**Summary**

Parents and teachers do not always share the same understandings of the goals and nature of parent involvement. This disconnection in understanding can vary depending on class, race/ethnicity, as well as the relationships that schools and parents develop (or fail to develop), and can vary based on parents' and teachers' role constructions. The network of support that parents have can either strengthen the home-school relationship or suggest to some parents that they do not need to engage with the school as a partner because their social networks meet their needs. When schools fill the
role of services’ locator with a parent or community liaison, the school often becomes a trusted partner that has helped to meet a need, so the parent may be more willing to engage with the teachers as part of a reciprocating relationship (Lopez et al., 2001; Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009; Ramirez, 2003).

What this study aims to better understand is what parent involvement looks like over the course of time for two types of parents, those who school staff view as having above-average and below-average involvement. I aimed to explore parents’ sense of self and role in the academic lives of their children as well as how they perceive the roles of their children’s teachers. If practitioners can better understand from parents’ perspectives, why they choose to engage, disengage, or remain apparently unengaged in their children’s schooling, school staff can understand what involvement strategies are effective, which are beyond the control of the teachers, and whether there are missed opportunities that could strengthen home-school partnerships if implemented effectively.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

According to Stake (2008), the purpose of case study is that it allows a researcher to focus on what can be learned from studying a single case. Case study is the analysis of a specific thing or person in a situation, and a collective case study is the analysis of several things or people in similar situations. A collective case study is not aimed at solely understanding the similarities of multiple cases, rather the spectrum of how they are alike and different, how they are consistent, and how they vary. An analysis of multiple cases does not look to understand one generalizable case by comparing each of the experiences as they relate to each other, but through the collection of stories, to increase understanding through each case’s unique unfolding (Stake, 2008). In this study, the cases studied were individual parents, and through a collection of ten parents’ stories, I gained insight into how parents view their roles in their children’s education.

Schools actively recruit parent involvement, and some parents comply while others do not (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Through collective case study, I aimed to learn what parent involvement looks like over time for these two sets of parents. Stake (2010) observed that a researcher must use caution when comparing cases in a collective case study because the researcher might ignore important differences between cases in her effort to document similarities. To mitigate this possibility, I paid special attention to each individual parent’s story, as they are unique, while also seeking out common threads among the group of parents.

Setting and Researcher’s Role

Garden Elementary School is an urban Title 1 school located in the southwest United States. Ninety-two percent of the approximately 800 students that attend the
school receive free or reduced lunch, and 89% are Latino. Like many neighboring Title I schools with similar demographics, Garden has struggled with maintaining high parent attendance at school events, and the lack of parent involvement is commonly remarked upon by teachers frustrated with the lack of both student achievement and growth. Garden School has participated in district initiatives aimed at increasing parent involvement that have had limited success, but the parents’ perspectives have not been assessed. It is my belief that when educators better understand parents’ viewpoints, educators have a clearer picture of what is missing from current parent involvement programs that are not working to fully engage families.

A point of interest is the physical presence on campus of some of the parents. Through informal conversations with teachers and the parent interviews as part of this study, physical presence seemed to indicate to teachers and staff that a parent might be more involved. In the spring of 2014, immediately following my first round of interviews, Garden School implemented a security precaution that consisted of installing a glass enclosure at the front lobby and requiring visitors to show identification and receive a visitor badge before entering campus. Parents walking children to the classroom was no longer permitted (with the exception of the first two weeks of school for kindergarten students). Parents were also no longer permitted to be on the campus playground before school, another venue where incidental conversations with teachers and staff used to take place. Without the physical presence that was available prior to the security precautions, I wonder if, and how, teachers and school staff might consider parent involvement differently, and if their recommendations would have remained the same or would have changed.
Researcher Positionality

As the primary researcher responsible for selecting participants, conducting interviews, and analyzing results, I would like to address any potential bias that may be present in this study. As an educator at Garden Elementary School for 14 years, I had personally implemented as well as observed parent involvement interventions implemented with varying levels of success. Having held various positions in the school, including teacher, instructional coach to teachers, and administrator, I had served on the PTO, translated for conferences on occasion, met with school staff and parents regularly, and when needed, I acted as a mediator between parents and school staff. Some of my former students have children who attend Garden, and I met with them informally to ensure they are involved in a way that will benefit their children and will also be valued to the teacher. These former students were intentionally omitted from the study. During meetings with teachers for instructional planning meetings to address academic and behavioral concerns, I would inquire about the parent contacts the teachers had made and helped brainstorm ways to keep the parents aware and involved in decision making. This added to the depth of my role as an educator who is a trusted advocate for children and their parents. I had a casual acquaintanceship and familiarity with some of the parents, so developing trust quickly with parent participants was not much of an issue as it may have been if I were stranger.

Parent Participants

In this study, I sought to understand how parents viewed their involvement in their children’s schooling over time. I focused on parents in a high-poverty school, identified by teachers, classified staff members (e.g., a crossing guard, educational
secretary, and cafeteria workers), and the school resource officer, as having either above or below-average parent involvement, as defined by the researcher. I documented and analyzed how parents perceived their engagement with teachers over time.

I analyzed what parent involvement looked like for 10 different parents over time. My goal was to better understand the perspectives of two sets of parents: a) parents who are identified by a teacher or school staff member as having above-average involvement; and b) parents who are identified as having below-average involvement. I was interested to discover how parents understand involvement in their children’s education, independent from how I labeled or defined the concept of parent involvement.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Data for this study was comprised of the interviews conducted with the 10 parents, in some instances with a translator. All interviews were transcribed, and those that were translated were transcribed in English.

**Parent Selection**

I provided all teachers, selected support staff (educational secretary, crossing guard, and cafeteria workers), and the school resource officer with a questionnaire that requested the names of two parents, one with above-average involvement, and the other below-average involvement. The questionnaire offered guidelines on how to identify parents in each of these categories (see Appendix B). The guidelines provided examples such as participation in school events, responsiveness to school-home communication, and if the school staff member believed learning at home was encouraged and supported. I chose these three criteria intentionally, for the following reasons:
a. school-based participation is the most obvious for teachers to see (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Finn, 1998);

b. effective communication between home and school allows each party to become involved in the home-school relationship (Barone, 2011; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Epstein, 1986; Keyes, 2002);

c. home-based parent involvement has been shown to have a potentially larger effect on student achievement than school-based parent involvement, but teachers do not always value this kind of involvement (Lau et al., 2011; Walker et al., 2011).

By asking for input from both teachers and classified staff, I intended to gain insights into how school personnel view parents that a review of meeting sign-in sheets cannot provide. Classified staff members offered different perspectives than teachers, as their views were based on observation and interactions with parents in a capacity different from that of the teachers. Additionally, since many of the classified staff had children or grandchildren in the school, I was interested in how an employee whose physical presence at school is required for their jobs, might impact the classification of other parents’ involvement.

Once all questionnaires were collected, I narrowed the recommendations by selecting parents that had been identified by more than one teacher or staff member (Table 1). I created my initial list of 10 participants, as well as a number of alternates to ensure sufficient sampling. My initial concern that teachers and school staff would be more aware of parents with frequent presence at school was proven inconsequential since I asked teachers for recommendations in the third quarter, and most had the opportunity
to connect with parents at some point during the school year. Thirty-two names were suggested as parents with above-average involvement. Of those, two parents I contacted said they were not interested in participating. One parent who did participate in all three rounds of the study was recommended by two staff members as having above-average involvement. Thirty-one names were suggested as parents with below-average involvement, and of those, two had withdrawn from school at the time of contact, four said they were not interested in participating, and two said they would think about it and call back (although they did not). One parent was recommended as having above-average involvement by a school staff member, and having below-average involvement by a teacher. In the interest of a representative sample, I intended to include non-parental guardians as well as fathers or male guardians in my research, but those I contacted were unable or uninterested in participating. All 10 parent participants are female, and all are the mothers of children attending Garden Elementary School.
### Table 1

**Portrait of Parent Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Above-average</th>
<th>Below-average</th>
<th>Straddler (recommended as both an above-average and a below-average involved parent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requests distributed for collecting parent information</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned requests with parent information</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of parents who were recommended by more than one person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of parents contacted who were not interested</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of parents I contacted but did not hear back from</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of actual participants in round 1 interviews</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants in rounds 2 &amp; 3 interviews</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent interviews took place at the elementary school or at the homes of parents, depending on the preference of participants. I used Creswell’s (2009) interview protocol (see Appendix E) to structure the interview and take notes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for thematic coding. The interview questions acted as guidelines for the researcher and participants, though the semi-structured interview format allowed the conversation to flow naturally. I did not discourage conversation that diverted from my interview questions, as most of the tangents were related to the child or children, and parents’ involvement with their children outside of the school setting.

**Initial Interviews**

From staff recommendations, I selected five participants with above-average involvement, and five with below-average involvement. The “straddler” parent who was recommended by a teacher as having below-average involvement and above-average involvement by a staff member was categorized as a below-average involved parent in this study. Selection of the 10 parents was based on comparing names (i.e., if two staff members recommended the same parent), selecting parents with at least one other child, and those who were interested in participating in my study and had availability to participate. I was interested in parents with multiple children to determine if they seemed to be similarly involved with all of their children or if their involvement varied based on the needs of an individual child or a relationship with a specific teacher. I was intentional to select parents who were both English and non-English speakers, to represent the diversity of home languages at Garden Elementary. Six of the 10 parents are Spanish speakers and four were English speaking and did not require a translator. Of the four parents who were selected for additional interviews, the above-average involved parents
were bilingual and interviews were conducted in English, and the below-average involved parents were Spanish speaking, requiring a translator (see snapshot of all parents from initial interview in Appendix G).

During the initial parent interviews, I facilitated basic introductions and explained the process (in Spanish when needed). Beyond that, I required the services of a translator. To ensure comfort of my participants, I hired a translator who is familiar to the parents. While not a trained interpreter, this translator has experience communicating with parents bilingually.

These initial interviews took place on Garden School campus primarily in the library during spring break, and in the PTO room, once school resumed. One meeting was in the home of a parent who preferred to meet there. The initial round of interviews was guided by interview questions, but was flexible to facilitate discussion. These interview questions were piloted informally with community liaisons and parents unassociated with the school to ensure that the questions were appropriate and relevant. The question categories for the initial interview, as seen in Figure 1, were designed to provide an introduction to the family in regards to educational situation and goals, as well as to understand how the parent places herself in that educational narrative.
1. Demographics of the family
2. Goals for the child
3. Learning at home
4. Parent’s educational experiences as a child
5. Attending school events
6. Communicating with teachers
7. Feeling welcome at school

Figure 1. Initial interview question categories.

Selecting Parents for Further Study

Studying parents who are just above and below the average regarding involvement in school was intended to provide a contrast between the two groups while avoiding outliers. Stake (2008) calls this “selecting a case of some typicality but leaning toward those cases that seem to offer opportunity to learn” (p. 130). Following the initial interviews, I continued to interview four of the 10 parents in two additional interviews, completing all three rounds over the course of four months. The continued interactions helped me to learn more about these select parents’ involvement over time and how they viewed their roles.

Following the initial analysis, I ranked the 10 parents based on my understanding of their role construction (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Tveit, 2009) related to parent involvement as reflected in their responses. This sense of the parents’ role construction helped me to determine parents whose involvement with the school stemmed either from a sense of responsibility as a critical part of their child’s education or one of obligation or habit, which was considered for participant selection.
Selection of the four parents for further study was based on whose involvement seemed to have been influenced by some event or circumstance, as well as considering the parents’ willingness to expand on their responses.

While all parents had something interesting to share, an anecdote that made her story unique, an experience from her own childhood that changed how she wanted to interact with her children’s school, or an example of an interaction she had with a teacher that made a lasting impression, I selected the four parents to study further based on two main criteria, confidence of role construction and advocacy for their children. Confidence, either strength or absence of, was a consideration. Yolanda and Natalie were confident in the choices they made for their children and felt that the need to advocate for their children’s academic progress came without question. Each mother was certain that she was doing right by her children to insist upon the supports she felt her children needed. Sonia’s confidence had grown during this school year since her initial interactions with Daniel’s new teacher in her insistence for support for Daniel and services for Anahi. Maria did not question her parenting abilities, but also did not present a visible advocacy for her children. Instead, she regularly reminded them to be compliant and amiable in the classroom.

A final consideration for the selection of the four focus parents was that each of these four mothers at some point disagreed with the school on a decision that was made and questioned the school’s decision in some way. Yolanda did not feel that Susana was being adequately challenged in the classroom, so she met with the teacher and principal and came to school on several occasions to retrieve enrichment work for her daughter. Sonia did not agree with Anahi’s teacher that her second grader was working on grade
level, so she met with several school staff members to gather a group of individuals to further scrutinize Anahi’s progress. Maria’s daughter Isabel was struggling to comply with a teacher’s request, and because of a relationship Maria had with a teacher (the former teacher of her older children), Isabel was moved to a different class and began to excel academically. Natalie’s son was not receiving the class size accommodations that his neurologist felt would best meet his needs, so Natalie returned to the school regularly to meet with the school psychologist, principal, and specialists in an attempt to allocate additional resources for her son.

Questions for the second and third round interviews acted again as guides to direct the discussion, however the second and third interviews contained more parent-initiated sharing about their children, and updates about parent interactions with teachers.
CHAPTER 4: PARENT PROFILES

Ten parents were selected for the initial interviews. Of those 10, I was looking for parents who had stories to tell about their interactions with the school, spoke with confidence regarding their interactions with the school, were able to expand on my questions, and were candid with me in our discussions. I selected two parents who were recommended as having above-average involvement and two who were recommended as having below-average involvement. While it was not intentional, the two above-average involved parents are English speakers, and the two below-average involved parents are Spanish speakers.

This chapter is divided into two sections, Parent Participants is the first section and provides background on and descriptions of the six parents who participated in the initial round of interviews, and Focal Parents is the second section, which provides a more in-depth description of the four focal parents selected for second and third interviews.

