

**THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER IN FAMILY  
INVOLVEMENT AS IDENTIFIED BY FAMILY SPECIALISTS AND  
PARENTS IN SELECTED TITLE I SCHOOLS IN NORTH EAST  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

A Record of Study

by

GLORIA LOU CANADA

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

December 2007

Major Subject: Educational Administration

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## ABSTRACT

The Role of the School Social Worker in Family Involvement as Identified by Family Specialists and Parents in Selected Title I Schools in the North East Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas. (December 2007)

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This study examined the influence of social workers placed at the elementary school level, who work with low-socioeconomic families. The intent of the study was to examine the role of the social worker, at identified Title I elementary schools, on parent involvement.

Research Question 1 asked, “What influence do the family specialists have in family involvement as reported by parents and family specialists at the identified Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?” The results of this study strongly support that the family specialist on the campus did have a positive influence on parents getting involved at their child’s school. Research Question 2 asked, “What selected variables influence parental involvement as reported by parents and family specialists, who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?” The results of this study strongly supported that the variables of open communication between home and school and the school being inviting to parents are positive factors in

getting parents involved. Research Question 3 asked, “What influence do community agencies have in assisting with the needs of families, as reported on the end-of-year summary sheets by the family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?” The results of this study showed that data procedures were inconsistent among the family specialists in the North East ISD. Data concerning the use of social service agencies was incomplete. No standard procedures are in place for tracking services provided to families. Research Question 4 asked, “What influence do parents have on determining the classes set forth for the Parent Academy, as reported by the parents and family specialists who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary campuses in the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas?” The results of this study strongly suggested that both parents and family specialists feel the parents have a voice in choosing the classes provided for them by the family specialists.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In a time of changing family demographics, an increasingly demanding workplace and growing student diversity, the school needs additional resources (Epstein, 1995; Melaville, 1998; Waddock, 1995) Schools in both urban and rural settings are being overwhelmed by the emotional and social needs of the children they serve who are being raised in poverty. The research identifies the need for a position, such as a social worker, to be available at schools to work with minority, low-income families. These “family specialists” are then able to address the particular needs of the students and their families.

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) holds as number one on their list of keys to success, for school districts which are implementing family involvement policies, as the hiring and training of a family liaison. This person is responsible for directly contacting families and coordinates activities between the school and the parents.

Family involvement is essential in assisting potential academic growth in student achievement. Barton (2004) points to eight factors that correlate to student achievement. Three of these factors are parent availability, student mobility, and parent participation. Barton believes the achievement gap by race, ethnicity, and

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The style and format for this record of study follow that of the *Journal of Educational Research*.

income mirror inequalities in those aspects of schooling, early life, and home circumstances that research has linked to school achievement. Reaching out to parents to eliminate this achievement gap, support must be provided through interaction with parents.

A survey conducted by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in 1990 identified seven essential elements of family involvement programs. Two of the most important were found to be (1) written policies and (2) administrative support for family involvement. A written school policy clarifies the definition of family involvement and provides guidelines in an environment where the informal norms of the school may be resistant to change. A strong policy requires support for developing, implementing and maintaining parent and family involvement Chavkin (2000).

Although both the parents and teachers want what is best for the child, often parents and teachers seem to be on opposite sides. Research leans toward relegating the parents to the role of visitors at the school. School newsletters and workshops create more interaction between the school and home, but do not provide parents with a real voice and therefore Fine (1993) finds this continues to keep parents in the role of school visitors. Miretzky (2004) recognizes the importance of open communication between parents and school. The imbalances of the parent-school relationship are revealed through literature. Research tends to assign to the teacher the responsibility to be pro-active in meeting the parents and adapting to or accepting the parental limitations found (Thorne, 1993).

While school systems may mandate parent-teacher involvement, it is easy for teachers to ignore if they are uncomfortable or unwilling with the directive (Anders & Richardson, 1994; Guskey, 1995). A family specialist/social worker would be instrumental in developing staff development for faculty and parents geared at bridging the gap between the school and the families they serve.

Findings in numerous studies indicate that positive parental involvement is a common characteristic among students who are successful in school (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004). The school's attempt to communicate openly with all parents and provide academic as well as emotional support for the family builds trust and a sense of belonging. The National PTA states that engaging families in their child's education is more effective than any other educational reform.

Administrators must find means to convey the positive impact parental involvement plays in the academic success of the children. Schools are a natural partnership in this venue of socializing children, by teaching and shaping positive behaviors (Walker & Severson, 2002). A commitment must be made by teachers and administrators for this long-term investment. The trust of the parents and the overall feeling of community in the school will provide a positive impact on the school, the parents and the students.

In developing a parent program to encourage parent participation in their children's education and to develop a parent's desire for their own continued education, school districts need a program designed to enhance the relationship between the schools and the families which they serve. One principle message that should be communicated to minority parents is the school's sincere belief that parent

involvement is of major importance to every student's success in school (Chavkin & Garza-Lubeck, 1990).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In developing a school culture to encourage parent involvement at Title I schools and encourage continued education for parents in low socio-economic areas, Title I schools need educators/social workers whose primary focus is to address the needs of its families. Parents often feel left out of the decision-making process and struggle to find their rightful role in schools (Fege, 2000). The family specialists promote parent participation, identify family needs and develop more parent centered schools. This is especially relevant at schools located in low-socioeconomic areas. Family Specialists work to fulfill the role of both educator and social worker. Comer (1998) suggested the value in what a school social worker contributes to the school's population is becoming a need in society rather than a luxury. Effective schools show high degrees of home involvement and work hard to reach out to parents. (Lopez, 2004).

There is a serious lack of parental involvement in schools which serve the low-income population. School social workers can facilitate parent involvement in their traditional roles as mediators between home and school, in their preventive roles as trainers, resource developers, family educators and consultants and advocates. School social workers can make a distinct contribution to the effective schools movement, particularly in the education of poor and minority pupils. Home visits and personal interactions between parents and school personnel make the school personnel aware of the survival needs of low income families.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the school social worker as it pertains to family involvement at selected Title I elementary campuses in the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas. The study identified the roles of the family specialist as reported by the family specialist and the parents who are participants of the Parent Academy programs at these selected schools. In addition, this study identified the degree of input parents have on determining the classes provided for them by the family specialists. This study also identified selected variables and their impact on parent involvement at the selected school campuses. Additionally, this study identified the contributions of community social services used by the family specialists at the selected campuses as reported by the family specialists and parents.

### **Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What influence do the family specialists have in family involvement as reported by parents and family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?
2. What selected variables influence parental involvement as reported by parents and family specialists who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary schools in North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?
3. What influence do community agencies have in assisting with the needs of families, as reported on the end-of-year summary sheets by the family

specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?

4. What influence do parents have on determining the classes set forth for the Parent Academy, as reported by the family specialists and parents who are participants of the Parent Academy, at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?

### **Operational Definitions**

The findings of this study were reviewed within the context of the following definitions of operational terminology.

**Community Agencies**—Organizations in the community of San Antonio, Texas which provide assistance to families in the areas of food, clothing, shelter, bill payment, child care, adult education, job opportunities and general health and welfare.

**End of Year Summary Sheets**—Paperwork completed by the family specialist at the end of the school year defining the opportunities they provided for the parents on their campus. The summary sheets are also an overview of social services which have been contacted and used by the family specialist to provide assistance and information for the families on their particular campus.

**Family Specialist**—A family specialist in North East ISD must have a teaching or counseling degree, is required to speak Spanish and have at least four years experience in education, social work, or a related field. The goal of a family specialist is to build communication with parents, staff and community in order to assist



families who are experiencing barriers to success and to build parent capacity to participate effectively in school activities. They provide services such as directing families to community food and clothing banks, shelters, assist in parent conferences, do home visits.

**Family Involvement**—The extent in which the parents, step-parents, grandparents, foster parents, and other adult relatives or guardians of the students enrolled at the identified Title I campuses participate in school sponsored activities and work with their children on school related assignments. Family involvement includes parent attendance at conferences and communication with teachers through notes and phone calls, attendance at school functions and volunteering on campus. Parent involvement also includes spending time reading to your child at home, helping your child with homework, providing a positive role model for their children and ensuring their child's emotional and physical health and well-being is cared for.

**Impact**—The impact of the community agencies include providing financial assistance, providing training in academic areas, providing training to enter the workforce as well as providing clothing, food and shelter for families.

**North East Independent School District**—NEISD encompasses approximately 140 square miles located in the north central and northeast areas of Bexar County, Texas. The district contains six high schools, 12 middle schools (3 of which are Title I), and 43 elementary schools (17 which are Title I). Approximately 60,000 students are currently enrolled. The majority of the district lies within the boundaries of the city of San Antonio, but several smaller communities are also included in the

district's attendance area. NEISD is the eighth largest school district in the state of Texas.

**Parents**—Parents of the children in this study include biological parents, step-parents, grandparents, foster parents and legal guardians involved in the raising of the child.

**Parent Academy**—The Parent Academy is a program offered to parents at Title I elementary and middle schools in NEISD. The program consists of 10 one-hour long classes taught to the parents by the family specialist throughout the school year. Occasionally teachers from the various campuses also volunteer to teach one of these classes for parents. Topics range from basic math and reading skills to methods in discipline and behavior management. Attendance will earn participants continuing education credits through the local junior college, San Antonio College. The Parent Academy also provides opportunities for learning about various types of employment. Speakers are scheduled during the school year. Examples of speakers include presentations by a local baker, salesperson, food service worker and banker.

**Roles of the Family Specialists**—The roles of the family specialists will be teacher, mentor, and liaison for community services.

**School Social Worker**—In this study the school social worker is synonymous with the title of family specialist.

**Selected Demographic Variables**—The selected variables include the age of the parents/guardians, race, the number of pre-school age children in the home, availability of transportation of the selected families, employment and the education level of the parents.

**Selected Title I Elementary Schools**—The eleven Title I elementary schools in North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas, which earned the “Recognized” status for their achievement scores for the 2005-2006 school year by the Texas Education Agency.

**Title I School**—A school in North East ISD which has a poverty rate of 60.612% or higher is considered a Title I school. Students may be identified as economically disadvantaged by the school district if their family meets the requirements for free and/or reduced price lunch, if the family receives food stamp benefits or qualifies for other public assistance. In addition, if the student is under the parental or custodial care of a family with an annual income at or below the official federal poverty level regardless of public assistance, they are also identified as economically disadvantaged.

**Variables**—Items identified as factors for preventing or reducing parental involvement which include, having children under school age to care for, having jobs outside the home, English not spoken in the home, lack of education of the parents, lack of transportation, and feeling unwelcome or intimidated at school.

### **Assumptions**

1. The respondents surveyed understood the scope of the study, the language of the instrument, were competent in self-reporting and responded objectively and honestly.
2. Interpretation of the data collected accurately reflected the intent of the respondent.

3. The methodology proposed and described here offered a logical and appropriate design for this particular research project.

### **Limitations**

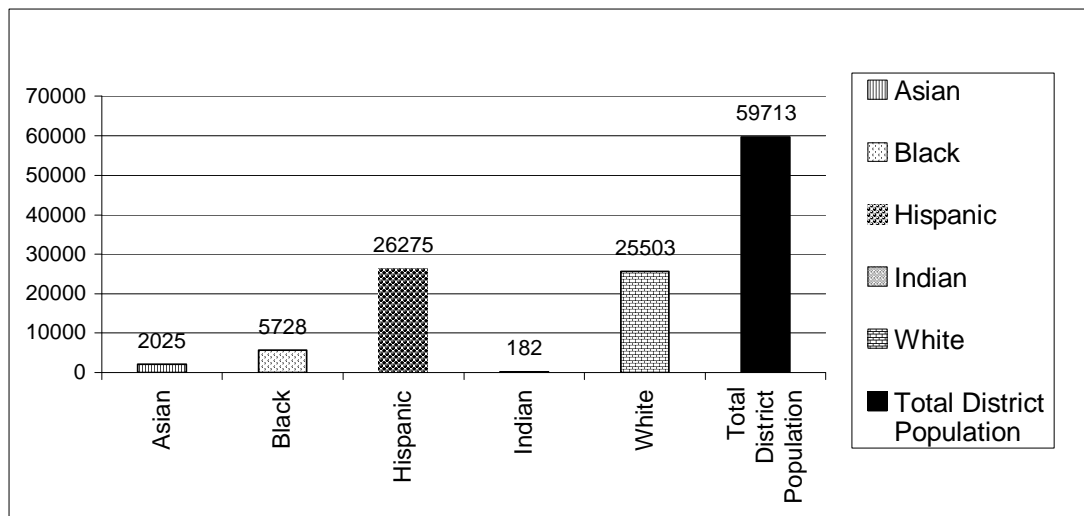
1. This study was limited to the selected number of Title I schools within the North East Independent School District participating in the study.
2. This study was limited to the information acquired from the literature review and survey instruments.
3. Participants identified as “parents” were limited to participants of the Parent Academy Programs at the identified Title I schools in North East Independent School District.
4. This study was limited by the Spanish translation of the survey and information sheet.

