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## The Effectiveness of the Achievable Dream Parent Involvement Program

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AN ACHIEVABLE DREAM PARENT  
INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty and Staff of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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By

Deena Lee Vreeland

May 2016

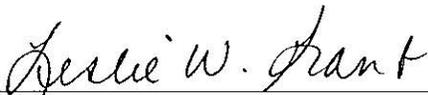
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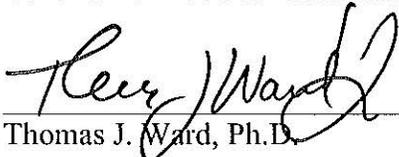
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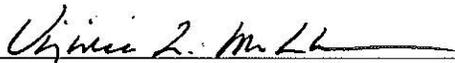
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## **Dedication**

First, this entire process is dedicated to my parents, Yvonne Johnson and Jim Vreeland. I cannot think of a time when you were not preparing me for this journey. You both have always served as inspirations to me through your strong work-ethic and dedication to being successful. Most importantly, you never allowed anything to stand in the way of my dreams and encouraged me every step of the way. I love you both more than words can say!

This has been a long journey. I could not have completed without Amy Runge. We entered this journey together and we are finishing it together. There were many nights of never-ending classes and papers when we were exhausted from a long day at work. We kept each other motivated when one of us may have been ready to give up. More importantly, we managed to have fun along the way.

My friends and extended family have supported me every step of the way! The time dedicated to my education caused me to sacrifice precious opportunities with those I love. I thank you for supporting me along the way.... Sometimes just to vent or when I wanted to give up!

My support system at The College of William and Mary was amazing! Thank you to my chair, Dr. Leslie Grant. You are an excellent leader and advisor. Thank you to my committee members, Drs. Tom Ward and Virginia McLaughlin. Your time, efforts, advice, and feedback were most appreciated.

I must give a big thank you to my An Achievable Dream family especially Kathy Edwards, Helen Myers, and Richard Coleman. Throughout the years, you each have played pivotal roles in my career and life. You have served as role models developing me into the professional I am today and have always supported my educational pursuits.

I owe the students, alumni, teachers, and staff a huge thank you as you served as my motivation to always “be” and “do” better. An Achievable Dream and those associated with the program have played a huge role in developing me into the person I am today. An Achievable Dream is (and always will be) a piece of my soul.

I cannot imagine the path my life would have taken professionally or academically had I not met Walter S. Segaloff. When I began at An Achievable Dream, I was 21 years old and I had just completed my undergraduate degree. Since then, I completed three additional degrees while working full-time. I owe a tremendous gratitude to Walter. He always encouraged me and never let an obstacle stand in my way. Although I began my doctoral program before Walter passed away, I am so sorry that he was not here to see me complete it. Therefore, I want to pay tribute for the role he played in my life. Walter S. Segaloff, this dissertation is dedicated to you. Thank you for being my boss, my friend, my mentor, and my family.

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# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AN ACHIEVABLE DREAM PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to determine if An Achievable Dream Academies are implementing an environment that is welcoming and inclusive of families. Based on the outcomes, decisions will be made to determine if the environment is inclusive or needs to be revisited to encourage family involvement. Participants included the 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11 grade families at An Achievable Dream Academy and An Achievable Dream Middle and High School in Newport News, Virginia. The study used the CIPP model of program evaluation to guide data collect on the context, input, process, and products of the parent involvement program. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using parent surveys, focus groups, home and school documents, and behavior, attendance, and SOL data.

The study illuminated the successes and challenges of the program as well as areas of recommended improvement. The results indicated that there was a high level of parent involvement but it did not greatly impact the students' success. With ongoing program monitoring and evaluation, the program can overcome these challenges and make recommended changes that will result in increased successes for the school and students. Recommendations for future research and program improvement include conducting a comparison study on AAD and a similar program, identifying what factors impact student success, and understanding the factors impacting teacher resistance.

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AN ACHIEVABLE DREAM PARENT  
INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction to the Study**

#### **The Problem**

Our nation continues to search for solutions to the seemingly insurmountable challenges and obstacles that our students face daily in our schools. Parental involvement is an important factor in the educational system and can impact a child's education significantly (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Parents and teachers have worked together since the beginning of the education system in one room school houses. Many factors have impacted the level and significance of the involvement over the years (Chrisler & Moore, 2012). In recent years, the federal and state governments have mandated that districts and schools implement a model that increases parent involvement and the responsibilities for parents (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

The literature related to parents and schools is rife with articles that convey a convincing and positive connection between parent involvement and academic achievement, school attendance graduation rates, educational aspirations, positive classroom behavior, enrollment in more challenging curricula, and favorable attitudes towards school (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). It has also been shown to be related to multiple positive outcomes in the academic setting. For example, parental involvement has been proven to be a powerful tool for making schools more equitable, culturally responsive, and collaborative (Lau, 2013). Long term social and financial benefits, such

as improved health outcomes, decreased welfare dependence, and reduced crime are also correlated with increased parental involvement (Lau, 2013). Research indicates that the earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects (Lau, 2013).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there has been a shift in parent involvement with many urban and rural areas seeing a sharp decline (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Because parental involvement may be beneficial in so many ways, low levels of parental involvement can be considered problematic because students do not have the benefit of the home-school connection (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Research shows that two-thirds of teachers surveyed believed that their students would perform better in school if their parents were more involved in their child's education, while 72% of parents say children of uninvolved parents sometimes "fall through the cracks" in schools (Chrisler & Moore, 2012). Yet, the data on parental involvement do not necessarily reflect these beliefs. According to The National Center for Education Statistics' Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey for the 2007 National Household Education Surveys Program show that 78% of parents attended a parent-teacher conference, 74% attended a class or school event, 46% served as a volunteer on a school committee, and 89% attended any kind of school function once throughout the entire school year (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Not surprisingly, these percentages are much lower for high school families (Chrisler & Moore, 2012). Only 74% of high school parents surveyed attended any type of school function throughout the year and only 34% volunteered at their child's school (Chrisler & Moore, 2012).

As educators strive to improve the role of parents and families in education, the establishment (or reestablishment) of strong parental involvement programs should be a primary goal for school leadership (Ferlazzo, 2011). With the research indicating the positive correlations between parent involvement and student achievement, schools are challenged to develop warm, welcoming environments that are engaging for the parents (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). To do so, the barriers that impeded a parent's participation must be identified and acknowledged to be real. In other words, why are parents not more involved and what can be done to improve it?

The role of parents and families at An Achievable Dream (AAD) Academies in Newport News, Virginia mirrors trends that are seen nationally. During the 2013-2014 academic school year, administrators at the two Newport News AAD sites noticed a decrease in levels of parental involvement. In particular, fewer parents were attending conferences, returning teacher's phone calls, handling behavioral issues, or corresponding through their child's agenda. At the same time, the administrators noticed that teachers were becoming increasingly responsible for ensuring that students continued to meet the requirements of their student contracts. For example, parents were rarely familiar with their children's grades, understood their high school academic plan required for graduation, and often blamed on the teachers for their child's misbehaviors. Based on the concurrence of the two conditions and an awareness of the relationship between parental involvement and student outcomes delineated in the literature, the administrators at the Newport News AAD sites determined it was likely that the increased need to monitor student behavior was a direct result of the decrease in parental involvement.

It is the goal of AAD to provide an inviting environment for families to feel welcome into the school and in their child's educational process. Parents and families are given the opportunity to learn strategies to assist their child in the learning process as well as work with the teachers and administrators on consistent behavioral expectations at school and home. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the perceived effects of An Achievable Dream on the student's family. In other words, does An Achievable Dream reach beyond the student and involve the families in their children's education?

### **Context**

The focus of this program evaluation is the parental involvement program at two of the An Achievable Dream sites in Virginia. In this section, the context in which the program is being implemented is being described. In particular, I discuss the structure of AAD as well as AAD's educational philosophy.

### **Structure of the Program Site**

AAD (2015a) is a comprehensive public school program for predominately minority youths who are socially and economically disadvantaged (2015a). The majority of the students who attend AAD are minority students who come from single-parent or no-parent homes and who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (2015a). AAD was developed to help this population of students successfully complete high school and become productive citizens (2015a).

Most of the students accepted into the program stay in the program until they complete Grade 12; a student will only be asked to leave the program if he/she does not meet the obligations of the parent/student contract. As part of the enrollment process, parents and students must demonstrate their understanding and commitment to AAD by

signing a contract promising to do their part in the partnership. This promise includes the “parent/family commitments” such as sending their child to school daily and on-time, adhering to the extended-learning time components, monitoring their child’s homework and signing their agenda book daily, attending parent conferences and events, and maintaining a crime and drug free household. Less than 1% of the students are deselected from the program each year. Typically, students who are deselected from the program are deselected at the elementary or middle school level, when behaviors that are incompatible with the AAD philosophy first manifest. Because students whose behaviors are incompatible with the AAD philosophy are deselected before reaching Grade 9, AAD’s graduation rate, which is based on retention of students in Grades 9-12, has remained at 100%.