Parent Participants

Luz

Luz was recommended as a parent with above-average involvement. She has four children, two of whom attend Garden Elementary School. Luz’s Spanish-speaking family emigrated from Mexico two years ago so their children could have educational opportunities in the United States, and to progress in their education past high school:

I teach my kids, first of all, to take pride in what they learn here, because we made a lot of sacrifices to bring them here. Especially myself, you know, I’ve made a lot of sacrifices to be here, so to take pride to go to school and learn as much as you can. Every day that you go to school, take a lot of pride to learn as much as you can, and take pride in that learning.
She attends many events at the school, both those directly related to her children’s academic progress, as well as the more general activities. She is also physically present at the school as a volunteer. When she first enrolled her children at the school, her youngest child’s teacher suggested that she look into volunteer opportunities to better familiarize herself with the American school and with the community:

When I first came here [to the U.S.], Ms. Enriquez [teacher] told me there was volunteering work I could do at the school and I got a lot of help from Ms. Enriquez last year because I just came to a new country, not knowing anything, and I was feeling very stressed out, and that’s how I started doing volunteer work.

Despite her initial admitted shyness, Luz explained that she will communicate with her children’s teachers to better be able to support them at home and to understand what they are doing at school. She shared that she asks a lot of questions of her children’s teachers, but does not apologize for this. Luz felt personally welcomed and important when the principal introduced herself to the family upon enrollment, and the impact of this was enough to have instilled confidence in Luz’s decision to uproot her family from their familiar life in Mexico:

I feel welcomed because everyone has been so helpful from day one, especially the people in the office. When I first got here, I told everyone I am new in this country and this city, I don’t know if my kids can come to this school, and the lady in the office was very helpful. She even helped me get a high school for my two older kids. When I was enrolling my kids, the principal introduced us to him, and I felt so important, so confident that she gave my kids her hand and she said, “Hi, Welcome to Garden.” When I got home, I told my husband, I really like that school. In Mexico, it is really rare that the principal will come and shake hands with children. They don’t really do that with children, or with the parents, and that gave me a lot of confidence in the school.

Yadira

Yadira was recommended as a parent with above-average involvement. She has four children, three of whom are enrolled at Garden Elementary School and one in high
school. Her family emigrated to the United States from Mexico less than a year ago, also for the educational opportunities for their daughters. Her own experience attending school in Mexico was not one she wanted for her daughters:

Being a woman, it makes it harder, because our parents believe that we don’t have to go to school, we don’t have to learn anything, we just have to you know, have kids, and take care of the kids. I went to school up to sixth grade. I wanted to continue school but my dad said “no,” and you know, back then we were always obedient, we obeyed what the parents said, so I had no choice, so I quit.

She participates in some of the events at school and is interested in learning about how her girls are behaving and what they are learning about. She appreciates attending school events to meet other parents and to learn about the classmates of her daughters.

Yadira’s seventh grade daughter had a difficult time adapting to school in the United States:

With Ana, you know, at the beginning, she was low in her grades, then she went up, and now she is down again. She doesn’t learn English, and she said that she doesn’t understand, that she cannot read and write in English. She gets help from the classroom, from the teacher or other students but now the teacher is seeing that she is not making her best learning, because she has all this help so she isn’t trying hard enough to learn by herself. I believe in her, and I know she can do it, but she is in that point where she thinks of herself that she cannot do it, so she isn’t thinking outside of that. She is thinking, “I can’t, I can’t,” and she is not trying.

Yadira feels the teachers are respectful of her time, and she awards them the same respect, as they are also busy, “I like that they [teachers] have the time to call parents for a meeting when they need to come. To know what the kids are doing”.

Sandra

Sandra was recommended as a parent with above-average involvement. This Spanish-speaking mother has three children, one at Garden School and the two older ones have completed elementary school. Sandra’s youngest, who is in sixth grade, has good
grades and no behavior issues. Sandra attends the parent-teacher conferences, mandatory
school events, and joined her son on a field trip a month before the interview, “to share
time with my child.”

One issue Sandra felt is lacking at the school was community involvement for
students and parents. In previous years with her older children, she felt there was a
greater focus on families giving back to the community via service events, and now there
is not. Regarding what parents might do to get more parents involved, Sandra shared that
Garden could:

Offer more programs that are interested in family things. Showing the parents and
children who “made it.” I feel that those types of programs will get parents
involved. Like parents and children doing things together to help the community.

Since Sandra has two older children who were promoted from Garden Elementary, she
feels comfortable going to the school if she needs anything, “We [the teacher and Sandra]
speak at the conferences, but if there is something that I feel I need to know about my
son, I always feel welcomed to communicate with the teacher”.

Karina

Karina was recommended by a teacher as having below-average involvement, and
by a school staff member as having above-average involvement. She understands
English, but feels more comfortable speaking in Spanish, so our interview was conducted
in Spanish through a translator. Karina has three children, two of whom attend Garden,
the oldest of whom is enrolled at a prestigious private high school on full scholarship.

Having an older child in a private high school after completing his elementary
education at Garden School, she has had to navigate the school system in a way that
contrasts with other parents in my study. She views her responsibilities differently from
other parents I interviewed and also knows how to get what she needs for her kids, even when the most obvious avenue of meeting with the teacher proves ineffective. For example, after some negative interactions with her youngest child’s teacher, Karina chooses instead to avoid the teacher and communicate through another school staff member instead:

I have good communication with Mr. Suarez, but not with Ms. Gonzalez. She waits to respond, and I prefer not to talk to her because she has a way of answering… we do not get along. Most of the time I will talk to the parent liaison, but I will not talk to Ms. Gonzalez, so I go to the office and talk to someone there. It’s uncomfortable to have that relationship with my child’s teacher.

Karina’s physical presence at school for personalized academic events (conferences and parent learning nights) as well as volunteering for general events (carnival, book fair, parent connection meetings) is likely how one staff member recognized her as having above-average involvement, and having intentionally withdrawn from the teacher, I can see how the teacher might have interpreted this as having below-average involvement. Likewise, this teacher may have recommended this parent as having below-average involvement because she was upset with the parent.

Karina feels welcomed at Garden, but does not have the same confidence in the school that she did at one point:

When Eric was here at school, Garden was very, very good. That’s why I enrolled my daughters – I was very happy with the school. Then it started going down academically. Right now I feel Garden is at an “okay” level. When Eric was here at school, there was a lot of programs for the students and he was involved in all of them. Now it’s a little different—they don’t have all those programs. The ones he was involved in four years ago, there was a big change. We were never informed of anything that was going on. And now I like it, it’s coming back.
Karina’s experiences with older children has helped her develop her social network. She references two different parents who she talks to about school-related issues, who she met at volunteer events, or from being at school at the same time.

**Evelyn**

Evelyn is an English-speaking parent who was recommended as having below-average involvement. She grew up in the United States and went to a two-year trade school after high school. She has three children, the youngest of which attends another school in the district that meets the goals of his special education services plan. Evelyn has a self-awareness of her role in her children’s schooling, but does not attend many school functions because of her work schedule. However, when her son was struggling in school because of his then-undiagnosed severe attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), she attended all the school meetings and conferences that were scheduled to get him services and testing. Her interactions with teachers were about academics, but also about behavior and how those two intersect. She feels the school is supportive of what she needs, and while she does not have a school-centered network of people upon whom to call when she needs assistance, she feels her needs and her children’s needs are being met.

Not long after parent-teacher conferences, Evelyn received a phone call from her middle school daughter’s teacher:

He said that she is one of his good students. And because she started chatting, and that’s not like her. It’s very strange. I know she can do better, and it’s the talking. So, I kind of felt that he really has faith in my daughter and she is very smart. And he knows that and I know that. But he wants me to catch that now, and that she’s got to stop talking. Like I like that the teachers care.
Evelyn feels the teachers are usually easy to communicate with,

Last year my daughter was starting to like a boy, and I remember she [the teacher] told me that she was giving her attention to a boy and not to her. And we nipped it in the bud right then. They are easy to talk to.

Evelyn primarily attends mandatory academic events, but she communicates with teachers and explains that she supports the school in every way that she is asked. When asked what the school could do to get more parents involved, she responded:

I don’t know. I don’t know if it’s actually the school. I think some parents don’t get involved with the school. That’s how my mom was. She’s Hispanic, and she’s like, “If she’s doing good, then I don’t need to go.” I think it depends more on the parents than the school. Because they do good on letting us know when we have to be here and what events are going on.

**Iliana**

Iliana is an English-speaking mother of two, recommended as a parent with below-average involvement. She agreed to be part of my study initially, but I was unable to reach her to set up a time to interview. One afternoon returning from a field trip she chaperoned for her third-grade son, she stopped by the office to see if I was available to meet, so we conducted the interview at that time.

Iliana has a responsive relationship with the school in that she will respond to teacher and school requests for participation, but will not initiate academic inquiries. She attends the parent-teacher conferences and parent learning meetings and occasionally other school events such as field trips, but her work schedule prevents her from attending other activities, “I try to be with them on field trips, but it’s sometimes hard because I work all day. Today I took time off. I didn’t tell my work where I was going. Growing up, my mom couldn’t do that for us.”
There was an incident with her sixth-grade daughter who had a boy over when
Iliana was not home. The boy ran out the back door when Iliana came home, and her
daughter insisted that nothing happened, they were only watching television.
Uncomfortable with this idea, Iliana talked to her daughter’s teacher and the school
resource officer about the incident and asked them to be aware of any changes in her
daughter’s behavior at school or around boys that might suggest a sexual relationship.
Though this is not an academic need, Iliana was aware of the networks she had available
in school personnel and utilized them when she felt her daughter’s safety and well-being
might be at risk.

When asked if Iliana felt the teachers were easy to communicate with, she
responded:

Some of these teachers, well, I don’t know. This one teacher, when my son was at
a smaller age, I don’t know. I don’t know if she just didn’t like him, I don’t know.
She would constantly call me. At that time, I was working at a later time. I would
go in and sit there and just see that he’s not the only one that’s up and down. But
then they changed him out of that classroom, because I don’t know if it was the
teacher or if it was him. I would go and peek to see what was happening. He
didn’t feel comfortable in that classroom, so I talked to the principal to see if he is
still getting in trouble. And when they changed him, he was doing better. I think
they just didn’t get along.

Iliana has a unique form of involvement, as she activates her social networks at
the school when needed, she attends mandatory academic meetings and volunteered as a
chaperone on a field trip with her child, but is still viewed by school staff as having
below-average involvement. She explained that her mother was unable to accommodate
school requests like this, so she feels it is important for her to attend school activities now
that she is a parent.
Focal Parents

Sonia

Sonia is an English-speaking mother of three who emigrated with her family to the United States from Mexico when she was a teenager. Sonia was recommended by school staff as a parent with above-average involvement. Following the tragic death of her brother in the U.S., her family decided to stay, “Because my little brother passed away at 17 in a car crash so his body was here so we all stayed here.” Her children are Yessica, in sixth grade, Anahi in second grade, and Daniel in kindergarten. She was the only participant who asked if we could meet at her home, explaining that there are always “nosy parents around the school,” and she preferred that our discussions remain private.

Sonia works seasonally at a tax preparation office during school hours, and her husband works as a plumber, often on-call for emergency situations. Sonia did not have a positive experience in school herself, stating she was often bullied, and that because she was a girl raised with all boys, she would respond to bullies by fighting:

I did not have a good experience. I was bullied a lot when I was little because of my weight. And then I was the only girl in the family until I was age 11. So I grew up with boys. So there was another thing at school that girls and boys were bullying me because of my weight, and my answer was to be like boys. If they would say something to me then I would say something and fight back, because that’s how I learned with the boys. Until I was age 13, it was then that I kind of understood that I didn’t want to be like that, didn’t want to continue like that.

She talked to her mother about her negative associations with school, but her mother did not take action until Sonia began crying and praying for something to change. Her mother changed her school in Mexico for a year before the family relocated to the United States, where Sonia had a more positive experience. Initially, her father did not feel it necessary that Sonia attend high school and that it was a waste of time since she would marry soon,
so she began cleaning houses with her aunt. Finally convinced by Sonia, her aunt enrolled Sonia in high school where she attended until her graduation. Sonia confessed that she learned to speak English while working at Burger King as a teenager rather than during classes at her high school.

As a parent, Sonia wakes up before her children to get herself ready for the day, then wakes her children, makes them breakfast, and helps them get ready for school. Most days she walks her children down the street to school and waits for them to walk home after school. In the afternoon, she makes her children something to eat and sits with them, sometimes helping them with their homework:

With my three kids, we are, me and my husband, it’s getting harder with the two little ones because they are so close. So I have to be doing homework with one, and the other one, well sometimes I don’t do homework with Yessica, but it’s like, I listen to her. Yessica likes to talk a lot, so I like to be with her so I can listen to what she is talking, so I can know what she is thinking. What’s going on in her life at school, and at the same time, I can kind of know her friends around her. So with Yessica, maybe Yessica is not homework, but I need to listen to her when she is doing her homework. I just need to ask the right question, then she starts going, going, going, that’s it.

Sonia feels that the purpose of education has two parts: one is family education, or how one grows up. The other is to learn what they need to “be someone in life.” At home, she is teaching her children to show respect for others, in how others think and act, especially elders. Sonia states that she encourages her children to advocate for themselves at school if they do not understand the way a teacher has explained a concept. While she sits with the children at home doing homework, if they are unclear on how to complete the work, she will teach it to them the way she remembers having learned in school herself.
Sonia makes a point to attend the school events that she feels will directly benefit her children. Sonia attends the parent-teacher conferences for each of her children, as well as meetings organized to address a specific need for one of them. The activities at school in which her children are involved are also something Sonia attends, such as her eldest daughter’s choir concert, athletic events, recognition assemblies, and the school health fair dance party:

Anahi is kind of shy. I have to work on this shyness thing with her, so when she wants to participate in something, I need to encourage her. Like the health fair dance party thing. That was one. It was so embarrassing. She kind of pushed me on the dancing this, to participate in the parents’ dancing contest. In the beginning, I was so embarrassed! But then, how can you say no to a little kid, when you are always telling her to go ahead and do it? So I just looked at her, I danced, I got second place. But to Anahi, it was like first place.

Sonia intentionally avoids activities at the school that involve unstructured time with parents, such as PTO meetings, monthly connection meetings with the parent liaison, and the parent learning nights where teachers share activities for home that correspond to lessons in the classroom. She explains that when parents get together, they begin to gossip about other moms and children, and despite her attempts to disengage from this type of behavior, other parents continue to swap stories of what one child did in the cafeteria, who was brought to the office that day, and who was not listening in class. Also, the chatter makes the meetings go longer:

Sometimes, I have three kids, and those meetings, instead of 45 minutes, they end up being longer than that. And the parents start talking about their own experiences, and I just don’t have time for that. I like to listen to that, but I guess it starts to get late.