### **Methodology**

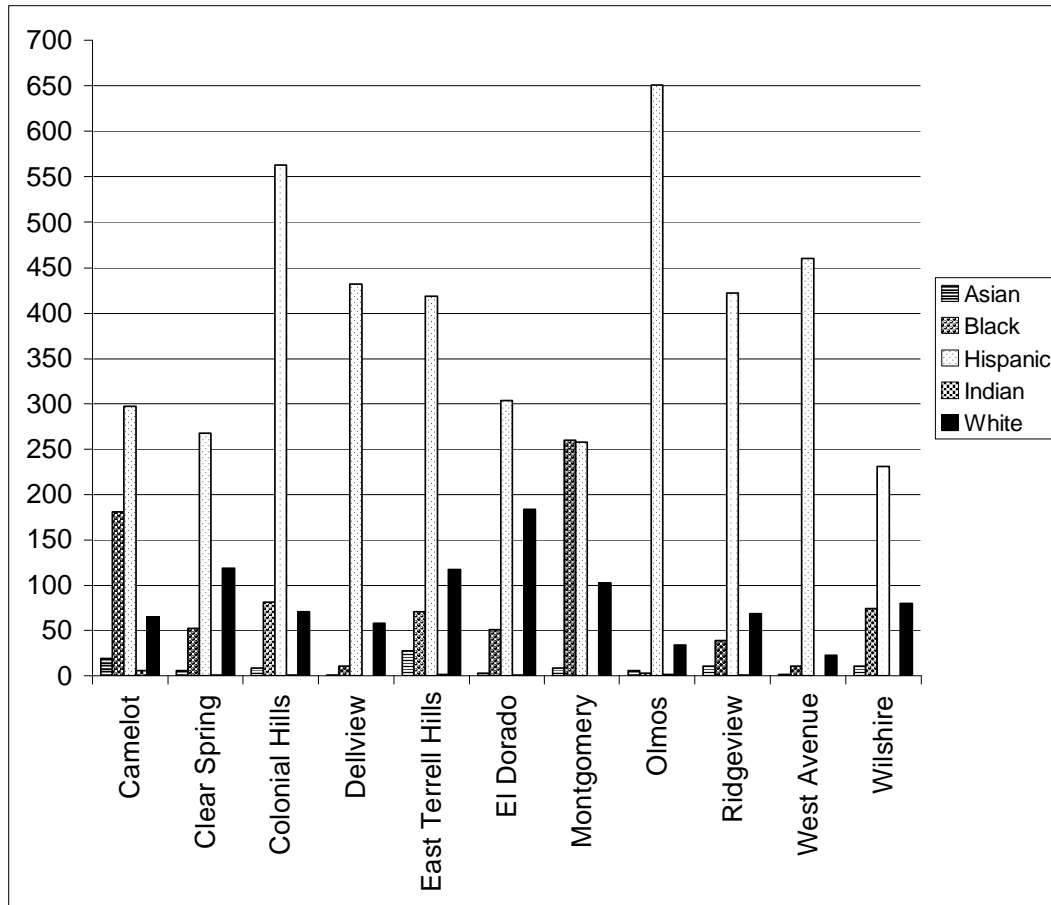
#### *Population*

The population of this study for the purpose of family involvement included 10 family specialists who worked at the 11 Title I elementary campuses in the North East Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas, which were “Recognized” by the Texas Education Agency for the 2005-2006 school year for academic performance (see Figures 1 and 2). These eleven campuses were chosen in order to evaluate the schools which were identified, by their “Recognized status, to be successful. These campuses were located across the district along the eastern, western and southern

borders of North East ISD. One of the 10 family specialists is split among two campuses. One of the 10 family specialists is split between two campuses (see Figures 1 and 2). Five to seven parents from each of the selected Recognized Title I campuses participated in the survey. In total, 66 parents participated in the study. All of the participating schools were located in the North East Independent School District (NEISD) in San Antonio, Texas.



**FIGURE 1. North East ISD Demographics, 2005-2006**



**FIGURE 2. Demographics of Participating Campuses, 2005-2006**

### *Instrumentation*

Data concerning the relationship between the family specialist and family involvement on the Recognized Title I elementary campuses were acquired using the previous year's *End of Year Summary* sheets completed by the family specialists. Additionally, a Likert-type scale of 1-5, measuring degrees of agreement, designed according to the guidelines outlined in *Educational Research: An Introduction* by Gall et al. (1996) was used to survey family specialists and parents. Content validity

was established by a panel of experts through a pilot peer review. A pilot survey/field test was conducted on the parent survey which involved a panel of three Parent Academy parents who were not participants of this study. A pilot survey/field test was conducted on the family specialist survey by three professionals which included the Director of Research for NEISD, one elementary counselor from a Title I school, and one family specialist. The three professionals were not participants of this study. Comments and suggestions from the panel were utilized to modify the questionnaire.

### *Procedures*

The procedure for the completion of the survey data collection took place by giving each participating family specialist a large envelope which contained seven parent surveys, one survey for the family specialist to complete, directions for completing the survey and sharpened #2 pencils. The parents' surveys and directions for completing the surveys were provided in both English and Spanish. The parents chose the survey in the language they felt most comfortable completing. Each family specialist was given a three week period in which to distribute and collect the parent surveys from their campus and send those, along with their own survey, back to the researcher through the inter-district mail system. No names were written on any of the surveys. As they arrived at the researcher's office, all surveys were combined together in one large envelope. Consent was given by the participants to become part of the population by returning the survey to the family specialist at their campus.

### *Data Analysis*

The results of the study were reported using the appropriate quantitative techniques according to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996). A computer program, SPSS, utilized by North East Independent School District's Research Department analyzed the data collected with the instrument. Several statistical procedures were used to answer the four research questions and test for significant differences. The researcher used appropriate charts, tables and graphs.

### **Significance of the Study**

Congress added a national educational goal in 1994 for school and family partnerships to the major federal legislation called Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Title I regulations were revised and include mandates for specific family-school connections for states, districts and schools to obtain and keep federal funds. According to Epstein (1996), parents from low-socioeconomic groups may appear withdrawn and apathetic, but in reality they feel disempowered. The parents in these communities often feel schools are not approachable (Lightfoot, 2003). In spite of a strong and growing body of evidence demonstrating important connections between school and family, many schools still lack in developing a program which includes parents as partners (Barclay & Boone, 1997).

The nature and value of family involvement in low-socioeconomic communities are increasingly important in today's mobile and diverse society. Concern about the willingness of families to become involved in their child's schooling are particularly



strong when those involved come from low-income families, are minorities, and attend urban schools (Lightfoot, 2003).

The findings of this study provide an assessment for educators, parents and policy makers to become more aware of the influence a school social worker has on parental involvement during a child's elementary school years as perceived by family specialists and parents in selected Title I elementary schools in North East Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas.

Information from the data collected in this study provides insight as to what can be done to create family centered elementary schools in low-socioeconomic areas. Creation of programs targeting the needs of these families helps in eliminating the achievement gap between those who have and those who do not have financial resources.

### **Organization of the Record of Study**

The record of study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I contains the introduction, a statement of the problem, a purpose for the study, research questions, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, methodology, and significance statement. Chapter II contains a review of the literature. Chapter III contains the methodology and procedures of the record of study. Chapter IV contains the analysis and comparisons of the data collected during the study. Chapter V contains the researcher's implications, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The “No Child Left Behind Act” signed by President George Bush on January 8, 2002, signaled a new era in how the federal government supports public schools and how public school children are educated (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). One component added to the “No Child Left Behind Act” is empowering parents. Chapter II includes the following themes and topics: (1) Public school students from low-income minority communities are at-risk due to barriers in their environment. (2) Parents’ perception of their role in public schools influences their involvement. (3) Communication between the school and parents from low-income minority communities is essential in order to assist families. (4) Parents will participate when they feel accepted and are provided a voice.

The challenge of understanding and providing for an increasingly diverse population of children and their families has focused on the development of programs to address these needs. Efforts focusing on the improvement of home-school partnerships as an approach to increased academic success have been growing in recent years (Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998).

In 1994, the U.S. Department of Education established the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE). The role of the department is to provide a network of sources available for organizations that were working to make education a community effort. This is in part an effort to reduce the gaps between children from low-income minority families and the middle class. Partnerships are created when

educators, students, families and community members work together to share information, encourage and guide students, assist in solving problems, and create celebrations when successes occur. Partnerships may look different as we acknowledge the awareness of non-educational barriers to learning. These barriers include factors such as poverty, poor health, or an unstable home situation (Decker & Decker, 2003).

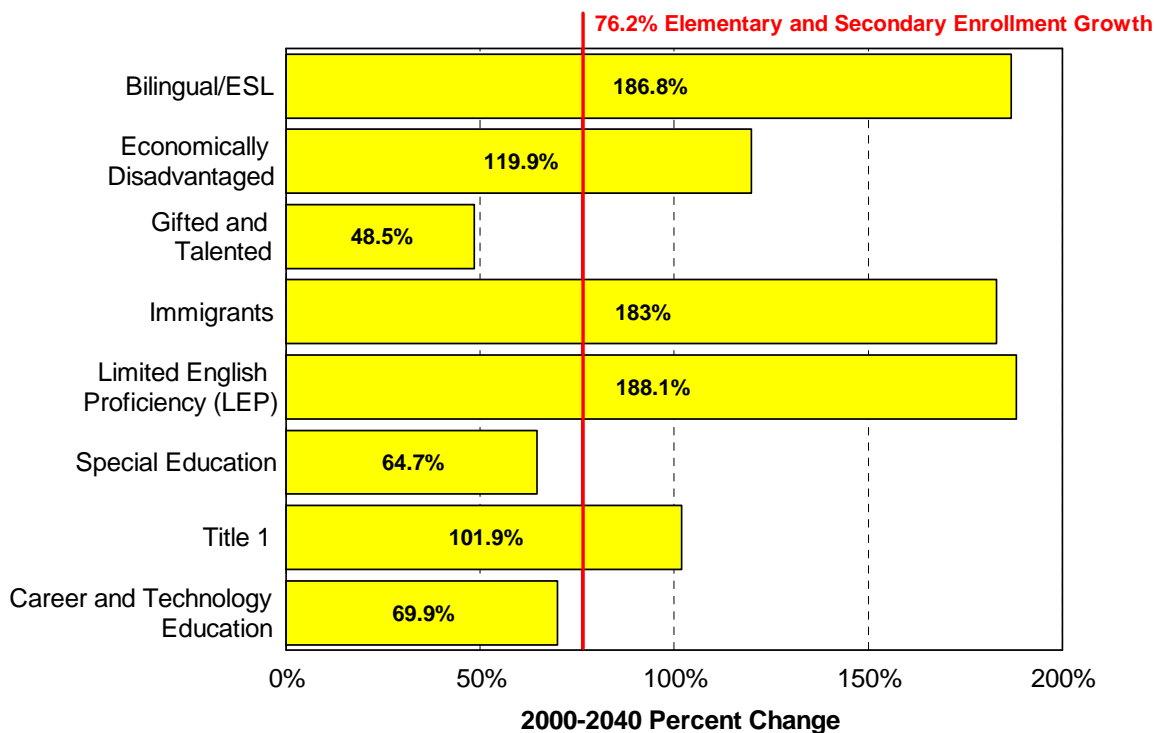
Adoption of the National Educational Goals has placed on the forefront, the need to maximize the resources school districts have to establish and maintain a quality education program for all children. Parental involvement and participation in the social, emotional, and academic growth of students was stated as Goal 8 by the National Educational Goals Panel (1995).

All school districts, except the smallest, under the National Education Goals, are required to spend 1% of its Title 1 funds on education and training for parents. It is also required that parents be involved in the decisions about how to spend these funds. Decker and Decker (2003) suggested assigning parent coordinators or family specialists as a primary way to help teachers make an initial outreach and maintain contact with their students' families.

Steve Murdock, Texas State Demographer, (2007) believed that between the years 2000 through 2040 the need for programs which specifically address the needs of the economically disadvantaged will grow 119.9% (see Figure 3).

Title I programs are predicted to grow by 101.9% during this time period. The demands for programs to address students with needs such as Bilingual/ESL, Immigrants, and Limited English Proficiency are all expected to grow over 180%

between 2000-2040. It is essential that preparations be made to address the oncoming changes and needs in our schools.



Source: The New Texas Challenge: Population Change and the Future of  
**FIGURE 3. Future Demands for Specific Programs**

In seeking to close the achievement gap, it is necessary to address the complex interactions among family, community and school. One of the most challenging issues facing education is to improve the academic achievement among diverse student

populations. This is particularly true in working with minority and low-income students families. Thirty years of research demonstrates that there is a strong link between parent involvement and increased student academic achievement (Foxworth, 2000).

### **Low-Income Population in Public Schools at Risk**

Delpit (1995) identified a power differential between low-income families and the mainstream as the source of the achievement gap between the school and the community's culture of power. Students whose home and community reflect mainstream culture tend to grow up within networks that implicitly transmit knowledge of styles, patterns, and norms which equip them to function successfully within the school environment. Delpit maintained that students outside the mainstream lack easy access to this insider knowledge that is not explicitly taught in school.

Questions arise regarding the extent to which power and privilege are tolerated when studies (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000) suggested that families might be able to have a greater impact on their children if they adopt the middle of the road, middle-class model of family involvement. In this situation, parents join the Parent Teacher Organization, volunteer in the classrooms, are visible on the campus as well as help with homework and attend parent-teacher conferences.

Children coming from low-income minority communities are considered at-risk students. Gutman, Sameroff and Eccles (2002) identified at-risk factors in their study as the mother's educational level, depression, marital status, number of children in the family, stressful family events, income and neighborhood factors. Through these

factors the researchers compile a multiple risk score. Positive family factors were also included. These positive factors consisted of consistent discipline, democratic decision making, and teacher and peer support. The study reported as the students' exposure to risk factors increased, the students had lower grade point averages, more absences and lower scores on achievement tests. Likewise, students with lower multiple risk scores did better in school.

A school's curriculum is not only about subjects (Nieto, 2002). The chief subject matter of school, viewed culturally, is school itself. How the school is situated in the lives and culture of its students and families involves orienting those outside the power elite to the culture of power. Family or parent involvement marks a step towards gaining power both for the child and for the parent.

Six types of parent involvement were recognized by Epstein (1995).

1. Parenting (helping families with parenting skills)
2. Communicating (assuring effective communication about school programs and students' progress)
3. Volunteering (organizing volunteers and providing volunteer opportunities)
4. Learning at home (involving families in working with their children at home)
5. Decision making (including families in school decisions)
6. Collaborating with the community (coordinating resources and services)

### *Barriers*

Problems in parent involvement often exist because attempts from the school are often based on white, middle-class assumptions concerning parents' views, resources and time available for school work (Leistyna, 2002).

More than a third of U.S. students are from linguistic or racial-minority families (Futrell, 1999). By contrast, only 5% of teachers "are from racially diverse groups." Abi-Nader (1993) states that the literature suggests teachers routinely enter into cultures of their students which they admit are foreign to them and practice a pedagogy just as foreign to their students.

Studies by Johnstone and Hiatt (1997) provided evidence that English as a Second Language classes offered to parents also provide a gateway for parents to become involved in other types of school activities. This attention to language acquisition of the parents has been identified as a way to break a barrier for both Latino parents and those of Asian immigrant families (Kim, 2002). English proficiency has been noted as related to all parental involvement variables. In schools where the majority of school personnel speak both English and Spanish, Mexican American families report much higher levels of family involvement. Spanish proficiency of the school personnel may facilitate immigrant parents' involvement (Lopez, Sanchez, & Hamilton, 2000).

Negative associations were found between increased economic pressures and the parents' ability to devote time and energy to support their children's well-being (Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd, 2002). Other reasons found for differences in the amount of school involvement by parents include a families' distrust or discomfort with school staffs, school procedures, and language barriers. "The

responses of the Mexican American parents suggested that their lower rate of participation at school was a result of their perceived lack of parental resources (including time), the fear that they have little to offer, and their limited English proficiency (Birch & Ferrin, 2002).

Researchers found that a parent's concepts about their role, based on cultural traditions, are not fixed, but can be changed by information provided by a parent program (Reese & Gallimore, 2002). One of these cultural practices identified that can be changed is that immigrant Latino parents do not ordinarily read to very young children. They wait until the child is old enough to understand and appreciate the reading material. This generally means an immigrant Latino child is not read to before the age of three or four.

Gutman and McLoyd (2000) provided another study examining low-income African American parents of both high-achieving and low achieving fifth and sixth graders. Although parents of both the high-achieving and low achieving students were involved at home, parents of the high-achieving students reported more at-school involvement than did the parents of the low-achieving students. Parents of the high-achieving students were found more likely to initiate contact with the school. Parents of low achievers seemed more suspicious of the school's actions on their child's behalf and reported having negative interactions with the school or school personnel previously.