AAD operates the AAD Academy (K-5) and AAD Middle/High School (6-12) in Newport News, Virginia. The focus of this study will be the two AAD sites in Newport News, Virginia. During the 2014-2015 academic school year, 1,236 students attended the Newport News AAD sites (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE], 2015). Approximately, 98% were minority students, 83% were from single-parent homes, and 9% were from no-parent homes (VDOE, 2015).

The Newport News AAD sites are possible as the result of collaboration between public and private organizations (AAD, 2015a). Newport News Public Schools provides the instructional and support elements common to all schools in the city, including curriculum, student services, basic staffing, transportation, food service, and maintenance (AAD, 2015b). AAD, Inc., a nonprofit entity, raises funds for programming and operates all of the additional components that contribute significantly to the program's

effectiveness: the extended school day, longer school year, uniforms, tennis, curriculum enrichments, technology, parent involvement, and program evaluation (AAD, 2015a).

### **Educational Philosophy of the Program Site**

All AAD sites espouse an educational philosophy posed by the Character Education Partnership (CEP). That is, a school's culture is critical for student success (Berger, 2010). According to CEP, "successful schools—ones that fosters both academic excellence and ethics—have positive, effective school cultures" (Berger, 2010, p. 1). Education reform movements in the past have been unsuccessful in changing student outcomes because they have been focused on changing school culture but not the rigor of standards, alignment of curriculum, or instructional strategies, or vice versa (Berger, 2010).

Academic excellence is supported through positive schools cultures that expect and provide rigorous academic standards, alignment of curriculums to those standards, and effective instructional strategies (Berger, 2010). Ethical behavior is supported through positive school cultures in which members of the school community treat one another well (Berger, 2010). Efforts that stop at spelling out the rules of behavior, that is, addressing the social component, are not enough; attention must also be paid to the moral element (Berger, 2010). Until students internalize values like respect and compassion and discipline, even the most detailed code of conduct will remain external to them and schools will remain dependent on surveillance and sanctions, benign or totalitarian, for enforcement (Berger, 2010).

Similar elements of a positive school culture are part of a holistic approach to education, which AAD developed and refers to as the SAME (social, academic, and

moral education) educational model (2015a). At AAD, academic excellence is supported by (a) aligning curriculums with standards and assessment; (b) using achievement data to tailor instruction to students' needs; and (c) selecting effective instructional methods and schedules (AAD, 2015a). Positive social behavior is supported by (a) setting standards of conduct that create a safe, orderly environment for learning; (b) getting teachers to work together to improve schools; and (c) fostering a school culture that breeds responsibility. Positive moral behavior is supported by (a) institutionalizing high expectations of students and teachers; (b) teaching character education and resolution; (c) adding the missing link (the values students need to be good citizens), and (d) forging the vision and values that inspire teacher evaluation (AAD, 2015a).

AAD also supports the elements of the SAME model and promotes a positive school culture by requiring parents and students to sign a contract. Each year, all parents and students must sign the parent/student contract, which outlines the expectations of the parents and students. The parent component requires parents to send their child to school each day and on-time, to review their child's homework and classwork daily, to attend conferences as necessary, to make sure their child wears their uniform daily, to join the Parent-Teacher Association, and to maintain a drug and crime free household. The student component requires students to attend school on-time and each day, to complete their daily assignments, to follow the uniform policy, and to follow all school rules and expectations to contribute to a positive learning environment. These expectations are reinforced by requiring parents and students to sign the contract annually.

## **Program Description**

Parent involvement is recognized as a significant factor in improving the quality of a child's education. Because of its importance, understanding how parents help their children and how schools can encourage greater parent involvement have been important research aims in education. In the late 1980s, Joyce Epstein introduced the School-Family-Community-Partnership Model, which soon became influential in parent involvement research (Epstein, 2005). The model redefined the relationship between schools, families, and communities as one of overlapping spheres of influence that share a concern about the success of the child (Epstein, 2005). The model has two main components.

The first component represents the partnership of schools, families, and communities and overlapping spheres with each sphere having interest and influence in the child's education (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011). There are two factors that greatly impact the overlap of the spheres: time and experience (Smith et al., 2011). In other words, the time in school, age of the child, and experiences of the child in the family influence the degree to which schools, families, and communities have mutual interests and influences on the child (Smith et al., 2011).

The second component of the model explains the interpersonal relationships and patterns of influence that are most important in a child's education (Smith et al., 2011). There are two types of interactions: those within organizations and those between organizations. Additionally, there are various levels of interactions (Smith et al., 2011). Traditional, standard interactions occur between families and schools. Examples of standard interactions would include newsletters and reports about the child's

performance. Specific, individual interactions are those between parents and teachers. Examples of individual interaction would include phone calls and conferences (Smith et al., 2011).

As a framework for increasing parental participation in education, the model recognizes six types of educational involvement and encourages schools to develop activities that engage schools, families, and communities (Smith et al., 2011). The six types of involvement are:

- Type 1 Parenting – Helps all families establish home environments to support children as students. Sample practices would include: suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level, and parent education courses (Smith et al., 2011).
- Type 2 Communicating – Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children’s progress. Sample practices would include: conferences with every parent at least once a year and weekly folders of student work sent home for review and comments (Smith et al., 2011).
- Type 3 Volunteering – Recruit and organize parent help and support. Sample practices would include: classroom volunteer programs to help teachers and students and a parent room for volunteer work and resources for families (Smith et al., 2011).
- Type 4 Learning at Home – Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum related activities. Sample practices include: information for families on skills required for students

in all subject areas at each grade level and calendars with activities for parents and students at home (Smith et al., 2011).

- Type 5 Decision Making – Include parents in school decisions. Sample activities include: active PTA or other parent organizations and district level councils or committees for family and community involvement (Smith et al., 2011).
- Type 6 Collaborating with Community – Identify and integrate resources and service from the community to strengthen school programs and student learning. Sample practices include: information for students and families on community health and information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents (Smith et al., 2011).

In alignment with Epstein’s model, the AAD Parental Involvement Program (see Figure 1) is designed to increase parental interaction in their child’s education, both at school and at home. The program is made up of three basic elements: (a) engaging families as full partners in their children’s academic success and increasing their capacity to support their children’s educational needs; (b) increasing school staff’s ability to work with parents and families to support and cultivate environments welcoming to parents; and (c) maintaining effective communication between school and home.