Privacy seems paramount to Sonia, so instead of attending parent functions that may benefit her children academically, she has asked teachers to meet with her separately to review the content that will be delivered at the parent learning night.
Sonia recalled many interactions with school staff she had this year, and in each of them, she reflects on what the teacher or staff member might have been thinking when s/he said or did something to or regarding one of Sonia’s children. For example, at the start of the school year, Daniel, her kindergartener, was moved to a different classroom due to language proficiency, but she was concerned that the new teacher may not be a good fit for her son’s personality. She began volunteering in the classroom in the mornings, helping the teacher while also keeping an eye on Daniel to be able to refer to specific behaviors or situations when they returned home. After Sonia spoke with Ms. Stowe, a teacher that Anahi had in a prior year about her concerns with Daniel’s classroom change, Ms. Stowe recommended that Sonia meet with the principal, Mr. Orozco, to inquire about why the change took place, and what other options might be available. She admits to feeling uncomfortable having questioned the school’s decision, but she was excited about the organization and supportive yet strict nature of the initial teacher, and seeing a looser structure with Daniel’s new teacher raised concerns. The meeting with Mr. Orozco provided information about the grouping of students based on language proficiency, and Sonia left without a change to her child’s teacher, but reassured that her concerns were heard. She assumes the principal spoke with the teacher, as Sonia began to see the teacher take a stricter approach to classroom management almost immediately, with keeping Daniel on task:

So I went to Mrs. Stowe and told her what was happening, and that I had to do something, but I don’t know where to start. I tried to have the principal change Daniel from Ms. Lucero’s class back to Ms. Berry, but I guess we couldn’t do that. And then Ms. Stowe told me we could talk to the principal. He said we could move Daniel to Ms. Trayne’s class. But then I spoke to my husband and we decided it wouldn’t be good in the same year for him to have 3 different teachers. So we decided to leave him where he is right now and let’s see what happens. Ms.
Stowe gave me a paper so I could receive counseling from a social Daniel’s doing much better. Daniel knows it is not only him: it is him, me, and the social worker. And since January, Ms. Lucero has given me spaces and the same sheet to each teacher he sees, such as the reading teacher. Since then, Daniel is different, and Ms. Lucero has changed too. I guess maybe the social worker is consulting with Ms. Lucero, and I, too, have spoken to Ms. Lucero. And since all this happened, I have asked Ms. Lucero what she needs from me. I tell her I have 15 minutes of time to give her, and she gives me a job to do. I try to have Ms. Lucero understand that it is important for Daniel’s education that I will support her, but at the same time, I explain to her that she should get a notebook, write down anything you want said to Daniel, tell it to me, and the next day we can talk and work it out.

Having drawn upon the resources in her social network with Anahi’s former teacher, Ms. Stowe, regarding her son’s situation, Sonia felt empowered to question other decisions at the school and to not simply accept the school’s policies and practices without question. Sonia’s daughter, Anahi, was now struggling academically, something Sonia noticed herself in doing homework with her children. In speaking with the teacher, the teacher was not concerned, saying that Anahi was in line with the rest of the class, and that Sonia need not worry. After several months of stymied progress, Sonia spoke with the speech teacher, and later a reading specialist, who each shared Sonia’s concerns. Sonia was persistent in speaking with the reading specialist on several occasions, then later an instructional specialist on multiple occasions about additional supports that might be available to Anahi to help bridge her learning gaps. By the end of the year, Anahi was tested for and deemed eligible for special education services. It is possible that another teacher may have noticed this and pushed for special education testing as well, but in this case, it was Sonia who advocated for her child, activated the network she had in other teachers on campus, and got the results she sought. Reflecting back, Sonia admits to having felt pushy and at times, “sneaky for going around the teacher,” but she felt that her daughter’s needs were not being met appropriately.
In the middle of the school year, Mr. Orozco, with whom Sonia met at the start of the year, had resigned from his position. Sonia was one of the parents selected to be on the interview panel for a new principal. She was not certain why she was selected, but was simply told that her name was provided to the superintendent’s office, who called her and invited her to be on the interview panel. Sonia was also asked to be on a district feedback committee regarding the parent learning nights (the events she no longer attends because she feels the other parents monopolize the teacher’s time). She participated because the district asked, explaining:

For some reason, I am kind of like not that involved in school so when they call me and they ask me, it’s kind of like feels weird, like what can I give, or how can I say it? Sometimes I don’t understand, I’m more like into my kids. I try to help them, support them. I’m not that involved in school, and the reason sometimes is because I don’t know those things. I didn’t know. For real, I didn’t know.

Sonia explains that if asked her opinion, she will be candid, so if they are looking for her opinion, they know that she will be honest with them.

When asked if her relationships with teachers and the school will change as a result of this year’s interactions, Sonia claims to feel more confident that she will insert herself as a partner in her children’s education with the school, as opposed to the recipient of information like she had felt before. With increased confidence and a sense of privilege that are both new to her, Sonia feels that this school year has been instrumental to her understanding of what her role can be in her children’s schooling and how she understands the teacher. She explains that she was sad when Daniel’s teacher changed at the beginning of the year, but that she “needed to connect more with her [the new teacher, Ms. Lucero] so I could understand her in her classroom,” so she began volunteering to spend time with the teacher and to better understand her approach. Sonia
looks forward to the new school year when she will make an immediate connection with all of her children’s teachers, telling the teachers about her children and what she expects from the home-school partnership.

Another factor that has had a lasting impact on Sonia's construction of her role in the education of her children was the willingness of the teachers who do not have her children in their classrooms to collaborate with her to help them. The former kindergarten teacher, the speech teacher, the reading specialist, the instructional specialist, all spoke with Sonia and either advocated for her themselves or directed her to a person who could better answer her questions. This network was not something that Sonia had expected to be available, but she was appreciative that they were.

The advice Sonia would offer a parent new to the school is to get to know the school, to “learn the system before you need it,” and to know your child so you know what to expect for him or her. Collaboration and communication are critical to an effective partnership, and if the teacher does not ask her about her child, she plans to share any pertinent information about their strengths, challenges, and tendencies so she and the teacher can work together to increase the academic progress of her children.

Yolanda

Yolanda is an English-speaking parent of three who grew up in the United States. Her youngest, Susana, is in first grade at Garden Elementary, and she has two teenaged daughters who also attended Garden. Analia is a sophomore in high school, and Gloria has graduated from high school and is now in the United States Marines. Yolanda was suggested by two staff members as a parent who has above-average involvement. She
works in an office, and has flexibility in her schedule to be able to attend school functions, whether they are held during the day or in the evening.

Yolanda went to school for most of her years in a neighboring state and moved to the Garden Elementary community for her last year in high school, the eleventh grade. Yolanda notes many differences in her school experience as compared to those of her daughters, and many of the examples are related to her physical presence in her children’s lives. She explains that her mother was always working, so she was unavailable to help Yolanda with homework and to talk about things going on at school and in her life. Wanting something different for her children, if her daughters need help with homework, Yolanda is available to help, and when they are both stuck, she uses the resources available on the internet. Yolanda’s husband speaks Spanish exclusively, and their youngest speaks only English. Both understand the language of the other, but neither speaks in anything but their native tongue to one another:

I am teaching her Spanish, and she is good. She can understand, but she can’t speak it. And my husband can’t speak English clearly, he’ll understand. But it’s funny, because both of them help each other, and she does her best in translating anything she has to do. Even though my husband does his best at understanding it, he can’t say it back to her.

It is clear through our discussion that physical presence is important to Yolanda, both from her own experiences, and those of her husband. Her husband’s father was 74 when he was born, his mother 44. The youngest child of relatively older parents, Yolanda’s husband was primarily raised by his siblings, so Yolanda feels it is her responsibility to teach him how parents should be interacting with their children:

There is a lot of different. He was never educated in the ways of discipline and education, nothing. So I, myself, had to help him so that we could both do a lot of communication with the girls. If he doesn’t understand because it’s girls, Hispanic, Latino, macho, you know those things, I tell him, “Okay, we’ve got
Yolanda, and this is how it works. And he asks me a lot, when I have to do meetings, appointments, I go, he babysits, and I go. He can’t cook, so if nothing’s ready to eat, he grabs a pizza, because pizza is better than nothing.

Yolanda believes the purpose of education is to prepare her daughters for their future. She views her role as ensuring the girls are well-rested, healthy, and ready for the tests at school. She feels that attending all of the meetings, showing up for the “little events, big events, testing,” are all ways that she as a parent can support her daughters’ education at school. At home, Yolanda is focused on teaching her daughters respect for themselves, others, and to always be alert to their surroundings.

Yolanda attends many events at the school, those directly related to her daughter’s achievement (i.e., parent conferences, parent learning nights, assemblies), as well as general events held at the school (i.e., school carnival, dance party night, a set of parenting presentations organized by the parent liaison on different topics related to raising elementary school-aged children). She explains that although the content of the parenting classes is mostly irrelevant to her, having already raised two older children and navigated multiple experiences throughout elementary and high school with them, she attends in case anyone ever needs the information, she would have it to be able to share. Additionally, if anyone needs her to take care of their child, she wants to have gathered as much information as possible to provide the child with the best care:

I guess it’s more of the interest of the parent to learn. Like I said, myself, I’ve been a mother for about nineteen years, and I’m still learning now. And everybody asks me why I’m taking those classes if you’re not having any more kids and your youngest kid is seven. And I tell them that the day after tomorrow, if someone is having trouble with their kids and I have to take over, I want to be prepared to know what I’m going to do. Or I may have missed some things when my kids were smaller, but I try to see another way how to communicate, how to share individual time with them. People comment and ask why do I act like White people sometimes, and I tell them that it’s not White people. It’s just being responsible. You don’t have kids just to have them. You have a responsibility to
take care of them. There’s things we’ve got to do: we’ve got to learn how to discipline them, how to care for them, how to teach them morals and respect, everything. You’ve got to be prepared to teach your child how to be a better kid and grow up to be a good person.

Learning about the events at school is not something Yolanda relies upon the school to communicate out in a timely manner. She explains how each month, calendar in hand, she will stop by the office after taking Susana to school, to ask the parent liaison what events are coming that month about which she should know. While these events will be shared with parents via flyers, social media updates, or messages on the school marquee, Yolanda appreciates knowing about them a month in advance, so she can organize her work schedule around the school event calendar, participating in as many events as possible.

The interactions with Susana’s teachers this year have been mostly positive, though Yolanda states that she perceives that the teacher does not like her, but also loves her in a way, because she knows that as a mom, she cares. Yolanda checks in with the teacher regularly, if not daily, to see how Susana is doing in class with her behavior, her handwriting, getting enrichment work for math, etc. Yolanda explains that she used to sit in Susana’s classroom, but because of a change in school procedure requiring parents to provide advance notice prior to observing in classrooms, she is able to do this less frequently. She feels that her physical presence is important to show her daughter and the teachers that she is a parent who cares, she is a parent who is at the school, who looks out for other students, and who tries to share her experiences with others.

Yolanda has had one ongoing academic concern about her daughter; she wanted more challenging work for Susana. When Susana was in kindergarten, her teacher
provided advanced math work for Susana in the classroom, and explained to Yolanda how to provide enrichment activities at home:

Well, Susana’s teacher last year, she was great! She worked with me and Susana a lot, and it was challenging. She was one of those teachers, I don’t know if it is good or bad, that she gave Susana more challenging stuff and push her a little bit. There was a whole group who she saw needed more enrichment, and she did give them work to do, and they liked it. And there was another teacher who I really liked too. The way she taught, the way she disciplined the kids and taught them respect. She was great!

Now in first grade, Susana is again feeling restrained by the classroom learning, and is ready for more of a challenge. The teacher has not provided enrichment work for Susana to do in the classroom or at home, so Yolanda met with the principal to ask for supplemental work. Mr. Orozco assured Yolanda that either he or the teacher would locate enrichment materials for Susana, but several months had passed since that meeting, and Yolanda had not received anything. She called the office and stopped by several times to gently remind Mr. Orozco about his assurance, and about three months later, a packet for second graders started coming home with Susana. While helpful practice for Susana, it appeared the plan had not been discussed with the teacher, who said she was not able to score it because she did not teach that grade level content. Seeing the difficulty in acquiring the extra work, Yolanda decided it was a battle not worth fighting, so she simply worked with Susana at home on the packets that were sent home, and checked them herself. This did not, however, seem to negatively impact Yolanda’s relationship with the teacher, nor her opinion of the teacher as a good communicator.

Yolanda values personalizing her relationship with each of her daughters based on who they are and what they need. She explains how she maintains this connection with her daughters, which she describes in racial terms:
A lot of people say, why do you want to do, I hope you don’t mind, what white people do? I say, what do you mean, what White people do? They spend time with certain kids and they leave the other kids by themselves. No, I say, I don’t do that. I say I spend time depending the ages of the children too. ‘Cause I leave my girls with my husband and I take turns. So I go out one day with the older one, and even though I don’t go shopping or eating or nothing, we grab something to drink and we’re walking around the stores, and we talk. Their needs, their wants, you know, whatever they see in the future. Or if they have a little issue they don’t like, they tell it. They come and say, Mom, this is going on. And I share the same things with the little one, the seven-year-old, as the 19-year-old. And they say how do you do that? Where do you leave the other kids? I said they have a father, and if he is not there for them, then he needs to let me know. He needs to watch them too.

Yolanda explains that her youngest did not have the vacation travel opportunities that her two older daughters had when they were Susana’s age, but that she tries to support Susana’s interests with additional classes. Susana has shown an interest in baking and cake decorating, so Yolanda has looked into classes at local stores and through the library that Susana can take to deepen her knowledge and love of these hobbies and continue her learning outside of school.

Yolanda attends many school functions, inserts herself into relationships with the teachers and school staff, and is not afraid to ask for what she wants if she feels it will benefit her children. She moved her daughters to Garden School when their former school was not offering the variety of programs that Yolanda felt should be offered to parents. She is not too intimidated to initiate a meeting with the principal to request supports for Susana, and she states that a few close friends and family members seek her out as an “expert” parent. Some question her parenting techniques, but Yolanda is quick to explain that where her children are concerned, she will do whatever she must do, will learn whatever might help, and will collect as many people as resources to help her daughters realize their dreams.
When asked if Yolanda plans to approach Susana’s future teachers differently, she says she will not. She always introduces herself early in the school year and seeks to develop a relationship with the teacher and plans to continue to do so. Yolanda feels that when the teacher understands that the parents are physically present and are active participants in their children’s education, the teacher will be more willing to work as a partner with her on the child’s behalf. She said that if she has a problem with the teacher, or if there is something she does not like, then she is at the school more often. Physical presence at school is what Yolanda feels indicates a caring and involved parent:

Well, the ideal relationship would be the parent stopping by, and checking, and if you can’t come by, then there is always the phone calls and e-mails. I personally prefer to stop by myself and if the kid has a special way of doing things or working, you know, or a problem paying attention, to let the teacher know. Because we are not geniuses and need help. If the kid needs special help in paying attention, or if holding a pencil helps them to pay attention, then you can hold the pencil, but be careful because other kids are around. Yeah, it’s good to communicate. Because as a teacher, you know what’s coming into the classroom, and as a parent, you know they’re going to be safe there. Yeah, stopping by is a good idea, but if you can’t make it, then at least once a month, give them a call at the school to check up on your kid. That’s what I always did, and I think it’s a good idea. But there are parents who work, and can’t get there.