Nine African American and Latino families with elementary school-age children were studied by Chin and Newman (2002). They found that most of the nine families were playing a balancing act trying to meet the demands of work and also provide



attention to their children's schoolwork. Most of the families have not been successful and are encountering various problems in their children's school lives.

Parents use their own educational experiences in terms of motivating themselves to become involved in their child's school. Mapp (1999), after interviewing a group of low-income parents from a diverse community, found some parents revealed that, while in school, they focused on their social lives and did not take their education seriously. Others said that they were lured into the workforce before graduating from high school; some dropped out of school to raise children; some said they missed out on higher education opportunities. Many stated that they were determined to keep the distractions they experienced from impeding their own children's educational opportunities.

Barriers most often reported among low-income parents as causes for their lack of parental involvement have been reported by Richman-Prakash, West, and Denton (2002) as

- inconvenient meeting times;
- getting time off from work;
- parents' education level;
- no child care;
- lack of transportation;
- language barriers.

Children from poverty are found more heavily in urban areas. Children account for 40% of the poor in the United States. Nearly one fourth of U. S. children live in poverty (Hodgkinson, 1989). Most of these children live in single parent, female-

headed households. So, the care of the child may be the responsibility of many different adults. This may include stepmothers, childcare, aunts, grandmothers, friends and neighbors. School personnel tend to decide in advance that single and working parents cannot be counted on to participate at school (Epstein, 1984).

Low-income single and working parents often spend as much time with their children as do middle-class parents with more education and leisure time. It can be the teachers who hesitate to give these children work to do at home believing that parents will not be available to help Epstein (1984).

In order to make schools more responsive to at-risk students, districts must provide appropriate academic as well as non academic opportunities for children. Joy Dryfoos (1996) suggested the term “full service schools” when describing schools that encompass all the needs of the student and the families they serve. These schools provided quality education and social services under the roof of the school building. They have the potential to become the center of the neighborhood that attracts both the students and their families.

### **Parents’ Perception of Their Role in Public Schools and Its Influence on Parent Involvement**

In contrast to the perceptions held by many school personnel, a low degree of parental involvement does not reflect a lack of parental interest. Parents invariably report a high degree of interest in their child’s education. A quantitative study by Chrispeels and Rivero (2001) hypothesized that the participation of Latino parents in their children’s education was limited by the discrepancy of their own sense of place

and the school's expectations. This is the point at which a parent training program could actually serve as a "cultural broker."

The families' and schools' aspirations for student success are not necessarily the same. While schools focus on academics, families tend to be more concerned about the whole child. Azmitia and Cooper (2002) found that this may have even more significance for relationships between schools and families of low-income and minority children. The researchers pointed out that one factor for this discrepancy may be the different perspectives as far as what matters for the student. Scribner, Young and Pedroza (1999) found that parents' concerns were not solely how successful their children were academically, but were concerned about nurturing the values of respect, honor, cooperation, good behavior, and responsibility of their children. Differences do exist in families' experiences, cultural values, practices and views.

In a study by Fan and Chen (1999), it was found that parents' aspirations and expectations for their children's educational achievement appear to have the strongest relationship with the students' academic achievement. There are consistent findings that most minority and low-income families have high aspirations for their children's academic success (Fan, 2001; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997).

In two studies (Azmitia & Cooper, 2002; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001) a distinction was made between the terms *aspirations* and *expectations*. Both studies noted differences between families' hopes and their realistic expectations regarding their children's attainment. Low-income families were

more likely than affluent families to express reservations about their children's attainment.

A study conducted by Birch and Ferrin (2002) reported that although low-income Mexican American families view their role in their child's education as a major responsibility, they often felt like they had little to offer their children because they either didn't have the ability or the time to make a difference and they did not know the specific steps they should take to help advance their children's academic achievement. Poverty and economic stress may be related to both the types of involvement and extent of involvement among low-income families.

Barriers of mistrust and misunderstanding develop between schools and families when they do not know each other. Establishing a Parent Center on a campus brings parents on the campus. When parents are more visible on campus, it becomes difficult for school employees to think that parents don't care (Davies, 1991). Schools need the parents and the parents need a place in the school.

To enhance school involvement personal contact must be made. Invitations, phone calls, and flyers are not as persuasive as face-to-face contact with parents (D'Angelo & Adler, 1991). The recruitment must start with the school staff. Once parents feel a part of the system then parents begin talking among themselves. This brings in more parents and moreover, parents can begin setting the priorities for the parent center. Often urban parents often hear only negative news from school. A successful center displays successful student work, provides books for students to take home, and is a gathering place for parents to find information. It should be an environment which makes parents feel at home. Activities are a mixture of business and socializing

among other parents. Parents are reachable. It takes commitment, effort and support on behalf of the school and the school district.

### **Communication among Schools and Families Is Essential in Providing Needed Services**

A critical problem exists when parent involvement is being determined by or within specific and unequal relations of power. This point is highlighted by O'Connor (2001) who observed that most of the teachers and staff to whom he had spoken with, did not regard the low-income parents in their school community as equal participants in their children's education and expressed serious doubts about parents' interest. This type of ambivalence by school staff confirms the family's general perception of inferiority and continues to maintain the gap between the roles of the parents and the roles of the teachers.

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Parents expressed dissatisfaction with interactions dealing with school staff. Auerback (2002) reported parents commenting on the rudeness of staff who made them wait for scheduled appointments, did not follow through on commitments, and

did not include them in discussions concerning their children. Auerback points out in his study that even trivial bureaucratic rebuffs have the potential for having a cumulative effect on family-school relationships.

The welcome and response of professionals expressed to families is a major factor in attracting parents to get involved and feel a part of the community. Aspiazu, Bauer and Spillett (1998) conducted a qualitative study at a family education center. This center was not on a school campus, but established within a federally subsidized housing unit. The researchers found that the family education center's accessibility and friendly atmosphere were the two major draws in the support among parents and children.

Ignoring racial issues can push parents and schools apart ( Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Seeking common ground and at the same time acknowledging differences is one role a principal must acknowledge to provide a welcoming atmosphere for socially and culturally diverse schools. Active and ongoing support from the school's principal makes a difference in helping diverse families become more engaged in their children's schooling. (Johnstone & Hiatt, 1997; Levine & Tricket, 2000) identified five different ways a principal can show their support for a family involvement program.

1. Communicating with families in their native language whenever possible through newsletters, bulleting and other written materials;
2. Holding informal meetings with families to seek the family's perspective as well as to inform families of updated school practices;

3. Maintaining a visible presence at parent-teacher conferences and school sponsored events;
4. Emphasizing, with both the school staff and school families, the commitment to family involvement activities.

Few teacher preparation programs include instruction on how to build partnerships between the classroom teacher and the school families (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Practical strategies for engaging effectively with families provide insights for teachers whose own family background and life experiences are different from those of the children they teach.

In a four-year study by Hampton, Mumford and Bond (1998), it was found that establishing long-term, significant relationships between the home and school is significant in the school's outreach program. The school staff recognized that parent involvement does not always look the same. Parent involvement will occur on various levels, different times and sometimes the most critical parent support does not always occur on the school campus. The research found that support from the school's principal for the family involvement program was a critical factor in strengthening parental involvement.

Typically, parents learn the roles they are expected to assume by the school over time. The structures, procedures, culture and norms of the school dictate these roles. (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). The school's assumptions about the status of the family tend to keep the roles of the family and the role of the school separate. Rather than active decision makers and partners in their child's education, parents find themselves more in the roles of supporters, helpers.

### *Administrative Support*

Although the principal of the school is normally the person who determines the outreach of the school, it is also the role of the school staff, administrators, supervisors, teachers and all support personnel to create a culture that is open, friendly and welcoming (Decker & Decker, 2003). A principal's leadership and willingness to engage families is essential to the success of any school-family program. According to Blank and Kershaw (1999), the school leader's willingness and ability to engage in collaboration are necessary to initiate partnerships, maintain control and sustain momentum. It is the responsibility of the school to reach out to those families who are considered hard to reach. Principals, teachers and parent coordinators must reach out to families, rather than waiting for the families to ask for help.

As the responsibilities of the school principal continue to expand, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2001) provided a publication that details the school leader's responsibilities in today's society. The article, *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do*, includes as part of the principals' responsibility, collaboration and communication with the local community. Creating a climate and culture of acceptance of diversity and nurturing this among the faculty is an essential role of today's principals.

The Institute for Responsive Education's research determined that because of the structure of school districts, they are found to be resistant to change (Davies, 1987). The goals of school districts are many, the means of achieving goals are fragmented



and the responsibility of the varied goals is spread out among administrators, counselors, teachers, families and students.

These organizational realities contribute to the difficulty of introducing and maintaining the idea of a family involvement program without a formal, written policy in place to provide structure and accountability. A school or district policy sets the direction by clearly stating the definition of family involvement and setting priorities and guidelines for the program. A mandate for family involvement is essential.

Two important elements for successful school-parent programs have been determined by Williams and Chavkin (1990) to be (1) having written policies for the school-parent programs and (2) having strong administrative support and encouragement for family involvement activities.

According to research by Public Agenda (Farkas, 2001), teachers view the role of community citizens as being limited. According to this study, teachers want the support of the local citizenry but are not interested in hearing their concerns or their feedback on school policies. With this, the teachers' view of the public's role in the educational process must be addressed before any meaningful engagement efforts may occur.

Weil (1997) pointed out teachers are skeptical for two reasons. First, they see diminished parental support in their classrooms. Second, they see increased criticism of public schools by the various interest groups, many with no knowledge or factual basis for their claims.

Training and staff development must be available for school staff. Promoting and providing professional development for all school staff ensures that standards are adhered to by all personnel. A wide range of activities, service directories and resource materials must be provided. Districts have to look at the possibility of positioning some community services on the campus site. Chavkin (2000) proposed that school districts will want to hire school social workers or family-community coordinators to provide the necessary link that will bridge the gap between home and school.

If principals and school administrators do not signal their investment in parental involvement, it is not likely that teachers, who are already overwhelmed by the many mandates they address, will take the initiative to reach out to parents (Miretzky, 2004). Parents want teachers to understand the realities of their neighborhoods and family situations.

Schools must communicate to families that they are attempting to reach out to them. The creation of full-service schools is just that. These schools are schools in which the educational, psychological, physical and social needs of students and their families are addressed. Community agencies work hand in hand with schools to help reduce the at-risk factors associated with poverty (Dryfoos, 1996). Combining interventions will help create stronger schools.

In addition, a study by Howley (1994) noted evidence that smaller size schools seemed to improve student performance in areas serving impoverished families. As of 1997, the ceiling set for small size elementary schools has been 350 students. It was

found that in school that service fewer than 301 students, poverty exerts less of a negative influence.

Areas for collaboration may include health care, social services, housing, before & after school care, parental literacy classes, linkage between employment and education. In order for school districts to create this type of school and collaboration, Hodgkinson (1989) identifies twelve starting points. These points include: (1) Studying the demographics of one's own community; (2) attending joint conferences—such as between education and health; (3) noting successful collaborative examples; (4) picking a single issue on which to collaborate; (5) involving key officials; (6) watching that no single agency is working in isolation; (7) rewarding and encouraging information sharing; (8) target prevention and early intervention; (9) communicating effective team building and decision making; (10) focusing on the process; (11) setting realistic time lines to establish and reach goals; (12) Committing the necessary resources of time, energy and commitment.

### **Parents Participate When Accepted and Heard**

Having a personal vision is powerful in shaping a person's life (Hoyle, 2002). Creating conditions that allow students and parents to attain their goals and picture their success is winning leadership. Whether a student or a parent, positive role models are significant in setting high standards and sharing a personal vision. Students who maintain a focus on a future goal not only make better grades but complete a higher education.

Overlapping spheres of influence between the home, school and community may begin to occur when the family is involved in the school. The school, when thought of as an extended part of the family, helps to portray a more positive school climate. Two key elements of increasing family involvement are demonstrating to parents that they are valued and acknowledging their time restraints and obligations in their daily lives (Epstein, 1995). It becomes necessary for educators and schools to increase their respect and understanding for diversity.

Metz and Furman (1997) described the old, traditional way of running a school as *gesellschaftlich* in nature because schools were looked at to be efficient, productive and competitive. In contrast, *gemeinschaft* values are now seen as pertinent to a school setting. This reform emphasizes relationships and interpersonal connections. These values are viewed as essential in creating nurturing schools.

The formation of an action team is suggested by Epstein (2001). These teams form the nucleus of a staff which serves to encourage partnerships among schools, families and the community. This team is responsible for designing an engagement process with clear goals and consists of school staff, parents or family members as well as community members. This action team focuses on issues pertinent to the specific campus and community. Each community carries its own specific challenges. Funkhouser, Gonzales and Moles (1997) identified similar teams as core teams to promote involvement.

The National Parent Teacher Organization (PTA) developed the National Standards for Parent and Family Involvement Programs. They were developed in cooperation with education and parent-involvement professionals through the

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education in 1997. The five standards that relate to parent and family involvement consist of (1) Communicating, (2) Parenting, (3) Student Learning, (4) Volunteering, and (5) School Decision Making and Advocacy.

These standards relate closely to the model of Epstein (1992). Epstein defined the categories of her Six Levels of Involvement Model as follows: *Parenting* is assisting families in setting home conditions that support children and understanding child development. *Communicating* involves talking and meeting with families as well as using other effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication. *Volunteering* is flexible enough to accommodate work schedules and support of the students and programs may take place at a convenient location other than the school. *Learning at Home* includes families helping with homework and providing other learning opportunities in the home. *Decision Making* provides a voice to the parents through school councils, committees and parent organizations and *Collaborating with the Community* results in coordinating resources and services for families through businesses and agencies.

In the course of exploring the many aspects of family involvement, Gutman, Sameroff & Eccles (2002) suggested that the combination of both parental involvement and the school environment may be most effective in supporting academic achievement. Gutman and Midgley based their study on African American students from low-income communities making the transition from elementary school to middle school. The students with both parent and teacher support received higher

grades than their peers. This “total support” was dependant on not only the support of both their parents and teachers but on the interaction between the two.

A parent program, or facilitator, could help provide assistance to parents in redefining their roles and sense of place in their children’s education and therefore enhance their potential involvement. The parents involved in the Chrispeels and Rivero study (2001) were participants of the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). After participating in this parent program, parents reported changes in their parenting style, increased their contacts with their children’s teachers, and increased their family’s reading activities, such as family reading time and family visits to the library.

Barton (2004) suggested a health and nutrition policy be recognized as an important part of a learning policy. He cited the example of a malnourished child born below the average birth weight and who comes to school with health problems and decaying teeth. High standards, test-based accountability and higher-quality teaching is not likely to boost this student’s achievement enough to eliminate the achievement gap. These items may raise achievement, but the gap has deep roots.