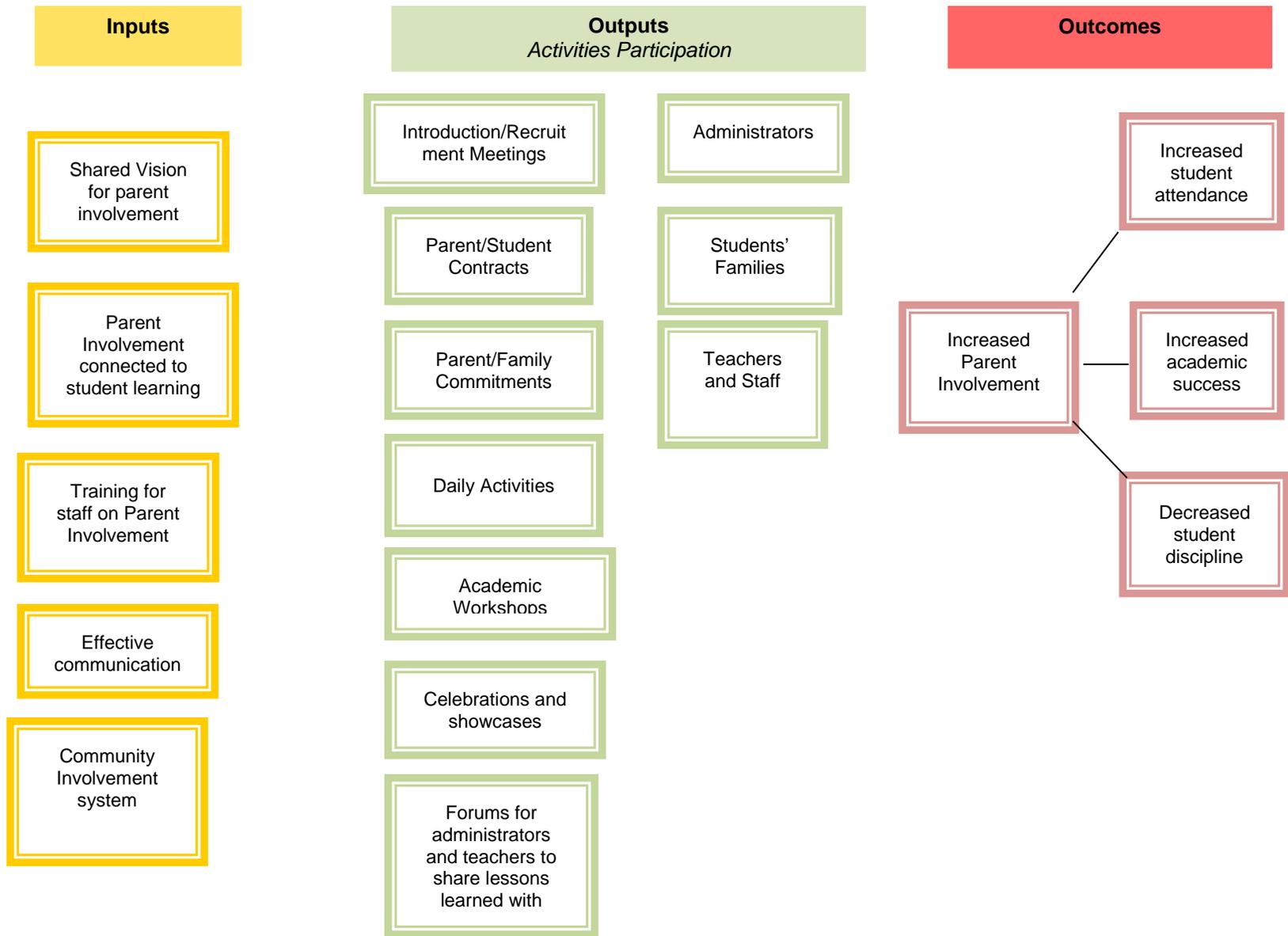


Figure 1. An Achievable Dream Parent Involvement logic model.

During the 2013-2014 school year, AAD's Parent Involvement Program was developed and implemented around a shared purpose for family engagement amongst the administrators, teachers, staff, and families. As the administrators, teachers, and staff were trained on implementing an effective parent involvement program. The training incorporated potential barriers the families may encounter to being involved in their child's education. Educators must understand that families may have limited knowledge on how to assist their child with homework the student learning objectives or may have had negative experiences with their own education (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). To be effective, the program must incorporate a comprehensive communication system between the schools and families. The communication system must also take into account barriers that can impact the families. If time allocation impacts parents from being involved in their child's school, then the communication modules must be flexible for the parents (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

AAD is expanding the traditional parent involvement into a more aggressive model that allows parents to feel welcome in the school and be involved in the learning process. As outlined in the logic model, AAD had to determine what inputs would be required for an effective parent involvement program. The necessary inputs include:

- A shared vision for parent involvement. All of the stakeholders must have a similar vision for the expectations of the parent involvement program.
- Parent involvement connected to student learning. The program must incorporate activities that will allow the parents to be involvement and integral to their child's success in school.

- Training for faculty and staff. In order for the program to be implemented effectively, AAD must ensure that the faculty and staff have the proper training on useful strategies for involving parents.
- Effective Communication. AAD has expanded the communications to families to include (but not limited to): written flyers and notifications, phone calls, monthly newsletters, classdejo (mass texting application), mass emails, and remind 101 (Edwards & Vreeland, 2010).
- Community Partnerships. AAD has numerous community partnerships to benefit the students and parents. The Riverside Health Clinics, located at both schools, assist parents in seeking medical support and referrals for their child. The Thomas Nelson Community College Southeast Campus is located at the AAD Middle and High School. Because it is located in the southeast community, it lessens the transportation burden for enrolled students (include AAD parents and alumni).

The AAD parent involvement program incorporates the following activities:

- Introduction Meetings. The AAD Parent involvement program is first introduced to the families at the recruitment workshops prior to the students entering the program. AAD holds meetings for families to disseminate information about AAD's education model, including its comprehensive approach to parent and family engagement. These meetings are held prior to the child attending AAD (Edwards & Vreeland, 2010).
- Parent/Student Contracts. As part of the enrollment process, parents and students must demonstrate their understanding and commitment to AAD by signing a contract and a pledge promising to do their part in the partnership. This promise

includes the “parent/family commitments” outlined below (Edwards & Vreeland, 2010).

- **Parent/Family Commitments.** Parents/guardians must agree to participate in the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) and attend family-teacher conferences. PTA meetings are held each quarter with sign-in sheets to collect attendance data and door prizes are used to incentivize participation. Parents/guardians must also participate in “family training” at the beginning of each grade level on the expected outcomes for the upcoming year, methods for implementing academic structure at home, strategies for supporting a child’s success, encouraging a child when he/she is not performing well, setting boundaries, and outlining the family’s dreams. This training is further supplemented by workshops throughout the year (Edwards & Vreeland, 2010).
- **Daily Instructional Activities.** In addition to their training, parents/guardians must remain actively involved in their students’ daily instructional activities. This includes agreeing to engage in required shared reading and math activities with their children based on recommendations from teachers and administrators and daily lessons provided to families; reviewing and signing a daily agenda book that outlines homework assignments, classwork, and teacher observations; and reviewing unit guides each evening between family adults and students to share what the student has learned that day, strengthen their skills, and involve parents/guardians in the learning process (Edwards & Vreeland, 2010).

- Academic Workshops. Teachers and administrators provide academic workshops to families to assist them with completing reading and math activities at home with their child (Edwards & Vreeland, 2010).
- Celebrations and Showcases. AAD hosts honor roll ceremonies, perfect attendance ceremonies, and club showcases to provide the parents and families with the opportunities to celebrate their child’s successes.

AAD’s strategies align with Epstein’s School-Family-Community-Partnership Model as follows in Table 1:

Table 1

*AAD’s Alignment to Epstein’s Model*

<b>AAD’s Strategy</b>	<b>Epstein’s Types of Parental Involvement</b>
Welcoming Environment	Type 2 – Communicating
Introduction Meetings	Type 2 – Communicating
Parent/Student Contracts	Type 4 – Decision Making
Parent/Family Commitments	Type 1 – Parenting
	Type 2 – Communicating
Daily Instruction Activities	Type 3 – Volunteering
	Type 5 – Decision Making
Academic Workshops	Type 1 – Parenting
	Type 4 – Learning at Home
Celebrations and Showcases	Type 1 – Parenting
Community Partnerships	Type 4 – Learning at Home
	Type 6 – Collaborating with the Community

**Overview of the Evaluation Approach**

The development and implementation of programs requires decision making on the part of the program developers and implementers. Evaluations of programs at various stages can generate data that program developers and implementers can use to make

decisions regarding the program. Many evaluation models have been developed over the years (Gall, Gall, & Borge, 2006). This study will use the CIPP model of evaluation.

### **Program Evaluation Model**

In the late 1960s, Daniel Stufflebeam developed the CIPP Model of evaluation to show how evaluation could contribute to the decision-making process in program management (Stufflebeam, 1983). CIPP is an acronym for the four types of educational evaluation included in the model: context evaluation, input evaluation, process evaluation, and product evaluation (Stufflebeam, 1983). Each type of evaluation is associated with a different set of decisions that must be made at various stages of program planning and implementation as well as after the program has been implemented at which time the program planners and implementers may reflect on the outcomes of the planning and implementation processes (Gall et al., 2006). Each type of evaluation requires that three broad tasks be performed: delineating the kinds of information needed for decision making, obtaining the information, and synthesizing the information so that it is useful in making decisions (Gall et al., 2006).

The purpose of a context evaluation is to identify problems, needs, assets, and opportunities within a defined community and environmental context (Stufflebeam, 1983). Context evaluation often is referred to as needs assessment because during the process of evaluating program context, program developers and administrators are urged to ask, “What needs to be done?” (Gall et al., 2006, p. 561). Data gathered through a context evaluation can be used by program developers and administrators to make decisions regarding the development of objectives that will result in program improvements (Gall et al., 2006).

The purpose of input evaluation is to make determinations about the resources and strategies needed to accomplish program goals and objectives (Stufflebeam, 1983). Input evaluation requires the evaluator to have a wide range of knowledge about possible resources and strategies as well as knowledge about research on the effectiveness of those resources and strategies in achieving different types of program outcomes (Stufflebeam, 1983). Data gathered through an input evaluation can be used by program administrators to make decisions about budgetary items as well as budgetary and strategic constraints (Stufflebeam, 1983).

The purpose of process evaluation is to monitor the project implementation process (Stufflebeam, 1983). Process evaluation involves the collection of evaluative data once the program has been designed and put into operation (Stufflebeam, 1983). Data gathered through a process evaluation can be used by program administrators to determine if the planned activities are being implemented properly and to make adjustments in the implementation process if the planned activities are not being completed properly (Gall et al., 2006).