Maria

Maria, a parent recommended as having below-average involvement, is a Spanish-speaking mother of seven, all of whom attend, have attended, or will attend Garden Elementary. The oldest is in college, three are in high school, the youngest is in preschool, and the two elementary-aged children are Isabel in seventh grade and Laritza in first grade. In addition to her seven, the girlfriend of one of her high school sons is also living with their family to escape an abusive stepfather. Maria runs a daycare out of her home and makes tamales to sell at the restaurant where her husband works. The daycare fills her home with children; however, of the 10 children in her charge, Maria states that
only two families pay her. She dismisses this as a concern, claiming that if families are on such hard times that they cannot watch their children, then she can take care of them until things turn around for the families.

Maria attended school in a small town in Mexico, explaining that the schools in small towns only offered middle school, and if someone wanted to attend school beyond middle school, they would need transportation to the city. Her family did not have the money to send her to the city, so Maria attended school through middle school. She feels that her children’s experiences with school are much different from her own:

I feel the difference here, in the motivation, even in the kindergarten, with the flash cards. In Mexico, they don’t have that. I can see the difference here because in Mexico they will just have the children look at the book and see the pictures. Here, they explain what the book is about, and so forth.

Laritza was retained last year due to insufficient academic progress, so she is in the first grade again this year with a different teacher. Maria states that last year, Laritza was not learning anything, and she did not know what to do. She spoke with another parent, who gave Maria the phone number of a specialist. The specialist was more focused on behavior and attention deficits, so they only had one session. Since then, Maria feels that her daughter is doing better because she can finish the stories that are sent home. Maria does not feel that Laritza’s teacher is easy to communicate with, as she is “the teacher with not a happy face,” and that Laritza is sometimes afraid of her teacher:

Not all of the teachers are easy to talk to. Not with Laritza. I feel personally that I see the teacher with not a happy face, and that may be the way they are. Some students get used to a teacher like that, and some students are afraid of the teacher. Laritza hugs her kindergarten teacher, but not her teacher now. Sometimes kids feel bad about that teacher. The teachers have to be so strict, so they can learn. When she [Laritza] feels sick, she will not tell the teacher, because she is afraid of her. She will come home and tell me.
Isabel is in seventh grade, and has had some behavioral challenges with one of her four teachers. Maria gets phone calls regularly from this teacher describing what she views as Isabel’s disrespectful behavior towards the teacher. Maria shares that she speaks with Isabel daily and explains to her that she needs to listen to the teacher. Isabel promises each day that she will, but has regularly been in trouble in that class, refusing to turn in work for that class, and at the time of the initial interview, was not passing that class. Maria feels that she has a positive relationship with Isabel’s other teachers and with the school. She appreciates that she will get a call from the school about Isabel’s behavior before her daughter comes home, so she can have both sides of the story from which to approach the day’s disciplinary action.

Additionally, Maria says that she feels welcome at the school, that they have always treated her well and are helpful, they “always give me an answer.” She makes friends with the parents of her children’s friends and says she makes friends easily.

Regarding the purpose of schooling, Maria says it is to “be smart, to have respect.” She feels her role is to tell the children they need “to go to school and study, to be something in the end.” She is confident that all of her children will continue in school and have whatever career they want. One of her high school aged children stayed home a few days prior to the first interview, and she told him that even if he was not feeling well, if he stayed home, then he needed to help her around the house. He spent his “day off” cleaning and helping to care for the children in the daycare and later told his mother that he would rather go to school not feeling well than stay home and participate in the work his mother does. This is the point that Maria is trying to explain to her children through her encouragement to complete school, so they can choose a career path. While Maria
does not explain the type of career she wants for her children, she refers to her husband’s work as a “job,” but never as a “career.”

Maria participates in many of the events hosted by the school, especially the ones that her children give her invitations to attend or those her daughters tell her she “has to” attend. She attended the parent learning night, as well as the project night where science fair projects and long-term units were displayed throughout the school. Maria said that it is not difficult to attend these events if one of the older children is available to watch the younger children at the daycare. She feels that the school hosts events primarily during the day, which might not be convenient for parents who work during the day. Maria also believes that how the school communicates events influences whether or not families will attend:

If the flyers will say it is obligatory to attend, parents will come. If there is a conference and everybody is here and they are required to be here, they will make time to stop what we’re doing to be at the school. If it doesn’t say that, well, today I left the tamales and the kids, and I’m here!

Regarding parent-initiated contact with the teacher, Maria recently spoke with Isabel’s teacher to see how her daughter is doing. The teachers had placed Isabel in a different class to see if moving her to another class would be a positive influence on her behavior, and it has. She is now working with students who are working at a more accelerated pace than her former class, and Isabel seems to be flourishing in this environment. By the second interview, her behavior had improved so significantly that Isabel was invited to the middle school girls’ leadership camp the weekend before the interview. Maria feels that by incidental conversations with the teacher, she is able to have a more thorough perspective of how her children are faring in the classroom, as opposed to structured parent-teacher conferences twice a year or more formal meetings. She does have
concerns about whether or not these informal meetings will be allowed to continue, considering the school’s recent security measures that do not permit parents onto campus without prior approval and a visitor badge.

Maria admits to having a stronger connection to her children’s teachers who are Spanish speakers, as it is easier for her to stop by and check in with the teachers on the kids’ behavior in the classroom as opposed to scheduling a meeting where a translator is available. In most instances, Maria supports the teacher and directs her daughters to follow the teachers’ directions, whatever they may be. There was one instance Maria shared where she recalled directing her children to disobey the teacher, but for a reason about which she felt strongly:

I told Cindy that if the teacher does not let you use the rest room, just get up and go to the rest room, then go to the office! Sometimes, it would happen to kids because they are afraid to ask and say something. And it was more than one kid. But that was last year, and maybe the rules have changed. I understand how the teachers feel, because sometimes the kids ask to use the restroom, and they just wander around the school and don’t use the restroom. And because of them, the rules apply to everybody. That’s why I told Cindy to just get up and use the restroom, then go to the office. I don’t know if that’s good or bad, but that’s what I told her.

Maria stated that she knows her children, and she knows which of them are trying to push a teacher’s patience. With Isabel, she said she will typically side with the teacher, though she will listen to Isabel’s concerns. Regarding Laritza, she will listen for patterns of complaint and then talk to other parents to see if the concerns are shared. For Maria, physical presence at school and incidental interactions are the strongest ways for her to maintain a relationship with the teachers at school.
Natalie

Natalie is a Spanish-speaking mother of four who was recommended as a parent with below-average involvement. Three of her children attend Garden Elementary, Ruth in seventh grade, Joel in fifth grade, and Carolina in fourth grade. Her youngest attends a developmental preschool at another school campus in the district. She is a stay at home parent, explaining that her children have many medical needs, so she must be available for them. Her husband works, but she did not explain in what field. Natalie attended her first year of high school in Mexico and later moved to the United States as an adult.

She feels there are many differences between her own education in Mexico and that of her children in the U.S.:

I feel it’s a little bit different. I tell my daughter that the teachers are not the same. When I was going to school, some of the teachers hit me on my hands. They teach you the times tables in math, and you only had one day to learn them. And if you didn’t know them after that day, they would hit you with a ruler on your hand. And they would put you in a corner with donkey ears. I tell my daughter that they let you get away with so many things! In Mexico, if you don’t turn in your homework, the consequences were terrible. There were times when I wasn’t allowed to go to the restroom, and I had an accident. But the kids here in the U.S. don’t have any consequences. I feel that the kids need to know some consequences, but maybe not as harsh as what I had suffered when I went to school. I tell my child that when I was her age, I already knew all my times tables, and a lot of things that she doesn’t know now. And besides going to school, I had to go to work, and I had to wash my own uniform. And my child doesn’t know how to do any of that! Even if she doesn’t have to do that, she doesn’t even do her homework! I feel that kids here are being education differently, because in Mexico you learned in a different way. And in Mexico, if you don’t know the work, you don’t go onto the next grade. If I were the one working at the school, I wouldn’t pass these children onto the next grade. I would let them stay for 5 years in first grade until they know the work! My daughter said she wants to go to Mexico and go to school over there. And I tell her that she doesn’t have any idea what school is like there. Teachers here will give you a lot of chances to turn in your homework. Teachers there will tear up your incompleted work, or give you a failing grade for the work.
All four of Natalie’s children have medical needs. Ruth has migraines. Joel has an autism diagnosis, severe ADD, a bone disorder that Natalie calls “multiple bones” that causes him to lose his balance and fall over occasionally, and a condition she is unclear about, but a neurologist told her that “his brain is not connected properly to his body, that’s when he falls down.” Carolina also gets migraines and sometimes stares off when her teachers or family are talking to her (this condition is later diagnosed as epilepsy), and the preschool child has autism, is wheelchair-bound and non-verbal with a disability that requires cardiologist appointments and therapies. Natalie grew frustrated last year with Garden School, explaining that she kept bringing in papers from the doctors that said that Ruth needed to be tested for special education services and that Joel needed to be in a special education class, but the school psychologist kept “shutting the door in my face.” At this point last school year, Natalie withdrew her children and enrolled them in a nearby charter school instead. When she became concerned with her children not getting homework, and her son being offered drugs and electronic cigarettes at the charter school, she withdrew all of the kids and re-enrolled them at Garden Elementary a few months prior to our first interview.

Natalie explains her understanding of the purpose of education as being able to learn, to experience different things, and to share with others. Her role in her children’s education is to help them turn in assignments for school. She says that she needs to come to meetings and to come to the school whenever possible to support the teacher. Natalie does not completely agree with everything about the school. For example, she feels the children are assigned too much homework and that the math packets that are sent home in
Spanish are inaccurately translated, so she struggles with supporting her children at home with this work.

For Natalie, the parent-teacher conferences are events she will do her best to attend, but she prefers to attend events like the carnival, dancing, and traditional Mexican celebrations. Natalie stated that she has challenges attending events:

I haven’t participated this year because it’s only been 3 or 4 months since I came back. And I participate in the conferences, but I haven’t been able to participate in any other events because I have 2 children with autism and I have to take them to therapy so it’s difficult for me to attend. And sometimes the little one gets sick and has to stay in the hospital, and I stay with him. Before, I used to participate in more, but now I don’t even have time for myself.

Her children do not like to join her at the events at school, so for the most recent meeting, Natalie got lost in the school trying to find the classrooms where conferences were held. She asked Ruth to go with her, but “she never wants me to go with her because she is growing up, so it was difficult. I followed another child and he told me where to go.”

Natalie feels it is important to attend events at the school where she will learn about her children’s academic progress and that this is her responsibility as a mom.

The majority of Natalie’s interactions with school staff are initiated by Natalie, and these center around her children’s medical issues, sharing information from the doctors, and advocating for her children if she feels the homework is too much for them. Natalie speaks highly of the teachers. She likes all of her children’s teachers, but she feels frustrated regarding her interactions with the school psychologist, who she feels is not listening to her and is resisting providing what the doctor is telling her she needs to have in place for her children. Natalie gets several phone calls a week from Joel’s teacher regarding his behavior in the classroom, which can vary from getting up and walking around the classroom, to “exploding” and running out of the class. In some conversations,
Natalie says she is supporting the teacher, “he shouldn’t complain [about his teacher] that I’m always on the teacher’s side, that she needs to take care of him,” while at other points in our conversations she says that the teacher is impatient with him, “the teacher tells Jose in front of me that he needs to behave, but I tell him it is not really his fault. He has a problem. He had a few good teachers who understood him.” Explaining her outreach for support from the school principal, Mr. Orozco, Natalie shares:

I brought all the paperwork from the hospital and gave all the information to Mr. Orozco, but I didn’t hear anything back from him. I told Mr. Orozco that I was afraid when Joel first came back to school because the teacher complained that he was disrespectful to her. So we had a meeting with Mr. Orozco, I mentioned to Mr. Orozco that I am afraid when Joel comes back to school, if he’s not in a good mood or something happens and someone does something to him, he will just explode and Joel will do something to that student. I am letting you know because I am afraid that something like that happens, you will be calling the police. This has been going on since Joel has been in kindergarten. That teacher knew about this problem, and so did the other teachers as he went up in grade. This has been going on since then, and I had to talk to the principal, I had to talk to the teachers, I had to talk to the psychologist, and when he was in fourth grade, the teacher called me one day. Joel had “exploded” and the teacher said he needed a babysitter, and that I had to go there to babysit him, and things like that.

Natalie has established networks of support in the doctors, nurses, and therapists she sees frequently during her children’s appointments and also has found a confidante in the parent liaison at Garden School. When asked how she might interact with her children’s teachers for the next school year and in the future, she explains that she will do the same as she has always done to explain Joel’s behavior to his teachers and how he has “a problem,” so his behavior is not his fault. Natalie shares that no one believes her in how Joel is at home:

I don’t want the teachers to see Joel as a problem child. I told the psychologist that she doesn’t live in my house and she doesn’t know what I go through. I can’t even go visit my family with Joel because of the way he acts. Sometimes my sister babysits him and she’ll call and tell me to come pick him up because she can’t stand him because of the way he acts. Sometimes I take him for a trip
together, or sometimes alone, and sometimes she can't take him with them when they go out. Sometimes Ruth gets upset because Joel doesn’t behave in a public place and she is embarrassed. So the person who is helping him will take him to California and to other places, and that is good for him. I had a doctor’s appointment for Carolina yesterday, and I couldn’t come to see the project last night. So I told Joel that the lady is going to go with you because Carolina has a doctor’s appointment, so he was very happy to go. I guess he was happy at first, then he told the woman that he wanted to go home and didn’t want to be there anymore. So they stayed for a little while longer, then went home. The other day, they all went out to eat together, and he said he didn’t want to sit with the other people, and told the waitress that he didn’t like the food she brought them. It was so embarrassing! I told the psychologist that she doesn’t know what I go through. He’s just so difficult!