Gutman and McLoyd (2000) identified one difference between high-achieving African American students and low-achieving African American students from similar low-income homes. That difference was identified as student involvement in extracurricular activities such as music or art classes and religious activities such as Bible study or participation in their church choir. The researchers concluded that when policies are in place which exclude children from participating in extracurricular

activities because of their low grades, this may hamper rather than support their academic achievement.

Studies regarding the extent to which family involvement is linked to the academic achievement of minority and low-income students are inconsistent. Jeynes (2003) looked at minority children (not including income levels) and found that family involvement among African American, Asian American, and Latino families did have a significant impact on their children's academic achievement. Starkey and Klein (2000) documented improved student performance in both Latino and African American preschoolers. Moon and Callahan (2001) found no significant effect on student achievement, although all students in the study were achieving at grade level. Family involvement may be directly linked to other positive student outcomes such as students' mental health, lack of truancy, and prevention from dropping out of school. (Cook, Herman, Phillips, & Settersten, 2002)

In 2002, Mattingly, Prislun, McKenzie, Rodriguez, and Kayzar analyzed 41 studies to then find only four which, in their opinion, used the most vigorous research design. This included having matched controls, pretests and posttests. Of these four studies, two found significant improvement in student performance on standardized achievement tests among the children whose parents participated in school intervention programs. The other two studies showed no significant effects on student achievement among the children whose parents were involved in a school intervention program. The intervention programs reviewed focused mainly on changing parent behavior, such as parenting skills, rather than changing school practices and teaching practices.

Training programs for Mexican immigrant parents reveal literacy training of the parents did increase the parents' role in school involvement. Rodriguez, Brown, Li, and Albon (1999) did not conduct pre- and posttests for parents due to the inconsistencies in the participation of the parents. They did find that parents reported increase in their home literacy activities at home, having more reading material available in the home and making family trips to the public library. Parents also reported a greater frequency in which they read to their children at home.

Predominantly, most training provided by schools for parents fall into one of the following four areas:

1. Basic parenting skills;
2. Knowledge of school systems and procedures;
3. Strategies for assisting children in specific subject matter, such as math or reading;
4. English language lessons for parents

Zellman, Stecher, Klein, and McCaffrey (1998) found that parents reported "substantial changes in their knowledge, attitudes, and behavior" along with more school involvement by attending the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) in California. This program consisted of attending eight parenting classes. The classes were taught in the language the parents were most comfortable with. There were three main focuses of the classes: (1) parenting skills, (2) how to provide family educational support, and (3) how to understand local school system's workings. In this same study, although parents reported greater parent involvement, there was a low



correlation between the teacher and parents reports of classroom visits and participation.

Paratore, Melzi, and Krol-Sinclair (1999) did not find that the level of the parents' literacy, education or English proficiency played a vital role in their ability to support their children's success in school. The researches also found that success in school was solely predicted by events at home or school, but rather a complex process of the actions of both home and school that included interactions between the two.

Repeatedly the research found that when all types of family involvement were studied, the factor which was the major influence on a child's success was the parents' aspirations and expectations for their child. This one factor tends to be the strongest link between the academic successes of children regardless of ethnic or cultural differences in families (Fan & Chen, 1999).

School social workers are in a unique position to provide a bridge between the two worlds (Altshuler, 2003). The school is seen as a potential anchor for the students when active commitment and collaboration occurs between the social worker and the school system. In order to achieve academic success and reduce antisocial outcomes, school based social workers must not only have a clear understanding of the problematic conditions of poverty but must also develop a comprehensive knowledge of minority cultural norms and how these norms piece into educational outcomes (Teasley, 2005). Although the social work profession made an effort to increase the number of minority practitioners since the mid 1970s, the majority of practitioners continue to be Anglo American females.

Collaborative efforts between child welfare workers and public education staff face challenges and barriers. Some of the barriers identified include financial (who pays for what), identification of clientele, different goals among services rendered and the coordination of how services are delivered and evaluated (Altshuler, 2003). While researching students in foster care, the researcher found that both caseworkers and educators expressed a mutual lack of trust with each other. Both educators and social workers perceived that each other were unwilling to communicate with each other. Educators felt that social workers withhold vital information and caused frustration at being unable to obtain information in a timely manner. Educators considered this information necessary to plan successful learning for children. Social workers were frustrated that teachers expect them to share confidential information which the social workers believe is not needed by the school system.

Social work education programs must prepare school-based practitioners in the area of culturally diverse practices in urban settings. The researcher suggests the need to improve and monitor the social workers' preparation in the area of cultural competence in an urban school social setting. Henderson and Berla (1994) conducted a comprehensive survey on parent and family involvement. The researchers suggested that the most accurate predictor of student success is not family income or social status but the impact the family has on creating a home environment that encourages learning, maintaining high and reasonable goals for achievement and the family's involvement in their children's education.

For a family involvement program to be effective, several key factors need to occur in the design (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Programs offering home visits are more successful for low-income families.

- Family involvement increases when families receive frequent and effective communication.
- Parents and families become more involved when they are treated as partners and made to feel comfortable.

One type of reaching out is the home visit. During a home visit the teacher or school representative have the opportunity to become familiar with the students' family situation and the parents are able to speak from the comfort and security of their own home. Home visits also give the families the opportunity to see school personnel in a more personal setting (Decker & Decker, 2003). A clearly communicated purpose for the visit should be established in respectful manner. Working towards educational equity and high standards is the purpose of the home-school connection.

Family resource centers provide another effective way for schools to reach out to families and provide support. Parent information and training on a wide range of subjects can be provided in a site specifically for parents. These centers, which can be located by on or off the school campus, provide a link where parents can access services, ask questions, and attend classes provided by the school.

A school social worker in a qualitative study (Casella, 2002) pointed to poverty as being the number one issue and identifies parent education as the only thing schools can do. The social worker identified the most at-risk and violent kids coming from

homes where there are no parents. The social worker described these students as being on their own from the time they're young children. The economic and social segregation of the poor provide children with exposure to violence. Social Interventionism is a form of violence prevention that stems from the school campus but has connections to nonprofit groups, city and state organizations, and social services in the city.

The establishment of community-based partnerships was boosted by George Bush's (Sr.) initiative named, America 2000. One of its six goals is to establish drug-free and violence-free schools. In Texas, the Alliance Schools Initiative is coordinating efforts of parents and teachers. Programs have been initiated to improve parent involvement.

The use of a parent liaison, specifically, to make daily calls to parents of at-risk students is part of an effort currently being used to close the achievement gap at Franklin Roosevelt High School in the Dallas area. Both school and non-school factors underlie the achievement gap. The conditions which improve learning both in and out of school are intertwined (Barton, 2004). The achievement gap closely mirrors inequalities in aspects of schooling, early life, and home circumstances that research has linked to school achievement.

When individual parents from disadvantaged, low income groups attempt to advocate for their children they have experienced being rebuffed, silenced or marginalized (Shirley, 1997; Valdes, 1996). The Diversity Project created at Berkely High School in 1996 and studied by Pedro Noguera and Jean Wing (2006) came about by giving parents a voice in bringing equality into the schools of their children. Disenfranchised parents were the target of this outreach program. Through the

Diversity Project, came the realization of the importance of providing assistance to parents in crises. A Parent Resource Center was designed as a point of contact for parents and families who do not know how to be heard by the school, were having difficulty with their children, or needed support without knowing where to go.

From Cornell (1995), the following suggestions are an attempt to reduce failure rate: (1) Don't expect these students to have access to magazines, reference materials, and other resources. (2) Don't assume the student can study at home. (3) Don't expect material contributions to fund drives. (4) Be tolerant of irregular attendance ... disorganization, unreliable transportation, financial crises, disruptions in normal family relations. All the items listed are target areas for staff development for those working in the school setting.

Providing staff development for families on topics such as teen anger management, college funding, student rights, parent-teen communication, law, learning disabilities among other relevant subjects is paramount in helping to close the achievement gap. Researchers described this type of assistance, in which the parents have a say in what is needed, as an inside-outside advocacy model (Noguera & Wing, 2006).

A parent training program in San Diego (Ochoa & Mardirosian, 1996, p.6) use as their motto, "No force on earth is as strong as a parent determined to get a fair break for his or her child." The goal of the program is to empower parent to help themselves so they can advocate for their children. The school personnel in charge of the program teach topics to parents such as the stages of child development, building self-esteem in children, and how to prevent underachievement.

A study was conducted on the Parent Support Specialist Program in Austin, Texas, and cited the various roles of the Parent support specialist. The parent support specialists work with families and students to provide presentations and workshops in the areas of gangs, drugs, teen pregnancies. Health and wellness presentations included topics such as mammography, inoculations, dental and vision screening (Washington, 2001). Along with these informational presentations, the parent support specialists attend staff meetings with school administration, recruit volunteers, make home visits and call parents.

Schools are pivotal in the collaboration of networking social service agencies with children and families. Early childhood enrichment programs, health care and basic subsistence assistance are addressed through social service programs to help children and their families. School-linked resource centers and family specialists address the need for improved access to social services.

Parental involvement includes different stages ranging from home involvement to decision making at the school. Pena (1998) cited open communication and varied communication as a start to bringing parents in to the school. Written newsletters, calendars, the marquee, and flyers are suggested. Parents who do not read would be left uninformed if a social network of parents is not maintained. An open door policy is needed so parents feel acknowledged and welcome at the school campus.

The research on parent involvement reveals the influence parent involvement has on the children, families and schools involved. The benefits from the comprehensive surveys of this research document many benefits (Henderson & Berla, 1995). Some of these benefits follow.

- Students achieve more when parents are involved, regardless of race, parents' education level or socio-economic status of the family.
- Educators have higher expectations of students whose parents or guardians communicate and collaborate with the school.
- Students from culturally diverse backgrounds tend to improve when their parents and educators communicate and understand the gap between the culture at home and the majority culture at school
- Programs designed to involve parents in partnerships with the school find academic achievement in disadvantaged children. The children who are farthest behind tend to show the largest gains.

Improved academic success for all students will not be accomplished if the basic fundamental needs that are prerequisites to learning are not addressed. These basic needs include health and wellness, appropriate behavior and a stable home environment. Gardner (2001) suggested partnership programs contain three concentric circles. The innermost circle represents the basic core of achievement, attendance and school graduation rates. The middle circle represents the achievement in school but also encompasses what happens outside the classroom, such as family situations. The outer-most circle represents the community and the human-services delivery within the community. The most effective learning partnerships encompass pieces of all three concentric circles.

According to Shore (1994), many schools are failing to carry out their basic mission. Both urban and rural school systems are overwhelmed by not only the educational needs, but the social and emotional needs of the children growing up in

poverty. The traditional way many schools function does not serve properly in a time of changing family demographics, a demanding workplace and growing student diversity. Changes in the structure and function of families in the United States point to the fact that additional resources are needed to successfully educate all students (Epstein, 1995; Melaville, 1998; Waddock, 1995).

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE) outlines keys to success for districts implementing a family or community involvement policy. The number one item on the list is the hiring and training of a family/community liaison. Reaching out to home is not the norm in most schools. The hiring of new personnel and the allocating of existing dollars and/or staff may be needed to build up support and to maintain that support. The major function of a family/community liaison is to make direct and personal contact with families, along with coordinating family/community/school activities.

The last 30 years of research has shown that parents and other family members who are involved in their child's education, significantly impact that child's school attendance, homework completion, grades, performance on tests, graduation from high school and interest in attending college (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Due to this, schools are interested in increasing family involvement, especially those schools which serve large populations of at-risk students. If parents lack the basic information to support their children in school, the challenge is not merely to increase the number of programs to address parent needs, but to ensure that these programs address the needs of parents and also to make sure they are available to those who need them most (Chadwick, 2002).



While it is possible to change some variables that affect student learning, it is not possible to change others. Changing a parent's educational background or level of income is not possible. Changing a parent's level of involvement is possible. This is important because children's academic achievement appears to be more strongly related to parents' level of school involvement than to their level of education or income (Thorkildsen & Stein, 1998). Parent involvement appears to account for ten to twenty percent of the variance in achievement. Parent expectations consistently have the strongest relationship with achievement. In low-income families, this need for attention is especially important. It is particularly important for schools to reach out to parents and create opportunities of involvement for these families that are traditionally less involved.

In summary, this chapter has focused on four main themes. First, public school students from low-income minority communities are at-risk due to barriers in their environment. The second theme is the lack of school involvement of parents from low-income minority communities. Additionally, communication between the school and parents from low-income minority communities is essential in meeting the student's, as well as the families, needs. In conclusion, parents will participate when they feel accepted and are provided a voice.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The 11 Title I elementary schools were selected for this study for three reasons. The first reason was its accessibility to the investigator. The second reason was the researcher's desire to determine the effectiveness of the family specialists' program in association with parent involvement. The third reason was all the 11 selected campuses were considered successful by being rated "Recognized" by the Texas Education Agency for the school year 2005-2006.

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of family specialists' on parent involvement at the selected Title I Elementary campuses as reported by both a parent survey and a family specialist survey. The primary purpose of the study was to identify roles the family specialists take on as a result of the needs of the families in their community. In addition, the use of services provided by community agencies through the family specialists will be examined. The degree on influence parents have on the selection of classes provided for parents by the family specialists were examined as well.

The relationships were examined by the following four research questions.

1. What influence do the family specialists have in family involvement as reported by parents and family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?

2. What selected variables influence parental involvement as reported by parents and family specialists who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary schools in North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?
3. What influence do community agencies have in assisting with the needs for families, as reported on the end-of-year summary sheets by the family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?
4. What influence do parents have on determining the classes set forth for the Parent Academy, as reported by the family specialists and parents who are participants of the Parent Academy, at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher obtained information for this study from a parent survey as well as a family specialist survey. The family specialist survey was validated by the researcher. The researcher had the family specialists complete an End of Year Summary Sheet to gain information about the variety of functions performed by the family specialists. Secondly, summary sheets were an attempt to quantify the various activities. The information gathered from these summary sheets assisted the researcher in formulating the questions for the family specialist survey.

The survey given to the parents to complete was also validated by the researcher. Before distributing the survey among the schools, three parents were asked to read through the survey and give comments and suggestions for questions that were not clear, vocabulary that was not understood or questions which may have been

irrelevant. The parent survey was provided to participants in both English and Spanish.

Permission to distribute the surveys was obtained from Dr. Mark Scheffler, Assistant Superintendent of North East School District as well as Dr. John Cadena, Director of Research for North East School District.

Chapter III reports the research methods used to accomplish this study. The chapter is divided into the following sections—population, instrumentation, procedures, and data analysis.