The purpose of the product evaluation is to determine the extent to which the goals of the program have been achieved (Stufflebeam, 1983). Because this evaluation is focused on outcomes, the evaluation takes place after the program has been fully implemented (Stufflebeam, 1983). Data gathered through a product evaluation can be used by program administrators to make decisions about continuing and/or modifying the program (Stufflebeam, 1983).

Evaluations can be formative or summative. A formative assessment is used to generate feedback on a process during the development of the process and is used to

measure ongoing progress (Bryson, 2011). A primary focus of formative assessment is to identify areas that may need improvement (Bryson, 2011). A summative evaluation is conducted to determine how worthwhile the final program is and is used to determine if the program is worthy to continue (Gall et al., 2006).

### **Purpose of the Evaluation in this Study**

Due to the longevity of the An Achievable Dream program, the An Achievable Dream Parent Involvement Program will be measured by the CIPP product evaluation to monitor the outcomes of the program. When evaluating a program with a long lifespan, a summative evaluation is the most appropriate measurement. Through a summative evaluation, An Achievable Dream will determine if it has made a significant impact on the families.

### **Evaluation Questions**

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. To what degree is the AAD environment welcoming to AAD families?
2. To what degree does AAD effectively communicate with the families?
3. To what degree does AAD influence parental involvement?
4. To what degree does parental involvement relate to student success at An Achievable Dream?

### **Significance of the Study**

The data produced as a result of program evaluation will provide valuable information for AAD as it continues to develop initiatives to promote positive outcomes for students and families. Parent Involvement is an integral component of equipping schools to be more equitable, culturally responsive, and collaborative. Although

legislation mandates that all districts and schools implement family involvement programs to receive federal funding, the stakes are so much higher than losing funding (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Families play an important role in the success of students. As the research indicates, students whose families are involved are much more likely to have fewer behavioral problems, achieve higher academically, and complete high school than students whose parents are not as involved in their school (Chrisler & Moore, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to determine if An Achievable Dream Academies are implementing an environment that is welcoming and inclusive of families. Based on the outcomes, decisions will be made to determine if the environment is inclusive or needs to be revisited to encourage family involvement.

### **Definition of Terms**

The education field has a specialized vocabulary specifically geared towards an organization's mission.

**An Achievable Dream** – The An Achievable Dream program began as a summer education and tennis program. It developed into a comprehensive K-12 program partnering with Newport News Public Schools. The program targets an “at-risk” population throughout the entirety of Newport News, VA. (Edwards & Vreeland, 2010).

**Economically disadvantaged** – A term that is used by government institutions to describe a group of people who is deemed at or below the poverty line. For example, economically disadvantaged students may be allocated free school meals because the student is a member of a household that meets the income eligibility guidelines for free or reduced-price meals (Fan & Williams, 2010).

**Family Engagement** – A family-centered and strengths-based approach to partnering with families in making decisions, setting goals, and achieving desired outcomes (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

**NCLB (No Child Left Behind) Legislation** - A United States Act of Congress that is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which included Title I, the government's flagship aid program for disadvantaged students (Jones, 2012).

**Parental Involvement** – The participation of parents in every facet of a child's education and development—from birth to adulthood—recognizing that parents are the primary influence in children's lives (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

**SAME Curriculum (Social, Academic, and Moral Education** – Implemented at both schools, at all grade levels. Students learn important skills through a specialized curriculum that includes ethics, etiquette, peaceful conflict resolution, healthy living, financial know-how, and standard business language (Edwards & Vreeland, 2010).

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

Parent involvement is defined as activities in the school and at home. It can take on many different forms to include volunteering at the school, communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, and attending school events such as performances or parent-teacher conferences. Research consistently and increasingly indicates that parental involvement has an impact on student success to include academic achievement, student behavior, and student attendance. The level of impact can depend on the level and consistency of the parental involvement. However, there are a variety of factors that can have significant impact on how and when a parent is involved. These factors include: student age, socio-economic status, level of parent education, marital status, race and ethnicity, teacher attitudes and beliefs, and the school environment.

### **Historical Perspective**

As professionals, educators gained parental trust and confidence through goodwill and positive recognition in the early 1900s. Soon after, educators began to work closely with parents in developing organizations to benefit students throughout the 1900s (Domina, 2009). Case in point, parents and teachers formed the Parent-Teacher Association Foundation, one of the predominant organization formed early in that era (Price-Mitchell, 2009). These organizations accelerated the bond between home and school and focused on improving the educational setting for students. In 1930,

professionals who attended the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection proposed that parent education would help teach parents the norms of society, proper ways to raise children, and an understanding of social issues (Jones, 2012). During the same time frame, the public school structure was founded with mechanistic ideals envisioning its functioning as a closed, self-sufficient system. Responsibilities within the system were fragmented between principals, teachers, counselors, administrators, and other professionals, each performing specialized tasks (Jones, 2012). Parent education was seen as a subspecialty and a necessary way of helping immigrant and indigent families assimilate into middle-class society, adopting the values and attitudes of the prevailing culture (Price-Mitchell, 2009).

Parent involvement was also affected by the deep-rooted racism during this time. Racism hindered the assimilation of African Americans and diverse others into the parent involvement culture (Price-Mitchell, 2009). With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, parental involvement comprised an important part of helping ethnic minorities adopt the values of the dominant race (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Head Start, a program developed during this time to provide services to low-income children, included the insights of parents in its governance and policy structure (Price-Mitchell, 2009). The participation of minority and low-income parents helped educators recognize the importance of cultural and class diversity as an asset rather than a disadvantage (Jones, 2012).

The 1970s saw a strengthening of federal support programs for parents and an emphasis on the connection between home and school on the premise that the interconnections between systems are as important for child development as the activities

within them (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Three important ideas were emphasized: the home is important and basic for human development; parents need help in creating the most effective home environment for that development; and the early years of life are important for lifelong learning (Price-Mitchell, 2009). It was also acknowledged that teachers must learn from parents as well as parents from teachers. This mindset required that educators develop new attitudes toward parents, including new skills in communication and group processes and sharing (Jones, 2012). While an emphasis on mutual teacher-parent learning was a shift in thinking about the relationship between parents and schools, the shift was not truly operationalized into schools' structure (Price-Mitchell, 2009).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there has been a shift in parent involvement with many urban and rural areas seeing a sharp decline in parental involvement. This has caused legislators at both state and national levels to become actively interested in the parental involvement aspect of public education (Jones, 2012). Case in point, former President Reagan's *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act established parental involvement as a priority (Domina, 2009). Seeing this result of *Goals 2000*, in order to receive federal education funds for Title I, school districts had to provide proof that 1% of all funds are earmarked for programs that promote parental involvement in schools (Domina, 2009). Schools were asked to re-evaluate their current policies, programs, and practices. *Goals 2000* was designed to alleviate the tension between schools and parents. Legislation was based on theories and studies by researchers and educators that parental involvement will enhance a child's success (Epstein, 2005).

Increasing parental involvement in schools became one of the six central goals of the Bush administration's 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (Jones, 2012). NCLB required states, districts, and schools to develop and implement policies and plans to reach all families. Districts had to provide professional development to build educators' and parents' capacities to understand partnerships and help schools develop goal-oriented partnership programs (Epstein, 2005). State departments of education had to disseminate effective partnership practices and review districts' plans. These and other requirements redirected state and district leaders from monitoring for compliance to actively helping schools improve the quality and results of partnership programs (Jones, 2012). Every school that received Title I funds was required to implement a program to involve all parents in ways that support students' achievement and success in school (Epstein, 2005). By requiring plans and practices that contribute to students' learning, NCLB identified parental involvement as an essential component of school improvement, linked to the curriculum, instruction, assessments, and other aspects of school management (Epstein, 2005). NCLB Section 1118 called for educators and parents to share information and decisions about the quality of schools, students' placements, and improving programs of family involvement (Epstein, 2005). Educators were required to communicate with all parents about their children's scores on achievement tests and how those test scores compared to all schools in a district and major subgroups of students (Jones, 2012). In underperforming or persistently dangerous schools, parents were given information on and options to change to more successful schools or to select supplemental educational services for eligible children (Epstein, 2005). In effect, the law activated the theory of overlapping spheres of influence, which posits that students learn more and better when

the home, school, and community share responsibilities for their success, and includes examples of the six types of involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community) to show how to engage families at school and at home (Epstein, 2005).

Parental involvement programs must include all families, even those who are not currently involved, and not just focus on those the easiest to reach (Price-Mitchell, 2009). Two main goals of the sociology of education are to understand inequalities in education and to design and test programs that yield more equal educational opportunities (Epstein, 2005). Equity was also a stated goal of NCLB's requirements for family involvement. The law repeatedly stressed that communications with parents must be clear, useful, and in languages that all parents can understand (Epstein, 2005).