With the school psychologist retiring at the end of this school year, Natalie is hopeful that the new school psychologist will be more willing to cooperate with the doctor’s recommendations regarding Joel’s educational placement.

Natalie’s advice to parents of children just starting school is to “follow the rules of the school.” She explains that it is difficult to know what to do, since the expectations are different for parents in the United States than they are in Mexico, but that in order to interact with teachers well, they should “follow the rules.” Additional advice that Natalie did not explicitly state, but instead shared throughout our interactions, was that parents should fiercely advocate for their children, even if the first school personnel does not either listen or give the parents what they want. Despite several teachers and the school psychologist telling Natalie that her child did not qualify for a “smaller class” (i.e., self-contained special education classroom), Natalie was hearing conflicting guidance from her doctor, so she continued to ask for it.

**Summary**

These four focal parents all share similar levels of participation in school events, physical presence at the school, and child-centered involvement outside of school. Both
pairs of parents respond to school-initiated communication, both pairs attend mandatory meetings as well as some optional events hosted by the school. There are, however, significant similarities that Maria and Natalie share, and that Sonia and Yolanda share. Maria and Natalie both have children who have disciplinary referrals often, or receive phone calls from the school regarding their behavior. Maria explains that almost daily, she was receiving calls about Isabel’s behavior with one of her teachers, and Natalie regularly receives calls about Joel’s behavior or outbursts in class.

Sonia and Yolanda both demonstrated proactive behaviors to work alongside the teachers or school. Sonia began volunteering in Daniel’s kindergarten classroom following a teacher change at the start of the year to be able to discuss specific issues with Daniel at home. Yolanda meets monthly with the parent liaison to learn of and plan for upcoming events prior to flyers being sent home with her daughter.

It is possible that when asked for parent recommendations that teachers and school staff considered the behavior of the students. This possibility does not remain consistent for all of the other parent recommendations, as several of the parents recommended as having below-average involvement do not have children who have disciplinary issues. However it is a shared pattern between Natalie and Maria. Teachers and school staff may have the perception that a parent who has a child who fails to follow school rules or speaks in a way that the teacher finds disrespectful may have less physical or emotional involvement, otherwise the child’s behavior would change. Similarly, a teacher or school staff member might view a parent who does not have a child with disciplinary referrals as having more involvement, as behavior does not prohibit the teacher from teaching and the children from learning. From Maria’s account, she
reminded Isabel daily to behave in class and to be respectful toward her teacher, and it was not until a change in her schedule which led Isabel to joining a class of peers with similar ability levels that her behavior improved. This change had nothing to do with Maria, as she was informed about the class change after a teacher recommended it. If my speculation is accurate, that teachers are assuming parent involvement levels coincide with students’ behavior, then school staff views are that parents' involvement levels can be connected to the behavior of their children at school.

A less speculative connection might be between the parents recommended as having above-average involvement, and the proactive steps they took in making themselves more aware of the events and meetings at school. Yolanda wanted to arrange her work schedule around school events, so she sought out the events calendar before it was officially released. Sonia intended to be aware of the new classroom setting for her son, as well as any issues that might arise in Daniel’s new class, so she could speak to him about specific incidences at home and help to smooth the transition. Neither of these mothers were obligated to participate in this way, rather chose to in order to do what they felt would most help them help their children.
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

As stated in Chapter 1, this study looks at parents’ involvement with their child’s school over time and what factors help to shape that trajectory. Parents whose involvement with the school is visible (e.g., attending activities at school, interactions with the teacher that are both teacher-initiated and parent-initiated, incidental physical presence at school like dropping off a child in the morning) tend to be viewed by the school as having a higher level of involvement, whereas parents whose physical presence at school is more limited tend to be viewed by the school as having a lower level of involvement. This study did not address the relationship between parents’ physical presence at school and student achievement. Instead, I aimed to analyze how parents’ views of their roles in the school change or are developed through interactions with the teachers and school.

Findings

Much to my surprise, I found that there were no significant differences in the self-reported actions of the parents with below-average and above-average involvement regarding their children. Additionally, how the parents in each group view their role in their children’s educational life and advocate on behalf of their children is more similar than it is different. This goes against the common sense assumptions of educators, and introduces a different element to the conversation about what makes a parent-teacher relationship an effective one. Lareau (2000) suggests that higher socioeconomic status fosters a sense of entitlement among these parents, which translates into more economically advantaged families expecting that the school do more for their children. In her study, families with less economic advantages tended to have fewer expectations of
the school’s obligation to provide opportunities, and instead would accept the guidance and assistance that the school offered, but would not question the school’s authority to the same degree that high socioeconomic status parents would.

Meaningful relationships made between home and school would strengthen the connections between parents and teachers, and this was the case with several of the parents in my study. The parents who felt valued by their children’s teachers and felt that they were a critical part of their children’s education, chose to attend the voluntary, non child-specific events held by the school. However, lower parent involvement at school does not necessarily equate to lack of child involvement, nor a lack of advocacy on behalf of their children.

**Race/Ethnicity and Parent Involvement**

This study was not designed to address racial differences in parental involvement as all 10 participants are Latina. Three were born in the United States to Mexican parents, and seven were born in Mexico. While my goal was to include parents of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as both genders in the sample, and I intentionally attempted to include recommended parents with non-Latino backgrounds and fathers of any background, the parents that fit these descriptors were either unavailable to participate in the study or were not responsive to my requests. That said, the enrollment at Garden Elementary is nearly 90% Latino students, so the parent participants in this study represent a majority of the school population. Four of the 10 parents finished their schooling in the United States, with only Sonia having emigrated from Mexico during her school years.
One parent did offer address race explicitly during our interview. When Yolanda was explaining how she spends individual time with each of her daughters, she prefaced her explanation with a hedged apology to me, “A lot of people say, why do you want to do, I hope you don’t mind, what White people do?” She explained to me that she is not doing something “White,” instead that she is spending time with each individual child to communicate more directly with each and giving each one time to talk about the most important things in her life at that time. Yolanda brings up the topic of doing what White people do twice in our interviews around the same context of spending time with one child while the others are at home. Reluctant to ask her to clarify why she thinks this is a White construct for fear of a tangent about race instead of role construction regarding her daughters’ schooling (a topic I now regret that I didn’t pursue), I can only speculate about the meaning of her comments. One insight that could potentially illustrate Yolanda’s connection between class differences and race is the flexibility of her work schedule as compared to some of her friends who ask about her “acting White.” Yolanda is able to modify her schedule to coordinate with events at the school, a concept she and her friends might associate with being middle class and White.

Language and Parent Involvement

Four of the 10 parents who participated in this study were comfortable enough with their English fluency to communicate without a translator during our interviews. Two of the parents who communicated in Spanish understood enough English to respond to my questions which I asked in English without having the translator ask the question in Spanish, but felt more comfortable communicating their responses in Spanish. By making introductions in the admittedly broken Spanish I do speak, I got the impression parents
felt relaxed and that the formality of a conversation with recording devices and a notebook was relaxed somewhat. Additionally, because I revealed my own vulnerability as an educator and researcher who is herself acquiring a second language, I believe the parents were able to recognize my attempt at bridging the communication barrier and several thanked me for trying.

The translator was a familiar person to each of the parents, which was simultaneously beneficial and disadvantageous to the study. A benefit is that parents could speak candidly and most of the conversations took a casual tone almost immediately. A disadvantage, which I addressed following the first few incidences, that the translator initially summarized the parents’ responses in the translation to English during our interview. Once I explained the importance of hearing the parents’ views and recording exact sentiments, the translator became more intentional in stopping parents more often so she could translate more directly. I also addressed this at the start of each interview so parents knew to expect interruption for translation.

One point to note is that there was not a significant difference in the types of or amounts of involvement between English-speaking and the primarily Spanish-speaking parents in this study. The primarily Spanish-speaking parents often sought out Spanish-speaking teachers when possible, but all were able to communicate with their children’s teachers when needed, especially when the meeting had been arranged in advance and a translator was available.

**Social Class and Parent Involvement**

All but one of the parent participants live in the neighboring community of Garden Elementary, which has over 90% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch.
Yolanda lives nearby, but her neighborhood’s attendance area is assigned to another school in the district. The majority of the parents I interviewed worked outside of the home, and only three worked in an office setting with relatively flexible work schedules. Three parents attended some kind of schooling after high school, and one of those parents is currently working in an office setting. Five parents talked specifically about ensuring their children finish school and attend college or find a career. While none of the parents explicitly explained what kind of careers they want for their children, one said she did not want her children scrubbing toilets as a job, another explained that she “did not leave my family behind in Mexico so my kids could goof around and not finish school”, and two parents said that they wanted their kids to be better in their lives than the parents were.

Lareau (2000) found that middle-class parents were more likely to allocate supplementary resources for their children. While this study does not compare middle-class parents to working-class parents but instead looks exclusively at working-class parents, a number of the parents still mobilized the networks they have to support their children in school. Most of the parents mentioned another person they knew at the school, either the parent liaison, members of the office staff, a former teacher of another child, or of course, their child’s current teacher as people who could help their children. When Sonia felt her daughter’s needs were not being recognized and that helping her with work at home was not catching her daughter up, she mobilized the resources in her social network. When Yolanda needed enrichment work for her daughter, she returned to school until she received the extra work. Maria came to the school to speak with the office staff regularly about Isabel’s behavior and took phone calls from the teacher when she found Isabel’s behavior problematic. Natalie gathered information from doctors and therapists
to advocate that her children receive the special education accommodations that their
doctor was insistent they needed and met repeatedly with the school psychologist and
principal, despite their decisions that the academic accommodations the doctor
recommended were not appropriate for his condition.

The parents participating in this study, all working-class parents, did not have
endless resources or unlimited financial capacity to pay for services and networks outside
of the school at their disposal. They did, however, have patience, tenacity, and a few
school employees with whom they had connections that they used to advocate for their
children. Many of the parents of the Garden Elementary community have access to
technology to assist their children with homework online, but in the case of the parents in
this study, most relied on social networks, on connecting with people and asking
questions as a more effective and efficient way to support their children at school.

Following Lareau’s (2000) discovery that working-class parents viewed the
school as the keeper of information needed to help students progress in school, the
parents in this study did tend to defer to the school for guidance, until the parents’
intuition led them to question the teachers or school staff. In those instances, the parents
in this study diverged from the patterns documented by Lareau and questioned the
teachers and school staff. When decisions were made that the parents did not feel best
met the needs of their children, the parents asked questions. For example, when the
principal made a classroom change for a student and the parent did not understand why,
she made an appointment to meet with the principal to learn why.

Experiences that allow parents to feel validated in their quest for the most
appropriate and beneficial education for their children will help to bolster parents’
confidence to act similarly in the future, despite class-based socialization that might make them more deferential to school personnel.

**Networks**

Several parents activated the networks they held to benefit their children, using whatever connections they had developed. For example, at the end of our third interview at the school, Maria wanted to speak to the summer school teacher to see how Laritza was faring in the class, and if the teacher felt she was prepared for doing second grade work. Yolanda keeps in touch with her former high school teacher to get helpful information for her oldest daughter who is newly enlisted in the military. Natalie communicates with the medical professionals she sees regularly for guidance about each of her children. Sonia spoke to former teachers of her children to investigate other options for her daughter when she felt her daughter’s needs were not being met by the teacher. Additionally, a year after the interviews were complete, Sonia sought out my assistance with an application for her daughter’s attendance at a summer program for Latina teens offered by a local university. Five of the original 10 parents interviewed had, at some point, communicated with the school resource officer about a variety of issues including teens running away, truancy, drugs in the neighborhood, and providing temporary refuge for a child in a dangerous situation.

Prior to conducting this research, I had anticipated that parents with above-average involvement might assume a role of entitlement, in which they would take advantage of what they felt would better their child’s educational experience, regardless of whether or not the school was offering that support. An entitled parent might continue asking until she felt satisfied that she had received adequate intervention for her child.
Over the course of our interviews, it was clear that Natalie, a parent classified by teachers and staff members as having below-average involvement sought out additional assistance for her son equal to that of Sonia, a parent who was identified as having above-average involvement, for her daughter. I had also anticipated that parents with below-average involvement would be hesitant to ask the teacher for help, either from a place of disentitlement, or from simply not knowing that they have a right to ask for more. This was the case for Maria, who was not aware that moving Isabel’s classes was an option until her math teacher made the suggestion. Now that she is aware that this is something the school can do, however, it is possible that she may make a similar request for her other children should a personality clash occur between a teacher and one of her children in the future.

From the onset, it was not my belief that parents with below-average involvement cared less or that they intended to be less involved in their child’s education in any way. Rather I had anticipated that the disconnect came instead from the school having a certain set of silent expectations and that parents had a different understanding of their roles. While individual personalities certainly play a part in the different parents’ interactions with the school, when looking at patterns, parents’ sense of their role in their child’s education, a parent who feels they are a critical part of their child’s educational development will participate with a focused determination and tenacity until their child’s needs are met.

**Parents’ Role Construction**

Teachers and other school staff members tend to believe that they know the “right” kind of participation and that if parents participate in the way schools feel is best,
that parents would have an appropriate level and type of involvement. What is not often considered, however, is that parents also have unique skill sets when it comes to being involved in their child’s schooling. Teachers may know academic content and pedagogy, but parents know their children. As long as schools assume a superior stance to parents, they will be missing the goal of home-school interaction, which is to develop a truly cooperative relationship between parents and school, with the child being the beneficiary.

To capture parents’ role construction, I started by asking the parent participants to explain the purpose of education, then moved to questions about their role in that purpose. Some parents responded literally (i.e., to get my kids to school on time and make sure homework was turned in), while others explained the encouragement and motivation they provide for their children’s continued education. While I intentionally did not define the concept that researchers understand as role construction for parents, I was curious how they viewed themselves as participants in their children’s schooling.