### **Population**

North East Independent School district serves a population of 57,679 students and encompasses approximately 140 square miles of the north central and northeast sector of Bexar County, Texas. Although the vast majority of the district is within the boundaries of the city of San Antonio, several smaller communities are also included in the North East ISD. These smaller communities include the cities of Castle Hills, Hill Country Village, Hollywood Park, and the city of Windcrest. North East ISD is the eighth largest school district in the State of Texas.

The eleven Recognized Title I elementary schools included in this study are: Camelot, Clear Spring, El Dorado, Colonial Hills, Dellview, East Terrell Hills, Montgomery, Olmos, Ridgeview, West Avenue, and Wilshire. Seven of the 11 campuses maintain a full-time family specialist as part of their staff. The remaining four campuses employ a half-time family specialist. The four schools with the half-time specialists are Clear Spring, El Dorado, Olmos, and Ridgeview.

All 11 campuses begin serving students at either at the pre-kinder or kinder level and continue up through fifth grade. The following campuses also provide bilingual education: East Terrell Hills, Colonial Hills, Dellview, West Avenue, and Walzem.

The subjects for this study were the 10 family specialists assigned to the campuses and a random sampling of five to seven parents from each campus who are members of the campus Parent Academy.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher used Microsoft Excel in spreadsheet format to record the data provided in the End of Year Summary sheets. These spreadsheets recorded types of training provided for the parents, number of Parent Academy graduates and community services provided for the parents during the 2005-2006 school-year. The demographic data were used for data analysis for this study.

The parent surveys were developed by the researcher. A panel of experts was identified to judge the clarity and appropriateness of each item. The panel consisted of three members—all parents who are members of the Parent Academy program of North East Independent School District. The panel was used to determine whether or not the instrument had content validity. A Spanish translation of the survey was provided along with the English version (see Appendices A and B). None of the panel of experts were part of the final random selection members.

The family specialist survey was also developed by the researcher (see Appendix C). The panel of experts used to validate this instrument was three educational professionals. The first is the director of research and information for North East ISD;

the second expert was a counselor at one of the Title I schools participating in the survey; the third is a family specialist at one of the Title I schools not participating in the survey. None of the panel of experts were participants of the survey.

Content validity is achieved when a test or survey is determined by a panel of experts to adequately represent the content that the scores represent (Gall et al., 1996). Content validity was established for both instruments. Recommendations were made and a few minor changes were made to the surveys relating to the wording of questions.

### **Procedures**

In November, 2006, the researcher met with Dr. John Cadena, Director of Research at North East Independent School District Central Office. The meeting was to explain the purpose of the research and through him, obtain the permission and support of the school district. Dr. Cadena provided guidance in survey questions, data collection, and the scope of the intended research. A letter for research approval had previously been submitted.

During the month of January, 2007, data collection procedures were in place. Each of the 10 family specialists from participating campuses was given an envelope containing seven parent surveys in both Spanish and English, a family specialist, Information Sheets in English and Spanish (see Appendices D and E), survey, sharpened #2 pencils and Scan-Tron sheets. The family specialists were asked to have the surveys completed randomly by parents at their campus who were members of the school's Parent Academy. After both the parent surveys and the family specialist

survey were complete, they were asked to send it to the researcher by in district pony mail. The purpose of using in district pony mail was to maintain confidentiality.

### **Data Analysis**

Results of the data gathered by the researcher for this study were reported using both numerical and graphic techniques. From the interpretation of the data, descriptive and inferential data analyses were used. Appropriate statistical measures used in the study included frequency, percentages, and Pearson Chi-square.

Frequencies enabled the researcher to calculate the descriptive statistics. The frequencies were classified into a limited number of values or categories. The researcher used general frequencies to provide insight as to sampling, selecting and weighting of data. The researcher supplied the list of variables for which frequency tables were produced.

The Chi-square test was applied to determine the significance of differences between two independent groups. For this study, one independent group is the campus family specialists. The second independent group is the group of parent participants. A significance level of  $p < .05$  was used in this study. The Chi-square test takes into account “the size of the sample and the magnitude of the relationship or difference reported in each study” (Gall et al., 1996, p. 55).

This was primarily a descriptive study. Results for the total population and each of the subgroups were reported in numerical table presentations for percentages and analysis of variance. Analysis and interpretation of the data adhered to the principles

prescribed for data description by Borg and Gall (1996) in *Educational Research: An Introduction*.

The information obtained was defined, coded, and analyzed using a statistical software package, SPSS, version 13.0. The level of significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ .

Data analysis has included specific statistical procedures for use in answering each research question. The first question was as follows:

1. What influence does the family specialist have in family involvement, as reported by parents and family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?

To answer this question, the researcher calculated the frequency distribution on the Likert scale for both the parents responses as well as the family specialist responses. An analysis of variance between the parents and the family specialists was performed. Identification of variables with significant differences for the means at the  $p < .05$  level was performed by the researcher.

The second question indicated in Chapter I is as follows:

2. What selected variables influence parental involvement as reported by family specialists and participants of the Parent Academy at participating selected Title I elementary schools in North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?

To answer this question, the following nominal variables were compared by determining the frequency of responses on the Likert scale:

1. Communication between the school and home
2. The school being inviting to parents



3. Maintaining a job outside the home
4. Level of parent education
5. Parents having pre-school age children at home
6. Support of family and friends
7. English not being the first language in the home
8. Parents' parents were involved in school
9. Classes being provided for parents

The third research question indicated in Chapter I as follows:

3. What influence do community agencies have in assisting the family specialists with the needs of families, as reported by End of Year Summary Sheets, at participating selected Title I elementary schools in North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?

To answer this question, the researcher calculated the frequency distribution of responses to each category of possible agencies listed on the End of Year Summary Sheets. A determination of the agencies used by each of the family specialists was made.

The fourth research question was indicated in Chapter I as follows:

4. What influence do parents have on determining the classes set forth for the Parent Academy, as reported by the family specialists and parents who are participants of the Parent Academy, at participating selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas?

To answer this question, the researcher calculated the frequencies of distribution on the Likert scale for both the parent responses as well as the family specialists responses.

An analysis of variance between the parents and the family specialists was performed. Identification of variables with significant differences for the means at the  $p < .05$  level was performed by the researcher.

Questions 20 through 25 on the Parent Survey consisted of demographic information from the parents. The following demographical information was obtained from the 66 parent subjects participating in the study:

- 1) Level of education
- 2) Number of years of involvement with Parent Academy
- 3) Employment outside the home
- 4) Pre-school children in the home
- 5) Race

This information served as identification factors in the description of the parent participants. This information provides a profile of a Parent Academy member with a child in elementary school in the North East ISD, San Antonio, Texas. Data from some respondents were missing for some questions in the study.

In summary, the population for the study was 10 family specialists currently active in their positions in North East ISD, San Antonio, TX. The population also consists of 66 parents at the participating Title I elementary schools in the same district. The instrument used in this study to identify the influence of the family specialists in

family involvement was validated by the researcher by a panel of experts, none of who were involved in the study.

This was primarily a descriptive study. Results for the total population and subgroups were reported in numerical tables for frequencies, percentages, and Pearson Chi-square.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the school social worker/family specialist in selected Title I elementary schools within the North East Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas. The study also investigated the influence the family specialist has on parents as it pertains to family involvement at selected Title I elementary campuses in the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas. To achieve this objective, a survey was developed to address parents' perspectives of the parent involvement on their campus. A second survey was developed to address the perspective of the family specialists at the selected Title I elementary campuses. The surveys provided the information for much of the research results presented in this chapter. The survey asked the 10 participating family specialists and the 66 participating parents to rate the answer to each questions on a 1-5 Likert scale in the following categories: "None," "A Little," "Some," "Very Much," and "Almost Always."

The information gained from this study will be available to professionals in the field of education who work with low-income, minority populations. This information may be used with school district staff involved in educational staff development programs for administrators, teachers and parents. It may also be used to develop specific social service departments within public school districts. The results from this study should be useful for anyone associated with education in general since the

demographics of the children in United States schools is rapidly becoming more diverse.

Chapter IV provides the results of the data collected from the selected populations through the survey developed by the researcher. The results were analyzed for the similarities and differences in reasons for parent involvement by both parents and the school family specialists.

Chapter IV contains an analysis of data obtained through the surveys as well as data gathered through the end-of-year information sheets provided by the participating family specialists. The intent of the research was to answer four questions concerning the role of the social worker/family specialist in family involvement at selected Title I schools which were identified as “Recognized” campuses by the Texas Education Agency for the 2005-2006 school year.

Questions to be answered by this study were:

- 1) What influence do the family specialists have in family involvement, as reported by parents and family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?
- 2) What selected variables influence parental involvement as reported by parents and family specialists, who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas?
- 3) What influence do community agencies have in assisting with the needs of families, as reported on the end-of-year summary sheets by the family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?

4) What influence do parents have on determining the classes set forth for the Parent Academy, as reported by the parents and family specialists who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary campuses in the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas?

## **Analysis of Demographic Data**

### *Profile of Parent Respondents*

The data reported for parent demographic data are grouped into five areas: Age, Educational Background, Race, Employment Outside the Home, Parents who have pre-school age children at home and Number of years the parent has been involved with the Parent Academy.

The age in years of all parent participants showed 30.3% of the parents were between the ages of 32-36. This group was followed closely by the 27.2% of parents who were 37 years of age or older. In the age group between 27-31 years of age, the data showed 24.2% of the parents. This data reveals that 81.7% of the participating parents were between the ages of 27 – 37 or older (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1. Number of Responses and Percentage for the Total Group and Each Subgroup of Parent Respondents Identifying Age of Parent Participants**

<b>Age of Parent Academy Respondents</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
No response	1	1.5
22-26	11	24.2
27-31	16	16.7
32-36	20	30.3
37 or Older	18	27.3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

Indicated in Table 2, from the parents surveyed, 16.7% did not graduate from high school; 39.4% did complete high school; 21.2% had some college education and 18.2% had completed college. There was no response from 4.5% of the respondents.

**TABLE 2. Number of Parent Responses and Percentage for the Total Group and Each Subgroup of Parent Respondents Identifying Parent Education Background**

<b>Educational Background of Respondents</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
No Response	3	4.5
Some High School	11	16.7
Completed High School	26	39.4
Some College	14	21.2
Completed College	12	18.2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

Data from Table 3 reveal that 6.1% of parent respondents were Anglo; 80.3% of parent participants were Hispanic; 6.1% were African American; 3% of the parents were other; and 4.5% of the parents were no response.

**TABLE 3. Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Information Regarding Race of the Parent Participants**

<b>Race of Parent Respondents</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
No Response	3	4.5
Anglo	4	6.1
Hispanic	53	80.3
African-American	4	6.1
Other	2	3.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

As indicated in Table 4, 31.8% did hold a job outside the home; 65.2% of the parent participants did not hold a job outside of the home; 3% of the parents did not respond.

**TABLE 4. Number of Respondents and Percentages for the Total Group and Each Subgroup of Parent Respondents Who Are Employed Outside of the Home**

<b>Employment of Parent Respondents Outside the Home</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
No Response	2	3.0
Yes	21	31.8
No	43	65.2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

As indicated in Table 5, 40.9% of the parents surveyed had pre-school age children at home; 56.1% did not have pre-school age children at home; and 3.0% had no response.

**TABLE 5. Number of Respondents and Percentages for the Total Group and Each Subgroup of Parent Respondents Who Have Pre-school Age Children at Home**

<b>Parent Respondents with Pre-school Children at Home</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
No Response	2	3.0
Yes	27	40.9
No	37	56.1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

As indicated in Table 6, this was the first year of involvement in the Parent Academy for 4.5% of the respondents; 53% of the respondents completed one year in the Parent Academy, 9.1% had of the respondents completed two years in the Parent



Academy; 15.2% of the respondents completed three years of the Parent Academy; and 10.6% completed three or more years in the Parent Academy Program.

**TABLE 6. Number of Respondents and Percentage for the Total Group and Subgroup of Parent Respondents and Their Years of Involvement with the Campus Parent Academy Program**

	Number of Years as a Participant of the Parent Academy Program										Total N	Total %
	1 <sup>st</sup> Yr		1 Yr		2 Yrs		3 Yrs		More than 3 Yrs			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
<b>Parent Response</b>	3	4.5	35	53.0	6	9.1	10	15.2	7	10.6	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>

## Parents' Perception of Parent Involvement

### *Research Question #1*

What influence do the family specialists have in family involvement, as reported by parents and family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?

The findings to this question demonstrate that parents feel the family specialists do have a significant impact on their involvement in Parent Academy (refer to Table 7).

**TABLE 7. The Degree of Influence of the Family Specialist on Parent Involvement as Determined by Both the Parents and Family Specialists**

		Encouragement from the Family Specialist Is the Reason I Have Become Involved in My Child's School											
		A=None		B=A Little		C=Some		D=Very Much		E=Almost Always		Total N	Total %
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
<b>Parent Response</b>		4	6.1	3	3.0	10	15.2	32	48.5	17	25.8	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Family Specialist Responses</b>		0	0	1	10	6	60	1	10	2	20	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

The participants were asked to answer the questions by filling in the circle on the answer choices on a Likert scale. The Likert scale ranged from 1 = “None” and 5 = “Almost Always.”

The data in Table 7 indicate the parent responses to this question are as follows: 25.8% of the parents surveyed chose, Almost Always; 28.7% chose, “Very Much”; 13.9% of the parents chose, “Some”; 2.6% of the parents chose, “A Little”; and 3.5% chose the response “None.”

Table 7 also indicates the Family Specialists responses were as follows: “Almost Always”, 20%; “Very Much”, 10%; “Some”, 60%; “A Little”, 10%; and “None”, 0%.

## **Variables Influencing Parent Involvement**

### *Research Question # 2*

What selected variables impact parental involvement as reported by parents and family specialists, who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas?

Each variable will be reviewed independently. The variables in the questionnaire used in this study for Question Two were: (1) communication, (2) the degree to which the school is welcoming, (3) parent employment outside the home, (4) educational background of the parent, and (5) having pre-school children at home.

*Question Two – Variable #1*

The findings to question two, for the first variable involving communication, reveal that both the parents and the family specialists believe strong communication exists between the home and school (see Table 8).

**TABLE 8. Number of Respondents and Percentage for the Total Group of Parent and Number of Respondents and Percentage for the Total Group of Family Specialists Identifying Level of Communication between the School and Home**

		<b>Question 1. Communication Exists between the School and Home about the Opportunities for Family Involvement.</b>				
Type		<b>A = None/Little</b>	<b>B = Some</b>	<b>C = Very Much/ Almost Always</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Family Specialists</b>	0	1	9	0	10
	<b>Parent</b>	2	9	54	1	66
<b>Total</b>		2	10	63	1	76

The combined parent responses of “Very Much” and “Almost Always,” concerning communication, totaled 81.9%, while the combined family specialist responses of “Very Much” and “Almost Always” totaled 90%.