The spread of parental-involvement policies reflects the application of key insights from the sociology of education to the day-to-day operation of American schools (Jones, 2012). As Epstein argued, parent involvement efforts acknowledge the crucial role that families and communities play in children's education (Domina, 2009). They attempt to moderate upper and middle-class students' home advantage by bringing all families, regardless of social class or race, into the daily life of the school (Domina, 2009). Parent involvement policies seek to redistribute cultural and social capital, boosting the resources that are available to disadvantaged children (Domina, 2009). They are thought to foster social closure by creating opportunities for parents, teachers, and administrators to network and share information with one another (Jones, 2012).

## **Definition of Parental Involvement**

The traditional definition of parental involvement includes activities in the school and at home. Parental involvement can take many forms, such as volunteering at the school, communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, and attending school events such as performances or parent-teacher conferences (Bower & Griffin, 2011). It has also incorporated parents providing supplies requested by the school, which include not only traditional classroom supplies such as pencils, paper, and folders, but also items for fundraisers or school events (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

Traditional definitions of parental involvement require investments of time and money from parents, and those who may not be able to provide these resources are deemed uninvolved (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). This overlooks differing perceptions on the part of parents from low socioeconomic status and minority populations regarding parental involvement and educational responsibilities (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Viewed through this lens, African American and Latino families often demonstrate low rates of parental involvement (Bower & Griffin, 2011). To be more inclusive of all socio-economic statuses and ethnic groups, schools need to redefine parental involvement and develop broader frameworks that can make involvement more inclusive for families of color (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

In recent years, the language has changed, from parental involvement and participation to parent-school partnerships, which implies the shared and equally valued roles in education (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Another term gaining wide usage is parent engagement, emphasizing the importance of parent's active power-sharing role as citizens of the education community, rather than people who participate only when

invited (Bower & Griffin, 2011). However, the shift in language has yet to change the fragmented focus of the research, and many schools continue to emphasize participation and volunteerism over partnership and engagement (Bower & Griffin, 2011). One of the main barriers to partnership may be schools' mechanistic worldview, which separates educators and parents rather than integrally connecting them. Educators see themselves as experts rather than equals, creating a hierarchical relationship with parents (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

What both parents and educators need is a partnership that draws on the strengths of both roles in a child's education. Recognizing what both parents and educators can bring to the table is paramount to a successful partnership. Not all parents are able to volunteer in the classroom or make it to parent conferences; therefore educators need to realize that a parent's role can take other forms. Reaching the parents in new and different ways can only lead to a more successful relationship between families and schools.

### **Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model**

Research recognizes parent involvement as an important factor in the quality of a child's education. Joyce Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model is an influential model in parent involvement research (Epstein, 2005). The model redefines the relationship between schools, families, and communities as one of the overlapping spheres of influence that share the concerns about the success of a child (Fan & Williams, 2010). The overlap of the spheres represents that the interests and influences of the stakeholders in a child's education are mutual. The primary shared interest is a caring concern that the child be successful. Additionally, according to the model, there are two

types of interaction: those within the organizations and those between the organizations. At the center of this half of the model is the child, who interacts with schools and family. The child is both changed by the interactions and produces change in others (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Epstein's model, adopted by the National Parent Teacher Association, encouraged a great deal of research, discussion, and debate in the field of family involvement (Fan & Williams, 2010). The model acknowledges many influences on children's learning, but is primarily uni-directional, exploring the explicit ways in which families help children learn and develop (Epstein, 2005). One of the goals of partnership research has been to identify the actions of the schools, families, and communities engage in when they focus on student learning. Epstein's classified six types of parental involvement: parenting to help all families establish home environments to support children as students; communicating to form effective school-to-home and home-to-school communication; volunteering to recruit and organize parent support and help; learning at home to provide families with information about how to help their students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities; decision making to include parents in school decisions; and collaborating with the community to identify and integrate resources from the community strengthen school programs (Epstein, 2005).

The positive aspects of Epstein's Model encompass the traditional definitions of parental involvement and recognize the role of parents in the home, including supporting educational efforts and providing an environment where educational activities are supported and encouraged (Fan & Williams, 2010). Furthermore, Epstein shifts some of the onus from the parents to the school by acknowledging communication as a

bidirectional endeavor and encouraging schools to create a place for parent ownership within the school through shared decision making (Fan & Williams, 2010). Studies have found connections between the use of this model and increased student achievement (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Limitations do exist with this model. Although the model works to empower parents to have a voice within the school and recognizes the work of parents in the home, the school is still expected to inform parents of effective strategies within the home (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Further, the role of parents in the decision-making process is defined by and created within the existing framework of the school, ensuring that parental involvement is defined and evaluated in the school's terms rather than the families' terms (Bower & Griffin, 2011). This model also fails to address the forms of advocacy demonstrated by African American families and their church involvement, which is a primary form of community collaboration among African Americans (Smith et al., 2011). In addition, many of the studies using Epstein's Model do not take into account differences in race and ethnicity; rather, they provide a general approach to parental involvement, regardless of race, class, or sociocultural factors (Bower & Griffin, 2011). Parental involvement strategies are largely based on school cultures that are formed from middle-class, European-American cultural norms; therefore, schools need to consider differences in cultural norms by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status in order to use parent involvement effectively as a strategy for student success (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

Some have called for research that takes into account the particular experiences of urban minority parents when evaluating their involvement in public schools (Smith et al, 2011). Auberbach asserts that there is continuum of support of minority parents that

ranges from “moral supporters” to “ambivalent companions” to “struggling advocates” (as cited in Smith et al., 2001, p. 74). Moral supporters encourage their children without making appearances at the school. On the other end of the continuum, struggling advocates work hard to fulfill their role according to traditional expectations but often face barriers when they try to be present at the school (Smith et al., 2011). In the middle are the ambivalent companions, parents who want their children to do well but do not make efforts to advocate on their behalf (Smith et al., 2011). To this point, David Levin, co-founder of the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), concludes that initially low-income parents may often be consumed by the challenges of trying to make a living, but if their children become successful at school, gratified families will support the schools in any way they can; good schooling comes before parental support, not the other way around (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

### **Home-School Connection**

Parent involvement has been defined as including behaviors at home as well as at school (Ysseldyke, 2002). Some researchers have defined parent involvement by the location in which involvement activities take place, differentiating among home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and home-school communication (Smith et al., 2011). Lee and Bowen employed a typology that takes into account both the activities and the location of the parent involvement (Smith et al., 2011). The measures of their research included: (1) parent involvement at school, (2) parent-child educational discussions, (3) homework help, (4) time management, and (5) parent educational expectations. The term parent involvement encompasses the gamut of activities parents engage in to help their children succeed at school (Smith et al., 2011).

Although student performance depends on what students do, their performance is influenced either positively or negatively by the kinds of support they receive for learning. Support occurs at school and at home (Smith et al., 2011). The Functional Assessment of Academic Behavior (FAAB) defines three areas of support for students: instructional support for learning, which occurs in the classroom; home support for learning, which occurs in out-of school hours; home-school support for learning, which represents the degree of continuity across home and school and the quality of the relationship for working as partners to support student learning (Ysseldyke, 2002).

Home support for schooling includes: a positive correlation between positive home environmental influences and a student's academic and school performance; parent involvement in schooling is positively associated with the kind of student benefits desired by educators (e.g., improvement in grades, attitude toward school, self-esteem, completion of homework, etc.); and the specific actions families take to facilitate their children's educational success is more important for academic progress than who the students are (Ysseldyke, 2002).

The home-school support for learning bridges the link and expectations between the home and school (Smith et al., 2011). The family and school have shared standards and expectations that incorporate a consistent structure (the routines and monitoring have been discussed between key adults). Through a positive trusting relationship, the key adults show mutual support to help the student learn and achieve (Smith et al., 2011). Social class or family configuration predicts up to 25% of variance in achievement, whereas family support for learning or interaction style, predicts up to 60% of variance in achievement (Ysseldyke, 2002).

## **Factors that Contribute to Parental Involvement**

Although the research has been inconsistent, there is increasing support to indicate that parental involvement has an impact on student success. There are many variables that can contribute to the level, consistency, and impact of parental involvement. This literature review has found the following factors to have significant impact: student age, socio-economic status, level of parent education, marital status, race and ethnicity, teacher attitudes and beliefs, and the school environment.

### **Student Age**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), parental involvement for students in middle and high schools tends to be lower than those in elementary schools. This report showed that in 1996 and 1999, 86% of elementary school parents had at least one meeting with their children's teachers, while 50% of parents of high school children had one visit with a teacher (McCormick, Cappella, O'Connor, & McClowry, 2013). Another parental involvement report completed in 2002-03 by the U.S. Department of Education NCES (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005) showed that over 90% of parents of kindergarten through fifth grade students were involved in their children's school work compared with 75% of middle school parents and 59% of the ninth through tenth grade parents were involved. In addition, only 53% of the parents of the eleventh and twelve grade students were involved (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005).