All 10 of the parents initially interviewed described a sense of purpose in their children’s schooling. These purposes included getting their children to school on time, treating people with respect, reminding them to turn in assignments, doing internet searches to help their children with homework with which they needed assistance, supporting interests outside of the school setting, and encouraging them to continue in school to have control over their lives. The differences between who school staff viewed as having above-average involvement and those viewed as having below-average involvement shared characteristics in their parenting styles, their involvement with their children, and most importantly, the advocacy they demonstrated for their children.
The two parents who communicated most frequently with the school, not specifically with the child’s current teacher, but with other school staff (principal, school psychologist, children’s former teachers, reading specialist, instructional specialist, parent liaison), were Sonia (an above-average involved parent) and Natalie (a below-average involved parent). Displeased with Anahi’s teacher’s dismissal of a deficit in her daughter’s learning, Sonia communicated with several school staff members to see what other options were available. This resulted in supplementary classes for Anahi, continued support from the reading specialist, and evaluation for special education services.

Likewise, concerned that Joel’s needs were not being met appropriately, Natalie scheduled appointments at the school regularly with the school psychologist and principal to share Joel’s doctors’ and her concerns that his disabilities required more supports than Joel’s teachers were providing. Despite their initial classifications for this study, these two parents were equally vocal and active in their concerns and felt that without their advocacy, their children’s needs may not be met.

Yolanda and Maria are parents who attend meetings focused on their respective children, occasionally attend general events and meetings at the school, and are both at Garden Elementary on a regular basis. Both enjoy cooperative and mutually respectful relationships with their children’s teachers, but tend not to interfere with the decisions of the school. When Maria’s youngest daughter was feeling uncomfortable in a classroom with a teacher who Maria found unfriendly, Maria directed Laritza to be good and quiet and to do her work. When Yolanda’s youngest was receiving supplemental work above her grade level and the teacher was unable to support this additional learning, Yolanda worked with Susana and scored the work herself. While Yolanda focused her parental
attention on one child at a time, Maria is raising her children as a group, and her day care added 11 more children to the home where she was already raising her seven.

The actions and perceptions of the four parents in this study differed more by individual characteristics than by the category of staff-observed involvement. Each parent did what she felt was needed to help her children grow, academically and holistically. In certain instances, that meant speaking with another teacher on campus about what other options may be, communicating with members of their social networks outside of the school setting, or helping her child at home. In other cases, the parents insisted on a meeting with the teacher and principal, brought medical recommendations for evaluation, or became a physical presence in the classroom to support and guide change for her child. The two parents who were able to effect the most changes for their children, Sonia and Natalie, both admitted that they will be more integrated in the education of their children with future teachers. This school year has taught both of them that one decision from one educator is not necessarily the end of the line, and that, as parents actively involved in their children’s lives at school, their input is as valuable and necessary as any educators.

**Physical Presence at School**

The guidelines for parent selection mentioned attendance at academic events, but made no mention of physical presence at the school, so why does physical presence seem to have the impact to teachers that it does? Despite research that states that parent presence at school does not have the impact on achievement that some may think (Baker et al., 2016; Finn, 1998; Lee & Bowen, 2006), teachers continue to pay attention to this notion and certain assumptions about the level of involvement for a parent who is
physically present at the school (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Lareau, 2000; Simpson Baird, 2015).

It may be that for teachers, the informal interactions that occur between them and parents who are a regular presence at the school (e.g., incidental conversations for clarification on an assignment, upcoming changes to the school schedule, or sharing resources for a new concept that is challenging for the student) creates the perception that physical presence is an indicator of parent involvement and that parents that are less physically present are less involved. Though it is not impossible for these conversations to take place via email, phone, or with a formally organized meeting, such steps are not necessary when a parent is at school to pick up or drop off a child or volunteers in the office on a regular basis.

**Attendance at Events**

Of the 10 parents interviewed, all had attended parent-teacher conferences. Six attended parent learning nights, another group of six met with the principal at some point during the school year, and yet a different group of six parents spoke with their child’s teacher in person outside of parent-teacher conferences. Each of these groups had a combination of parents with above and below-average involvement. Three parents, all in the above-average involvement category, spoke with a teacher other than their child’s teacher. The categories of involvement showed no relationship with parents’ attendance at school events or activities at Garden. Parents with below-average involvement attended an average of five events, and above-average involved parents averaged six and a half events. Every connection opportunity (Table 2) was attended by at least one parent with
above-average involvement, and three of the five connections not made by parents with below-average involvement would not have directly impacted their child.

Table 2

*Available Home-school Connection Opportunities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Above-average involved parents in attendance</th>
<th>Below-average involved parents in attendance</th>
<th>“Straddler” parent in attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Conferences</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Parent learning night</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Met with principal</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Approached teacher in person</em></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Contacted school</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Contacted principal</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Field trip chaperone</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Spoke with a teacher other than child’s teacher</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Curriculum display night</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoke with parent liaison</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent connection meeting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnival</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent training meeting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-bullying breakfast</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates activities where topic was related to the parent’s child specifically
For the individual conferences, personalized invitations were sent to each parent, whereas when the school hosts a non-academic or general academic event, a generic flyer is sent home. It would be curious to see if more personalized invitations or if students explained to parents why their attendance is beneficial both to the parent and to the student resulted in a difference in attendance. According to Walker et al. (2011) and Anderson and Minke (2007), personalized invitations from teachers and those from students are more effective in initiating contact with parents than their generic flyers and might be an effective strategy for increasing attendance at school-based events. In addition to simply appearing more personalized, the parent may feel that if the school is specifically requesting their input and attendance, their partnership with the school is critical for their children’s benefit.

In regard to the ways that parents learned about the events, seven of the parents learned of the events from flyers that went home. Yolanda was the exception, a parent with above-average involvement, who goes to the school once a month and creates her personal calendar of events around the school’s events. She asks the parent liaison about upcoming events and writes them out so she can ensure her attendance at the parent meetings and academic and non-academic events.

**Home-Centered Involvement**

Parents are the first teachers of children. What parents teach their children is indicative of what the family values, where the parents place their priorities, and of the legacy the family wishes to leave. Of the 10 parents in the first round of interviews, five were focused on teaching their children respect and motivation (Yolanda and Sonia shared this focus). Two were focused on compliance with school rules (one of those
parents was Natalie), and three shared the goal of ensuring their children complete school so they can take care of themselves as adults (Maria had this focus).

The parents who valued respect and motivation spoke of the importance of school to help children become good people and members of society; one emphasized that she came to the United States, knowing that her life would be more difficult, so that her daughters could learn English and become whatever they believe they can be. Yolanda emphasized respect and that she wants her daughters to be “alert to their surroundings” and well enough prepared and educated to adapt to their situations as needed. Sonia explained that being respectful starts with respecting themselves, their elders, and others in the community. Four of these parents were recommended as parents with above-average involvement. Of the parents who emphasized teaching their children to be respectful and motivated, three emigrated to the United States in their teenage years or later, and the other two were second generation American citizens whose parents emigrated from Mexico. A courageous spirit and element of hopefulness is common among the immigrant community of Garden School.

Of the two parents who explained that they are teaching compliance to their children, one was the straddler parent, who was recommended both as a parent with above-average and with below-average involvement by two different school staff members. That parent explained that she wants her children to do their work and whatever is expected of them. It is interesting to note that this parent’s oldest child is attending an academically rigorous private high school supported by scholarships for which he applied. Natalie is the other parent who explained that at home, she is teaching her children that it is important to attend meetings at the school and to do the work that
their teachers ask them to do, even when she (as the parent) does not agree with the assignments. This compliance-based guidance highlights a non-confrontational disposition which the mothers prefer for their children, a direction with fewer obstacles. Interestingly, while Natalie guides her children toward the path of least resistance, her own story is peppered with obstacles, and she is tenacious in her pursuit of resources and support for her children.

The final group of parents explained that at home, they encourage their children to finish school. Of the three parents, two were recommended as having below-average involvement. One of the parent’s goals was for her children to finish school in the United States and to be able to stay here. As their mother, she promised to help them in any way she can. Another parent explained that she wants her children to “do good in school, so they can be whatever they want to be. I just motivate them to do good.” Maria was the third parent in this group, and at home, she was guiding her children to continue in school, so they can take care of themselves.

Each parent was adamant in her belief that she had a role to play in the education of her children. While the responses varied, all of the parents described their goals for their children and felt that what they were teaching their children at home was crucial to this goal.

**Child Involvement**

A concept that emerged from the data is one of child involvement. For this study, I define child involvement simply as a parent’s support of her child in any way that will benefit the child beyond their basic needs (food, shelter, clothing). Examples of child involvement are: maintaining records for continued enrollment at school (updating
immunization records, submitting annual emergency contact information, signing report cards), attending medical appointments, extra-curricular activities, support with homework or reading at home (this can range from directing children to complete homework assignments, to helping children with homework), discussing concerns (such as behavior challenges, academic progress or delay) with family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, or doctors, and attending activities or events that interest the child. Child involvement, as it emerged from this study, is the concept of parents’ initiating and participating in anything related to their children, both related to and unrelated to school. This is not directed by the school; there are no school policy and procedures that govern how parents focus time, attention, and resources to support their children.

Parent involvement, on the other hand, is a concept that has been defined, debated, and integrated into school policies for dozens of years. Much research surrounding parent involvement is focused on a school’s role in involving parents (Baker et al., 2016; Barone, 2011; Cassity & Harris, 2000; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Epstein, 1986; Lareau, 2000; Lopez et al., 2001; McNeal, 1999; Peña, 2000; Poza et al., 2014; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Simpson Baird, 2015; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Valdés, 1996). Both researchers and practitioners are interested in creating partnerships between home and school where both parents and school personnel would work together on equal footing around the goal of progress for the child. However, when “progress” is defined as increased academic achievement in school, the scales are unbalanced. The goal is clear, but is more heavily weighted to make the school the expert. The parents may want their children to be academically successful, but when teachers have the training and experience to teach academic content to students and are knowledgeable on the standards
on which students will be taught and evaluated, parents can support this goal, but are not equal partners in this effort. What parents can offer, however, is insight into the histories of their individual children. They know the type of teacher to which their children best respond, the learning with which they have struggled through the years, the subject(s) that interest the child, and issues going on with the child that may interfere with academic focus or attention. They have that continued knowledge of their child that the teacher does not, particularly at schools with high teacher and staff turnover.

Sonia took a job that would coordinate with the school schedules of her children, plans her day around their routines, and uses the resources the school has available to advocate for her children. When Daniel was moved from his starting kindergarten class, she sought out an explanation as to why. When concerned with his success in the classroom, she took time to volunteer in the classroom to support his transition. Anahi was not progressing at a rate that Sonia felt appropriate, and when the teacher told her not to be concerned, Sonia reached out to three other staff members to try to get the resources and support she felt her child needed. Her approach with her three children differs, as she recognizes what each of them needs and how each is most successful.

Yolanda exemplifies child involvement in her attention to each of her children as individuals. This is manifested in the time she spends with each child, getting to know them as individual people instead of as a collection of children, developing Susana’s interest with cake decorating, maintaining contact with her own former teacher who was in the military while her eldest daughter enlists in the Marines, and taking parenting classes that do not relate to the current ages of her children in case they might ever appear relevant to another parent. She supports the communications between her husband and
daughter who speak different languages, and refines how she and her husband respond to the differing needs of their daughters. When Yolanda did not feel their neighborhood school was offering sufficient programs and supporting families enough, she withdrew her daughters and enrolled them at Garden School, where she heard from other parents the programs were more plentiful and support more encompassing.

Maria’s child involvement is spread across her seven children, a son’s girlfriend whose home situation was unsafe, and the 10 children for whom she babysits during the day. She is at the school whenever she is called for disciplinary issues with Isabel to follow up on the incident before her daughter returns home for the day and continues to promote the importance of schooling to her children. Maria has opinions about Laritza’s teacher; she feels the teacher could be more friendly and happy, but this does not deter Maria from seeking out opportunities to help Laritza succeed academically. She enjoys a close relationship with the parent liaison at Garden School and has incidental discussions with office staff regularly. She attends the school events her daughters encourage her to attend, although she does not usually attend those that do not directly impact her children specifically. When asked how an interaction with a teacher might change, Maria’s response was “if a teacher would see Isabel in a different way, there would be a different reaction. I would not feel comfortable having a teacher who is not good for my child.” When Isabel was not listening to her teacher, and was getting in trouble regularly, Maria was following the school’s lead and encouraged Isabel daily to listen to her teacher and to be respectful. When another teacher recommended Isabel switch classes, Maria appreciated the suggestion, and noticed an improvement in her daughter. While Maria did not initiate this change, she did notice that a relatively simple change resulted in a drastic
change in her daughter’s attitude about school, toward her classes and studies, and a decrease in phone calls from the school regarding Isabel’s behavior.

Although Natalie was recommended as a parent with below-average parent involvement, she is highly child involved with her four children and their medical needs. While she is not attending parenting classes or chaperoning field trips, she is meeting with neurologists and occupational therapists for her children. She consults with professionals outside of the school with questions, does not hesitate to approach school staff when she feels her children’s needs are not being met, and advocates for her children regularly. Of the four parents in the study, Natalie seems to be the parent that is the most child involved, as she spends time exclusively organizing, coordinating, transporting, attending, and following up on appointments for her children. This is possibly attributable to the many medical needs of her children, but Natalie advocates for each of her children and for access to special education services and classroom accommodations more frequently than any of the 10 parents in this study.

**Intentional Disconnection**

Occasionally, despite the networks of resources that parents had developed, at times some parents avoided activating those resources. Two parents from the initial round of interviews, one of them Maria, were unhappy with or uncomfortable with their child’s teachers, but chose to avoid confrontation with the teacher, directing their children instead to remain calm and quiet until the end of the year. This avoidance was not because the parents did not have access to resources within their social networks, as each parent had employed a connection for another matter during the same school year. So, what causes a parent to reach out in one case, but not in the other? For Maria, it had not
occurred to her to confront Laritza’s teacher about her “unhappy face,” because she conceded that “some people are just like that.” The other parent felt her daughter’s teacher spoke to her in a rude way, so she limited her contact with the teacher to exclusively be during mandatory parent-teacher conferences, and instead communicated with the parent liaison about all other issues. It may be a personality tendency to prefer avoiding confrontation, or it may be intimidation, or lack of confidence. Or simply, the parents did not feel that an unsmiling face or a dismissive attitude was that big of a deal.

Maria’s attitude of generosity and inclusion with her family and daycare may be examples of an agreeable personality, and that she is not bothered by most things.