Table 9 provides the data for a Chi-square test. It was inferred that in the population there was no significant difference between the responses of the family specialists and parents concerning the statement: Communication exists between the

home and school about opportunities for family involvement. The level of significance was greater than .05 using the Chi-Square test between categorical variables.

**TABLE 9. Chi-Square Tests Comparing Responses of Family Specialists and Parents Concerning the Statement: Communication Exists between the School and Home about the Opportunities for Family Involvement**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	.612(a)	3	.894
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	1.009	3	.799
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	76		

(a) 5 cells (62.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .13.

### *Question Two – Variable #2*

The findings for question two, for the second variable concerning the degree to which the school is welcoming, indicate that both the parents and family specialists feel strongly that their schools are welcoming and inviting to parents. See Table 10.

### *Degree to Which the School is Welcoming and Inviting*

The combined responses of “Very Much” and “Almost Always” for family specialists were 90%, while the parent total of these two responses totals 87.8%.

**TABLE 10. Number of Respondents and Percentage of Responses of Parent and Number of Respondents and Percentage of Responses of Family Specialists Identifying Degree to Which School Is Welcoming and Inviting to Parents**

		<b>2. The School and Staff Are Welcoming and Inviting to Parents</b>			
		<b>A = None/Little</b>	<b>B = Some</b>	<b>C = Very Much/ Almost Always</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Type</b>	<b>Family Specialists</b>	0	1	9	10
	<b>Parent</b>	1	7	58	66
<b>Total</b>		1	8	67	76

Table 11 provides the data for a Chi-square test. The Chi-square test analyzed the data between categorical variables. It was inferred that in the population there is no significant difference how the family specialists and parents answered on the statement: The school is welcoming and inviting to parents. The level of significance was greater than .05 using the Chi-square test between categorical variables.

**TABLE 11. Chi-Square Tests Comparing Responses of Family Specialists and Parents Concerning the Statement: The School and Staff Are Welcoming and Inviting to Parents**

	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	.159(a)	2	.924
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	.290	2	.865
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	76		

(a) 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .13.

*Question Two – Variable # 3*

The findings for question two, for the third variable concerning parent employment outside the home, indicate the parents feel that having a job outside the home does keep them from becoming involved in their child’s school (see Table 12).

**TABLE 12. Number of Responses and Percentage for the Total Group of Parents and Number of Respondents and Percentage for the Total Group of Family Specialists Identifying the Influence on Parent Participation at School When Parents Are Employed Outside the Home**

		<b>3. Having a Job outside the Home Keeps Parents from Becoming Involved with Their Child’s School.</b>				
Type		<b>A = None/Little</b>	<b>B = Some</b>	<b>C = Very Much/ Almost Always</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Family Specialists</b>	0	7	3	0	10
	<b>Parent</b>	17	20	28	1	66
<b>Total</b>		17	27	31	1	76

Parent responses in the “Very Much” and “Almost Always” categories totaled 42.4%. The responses from the family specialists indicate they do not feel as strongly that parent employment affects school involvement. Their combined responses for the “Very Much” and “Almost Always” categories totaled 30%.

Table 13 provides the data for a Chi-square test. The Chi-square test analyzed the data between categorical variables. It was inferred that in the population there is no significant difference in responses from the family specialists and parents concerning the statement: Having a job outside the home keeps parents from becoming involved with their child’s school. The level of significance was greater than .05 using the Chi-square test.

**TABLE 13. Chi-Square Tests Comparing Responses between Family Specialists and Parents Concerning the Statement: Having a Job outside the Home Keeps Parents from Becoming Involved with Their Child's School**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	6.908(a)	3	.075
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	8.570	3	.036
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	76		

(a) 5 cells (62.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .13.

*Question Two – Variable #4*

The findings for question two, for the fourth variable concerning parent educational background, indicate that both the parents and family specialists do not strongly feel that a parent's lack of education keeps them from being involved in their child's school (see Table 14).

**TABLE 14. Number of Respondents and Percentage for the Total Group of Parents and Number of Respondents and Percentage for the Total Group of Family Specialists Identifying the Influence of a Parent's Education in Getting Involved in Their Child's School**

<b>4. A Parent's Lack of Education Keeps Them from Getting Involved in Their Child's School.</b>					
Type		A =			Total
		None/Little	B = Some	C = Very Much/ Almost Always	
	<b>Family specialists</b>	6	2	2	10
	<b>Parent</b>	31	21	14	66
<b>Total</b>		37	23	16	76

*Parent's Educational Background*

Table 15 provides data for a Chi-square test. The Chi-square test analyzed the association between categorical variables. It was inferred that in the population there is no significant difference in responses from the family specialists and parents concerning the statement: A parent's lack of education keeps them from getting involved in their child's education. The level of significance was greater than .05 using the Chi-square test.

**TABLE 15. Chi-Square Tests Comparing Responses of Family Specialists and Parents Concerning the Statement: A Parent's Lack of Education Keeps Them from Getting Involved in Their Child's School**

	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>
Pearson Chi-Square	.710(a)	2	.701
Likelihood Ratio	.739	2	.691
N of Valid Cases	76		

(a) Cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.11.

*Question Two – Variable # 5*

The findings for question two, for the fifth variable concerning having pre-school age children at home, indicate that having young children at home does prevent parents from participating in school activities. Forty-seven percent of parents marked the "Very Much" and "Almost Always" categories. The family specialists' responses in these two categories were 40 % (refer to Table 16).



**TABLE 16. Number of Respondents and Percentage for the Total Group of Parents and Number of Respondents and Percentage for the Total Group of Family Specialists Identifying the Influence That Caring for Younger Children at Home Has on Parents Participating in School Activities**

		<b>5. Caring for Younger Children at Home Prevents Parents from Participating in School Activities.</b>			
Type		<b>A = None/Little</b>	<b>B = Some</b>	<b>C = Very Much/ Almost Always</b>	<b>Total</b>
	<b>Family specialists</b>	3	3	4	10
	<b>Parent</b>	19	16	31	66
<b>Total</b>		22	19	35	76

*Influence of Younger Children at Home*

Table 17 provides data for a Chi-square test. The Chi-square test analyzed the association between two categorical variables. It was inferred that in the population there is no significant difference in responses from the family specialists and parents concerning the statement: Caring for younger children at home prevents parents from participating in school activities. The level of significance was greater than .05 using the Chi-square test.

**TABLE 17. Chi-Square Tests Comparing the Responses of the Family Specialists and Parents Concerning the Statement: Caring for Younger Children at Home Prevents Parents from Participating in School Activities**

	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	.211(a)	2	.900
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	.209	2	.901
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	76		

(a) 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.50.

## Influence of Community Agencies

### *Research Question #3*

What influence do community agencies have in assisting with the needs of families, as reported on the end-of-year summary sheets by the family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?

The findings for Question 3 indicate the lack of consistent documentation by the family specialists. Many End of Year Summary Sheets were not completed with numerals, but rather checkmarks. The findings also indicate some campuses provide more services to their families than others (see Table 18 for data).

Table 18 identifies the number of times the family specialist at each campus provided the identified social services to address the needs of the families at the selected Title I elementary schools. Table 18 also provided the combined total of each service used among all schools is provided. Five out of the 11 schools had surveys that were completed with checkmarks rather than numerals. This resulted in incomplete data on the End of Year Summary sheets.

**TABLE 18. Frequency Distribution of Identified Social Services Provided by Family Specialists and Totals of Identified Social Services Provided at All Campuses**

Elementary Campus Name	Salvation Army Shoe-In	Operation School Bell	Holiday Help	CHIPS	McKinney	Total Times Assistance Was Provided at Individual Campuses
Camelot	*	*	*	*	*	*
Clear Spring	0	30	20	0	11	61
El Dorado	10	30	20	0	20	80
Colonial Hills	10	30	30	30	10	110
Dellview	*	*	*	*	*	*
East Terrell Hills	*	*	*	*	*	*
Olmos	2	30	80	0	2	114

TABLE 18. Continued

Elementary Campus Name	Salvation Army Shoe-In	Operation School Bell	Holiday Help	CHIPS	McKinney	Total Times Assistance Was Provided at Individual Campuses
Montgomery	12	32	30	33	44	151
Ridgeview	26	30	30	0	22	108
West Avenue	*	*	*	*	*	*
Wilshire	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>624</b>

\*Survey was completed with checkmarks rather than numerals, indicating usage of social service

## Parent Voice

### *Research Question #4*

What influence do parents have on determining the classes set forth for the Parent Academy, as reported by the parents and family specialists who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary campuses in the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas?

The findings to this question reveal that both the parents and the family specialists feel the parents have a strong voice in determining the classes taught in the Parent Academy classes (refer to Table 19 for data).

**TABLE 19. Number of Respondents and Percentage for the Total Group and Each Subgroup of Parent Respondents and Number of Respondents and Percentage for the Total Group and Each Subgroup of Family Specialist Respondents Identifying the Degree to Which Parents Have a Voice in Choosing the Classes Taught in the Parent Academy**

<b>15. Parents Have a Voice in Choosing the Classes Taught in the Parent Academy.</b>						
<b>Type</b>		<b>A = None/Little</b>	<b>B = Some</b>	<b>C = Very Much/ Almost Always</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Family Specialists</b>	0	2	8	0	10
	<b>Parent</b>	8	9	48	1	66
<b>Total</b>		8	11	56	1	76

Parent responses in the “Very Much” category were 50% while the family specialists responded with 70% in the same category. Combining both the “Very Much” and the “Almost Always” categories, the parents’ responses totaled 72.7% while the family specialists responses totaled 80%.

Table 20 provides the data for a Chi-square test. The Chi-square test analyzed the association between categorical variables. It was inferred that in the population there is no significant difference in responses from the family specialists and parents concerning the statement: Parents have a voice in choosing the classes taught in the Parent Academy. The level of significance was greater than .05 using the Chi-square test.

**TABLE 20. Chi-Square Tests Comparing Responses of Family Specialists and Parents Concerning the Statement: Parents Have a Voice in Choosing the Classes Taught in the Parent Academy**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.669(a)	3	.644
Likelihood Ratio	2.821	3	.420
N of Valid Cases	76		

(a) 4 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .13.

### Summary of Findings

This study investigated data from a survey given to both parents and family specialists. The survey was provided in both English and Spanish to ensure parents were provided an instrument in the language they felt most comfortable. There were a total of 10 family specialists and 66 parents. Eleven Title I elementary campuses were involved in the study.

The first research question dealt with discovering the degree of influence the family specialists have on family involvement. The overall indication is the parents felt strongly that the family specialists were the reason they became involved in their child's school. The family specialists, on the other hand, did not strongly indicate that their encouragement to the families was the reason parents became involved in their child's school.

The second research question investigated five variables which may influence parental involvement in school. The overall indication of the first variable (communication between the school and home) and the second variable (the school being welcoming and inviting) demonstrated a strong influence on parent involvement. The responses of both the parents and the family specialists were in agreement. The

overall indication of the third variable (parent employment outside the home) does significantly affect parental involvement in schools. The fourth variable revealed that a parent's lack of education did not have a significant influence on parent involvement. The fifth variable indicates that having pre-school children at home does negatively affect parental involvement.

The third research question dealt with discovering the use of community agencies used to provide assistance for families in need. The overall indication is that although community agencies were used, they were not used consistently throughout the North East ISD. Data by the family specialists were found to be weak.

The fourth research question dealt with parents having a voice in the classes they was taught. The overall indication is that both the parents and the family specialists agreed strongly that parents did have a voice in choosing classes.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the influence of family specialists on family involvement in selected public elementary schools as perceived by parents and family specialists in the North East Independent School District. Data were collected during the 2006-2007 school year. A review of the literature was conducted to form a foundation upon which to base this study.

This chapter contains a summary, results of the findings, and the conclusions. The first section presents a summary of the study, the procedures, and the author's findings based upon the research questions that were posed. The second section presents the conclusions and implications that were derived from the data as well as the review of literature. The third section includes the recommendations for further study.

#### **Summary**

The primary goal of this study was to examine the influence of the social worker/family specialist on parent involvement as reported by parents and family specialists at the identified Title I elementary schools in the North East Independent School District (NEISD).

Data were used from questionnaires given to parents who were members of the Parent Academy program and the family specialists at the identified schools. The

parent questionnaires were available to parents in both English and Spanish. A total of 66 parents and 10 family specialists participated in the study. The responses from the questionnaire were analyzed. Data were also used from the end-of-year summary sheets completed by the family specialists.

The study revolves around four major research questions:

1. What influence do the family specialists have in family involvement, as reported by parents and family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?
2. What selected variables influence parental involvement as reported by parents and family specialists, who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas?
3. What influence do community agencies have in assisting with the needs of families, as reported on the end-of-year summary sheets by the family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?
4. What influence do parents have on determining the classes set forth for the Parent Academy, as reported by the parents and family specialists who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary campuses in the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas?



## **Summary of Findings**

The research findings of this study were related to the theoretical context of bridging the gap between school and home in low socio-economic families. This research investigated the use of family specialists/social workers as it influences parent involvement. Provided below is a review of my findings for each research question.

### *Research Question I*

What influence do the family specialists have in family involvement, as reported by parents and family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?

### *Conclusions*

The results of this study support the use of a family specialist/social worker in the schools to influence parent involvement. Question I revealed that parents felt the family specialists had a much stronger degree of influence on their parent involvement than the family specialists felt. Table 7 (in Chapter IV) shows that 74.3% of the parents believed encouragement from the family specialist was “Very Much” or “Almost Always” the reason they became involved in their child’s school. On the other hand, Table 7 shows that 30% of the family specialists’ believe their encouragement to families is “Very Much” or “Almost Always” the reason parents get involved.

These findings are similar to those of Altshuler (2003) found in Chapter II. Social workers are in a unique position to provide a bridge between the two worlds of school

and home. The Chrispeels and Rivero study (2001) also defined that parent programs, or facilitators, help provide parents in redefining roles and therefore enhance their potential involvement. Decker and Decker (2003) suggested assigning parent coordinators as a way to help teachers make the initial outreach with their students' families.

### *Implications for Practice*

The review of the literature is similar to the results of this study. It is apparent from the review of the literature that there are benefits to having a link of communication between the school and home. The link, in this case, is the family specialists.

The school works as a potential anchor for students when active commitment and collaboration among the social worker, the school and the home takes place. The barriers between the home and school include factors such as poverty, poor health or an unstable home situation (Decker & Decker, 2003). School districts will want to hire school social workers or family-community coordinators to provide the necessary link that will bridge the gap between home and school (Chavkin, 2000). Parents feel encouraged to participate in their child's school. The social workers/family specialists are a built in support system for parents who otherwise may not consider family involvement in the school.

### *Research Question 2*

What selected variables influence parental involvement as reported by parents and family specialists, who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary schools I the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas?

The five variables which were specific to this study were (1) communication between the school and home, (2) the school being welcoming to parents, (3) parents being employed outside the home, (4) education of parents and (5) caring for younger children at home.