In a sample of 145 parents/guardians of black students in two large schools in urban areas of the South and Southwest, Hayes (2012) found that student age was significantly and negatively related to home-based parental involvement. As students'

ages increased, parental involvement in the home decreased (Hayes, 2012). Often times, this decreased involvement can be due to an increase in nontraditional family situations (single-parent families) or the parents not feeling as though they can contribute as much as the students get older. As the school and homework gets harder, parents can be intimidated by the content and may fear they will not be able to assist their child (Hayes, 2012).

Based on the research, a parent's level of involvement varies greatly from the student's elementary years compared to the student's high school years. This trend is impacted by the increase in nontraditional family situations and the parents feeling as though they do not have as much to contribute as the student gets older. As children age, they tend to rely on their peers for academic assistance more than their parents.

### **Socio-Economic Status**

In this day and age there exists a great deal of stereotypes about the relationship between low-income parents and their children. One of the prominent stereotypes is the idea "that low income parents do not care about their children's schooling, are not competent to help with homework, and do not encourage achievement" (Fan & Williams, 2010, p. 55). These stereotypes tend to place the families affected into the disrespected, suspicious and incompetent category, which only leads to less involvement and more distress with the public schooling system (McCormick et al., 2013).

It is important to understand some of the differences that might exist between inner-city parents and suburban parents (Smith et al., 2011). Many children attending school in inner-cities are living in single parent homes where the sole provider is working one or more jobs to keep food on the table and a roof over the heads of the family (Smith,

et al., 2011). As a result, the parent might not be available to help the child with schoolwork because the parent may be at work during the time the child normally arrives home from school (Fan & Williams, 2010). Instead of making assumptions about the parents' levels of support, educators must develop a better understanding about the home-life of children (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Families from lower socio-economic backgrounds expend considerable effort, including more informal conversations and unscheduled visits, to demonstrate their involvement to teachers and the school at large; however, these less structured approaches are often viewed as intrusive by schools and teachers (Fan & Williams, 2010). Furthermore, schools are cautioned against defining these behaviors as parental involvement and the schools' definition often results in families feeling disenfranchised and their efforts are unrecognized (Fan & Williams, 2010). For families in poverty, the school's control of time and "appropriate" communications retains its power in parental involvement practices (Smith et al., 2011).

The health and well-being (physically and psychologically) of families from low socio-economic households can also have a profound effect on the level of parental involvement (Domina, 2009). Environmental factors such as neighborhood, family structure and socioeconomic status contribute to the inequalities in health care (Domina, 2009). Although health care may not seem to be related to academic achievement of children, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, if deficiency needs (such as physiological, esteem, love and safety needs) are not met, growth needs (such as the need to know and understand things) cannot be fulfilled (Domina, 2009). This means that for inner-city children growing up in a violence-prone neighborhood who do not always have

parents around to reassure them that they are safe, may have a harder time learning in school. This may be due to a lack of attention or ability to concentrate, because they have not fulfilled their deficiency needs (Domina, 2009).

Based on the literature, there are unique factors that impact whether a parent from a low socio-economic household can play a “traditional” role of involvement in their child’s education. Given the evidence regarding the limitations of current parental involvement practices, new practices are needed that incorporate culturally relevant strategies. Such practices should include components of relationship building, advocacy, and parental efficacy, as these have been shown to be effective in working with African American, Latino, and low-income populations (Domina, 2009).

### **Level of Parent Education**

Research has shown that more educated parents and parents proficient in the language spoken in the school are more likely to be involved with their child’s schooling (Brannegan, 2014). Qualitative research has found that parents with low levels of education and parents that don’t speak English often participate less frequently because they are insecure about their ability to effectively assist their children with schoolwork (Brannegan, 2014). In Hayes’s (2012) study, Hayes found that the level of a parent’s education significantly and positively impacted levels of both home- and school-based parental involvement as well as the parent’s attitude toward the value of his/her child’s effort and achievement in school. The higher the level of parents’ education, the more likely they were to be involved in these three capacities (Hayes, 2012).

According to the literature, a parent’s own level of education can impact their level of involvement in their child’s education. This may be due to the parent’s own

values regarding education and/or their ability to communicate effectively with the school. In many instances, parents are often insecure about their ability to assist their child because of their own lack of education.

### **Marital Status**

Previous research on the correlation between involvement and the composition of adults in the household is limited. Single parents have been found to be more and less involved than two-parent households (Brannegan, 2014). In Hayes's (2012) study, Hayes found that a parent's marital status significantly and positively impacted school-based parental involvement. Parents from two-parent households were more likely to be involved in school-based activities when compared to parents from single-parent households (Hayes, 2012). Other studies have not found a significant correlation. Two competing theories support these findings. First, single parents may be more stressed and have less time to devote to school involvement, and therefore may be less active than two-parent households (Smith et al., 2011). On the other hand, parents that live with a partner may be more involved with one another, detracting from time that can be spent with their child's school (Smith et al., 2011).

The marriage of the primary caregiver could also impact the level of parental involvement with school (Brannegan, 2014). Research has found that the marriage of a single-mother has a positive impact on a student's academic achievement trajectory (Brannegan, 2014). Marriage may also be associated with increases in parent involvement as the addition of a committed partner may make it easier, both logistically and financially, for a family to be involved in school activities (Brannegan, 2014). On the contrary, any change in family structure may cause instability and potentially decrease

home-school involvement as the establishment of a new union could introduce changes in the allocation of family resources (Brannegan, 2014).

While research exists on how household demographics correlate with parental involvement, research on how household changes affect involvement is limited (Smith et al., 2011). By understanding how changes in households affect behavior, households and children at risk can be identified and targeted by policymakers, administrators and school staff. It is important to understand how household factors influence the likelihood of a family getting involved. If certain household characteristics are associated with lower rates of participation, then schools and districts may need to focus their efforts on engaging this vulnerable population (Brannegan, 2014).

One recent research study focused specifically on how parent involvement in elementary school varies based on the composition of and relationship between household adults by (1) assessing how the addition of an adult cohabitant influences the incidence of involvement; and (2) examining the influence of a parent getting married on household involvement (Brannegan, 2014). This analysis was designed to help inform policymakers, school administrators and school staff on how changing home environments might influence the interaction between a family and their child's school by estimating the immediate influence of cohabitation and marriage on parental involvement (Brannegan, 2014).

This analysis relies on data collected from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Class (ECLS-K) of 1998-1999 (Brannegan, 2014). This data-set includes seven waves of data, following students from Kindergarten (1998-1999) to 8th grade (2006-2007). The ECLS-K is a nationally representative assessment and is

designed and collected by the National Center for Education Statistics to study educational stratification among American elementary and middle school students (Brannegan, 2014). A nationally representative sample of schools was constructed for the study and, on average, 23 students were surveyed at each school, many of whom were in the same class (Brannegan, 2014). More than 21,000 students were sampled and at each wave students were tested in reading and math and parents, teachers, and school administrators provided background information (Brannegan, 2014).

The results of this analysis indicate that the influence of an additional adult or a marriage on a household's level of school involvement is fairly insignificant (Brannegan, 2014). An additional adult in the household is associated with lower levels of volunteerism, but further investigation indicates that that association may be driven by a minority of cases where older individuals move into the household and require the attention of the child's guardian (Brannegan, 2014). The volume of involvement is also unaffected by the addition of an adult or the marriage of a single-parent (Brannegan, 2014).

As indicated by the research, marital status can impact a parent's level of involvement in their child's education. The significance of the impact varies by study. Children from two-parent households tend to receive the most attention from their parent at home and at school, which may be correlated with the ability of parents to share these responsibilities. When the primary-caregiver marries during the child's education, the level of parent involvement typically increases. Studies have also reported that cohabitation can possibly negatively impact parental involvement, especially if the parent is caring for an older relative.

## **Race and Ethnicity**

Parental involvement strategies should consider race and ethnicity because research has demonstrated differences in parental involvement among African American, Latino, and White families (Smith et al., 2011). African American families tend to spend more time in home-based activities with their children than their White counterparts; however, home-based involvement is difficult for schools to measure and is often overlooked, and families are not recognized for their efforts (Smith et al., 2011). Parent groups are a strategy that has proven particularly successful with African American families, allowing parents to obtain information about the school, advocate for the children as a collective group, and form support networks with other families (Smith et al., 2011).