Sonia intentionally disconnected from larger school events when she stopped participating in parent learning meetings. She explained that she used to attend to learn more about how to support her children academically, but had grown weary of parents sharing anecdotal stories of their own struggles with the subject, or arriving tardy to the meeting so the teacher had to begin again with the content. Sonia explained that her time is valuable, so she did not want to attend a meeting that was supposed to have been led by the teacher, but became a forum for group discussion and reviewing information for late arrivers. Still interested in the content, Sonia set up meeting times with each of the teachers so she could learn the content one-on-one without having to endure the group setting she so disliked. At the time of our final interview, every teacher had been willing to meet with Sonia at a different time to review the content of the hour-long parent learning nights. Whether the teachers agreed to have an additional training with Sonia alone because they viewed her as a parent with above-average involvement or because they appreciated the support she provides the teachers and her children, or because they
simply liked her and did not mind the extra meeting time, cannot be definitively answered, only speculated upon.
CHAPTER 6: REFLECTION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUMMARY

This study is aimed at addressing a question I have had for many years of my professional life: a) how do parents view themselves in the relationship between home and school, and b) are the efforts that schools make helping to develop parents’ role construction as a partner or creating a compliant follower to be led by the school? In working with students, teachers, and families, I have implemented district initiatives intended to increase effective parent involvement, to involve parents in decision making, and to assure students, teachers, and parents that students’ success throughout their K-12 school careers relies upon teachers and parents working together toward that goal. Through the initiatives I have implemented, or have seen implemented professionally as well as personally with my own children, and the varying success of different programs and practices, I realized that aside from Likert item surveys that schools request parents to complete, parents’ opinions about parent involvement and what that entailed were not deeply considered. I propose a mindset shift away from the concept of parent involvement and toward child involvement. This section includes recommendations for practice, both for schools and teachers, as well as for future research.

There were no substantial differences in the behaviors of the parents with above-average and below-average involvement in this study. Some below-average involved parents acted more as advocates for their children in situations that required going against a teacher (communicating with the principal directly, seeking out information from another source), while some above-average involved parents trusted the school to make the “best decision” for the child, and did not question the choices of the school staff. Some parents with both above or below-average involvement—at least from the
perspective of teachers and school staff—remained stalwart in their efforts to find supports they felt would be most beneficial to their children, despite teacher push-back or disagreements.

These findings contradict the findings of some of the research on parent involvement that states that working-class parents do not allocate resources for their children in the same manner that middle-class parents do. It is possible that this is in part due to changes in parent practices since the initial studies were conducted (e.g. Lareau, 2000). While I only worked with parents in the working-class for this study, I learned that parents will activate whatever networks they have available in order to best support their children and the more connections parents have through the school, the better they will be able to navigate the educational system.

**Recommendations for Schools and Teachers**

Schools will continue to incorporate parent involvement strategies into their school policies and practices. However with a better understanding of how parents view their roles in the school, schools can be more strategic in the types of interactions they have with parents to increase parent partnership, foster ongoing communication, and value the input that parents have. The goal of this focus moves toward the concept of child involvement, which recognizes the parent as the constant partner in the child’s K-12 educational experience, and the teacher as the temporary (yet also critical) participant (Figure 2). With the child as the focus of Child Involvement, parents, teachers, and members of the social network around the child are all equal partners in the development of the child. Following the traditional “parent involvement” model, the teacher directs parents to support the child at home, therefore focusing efforts on home
supporting school. The left side of figure two provides a representation of the traditional model of parent involvement, while the figure on the right provides a representation of the child involvement model I propose, where the child is the focus, parents and teachers equally participate in the child’s learning.

Figure 2. Parent Involvement versus Child involvement.

**Child Involvement**

One possible strategy to increase child involvement is to empower parents to act as advocates for their children. Each of the focal parents in this study questioned or disagreed with a school decision when they felt it would benefit their children. Two of them did so only after having consulted with another teacher with whom they had an existing relationship or the parent liaison or office staff who essentially “gave the parent permission” to ask questions. Many parent involvement initiatives are directed toward the school sharing information with parents; however, what this study reveals is that
parents and teachers working together is an approach that will have a more lasting impact in helping parents advocate for their children in the future. While a large group parent learning night might help parents to learn how to best support their child with academic content, a parent perspective seminar as professional development for educators as well as for parents that would allow teachers to see parent involvement from the parents’ view. A parent with a strong sense of role construction and confidence in the home-school partnership will be a more effective and capable partner for all of her children through all their years in the K-12 educational system.

To build on this concept of helping parents feeling valued and integral to the educational process, teachers and administrators should engage in discussions with parents about the goals parents have for their children and how school as an institution can help support the parents in achieving that goal. Schools can keep portfolios on students with this information, so instead of having to introduce each year’s teacher to the goal, the teachers can instead check in with parents about progress that has been made, obstacles that have appeared, and together the partners can determine the next steps to help the student reach that goal. This will help teachers shift their perspective from primarily focusing on the academic year with the teacher as the child’s primary advocate, to a K-12 path with the parent as the primary advocate.

I propose three questions that teachers can ask at the start of a school year to learn more about the child, and to initiate a partnership which can allow parents to develop and maintain a stronger role construction:

1. What goals do you have for your child? What do you want him/her to be or do later in life?
2. Tell me about a positive school experience your child has had.

3. Tell me about a negative interaction or experience your child has had in school.

National parent advocacy groups offer sessions for parents of students receiving special education services on how to best advocate for their children, but not necessarily for general education students who are not receiving any additional supports. The latter could be conducted through annual meetings where school personnel other than classroom teachers introduce themselves to parents and explain what they do at the school, as well as what their roles are related to involving parents in the education of their children. Teachers conduct parent-teacher conferences and occasionally showcase nights, but supplemental staff such as reading interventionists, instructional specialists, and speech teachers are likely to hold positions that many parents do not understand. A brief explanation of what the staff member’s job responsibility is for students, teachers, and parents would provide parents more information about who is working with their children and the roles they play in the collective effort to helping their children succeed. Once parents understand who the players are in their children’s school, they will be better equipped to recognize the supports available for their children, and later, to question if those supports are being implemented effectively and meaningfully.

**Addressing Assumptions**

Teachers and school staff often make assumptions about parents, namely what the type and amount of their involvement means about the extent to which they support their children. By recognizing what the assumptions and biases are, and working to develop an individual relationship with all parents (like teachers do with all children), the home-
school connection is strengthened and the child benefits. An example of a bias is that a child with frequent disciplinary referrals does not have an “involved parent”, or that a child misbehaves because there is not support at home emphasizing the importance of focus at school. An example of an assumption is that a parent who does not attend school functions is uninterested in her child’s school life. When teachers make assumptions or do not address biases, they are projecting possibilities instead of uncovering truths.

Similar to the professional development many educators are receiving about trauma-informed instruction, professional development sessions that help teachers let go of the assumptions and biases that teachers hold about parents and parent involvement may be challenging and uncomfortable, but are necessary to make the significant change from parent-focused involvement to child-focused involvement practices.

**Beyond Belonging**

Schools should continue to provide opportunities for families to be invited onto campus for both mandatory and non-mandatory meetings, as they will allow teachers and parents to develop relationships based on mutual respect. When parents feel as welcomed to a school campus for short appearances as they are for planned events, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging to and ownership of the school and will be more willing to work as partners. For example, Luz, the parent in this study who came to the United States as an adult was unsure of how schooling worked in America. Following a teacher’s suggestion of volunteering in the classroom to learn what the school was about, she felt more informed of and confident about what her role could be in the school.

Essentially, home-school partnerships should allow for discussion and collaborative problem solving around children. When schools value the input that parents
offer, parents will advocate more strongly for their children; therefore, parents will seem more involved to teachers. Teachers notice parents with this increased involvement as being more “concerned parents,” and they consult the parents before making decisions on behalf of the children. This chain reaction will strengthen parents’ role construction for future school years, strengthen the support that teachers feel from home, and ideally, will have the effect of “increasing parent involvement,” an elusive goal for many schools, including Garden Elementary.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In this study, I defined for teachers and school staff what I meant by above-average and below-average involvement. If I were to conduct this study again, I would ask the teachers for clarification about why they chose particular parents for the above and below-average involvement categories. I provided guidelines for parent selection, but it is possible that outside forces or specific interactions affected the teachers’ selection more than the guiding questions. For example, if a teacher felt frustrated by a recent inability to contact a parent, or if the parent and teacher had a meeting that morning and the staff member felt the parent was exceptionally collaborative in her attempt to troubleshoot a current challenge, perhaps the staff member might have been calling upon this recent memory instead of looking across the range of her parents to make her selection on the recommendation form.

Some clarification that might be requested from teachers should this study be replicated, is to ask them to write a brief explanation about why they selected the parents they did. Another idea to consider is to interview a sample of teachers, asking them to explain how they view and would describe characteristics of an above-average and a
below-average involved parent. Additionally, one might ask teachers to explain some characteristic behaviors of an involved parent, the expectations the teachers feel parents have of their children, and their assumptions about parents’ beliefs and perceptions of involvement in the home-school partnership for both an above-average involved parent and a below-average involved parent.

Additionally, interesting insight into the parents’ sense of their role in their children’s schooling would come from following the focal parents through at least another year of school to see how they continued to negotiate their interactions with teachers and school staff.

**Limitations**

This study looked at one school in one school district in the southwest United States. Replicating this study might yield different results if conducted in other communities that include families of a wider range of socioeconomic statuses, families who are not recent immigrants, families whose primary language is the same as that of the teachers and school staff, and parents whose oldest children are only starting their K-12 schooling experience. Additionally, this study includes the voices of 10 parents, and only four over time, so the analysis is not generalizable to a larger sample or population.

As the primary researcher and at that time of the study, an employee at the school, it is possible that some of the parent participants responded with less candor due to my closeness to the school. While none shared this sentiment explicitly, I did get the impression that several of the parents wanted to answer my questions correctly, as one or two of the parents looked to the translator for validation after responding to certain
questions. Again, while not directly related to this study, it is possible that this validation may not have been sought if the translator and I were not familiar faces at the school.

**Summary**

As an educator at Garden Elementary for over a decade, I felt I had an understanding of why some parents seem to be more involved than others and why schools tend to focus on certain types of involvement practices over other types. As a parent who utilizes before and after-school child care, I analyzed my own involvement at my children’s school and realized that based on my own professional expectations and assumptions, I would likely classify myself as a parent with below-average involvement in regard to my physical presence at school. But I attend mandatory meetings at the school, occasionally some invitational events, help my children with their homework as needed, communicate with the teachers when needed, and encourage them to work hard and plan for a career. I wondered why, then, would my lack of physical presence at school chaperoning field trips and volunteering at the book fair make me less likely to be classified as an above-average involved parent? To answer this question, I sought to investigate how parents who are not educators view their own roles in their children’s education.

The purpose of this study was to determine how parents viewed themselves as partners in their children’s schooling, what they felt they contributed to their children’s educational growth, and the extent to which they felt empowered to respond to teachers and school staff when they disagreed with or questioned a decision or direction regarding their children. This study highlights how parents viewed themselves and their interactions with the school and how those self-views relate to how teachers view the parents. The
classification of parents with above-average and below-average involvement seems arbitrary when looking at parents’ involvement with their child both in and outside of the school setting. The parents in this study had primarily positive senses of their own purposeful roles in their children’s schooling, though most also underestimated the significance of how their actions benefitted their children. My study did not investigate possible reasons for this, though I could speculate that due to parent/teacher communication that was limited to how parents can support the school, parent influence went largely unrecognized by school staff.

To a beginning teacher, as with all teachers, I would share this: get to know the parents of your students. Parents will advocate for their children, either silently or publicly, though some do not know how they can support their children as students most fully. Educators have the privilege of connecting with and advocating for students daily. But as with any partnership, it is only as strong as the team together. Teachers, administrators, and school support staff have the unique opportunity to empower the people who will be the loudest and most consistent advocates in the children’s lives, their parents.
References


APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
EXEMPTION GRANTED

Jeanne Powers
Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe
480/965-0841
jeanne.powers@asu.edu

Dear Jeanne Powers:

On 3/6/2014 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>Understanding the parent in parent involvement: A case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>Jeanne Powers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>STUDY00000575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant Title:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant ID:</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Documents Reviewed:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consent letter.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quirk HRP 503a, Category: IRB Protocol;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview questions.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment script.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Participant Recommendation, Category: Recruitment Materials;</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 3/6/2014.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator

cc: Jennifer Quirk
    Jennifer Quirk
APPENDIX B

PROTOCOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION
Protocol for Selecting Parents

Teachers,

Thank you for taking the time to help me identify parents of your students. I would like you to identify two parents: one that you would consider to have above-average involvement, and the other, below-average involvement. I am not looking for your most involved parent, nor the parent who is nearly impossible to contact.

Here is what I mean by above-average involvement –

- Does the parent participate in most school events (e.g. carnival, assemblies)?
- Does the parent mostly respond to your requests for his/her child (e.g. parent-teacher conferences, phone calls/emails)?
- To the best of your knowledge, does the parent mostly support their child at home (e.g. a place/routine to do homework, homework help when applicable, talking about school at home, estimating at the grocery store, etc.)?

Parent Name __________________________________________

Student Name ______________________________________________________

Do you know if this child has siblings at Garden? Do you know what grades they are in/who the other teachers are?

___________________________________________________________________

Does the parent speak English? ______________

Here is what I mean by below-average involvement-
• Does the parent participate in school events or individualized meetings, but doesn’t follow up on requests?

• Is communication with the parent sometimes a challenge, as calls/emails are not returned promptly (but perhaps eventually)?

• To the best of your knowledge, does the parent attempt to support their child at home, but inconsistently (e.g. a homework calendar might be signed for the whole week on Monday, homework is often incomplete, you question whether the parent views homework as a priority)?

Parent Name __________________________________________

Student Name ____________________________________________

Do you know if this child has siblings at [blank]? Do you know what grades/who the other teachers are?

___________________________________________________________________

Does the parent speak English? ____________

Thank you for your assistance!
Protocol for Selecting Parents

Dear staff,

Thank you for taking the time to help me identify parents in our school community. I would like you to identify two parents. One, you would consider to have above-average involvement, the other, below-average involvement. I am not looking for the most involved parent, nor the parent who is nearly impossible to contact.

Here is what I mean by above-average involvement –

- Does the parent participate in most school events (e.g. carnival, assemblies)?
- Does the parent mostly respond to teacher requests for his/her child (e.g. parent-teacher conferences, phone calls/emails)?
- To the best of your knowledge, does the parent mostly support their child at home (e.g. a place/routine to do homework, homework help when applicable, reads to the child, and/or talks about school at home)?

Parent Name __________________________________________

Student Name ___________________________________________

Do you know if this child has siblings at Garden? Do you know what grades/who the other teachers are?