### *Conclusions for the Five Variables*

*Variable 1.* The results of this study indicate the importance of communication. Question 2 shows that both the parents and the family specialists indicated strong communication exists between the home and school about the opportunities for family involvement. Tables 8 and 8.1 show the family specialists feel slightly stronger (90 %) than the parents (81.9 %) about the existence of communication.

These results are similar to the findings of Reese and Gillimore in Chapter II. A parent's concepts about their role can be changed by information provided by a parent program. Communicating by providing information to parents is essential in a parent outreach program.

*Variable 2.* The results of this study strongly support the idea that the school environment is inviting and welcoming to parents. Both the parents and family specialists strongly agreed that their campuses were welcoming and inviting to parents. The data in Tables 10 and 11 show a strong correlation between the 90 percent response from the family specialists and the 87.8% response from the parents indicating that their campuses were "Very Much" and "Almost Always" welcoming and inviting to parents.

The results of this study agree with Nieto (2002) in Chapter II. He argued that the school's curriculum is not only about subjects. The culture of the school's families comes into play when attempting to bring them into the school. This study was limited to parents who were already members of a Parent Academy program. Therefore, a connection had already been established between the parents and the school. Parents who took this survey had already begun establishing relationships with different school personnel. This, in turn, may have accounted for their high degree of positive feelings for their child's school.

*Variable 3.* The results of this study support the fact that parent employment does influence the amount of parent involvement in school. The research findings in Tables 10 and 10.1 contain data indicating 30% of the family specialists and 42.4% of the parents felt employment had at least some influence on school involvement.

This was similar to what was stated by Mistry, Vandewater, Huston and McLoyd (2002) in Chapter II. Negative associations were found between increased economic pressures and the ability of parents to devote time and energy to their child's well-being. When a parent has other obligations, one of them being providing for their family, parent involvement can become limited. Chin and Newman (2002) found that while low socio-economic families were trying to meet the demands of work and pay attention to their child's school work, the fine line often led to their children having difficulties at school.

*Variable 4.* The results of this study show that a lack of parent education does not result in less parent involvement. The research findings in Tables 14 and 15 show that the educational background of the parent does not significantly affect parent involvement at the participating campuses. According to this study, the responses in the “Very Much” and “Almost Always” categories were 30% from the family specialists and 21.2% from the parents.

These results do not support the study by Richman-Prakash, West and Deton (2002). They listed the parents’ education level as one of six barriers of parental involvement. The difference in the studies may be due to the educational level of parent respondents in this study. According to Table 2 in Chapter IV, 39.4% of the parent respondents had completed high school, 21.2% had some college and 18.2% had completed college. The difference may also be due to the fact that the specific group of parents who were surveyed in this study were members of the Parent Academy and therefore were parents who may not be intimidated with learning new ideas.

*Variable 5.* The results of this study strongly support the idea that having younger children at home limits parental involvement. The data in Tables 16 and 17 in Chapter IV show having younger children at home does significantly influence family involvement in school. The data show 47% of the parents marked the “Very Much” or “Almost Always” categories and the family specialists indicated 40% for the same categories.

These findings are in agreement with the literature by Gutman, Sameroff and Eccles (2002) that identified the number of children in a family as one of the at-risk factors. Epstein's (1995) research, referred to in Chapter II, states that a parent's time restraints and obligations in their daily lives are two key elements which influence family involvement.

### *Implications for Practice – Research Question 2*

The results of this study strongly suggest that many factors affect parental involvement in school. Communication, environment of the school, parent employment, parent education and young children at home all affect the degree of parental involvement.

In Chapter 2 Nieto (2002) referred to the chief matter of the school as not only being about subjects. One of the chief matters is the actual culture of the school towards its families. The Parent Academy parents who were the participants of this survey, were parents who had begun establishing relationships with the school. It is evident that open communication is needed to bring parents onto the school campus and the culture of the school is what will ultimately keep parents involved in the campus.

Joyce Epstein (1992) identified communication as one of the categories of her Six Levels of Involvement Model. Communicating by talking and meeting with families, using newsletters, home visits, and teacher notes helps provide cooperation between the home and school. Family involvement increases when families receive frequent and effective communication (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

A welcoming environment is essential in establishing parent involvement in schools. Auerback (2002) pointed out that rebuffs to parents by the school, such as rudeness, no follow through, or exclusion in discussions have the potential for having a cumulative negative effect on family-school relations. The welcome and response of professionals expressed to families is a major factor in attracting parents to get involved and feel a part of the community (Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998).

According to Mistry, Vandewater, Huston, & McLoyd (2002) negative associations were found between increased economic pressures and the parents' ability to devote time and energy to support their children's well-being. Since many students from low income communities have parents who work long hours, or even more than one job, educators must be aware of the needs of their particular communities. Meetings, conferences, classes need to be offered at times convenient for parents working long or odd hours. Further implications are that students may not always have help available at home. This is not due to parents who are uninterested, but parents whose time revolves around putting bread on the table.

Teacher preparation programs which include engaging effectively with diverse families are necessary. Henerson and Mapp (2002) suggested teacher programs include how to build partnerships between the school and families. This is relevant when the majority of teachers' experiences are different from those of the children in their classrooms.

The role of schools is changing as the needs of families are changing. No longer does schooling take place only within the school day or does it take place only for the children. Educators must look at creating a school to fit the family, not the family to

fit the school. Chapter II notes Chadwick (2002) suggesting that programs are needed which not only meet the needs of parents but are available to those who need them most.

### *Research Question 3*

What influence do community agencies have in assisting with the needs of families, as reported on the end-of-year summary sheets by the family specialists at the selected Title I elementary schools in the North East ISD, in San Antonio, Texas?

### *Conclusions*

The results of the study indicate that community agencies do provide a large number of services through the family specialists at the identified schools. The data reveal that a total number of 624 social services were provided by the family specialists during the 2006-2007 school year. This number only accounts for the family specialists that completed the form numerically. These services include assistance with food, clothing and shelter. Chavkin (2000) suggested districts look at the possibility of positioning some community services on the campus site. The services become more easily accessible families with low socio-economic circumstances.

It should be noted that data regarding Question 3 were revealed to be incomplete by Table 18 in Chapter IV. Family specialists at five campuses used checkmarks, rather than numerals, complete the forms.



### *Implications for Practice*

The review of the literature is consistent with the results of this study. In Chapter II, Chavkin (2000) proposed positioning some community/social services on the campus site. A wide range of materials, resources and activities must be provided. Parents want teachers to understand the realities of their communities and family situations, according to Miretzky (2004). Only in doing so can the proper services and outreach be provided for families in need.

Written policies and data are essential to identifying the needs of at-risk families and being able to service those needs. If family involvement is to be a priority of any school district, mandates must be made to ensure accountability. One of the two important elements identified by Williams and Chavkin (1990) is to have written policies for school-parent programs.

As educational practitioners, it is necessary to acknowledge we are responsible for much more than simply reading and arithmetic. In order to provide the best learning situation possible for our children, educators must address the basic needs of the families they serve.

### *Research Question 4*

What influence do parents have on determining the classes set forth for the Parent Academy, as reported by the parents and family specialists who are participants of the Parent Academy at the selected Title I elementary campuses in the North East ISD in San Antonio, Texas?

### *Conclusions*

The results of this study support the need for parents to have a voice. Tables 19 and 20 address the statement of parents having a voice in the decision of classes. Both parents and family specialists agreed that parents do have a voice in choosing the classes taught in the Parent Academy. Combining the “Very Much” and “Almost Always” categories when identifying if the parents had a voice, the family specialist total was 80% and the parents’ total was 72.7%.

The challenge is not merely to increase the number of programs to address parent needs, but to ensure that these programs meet the needs of parents and also to ensure they are available to those who need them most (Chadwick, 2002). With every school community having specific needs and wants, the focus of classes at each campus may vary. A study in Chapter II by Henderson and Berla (1994) cited that parents became more involved when they were treated as partners.

### *Implications for Practice*

The review of literature is consistent with the findings of this study. The Diversity Project, created by Pedro Noguera and Jean Wing (2006), came about by giving parents a voice and bringing equality into the schools of their children. Parents have a say in what is needed when choosing topics for parent staff development. Topics vary widely in different parent programs. Classes range from parent-child communication, anger management, health awareness, nutrition, attention deficit disorder, presenting oneself at an interview, parenting skills, student rights as well as classes just for fun, such as cake decorating.

Washington (2001) cited that one of the roles of the parent support specialist in the Parent Support Specialist Program in Austin, Texas, is to work with families and students to provide presentations and workshops in a variety of areas of interest.

School social workers must not only have a clear understanding of the problematic conditions of poverty but must also develop a comprehensive knowledge of minority cultural characteristics (Teasley, 2005). Clearly it is in the best interest of the schools to gain input from the families they serve. Building these relationships with parents validates that their voice matters.

Schools are increasingly being asked to take on much more than simply the educational responsibilities of teaching children. Schools serving impoverished neighborhoods are quite often spending much of their teaching time grappling for solutions to the problems their students face. Families in poverty face many emotional stressors. These may include the realities of hunger, inadequate housing, child neglect; inadequate health care, unsafe neighborhoods and the mobility of families are an everyday issue. With collaboration, the schools can become the hub to agencies which provide social services needed by families in the community.

Community based schools, or full service schools, are based upon the idea of linking schools to the outside community. The school then becomes not only a place for children, but for the whole family. Children no longer simply get dropped off at the front door, but parents enter the doors and know where to go and who to ask for help.

The driving force behind full-service schools is that students must have their basic needs met before they can learn effectively. These basic needs include having

adequate food, clothing, shelter and health care. Even the latest and most innovative curriculum cannot benefit students who are sick or not ready to learn when they arrive at the school door.

With public school districts needing and wanting the support of the communities they serve, what better way to develop relationships with their constituents than to work directly with them? Education is the business of serving and providing for people so they can better help themselves. This is true for students entering kindergarten to those in higher education. Partnerships encourage this type of learning to take place.

Through this effort, educators will no longer be isolated in their work. Families will share the responsibility of education. As communities, states and this country become more diverse, it remains the job of public schools to service all children equally and provide all children the same opportunities for success. School social workers begin this process through building respect and trust between school staff and the families they serve.

As parents become involved with the school system, the school district will benefit. Parents will be more likely to support the school system and vote for bond elections.

With parent support, and the support of social services, student attendance will increase. The more a child is in school, the more chance he has to succeed academically.

The better a student does in school; the more likely they are to attend on a regular basis. This in turn means they are less likely to drop out. The school district attendance rate will go up.

School policies need to take into account the changing demographics and needs of the future. This will impact not only the hiring of social workers as school personnel, but the budgeting of funds, expansion of staff development, providing enrichment opportunities for children before and/or after school, working with community service people, but also the design, placement and size of school buildings. Our schools are no longer the one room school house which fits the needs of all.

It is clear that the voices of diverse and economically disadvantaged parents must be heard and respected by the schools.

### **Recommendations**

At a time of changing demographics and with schools becoming responsible for more than just the education of our children, the role of school outreach through a social worker is critical.

This study was intended to serve as basic research for North East Independent School District to evaluate their family specialist program and use the findings for future planning purposes. The study's primary purpose was to examine the influence of the family specialists in parent involvement at selected Title I elementary schools.

In conclusion, schools are increasingly being asked to take on much more than simply the educational responsibilities of teaching children. Schools serving impoverished neighborhoods are quite often spending much of their teaching time grappling

for solutions to the problems their students face. Families in poverty face many emotional stressors. These may include the realities of hunger, inadequate housing, child neglect; inadequate health care, unsafe neighborhoods and the mobility of families are an everyday issue. With collaboration, the schools can become the hub to agencies which provide social services needed by families in the community.

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The driving force behind full-service schools is that students must have their basic needs met before they can learn effectively. These basic needs include having adequate food, clothing, shelter and health care. Even the latest and most innovative curriculum cannot benefit students who are sick or not ready to learn when they arrive at the school door.

With public school districts needing and wanting the support of the communities they serve, what better way to develop relationships with their constituents than to work directly with them? Education is the business of serving and providing for people so they can better help themselves. This is true for students entering kindergarten to those in higher education. Partnerships encourage this type of learning to take place.

Through this effort, educators will no longer be isolated in their work. Families will share the responsibility of education. As communities, states and this country

become more diverse, it remains the job of public schools to service all children equally and provide all children the same opportunities for success. School social workers begin this process through building respect and trust between school staff and the families they serve.

As parents become involved with the school system, the school district will benefit. Parents will be more likely to support the school system and vote for bond elections.

With parent support, and the support of social services, student attendance will increase. The more a child is in school, the more chance he has to succeed academically.

The better a student does in school; the more likely they are to attend on a regular basis. This in turn means they are less likely to drop out. The school district attendance rate will rise. Taking care of children means taking care of education. Everyone wins.

The literature for this study along with the findings revealed in this research support the following recommendations.

- 1 . The data in this study indicated that the presence of a family specialist/social worker on a school campus influences parent involvement in a positive way, according to parents and family specialists in the North East Independent School District. Encouragement from the family specialist to get involved at school is a primary reason parents are participating.
- 2 . The data collected indicated that the variables of open communication between home and school and the school being inviting to parents are positive factors

- in parents getting involved. Employment outside the home, educational status of the parents and the presence of younger children at the home did not appear to be factors that hindered family involvement in school.
- 3 . The data collected from the end-of-year summary sheets were not completed, using numerals, by all the family specialists. Some sheets were completed with check marks. The data available demonstrates family specialists use specific social services to assist families throughout the school year. The data collected in this study indicated that parents are given the opportunity to use their voice in choosing classes taught at the Parent Academy. The classes address the needs and wants of the parents. The classes at each campus may vary, according to the needs of the particular community.
  - 4 . The data collected in this study indicated that parents are given the opportunity to use their voice in choosing classes taught at the Parent Academy. The classes address the needs and wants of the parents. The classes at each campus may vary, according to the needs of the particular community.

#### *For Further Research*

The following are recommendations for further research related to this area.

1. This study was limited in scale and should be replicated in other districts to further explore the influence of family specialists/ social workers in parent involvement at Title I elementary schools. Similarly, each program should be researched.



2. Social work/family specialist programs should require the proper collection of data in order to track the history and effectiveness of the program. It would be beneficial if this data is checked by a supervisor of the program to ensure data is completed correctly. It is recommended that data be collected twice yearly. Such data could be very helpful in determining the needs of the various campuses, as well as determining the work each family specialist is contributing.
3. It is recommended that staff development be provided, focusing on the culture of poverty, to all school social workers/family specialists.
4. It is recommended that staff development be provided, focusing on the culture of poverty, to all faculty and staff who work at Title I schools.
5. Universities should provide a class not only on multiculturalism, but on the effects of poverty on a family. Many young educators come to the Title I schools with a naïve sense that everyone is middle class.
6. There is room for improvement in family involvement programs. It is suggested that free babysitting be made available while parents are attending classes on campus during the school day. This would communicate welcome and acceptance of all the children in the family. These pre-school children will soon be students on the elementary campuses.
7. Comparisons of parent involvement programs should be made between Title I schools that received the “Recognized status and those which received the “Acceptable” status from TEA.