In a study using random stratified sampling procedures with 30 low-income African American (48%), Hispanic (25%), and Pacific Islander (17%) parents, researchers found that parents believed the school should provide the academic education and parents should provide the moral education for their children (Fan & Williams, 2010). Further, parents can exhibit parental involvement through activities such as providing nurturance to their children, instilling cultural values, and talking with their children, which do not align with traditional forms of parental involvement as defined by schools (Fan & Williams, 2010). Other forms of advocacy that tend to be overlooked as parental involvement are found in studies specifically with African American parents (Fan & Williams, 2010). These include setting clear and consistent behavioral rules for their children, engaging in frequent and meaningful conversations with their children,

encouraging independence, providing assistance with homework, and expressing graduation expectations (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Researchers have found that when viewing parental involvement through the traditional view discussed earlier—meeting with teachers, volunteering at school, etc.—many minority parents are labeled as “not involved” (Fan & Williams, 2010). By widening the view on parental involvement to include what is done separately from the school, specifically in the home between parent and child, minority parents are actively involved in the education of their children. Minority parents tend to consider the academic element to be the responsibility of the school, while their focus is centered on the moral and life skill-centered areas.

### **Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs**

Teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about parent involvement are greatly influenced by their views and participation in school life. When teachers perceive their school has a caring atmosphere, parents are more likely to be involved (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Epstein and Becker address the findings from comments from over 1,000 teachers on a survey about parent involvement; teachers’ time, parents’ time, and students’ time and feelings were addressed (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Teachers mentioned the abundance of time that it takes to implement parent involvement practices (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

Teachers surveyed by Epstein and Becker also acknowledged the various duties that parents have within the home that may contribute to a lack of time for parent involvement in their children’s education (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). In addition, teachers described the importance of students’ out-of-school time to relax, play, and

pursue their own interests. Teachers did suggest that even brief amounts of time that parents spend on home learning activities with their children can be quite beneficial if the time is used wisely (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). However, teachers also felt that the children whose parents did not take part in home learning activities with them were at an academic disadvantage. Many teachers described their principal's support and school climate as important aspects for successful parent involvement programs (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

Parents' involvement in home learning activities with their children often constitutes both positive and negative responses from educators (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Some teachers believe that academic-related interactions between children and parents provide educational support, while others believe that teaching academic skills is the teacher's responsibility. Becker and Epstein conducted a survey of 3,700 first, third, and fifth grade public school teachers (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). The teachers described their professional attitudes and teaching practices. Also, over 600 elementary school principals participated in a brief questionnaire about parent involvement programs. Overall, the survey yielded highly positive views of teaching strategies that were parent-oriented (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

About half of the teachers reported some parent involvement in the classroom. Therefore, parents' observations while volunteering may lead to effective home learning activities related to school (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Communications that involve "traditional" parent-teacher interactions (e.g., open house, parent-teacher conferences) were viewed favorably by both teachers and principals. Some teachers described active use of parent involvement strategies regardless of the various educational levels of the

parents (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). The survey results indicated that teachers who do not use parent involvement techniques and teach children of less educated parents, believed the parents would be unlikely to complete homework-related activities with their children (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Although teachers reported using personal contact with parents (e.g., brief conversations, telephone conversations, conferences, and special appointments), home visits were infrequently used. However, teachers who did make home visits were more inclined to have positive views about parent involvement techniques (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Sometimes home visits conducted by teachers or parent involvement coordinators are used to deliver home learning materials. Some successful parent involvement activities were described by teachers as the following: parents reading with children at home, signing papers and/or folders, conferencing at convenient times for parents, home visits, and summer learning activities to complete at home (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

Efficacy “manifested by confidence in one’s teaching and instructional program... implies a sense of professionalism and security in the teaching role. Such confidence would logically enhance teachers’ efforts to discuss their teaching program and goals with parents” (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009, p. 37). The greatest amount of parent involvement occurs when teachers with positive attitudes regarding parent involvement maintain open communication with parents and collaborate with them; when administrators and teachers initiate and welcome parent involvement, it can be successful (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Thus, in order to improve parent-teacher relations, principals should make a conscious effort to promote teacher efficacy.

Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Brissie (1997) conducted a study of 66 schools within eight school districts. Questionnaires were distributed to 66 principals and 1,003 teachers. Upon completion of the study, the researchers reported that the strongest predictor for teacher support of parent involvement was teacher efficacy, that is, teachers' beliefs regarding teaching effectiveness (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1997). Hoover-Dempsey and her colleagues describe teacher efficacy related to four different parent involvement practices which include: (1) conferences, (2) parent volunteers, (3) parents as tutors, and (4) teacher perception regarding support of parents. Teacher concerns focus on the following: undependable volunteers, failure of parents to implement home learning activities, lack of discipline in the home, and teachers' fear of parent contact (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1997).

The literature supports that most educators do support parental involvement and consider it to have a positive correlation to student success. Schools that establish open door policies and welcoming environments for parents are generally more successful and garner positive attitudes about parental involvement. A huge indicator of this success is an educator's ability to reach the parents effectively, not always necessarily by traditional means, as well as the educator's ability to approach the parent as an ally and equal in the educational process.

### **School Environment**

Research suggests that contextual variables related to the school's social environment have a primary influence on parental involvement. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) assert that parents take an active role in their child's education, in part, because they perceive opportunities, invitations, or demands from the school's

environment that necessitate their involvement (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). An invitation for involvement from members of the school community is an important factor in motivating parents to become involved in their child's education (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Numerous studies have demonstrated the relationship between positive school climate and parental participation.

For example, Dauber and Epstein found that among inner-city parents in Baltimore, school practices related to informing and involving parents about how to help their children at home and provision of information about academic content and learning goals were the most important determinants in increasing parental school involvement. Overall, school practices were found to play a more significant role than demographic variables (e.g., parent education, family size, marital status, and grade level) (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

Epstein (1986) found that parents' attitudes were generally positive toward their child's school, but they believed that teachers could do a better job of facilitating their home-based involvement (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). The majority of parents expressed a desire for teachers to assist them in developing the skills necessary for engaging in specific home-based learning activities with their children (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). A more recent study found that among urban African American parents, perceived teacher support predicted home-based involvement among those of high socioeconomic status and school-based involvement among those of low socioeconomic status (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

Consistent with the literature, parents' social networks acquired through active participation in their child's education can expose them to skills and information which

empowers them to advocate for their children by challenging school practice (Smith et al., 2011). Overall, positive and supportive school environments encourage parent's continued involvement in their child's education. Efforts to increase parental participation are most successful when schools engage in open communication and make concerted efforts to work collaboratively with parents (Smith et al., 2011).

The literature supports that schools that actively reach out to parents consistently in multiple ways, allowing for a varied approach for parental involvement, are most effective at establishing positive gains in this arena. Parents desire the skills necessary to involve their children in home-based learning activities, and are willing to implement these tools in the home if given the proper guidance and resources from the school. Schools that foster partnerships with parents, consistently expressing a need and appreciation of parental involvement, and maintaining an approachable and positive connection with families naturally see more success.

### **Impact of Parental Involvement**

Empirical investigation has established the significant role of families in promoting and sustaining high levels of academic achievement among students. Parental involvement in education is positively associated with a variety of favorable outcomes for children, such as increased academic achievement, student behavior, and student attendance.

#### **Academic Achievement**

Research from the University of New Hampshire shows that students achieve higher academic success when their parents are actively involved in their education (Conway & Houtenville, 2008). Researchers Karen Smith Conway, professor of economics at the

University of New Hampshire, and her colleague Andrew Houtenville, senior research associate at New Editions Consulting, found that parental involvement has a strong, positive effect on student achievement (Conway & Houtenville, 2008).

According to Conway, parental effort is consistently associated with higher levels of achievement, and the magnitude of the effect of parental effort is substantial. We found that schools would need to increase per-pupil spending by more than \$1,000 in order to achieve the same results that are gained with parental involvement (Conway & Houtenville, 2008, para. 6).

Researchers have found that numerous factors contribute to students' academic achievement. For example, among Black urban students, Hayes (2012) found that student age and parents' employment status were predictors of students' academic outcomes. In Hayes's (2012) study, Hayes found that both home- and school-based parental involvement significantly and positively impacted parent-reported levels of student achievement. However, only home-based involvement was a predictor of students' academic achievements (Hayes, 2012).

Parents seemed particularly interested in the academic achievements of their daughters (Conway & Houtenville, 2008). The researchers found parents spent more time talking to their daughters about their schoolwork during dinnertime discussions (Conway & Houtenville, 2008). There are a number of theories about why girls seem to garner more attention from their parents than boys. One possibility is that girls are more communicative with their parents so these conversations about academics are easier for parents to have with their daughters (Conway & Houtenville, 2008).