_____________________________________________________

Does the parent speak English? ________________
Here is what I mean by below-average involvement:

- Does the parent participate in school events or individualized meetings, but you sense a lack of commitment or follow-through?

- Is parent communication with the teacher not a priority, as phone numbers are not updated to the school, or home visits are necessary for the teacher to communicate with parents?

- To the best of your knowledge, does the parent attempt to support their child at home, but inconsistently?

Parent Name ______________________________________________________

Student Name ______________________________________________________

Do you know if this child has siblings at Garden? Do you know what grades/who the other teachers are?

________________________________________________________

Does the parent speak English? _____________

Thank you for your assistance!
APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT FORMS
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT (teachers/classified staff)

Study Title: Understanding the Parent in Parent Involvement: A Case Study

My name is Jennifer Quirk. I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Jeanne Powers in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand parent interactions with their child’s teacher and school.

I am recruiting parents who teachers and selected classified staff members have identified as having above-average and below-average involvement. What I am asking of you is to complete this parent recommendation questionnaire. There are guidelines about the selection of parents in both of these categories. From your recommendations, I will invite ten parents to participate in one interview once, and four to five of those will be invited to a second and third interview.

The interviews will take no additional time for you, and will not interrupt your instructional time. Upon completion of the parent recommendation form, your participation is complete.

Your responses on the recommendation sheet will remain anonymous, and you will not be identified in any of the research results.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please email me at jennifer.quirk2@gmail.com

By completing and submitting the parent referral form, you agree to participate in this study.
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT (parents)

Study Title: Understanding the Parent in Parent Involvement: A Case Study

My name is Jennifer Quirk. I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Jeanne Powers in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand parent interactions with their child’s teacher and school.

I am recruiting ten parents who have been recommended by selected school employees. All ten participants will be interviewed once, and four to five will be asked to be interviewed a second and third time.

The first interview will take approximately one and a half hours of your time, and if selected for the second and third interviews, each of those will take approximately one hour. The interviews will take place either at school or at your home, depending on your convenience, and the time will also be at your convenience. If you decide to participate, you will receive a $10 gift card after the first interview, and if selected for the follow-up interviews, a $25 gift card after the third interview.

I will have a Spanish language translator with me if that is needed. With your permission, the interviews will be digitally recorded so what you say can be transcribed into written form.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please email me at jennifer.quirk2@gmail.com
APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORMS
Parent Consent Form

Study name: Understanding the parent in parent involvement: A case study

My name is Jennifer Quirk. I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Jeanne Powers, PhD., in the Mary Lou Fulton College of Education at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study because I am trying to learn more about what you do to support your child’s learning and parent involvement in elementary school. I want to learn about your interactions with your child/children’s teacher(s).

I am inviting your participation, which will involve at least one, but not more than three interviews. The first interview will take approximately 1.5 hours, and if you are selected for, and agree to the second and third interview, each of those will take about one hour. I will have a translator if one is needed. I will ask you questions about your beliefs about education, how you feel about events at the school, interactions with your child’s teacher, and the people who help you make decisions about your child’s education. You do not have to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable answering, and may stop participation at any time.

If you decide to participate, you will receive a $10 Target gift card as compensation for your time, after the interview is complete. If you are selected and participate in the follow-up interviews, you will receive a $25 Target gift card after the third interview is complete.
Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time, there is no penalty. Participation in this study does not impact your child’s grade in any way.

Although there is no direct benefit to you, possible benefits to other parents are that teachers may better understand what parents think of their interactions with teachers, and schools can work to strengthen parent-teacher relationships to better help children be successful in school. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your responses will be confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

I would like to digitally record our conversation, and I may take notes during our conversation. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be recorded; you can also change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. After the interview, the recordings will be written down, word for word. After my study is done, the recordings will be deleted. Electronic copies of the transcripts will be stored and password protected. When the study is completed, these transcripts will be deleted.

If you decide to be in the study, I will not tell anyone else how you respond as part of the study. No one will know about your feelings or understandings of your interactions with your child’s teacher.
If you have questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at:

Principal Investigator: Dr. Jeanne Powers, Associate Professor, Mary Lou Fulton Teacher’s College

Co-Investigator: Jennifer Quirk, Doctoral Candidate, Mary Lou Fulton Teacher’s College, DELTA Doctoral Program

If you have questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk; you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at [contact information redacted].

Please let me know if you would like to participate in this study.
Forma de Consentimiento para Padres

Nombre del estudio: Entender a los padres en el involucramiento de padres: Caso de estudio

Mi nombre es Jennifer Quirk. Soy una estudiante graduada bajo la dirección de la Profesora Jeanne Powers, PhD, en el Mary Lou Fulton Colegio de Educación en la Universidad de Arizona. Estoy conduciendo una investigación de estudio porque estoy tratando de aprender mas acerca del involucramiento de padres en la escuela primaria. Quiero aprender acerca de la interacción entre el maestro y su hijo(s).

Estoy haciéndole una invitación a participar, el cual estaría involucrada al menos una, pero no mas de tres entrevistas. La primera entrevista tomará aproximadamente una hora y media (1.5) y si usted es seleccionado, y esta de acuerdo para una segunda y tercera entrevista, cada una de estas tomarán como una hora. Tendría un traductor si fuera necesario. Le haría preguntas acerca de sus creencias acerca de la educación, como se siente usted acerca de los eventos en la escuela, interacción con los maestros de sus hijos y de las personas que le han ayudado a tomar decisiones en la educación de sus hijos. Usted no tiene que responder ninguna pregunta con la cual no se sienta confortable, y puede dejar de participar en cualquier momento.

Si usted decide participar, usted recibirá una tarjeta de regalo de $10 del Target como compensación por su tiempo después de que la entrevista sea completada. Si usted es
seleccionado y participa en las siguientes entrevistas, usted recibirá una tarjeta de regalo de $25 del Target después de la tercera entrevista.

Su participación en este estudio es voluntario. Si usted decide no participar o decide salir de el no hay ninguna penalidad. Su participación en este estudio no impactara las calificaciones de su hijo(a) en ninguna forma.

Aunque no hay ningún beneficio directo para usted, posibles beneficios para otros padres sería, que los maestros tengan mejor entendimiento a lo que piensan los padres de la interacción con los maestros(a), y las escuelas puedan trabajar en reforzar la relación padres/maestros y así ayudar a que los niños tengan éxito en la escuela. No hay riesgos posibles o malentendidos por su participación.

Sus respuestas serán confidenciales. Los resultados de este estudio podríad ser usado en reportes, presentaciones, o publicaciones pero su nombre no será usado.

Me gustaría grabar digitalmente nuestra conversación y tal vez tomar notas durante nuestra conversación.

La entrevista no será grabada sin su autorización. Por favor hágame saber si no quiere que se grabe la entrevista; usted también puede cambiar de opinión después de que de inicio la entrevista, solo me lo tiene que hacer saber. Después de la entrevista, lo que se grabo será escrito palabra por palabra. Después de que termine mi estudio, las grabaciones serán destruidas. Copias electrónicas de las escritos serán guardadas y
protegidas con contraseña. Cuando el estudio sea completado, estos escritos serán destruidos.

Si usted decide participar en este estudio, yo no compartiré con nadie sus respuestas como parte de este estudio. Nadie sabrá sus sentimientos o su entendimiento de interacción con el maestro(a) de su hijo.

Si usted tiene preguntas con respecto a este estudio, favor de contactar al el equipo de investigación a: Investigador Principal: Dr. Jeanne Powers, Profesor Asociado, Mary Lou Fulton Colegio de Maestros
Co-investigator: Jennifer Quirk, Candidata Doctoral, Mary Lou Colegio de Maestros, DELTA Programa Doctoral

Si usted tiene preguntas acerca de sus derechos como sujeto/participante es este estudio o si usted siente que la han puesto en riesgo; usted puede contactar al Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, a traves de la oficina de ASU de Investigación de Aseguramiento e Integridad al tel.  

Por favor hágame saber si a usted le gustaría participar en este estudio.
APPENDIX E

PROTOCOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION
Interview Protocol

This interview protocol is based on Creswell’s (2009) description of suggested interview components. All interviews will be digitally recorded, and I will take notes by hand to capture additional observations or reactions. All digital recordings will be deleted upon completion of the study.

Date/ Time       Location       Interviewee

Introduction

Questions       Notes on Responses

Concluding statement

Thank you
APPENDIX F

PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWS
Interview Session #1 (10 parents)

I. Introduction

1. How many children do you have, and in what grades are they?
2. How long have your children attended [blank]?

II. Education

3. Tell me about your educational background. Were your school experiences similar to your child’s? If so how? How were they different? (If not in school) Do you see yourself going back to school for any reason? Why or why not?
4. Tell me about your goals for your child’s education. Why? How does education fit into the future you envision for your child?
5. How will you help your child reach those goals?
6. What is something important to you that you are teaching your child at home?

III. Accessibility

7. Tell me about school events have you participated in this year. What are some other events that you have attended?
8. How did you learn about that/those event(s)?
9. Why did you attend these events?
10. Was it easy to attend the event? Was there anything that made it difficult to attend?
11. Tell me what you thought about that event. (If parent did not attend), why did you not attend? Did you want to attend? What would help you attend school events?

IV. Relationship with teacher/school

12. Tell me about a typical week. How often do you go to your child’s school? What do you do when you go there? How long do you stay? Who do you talk to?

13. Tell me about a recent conversation with your child’s teacher. When was it? Who started the conversation? What did you talk about? Do you talk to your child’s teacher often? Why or why not? Have you ever talked with your child’s teacher outside of school?

14. How do you feel about communicating with your child’s teacher? Is the teacher an easy person to communicate with, about your child? How?

15. What have your child’s teachers asked you to tell them about your child?

16. Do you feel welcomed at Gateway? Why or why not?

17. What is something that you feel Gateway does well for parents?

18. What could Gateway do to get more parents involved?

V. Networks

19. Who do you talk to when you are having a question or a concern with a situation about your child’s school?
20. Where did you meet this person? (e.g. parent of child’s friend, met at a
meeting).

21. Tell me about a time when you talked with someone outside of your home
about a situation at your child’s school.
Interview Session #2, 4 parents

I. Accessibility

1. I’d like to look back at some of the questions I asked you last time, to see if your responses are the same or have changed.

2. Tell me about a typical week now. How often do you go to your child’s school? What do you do when you go there? How long do you stay? Who do you talk to?

3. What events have you attended since we last spoke? Why did you attend? What did you do at the event/meeting? Did you enjoy the event?

II. Relationships

4. When was the last time you talked to __________’s teacher? What did you talk about? How do you feel the conversation went? Is there anything you would have like to talk about more?

5. Tell me about your relationship with this child’s teacher? How do you feel when you talk to her?

6. Tell me about some of the other relationships you have had with other teachers. Is your relationship with your child’s teacher this year similar or different?

7. What is the best kind of relationship a parent can have with a teacher?

8. Is there anything that would make you change how you interact with your child’s teacher?
III. Networks

9. Last time we spoke, you said that you talk to _____ when you have a school-related issue or concern. Have you spoken with him/her since we last talked?

What did you talk about?

10. Do people ever come to you for help with their child’s school or teacher?

How do you know them, and what did you help them with?
Questions at the second follow-up interview (Session #3) will be:

I. Accessibility

  1. When we last met, you told me __________.

     Tell me about a typical week now. How often do you go to your child’s school? What do you do when you go there? How long do you stay? Who do you talk to?

II. Relationships

  2. Last time we spoke, you had spoken to your child’s teacher about ________.

     Have you talked to her since? What did you talk about? How do you feel the conversations went?

  3. Think back to the beginning of the year when you first met this teacher. Has your relationship with this teacher changed since then? If so, why?

  4. How did your relationship with your child’s teacher affect how you think about your child’s school?

  5. Is there anything you have learned from meeting with ______’s teacher that has changed how you interact with other teachers?

  6. How do you feel about meeting your child’s new teacher in July? Will you do anything different next year?

  7. What would you want to tell teachers, that you think they should know about parents and the children that attend this school?
III. Networks

8. Last time we spoke, you said that you talk to _____ when you have a school-related issue or concern. Have you spoken with him/her since we last talked? What did you talk about?

9. Last time we spoke, you said that people come for help with their children’s school or teacher. Have you talked with them since we last spoke? What did you talk about?

10. What advice would you give a parent with kids just starting school? What should they know that you wish someone had told you about interacting with teachers?

11. Is there anything about being a parent of a student at [Gateway] that you think I should know, that we have not discussed?
## Overview of All Parents

*Indicates parent selected for additional interviews

**Above-average- AA  Below-average- BA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Involvement Category **</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Level &amp; country of schooling completed</th>
<th>Purpose of education</th>
<th>Parent’s main role(s) in child’s schooling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luz</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6th grade, Mexico</td>
<td>To learn personally, the English language, and to go forward in their education</td>
<td>To push them to finish school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yadira</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6th grade, Mexico</td>
<td>To show kids how to show respect to others, other students, to their older (sic)</td>
<td>To believe in them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vocational school, Mexico</td>
<td>Support, emotional and physical</td>
<td>Support my kids above all else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Yolanda</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11th grade, U.S.</td>
<td>Prepares you for the future</td>
<td>To make sure they get enough sleep, to prepare them for testing at school, to be healthy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Sonia</td>
<td>AA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Graduated high school, U.S.</td>
<td>Family education, the way they grow up; what they need to learn to be someone in life</td>
<td>To make sure they are safe, that they do their homework, and to encourage them to ask questions in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Involvement Category</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Number of Children</td>
<td>Level &amp; country of schooling completed</td>
<td>Purpose of education</td>
<td>Parent’s main role(s) in child’s schooling</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karina</td>
<td>AA &amp; BA</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vocational school, Mexico</td>
<td>To get a good education, and for them to progress. I don’t want them to be working like me. I want them to have a career</td>
<td>To talk to them and make sure they have a career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Business college after high school, U.S.</td>
<td>To prepare them for when they’re out in the world. Get a good job and do whatever they like</td>
<td>To motivate them to go to college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Maria</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8th grade, Mexico</td>
<td>To be smart, to have respect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Natalie</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9th grade, Mexico</td>
<td>For the children to learn, to experience certain things in their work. To share with other people</td>
<td>To help them turn in work for school, to come to the meetings and once in a while support the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iliana</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11th grade, U.S.</td>
<td>Having my children learn</td>
<td>To help them to learn and do better in school with their homework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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