8. Examine attendance rates at Title I schools with family specialists/social workers as opposed to those Title I schools without family specialists.
9. Track the grade history of students before and after parents joined the Parent Academy or a similar parent program.
10. Examine the overlapping duties and responsibilities of school counselors, social workers and school administrators. Would this be an issue on a school campus?

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**APPENDIX A**  
**PARENT SURVEY (ENGLISH VERSION)**

**Family Involvement Survey for Parents**

Please circle the letter you feel best fits the statement or question.

A) None      B) A Little      C) Some      D) Very Much      E) Almost Always

1. Communication exists between the school and home about the opportunities for family involvement.      A   B   C   D   E
2. The school and staff are welcoming and inviting to parents.      A   B   C   D   E
3. Having a job outside the home keeps parents from becoming involved with their child's school.      A   B   C   D   E
4. A parent's lack of education keeps them from getting involved in their child's school.      A   B   C   D   E
5. Caring for younger children at home prevents parents from participating in school activities.      A   B   C   D   E
6. The Family Specialist has provided assistance for me or my family through referral to community agencies.      A   B   C   D   E
7. I have become a better parent through my involvement in my child's school.      A   B   C   D   E
8. My family and friends support my decision to attend Parent Academy classes or participate in other ways at my child's school.      A   B   C   D   E
9. I feel my involvement at school will help my child be more successful at school.      A   B   C   D   E
10. I will continue to stay involved in school activities as my child goes on to middle school.      A   B   C   D   E
11. My limited English keeps me from being active in school activities.      A   B   C   D   E
12. Encouragement from the Family Specialist is the reason I have become involved in my child's school.      A   B   C   D   E
13. The reason I am involved in the Parent Academy at my child's school is to help better myself.      A   B   C   D   E
14. The reason I am involved in my child's school is so I can help my child with his/her school work.      A   B   C   D   E
15. Parents have a voice in choosing the classes taught in the Parent Academy.      A   B   C   D   E
16. My parents were involved in my elementary school when I was growing up.      A   B   C   D   E
17. I talk with my children about going to college.      A   B   C   D   E

18. The Family Specialist has provided assistance for me and my family for...(circle all that apply)
- A) health care
  - B) food
  - C) clothing
  - D) shelter
  - E) parent classes
19. I feel the role of the Family Specialist is mainly...
- A) to provide classes for parents
  - B) to help in getting health care to families
  - C) to help families find emergency shelter
  - D) to help families with food & clothing
  - E) to help with communication between the school and the families it serves
20. My educational background
- A) some high school
  - B) completed high school
  - C) some college
  - D) completed college
21. I have been a member of Parent Academy for
- A) this is my first year
  - B) one year
  - C) two years
  - D) three years
  - E) more than three years
22. My age is
- A) 17 – 21
  - B) 22 – 26
  - C) 27 – 31
  - D) 32 – 36
  - E) 37 and older
23. I am currently employed outside the home.
- A) yes
  - B) no
24. I have pre-school age children at home.
- A) yes
  - B) no
25. Race – please mark only one.
- A) Anglo
  - B) Hispanic
  - C) African American
  - D) Other

**APPENDIX B**  
**PARENT SURVEY (SPANISH VERSION)**

**Por favor marque con un círculo la letra que corresponda mejor a lo expresado o a la pregunta**

A) Para nada    B) Muy poco    C) Poco    D) Mucho    E) Casi siempre

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Existe comunicación entre la escuela y el hogar sobre las oportunidades de participación de la familia.   | A | B | C | D | E |
| 2. La escuela y el personal son acogedores y agradables para los padres de familia.  | A | B | C | D | E |
| 3. El tener un trabajo fuera de la casa no les permite a los padres involucrarse en la escuela de su hijo.   | A | B | C | D | E |
| 4. La falta de preparación de los padres impide que se involucren en la escuela de su hijo.  | A | B | C | D | E |
| 5. El tener que cuidar a niños pequeños en casa impide que los padres participen en actividades de la escuela de su hijo.  | A | B | C | D | E |
| 6. La especialista de familias nos ha proporcionado ayuda a mí y a mi familia enviándonos a agencias comunitarias.   | A | B | C | D | E |
| 7. He llegado a ser un mejor padre de familia a través de mi participación en la escuela de mis hijo.  | A | B | C | D | E |
| 8. Mi familia y amigos apoyan mi decisión de asistir a las clases de la <u>Academia para Padres de Familia</u> o de participar de otras formas en las actividades de la escuela de mis hijo. | A | B | C | D | E |
| 9. Pienso que mi participación en la escuela ayudará a que mi hijo tenga más éxito en ella.  | A | B | C | D | E |
| 10. Continuaré manteniéndome involucrado en las actividades escolares cuando mi hijo vaya a la escuela intermedia.   | A | B | C | D | E |
| 11. Mi dominio limitado del inglés impide que sea activo en las actividades escolares.   | A | B | C | D | E |
| 12. El ánimo que me da la especialista de familias es la razón por la cual me he involucrado en la escuela de mi hijo.   | A | B | C | D | E |
| 13. La razón por la que participo en la Academia para Padres de Familia de la escuela de mi hijo es para ayudarme a mejorar a mí mismo.  | A | B | C | D | E |



14. La razón por la que me involucro en la escuela de mi hijo es para poder ayudarlo con sus tareas escolares. A B C D E
15. Los padres de familia tienen voz al escoger las clases que se enseñan en la Academia para Padres de Familia. A B C D E
16. Mis padres participaban en las actividades de mi escuela primaria cuando yo era pequeño. A B C D E
17. Hablo con mis hijos acerca de asistir a la universidad. A B C D E
18. La especialista de familias nos ha proporcionado ayuda a mí y a mi familia en... (Marque con un círculo lo que aplique)
- A) el cuidado de la salud
  - B) la alimentación
  - C) el vestuario
  - D) la vivienda
  - E) las clases para padres
19. Pienso que el papel de la especialista de familias es principalmente el de ...
- A) proveer clases para los padres de familia
  - B) ayudar a las familias a obtener cuidado de la salud
  - C) ayudar a las familias a encontrar refugio en emergencias
  - D) ayudar a las familias con comida y ropa
  - E) ayudar con la comunicación entre la escuela y las familias a las que sirve
20. Mi preparación
- A) algo de secundaria
  - B) terminé la secundaria
  - C) algo de universidad
  - D) terminé la universidad
21. He sido miembro de la Academia para padres de familia por
- A) este es mi primer año
  - B) un año
  - C) dos años
  - D) tres años
  - E) más de tres años
22. Mi edad
- A) 17 - 21

- B) 22 - 26
- C) 27 - 31
- D) 32 - 36
- E) 37 o más

23. Actualmente estoy empleado fuera de casa

- A) Sí
- B) No

24. Tengo niños preescolares en casa

- A) Sí
- B) No

25. Raza, por favor marque solamente una

- A) anglosajona
- B) hispana
- C) africanoamericana
- D) asiática
- E) otra

**APPENDIX C**  
**FAMILY SPECIALIST SURVEY**

**Family Involvement Survey for Family Specialists**

Please circle the letter you feel best fits the statement or question.

A) None   B) A Little   C) Some   D) Very Much   E) Almost Always

1. Communication exists between the school and home about the opportunities for family involvement.      A   B   C   D   E
2. The school and staff are welcoming and inviting to parents.      A   B   C   D   E
3. Having a job outside the home keeps parents from becoming involved with their child's school.      A   B   C   D   E
4. A parent's lack of education keeps them from getting involved in their child's school.      A   B   C   D   E
5. Caring for younger children at home prevents parents from participating in school activities.      A   B   C   D   E
6. I provide assistance for families through referrals to community agencies.      A   B   C   D   E
7. Involvement in the Parent Academy improves parenting skills.      A   B   C   D   E
8. A parent's involvement in the Parent Academy helps his/her child to be more successful at school.      A   B   C   D   E
9. I feel a parents in the Parent Academy will continue their school involvement into their child's middle school years.      A   B   C   D   E
10. Parents with limited English are hesitant to become involved in school activities.      A   B   C   D   E
11. Parents become involved in school activities after I encourage them to do so.      A   B   C   D   E
12. Parents become involved without my encouragement.      A   B   C   D   E
13. Parents become involved in the Parent Academy to help better themselves.      A   B   C   D   E
14. Parents become involved in the Parent Academy to help their child with his/her school work.      A   B   C   D   E
15. Parents have a voice in choosing the classes taught in the Parent Academy.      A   B   C   D   E
16. The parents in Parent Academy talk about the possibility of their child going to college.      A   B   C   D   E

17. I have been a Family Specialist in North East ISD for
- A) this is my first year
  - B) one year
  - C) two years
  - D) three years
  - E) more than 3 years
18. Most of my time helping families is spent providing assistance with
- A) health care
  - B) food
  - C) clothing
  - D) shelter
  - E) parent classes
19. I feel the role of the Family Specialist is mainly
- A) to provide classes for parents
  - B) to help get health care for families
  - C) to help families find emergency shelter
  - D) to help families with food & clothing
  - E) to help with communication between the school & the families it serves
20. The number of parents involved in the Parent Academy on my campus for the 2005-2006 school year was \_\_\_\_\_.

**APPENDIX D**  
**INFORMATION SHEET (ENGLISH VERSION)**

## INFORMATION SHEET

“The Role of the School Social Worker in Family Involvement as Identified by Family Specialists and Parents in Selected Title I Schools in North East I.S.D. in San Antonio, Texas”

You should know that this study is part of my doctoral requirements. With your input, I hope to learn that various roles, conducted by the family specialist, that impact family involvement at the elementary school level. As parents and as family specialists, your perspectives and opinions are very important. Please keep in my mind that in no way is this survey about any particular school, parent, or family specialist. It is about the roles the family specialists play in family involvement.

The Purpose of the Study: The primary purpose of this study is to identify the activities and initiatives that build a positive working relationship between the school and the families it serves. A secondary purpose of the study is to provide data that can focus on training and staff development needed to develop practices that build a sense of community and cooperation between the school and families.

The survey should take about 5 minutes to complete. There is very low risk to participation in this study. It is totally voluntary and any participant can refuse to answer the questions and/or quit at any time without penalty.

You will be one of approximately 75 participants from Title I elementary schools in North East I.S.D. whose campus received the “Recognized” status from the Texas Education Agency in the 2005-2006 school year. There are no direct positive or negative benefits to you from responding to this survey. There is not risk to you because your responses are completely anonymous. In no way can you or your responses be identified. Please do not put your name or school name on the survey. Upon completion, the surveys will be collected and placed in an envelope to ensure the anonymity of all responses.

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research related problems or questions regarding subjects’ rights, you can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Angelia M. Raines, Director of Research Compliance, Office of the Vice President for Research at (979) 458-4067 or at [araines@vprmail.tamu.edu](mailto:araines@vprmail.tamu.edu).

If you have further questions you can contact me, Gloria Canada at (210) 564-1775 or at [gcanada@satx.rr.com](mailto:gcanada@satx.rr.com). You may also address questions to the co-chairs of my committee, Dr. Stephen Stark at [sstark@tamu.edu](mailto:sstark@tamu.edu) (979) 845-2656 and Dr. John Hoyle at [jhoyle@tamu.edu](mailto:jhoyle@tamu.edu) (979) 845-2748

**APPENDIX E**  
**INFORMATION SHEET (SPANISH VERSION)**



## HOJA DE INFORMACIÓN

“El rol de la trabajadora social escolar en la participación de las familias como lo identifican las especialistas de familia y los padres de familia en las escuelas seleccionadas de Título I del North East I.S.D. en San Antonio, Texas”

Usted debe saber que este estudio es parte de los requisitos de mi tesis doctoral. Con su información, espero aprender sobre los varios papeles que la especialista de familias desempeña y el impacto en la participación de las familias en las escuelas primarias. Como padres y como especialistas de familias, sus perspectivas y opiniones son muy importantes. Por favor tengan en cuenta que de ninguna manera esta encuesta se trata sobre alguna escuela, padre o especialista de familias en particular. Se trata de los papeles que juegan las especialistas de familias en la participación de las familias.

El propósito del estudio: El propósito principal de este estudio es identificar las actividades e iniciativas que crean una relación de trabajo positiva entre la escuela y las familias a las que sirve. Un propósito secundario del estudio es el de proporcionar datos que puedan enfocar en la capacitación y desarrollo que el personal necesita para desarrollar las prácticas que creen el sentido de comunidad y cooperación entre la escuela y las familias.

La encuesta deberá tomar unos 5 minutos. Hay un riesgo muy bajo en la participación de este estudio. Es totalmente voluntario y todo participante puede negarse a contestar las preguntas o a dejar de contestarlas en cualquier momento sin ninguna consecuencia.

Usted será uno de aproximadamente 75 participantes de las escuelas primarias de Título I de North East I.S.D. cuyos planteles han recibido la calificación de “Reconocida” de la Agencia de Educación de Texas en el año escolar de 2005-2006. No hay beneficios directos positivos ni negativos para usted al responder este cuestionario. No hay riesgos para usted porque sus respuestas son totalmente anónimas. No hay ninguna manera de que usted o sus respuestas puedan ser identificadas. Le ruego que no ponga su nombre o el nombre de la escuela en la encuesta. Después de que las encuestas sean llenadas, se las recogerá y se las pondrá en un sobre para asegurar el anonimato de todas las respuestas.

Este estudio de investigación ha sido revisado por el *Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in Research*, de la Universidad A&M de Texas. Para problemas o preguntas sobre los derechos de sujetos de investigación, puede comunicarse con el *Institutional Review Board* a través de la Sra. Angelia M. Raines, Directora de *Research Compliance, Office of the Vice President of Research* por el (979) 458-4067 o por [araines@vprmail.tamu.edu](mailto:araines@vprmail.tamu.edu).

Si tiene preguntas puede comunicarse conmigo, Gloria Canada por el (210) 564-1775 o por [gcanada@satx.rr.com](mailto:gcanada@satx.rr.com). También puede dirigir sus preguntas a los codirectores de mi comité, Dr. Stephen Stark por [sstark@tamu.edu](mailto:sstark@tamu.edu) (979) 845-2656 o Dr. John Hoyle por [jhoyle@tamu.edu](mailto:jhoyle@tamu.edu) (979) 845-2748

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Fifth Grade Teacher, Walzem Elementary, 1994 – 1995  
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Second Grade Teacher, Lone Star Elementary, 1989 – 1990  
Fifth Grade Teacher, Dobie Intermediate, 1984 - 1989

The typist for this record of study was Mr. Bill A. Ashworth, Jr.