The researchers also found that parents may reduce their efforts when school resources increase, thus diminishing the effects of improved school resources (Conway & Houtenville, 2008). It is typical for parents to scale back their involvement with their child's education when a school adds resources. As a result, increasing school resources may not be as effective as we expect since they may diminish parental involvement (Conway & Houtenville, 2008).

Fan and Williams (2010) conducted a research study to examine whether various dimensions of parental involvement predicted 10th-grade students' motivation (engagement, self-efficacy towards math and English, intrinsic motivation towards math and English) and academic achievement using data from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002. This study makes an important contribution to the literature by demonstrating that the content of communication between the school and parent has a significant difference in adolescents' academic self-efficacy, engagement, and intrinsic motivation (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Fan and Williams (2010) subscribe to the view that the consequential reactions and behaviors of parents after conversing with teachers are likely to be associated with adolescents' academic self-efficacy in math and English, engagement and intrinsic motivation in math and English. Parent-school communications concerning students' school problems can easily lead to certain discouraging conversations, criticisms or punishments from parents, which decrease students' confidence, interest and engagement in learning (Fan & Williams, 2010). On the contrary, parent-school communications regarding other school issues, such as academic programming and future educational plans, can assist parents by providing resourceful and useful information that help their

children to succeed (Fan & Williams, 2010). Parents are more likely to communicate with and provide guidance to their children in a positive manner following these informational contacts with teachers and, as a result, benefit students' perceived competence, engagement and intrinsic motivation (Fan & Williams, 2010). These results, therefore, emphasize the importance of how parents communicate and intervene with their children, especially when their children are struggling at school. The results of this study also confirm the importance of schools' engagement in efforts to communicate with parents, which has been noted in previous studies as benefitting both students and parents (Fan & Williams, 2010).

Another key finding of this study is that parents' educational aspirations for their children stood out as a strong positive predictor for adolescents' academic self-efficacy in math and English, engagement and intrinsic motivation in math and English (Fan & Williams, 2010). The findings indicate that students who perceived that their parents valued their education and had high expectations for their academic success were likely to feel interested and engaged and confident towards their academic endeavors (Fan & Williams, 2010). This implies that when parents' educational values and aspirations are conveyed and communicated it is important in shaping their children's motivation to achieve academically. The results not only confirm a previous finding that parents' values have strong positive relationships with students' senses of self-competence, but they also provide new evidence that parents' educational aspirations for their children also have strong positive associations with their children's academic engagement and intrinsic motivation in both English and math (Fan & Williams, 2010). It is possible that as parents' educational values and aspirations transform into their children's own values

and decisions, students are more likely to become interested and engaged in pursuing the goal as their own (Fan & Williams, 2010). The findings are also indirectly consistent with documented evidence of the strong association between parental values and improved academic achievement, as achievement motivation often serves as a pathway to mediate students' academic performance (Fan & Williams, 2010).

### **School Attendance**

Reducing the rates of student truancy and chronic absenteeism has been and continues to be a goal of many schools and school systems (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005). Despite the long history of concern over student attendance, the issue has received relatively little attention from educational researchers. Researchers have focused more attention on the issue of students who drop-out of school before receiving a high school diploma than on issues related to rates of daily student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005). The research that has been conducted on student absenteeism suggests that it may be as important as any issue confronting schools today (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005).

Beyond the fact that poor attendance predicts dropping out of school, chronic absenteeism can result in other negative consequences for students and schools. Students who are not in class have fewer opportunities to learn the material that enables them to succeed later in school (Fan & Williams, 2010). Research on truancy and absenteeism suggests that students with better attendance score higher on achievement tests than their more frequently absent peers (Fan & Williams, 2010). Attendance not only affects individual students but also can affect the learning environment of an entire school.

School funding is often at least partially dependent on the number of students who regularly attend. Fewer pupils mean fewer resources for educational programs (Fan &

Williams, 2010). Finally, in some locations student attendance is used as an indicator of how well a school is functioning, and requirements are set and monitored for ratings.

Studies investigating family practices have suggested that not all parent-involvement activities are associated with attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005). For example, parent involvement in checking homework and reading with a child is associated with improved report card grades, achievement scores, and subject-specific skills (Smith et al., 2011). Other researchers have reported that specific family involvement practices such as parental monitoring, parent-child discussions, parent participation at the school, and PTA membership are linked to student attendance (Smith et al., 2011). Some parenting activities are more likely than others to affect attendance. The extant studies suggest that schools that want to increase daily student attendance are more likely to succeed if they reach out and work with parents in specific ways to address this problem (Smith et al., 2011).

When schools design and implement activities that focus on attendance using Epstein's six types of parent involvement, parents and others in the community can make a difference (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005). After controlling for prior rates of student attendance and mobility, a study of 39 elementary schools found that the quality of family, school, and community partnership programs was associated with rates of student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005). Other researchers also reported relationships between specific school practices to involve parents and student attendance. Telephone calls to parents of absent students were associated with an increase in student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005). Similarly, the provision of timely information to families about student absences and school policies on absenteeism helped improve attendance.

In Hayes's (2012) study, Hayes found that home-based parental involvement significantly and negatively impacted students' attendance at school. The greater the level of parental involvement at home, the less likely students were to miss school (Hayes, 2012). This condition was found to be mediated by student age, whereas the older the student, the greater the impact of parental involvement on student attendance (Hayes, 2012). Older students had fewer missed days of school than younger students who received the same level of home-based parental involvement (Hayes, 2012).

William Jeynes (2007) and California State University conducted a meta-analysis, including 52 studies, to determine the influence of parental involvement on the educational outcomes of urban secondary school children. Statistical analyses were done to determine the overall impact of parental involvement as well as specific components of parental involvement (Jeynes, 2007). Four different measures of educational outcomes were used. These measures included an overall measure of all components of academic achievement combined, grades, standardized tests, and other measures that generally included teacher rating scales and indices of academic attitudes and behaviors (Jeynes, 2007). The possible differing effects of parental involvement by race and socioeconomic status were also examined.

The results of the meta-analysis indicated that parental involvement is associated with higher student achievement outcomes (Jeynes, 2007). This trend holds not only for parental involvement overall but also for most different components of parental involvement that were examined in the meta-analysis. Moreover, parental involvement is also associated with higher achievement for racial minority students as well (Jeynes, 2007). The results of this study indicate that the general parental involvement variable

yielded statistically significant outcomes of .5 to .55 of a standard deviation unit (Jeynes, 2007). The results indicate that the influence of parental involvement overall is significant for secondary school children (Jeynes, 2007). Parental involvement as a whole affects all the academic variables under study by about .5 to .55 of a standard deviation unit (Jeynes, 2007). The positive effects of parental involvement hold for both White and minority children (Jeynes, 2007).

### **Student Behavior**

School intervention studies show that efforts to improve student behaviors can be more effective when the family is involved. A recent longitudinal examination of parent involvement across a nationally representative sample of first, third, and fifth graders found that involvement did predict declines in problem behaviors (McCormick et al., 2013). A key limitation of this literature has been the operationalization of parent involvement as a count of contacts between parents and school personnel within a given time frame (Bracke & Corts, 2011). More recent knowledge has begun to identify conceptually and empirically distinct dimensions of parent involvement in elementary school, including home-based learning activities (e.g., helping with homework, maintaining study routines), school-based involvement (e.g., volunteering at school events, fundraising), and home-school communication (e.g., attending parent-teacher conferences, writing notes to teacher) (Bracke & Corts, 2011). Studies that examine distinct dimensions of parent involvement frequently demonstrate positive relations with children's behaviors.

For example, using time-lagged growth models, Domina found that parent involvement activities like homework help and school volunteering predicted lower

levels of future behavior problems for elementary school children, relative to parents who did not engage in these activities (Bracke & Cortis, 2011). In addition, another study identified multiple dimensions of involvement (school based, home based, and home school) related to young children's positive emotional outcomes in a cross-sectional study of urban, ethnic minority children (McCormick et al., 2013).

Hayes (2012) found that home-based parental involvement interacted with student age to significantly predict student behavior, as measured by number of the discipline referrals received. That is, the older the student, the more likely that parental involvement in the home would predict positive student behavior such as low numbers of discipline referrals (Hayes, 2012). However, Hayes also found that school-based parental involvement interacted with student age to negatively predict student behavior. That is, the older the student, the more likely that parental involvement in the school would predict negative student behavior such as high numbers of discipline referrals (Hayes, 2012). Hayes attributed to this phenomenon to the fact that students with behavior issues would inherently promote increased parental involvement with the school. Parents of students with poor behavior would be more likely to be contacted by teachers and/or administrators to discuss the poor behavior and options for improving the behavior (Hayes, 2012). In addition, parents might also be expected to meet with teachers and/or administrators on school grounds for these same reasons (Hayes, 2012).

McNeal conducted a one-dimension study of parent involvement—direct interactions between teachers and parents— and determined it has been related to poor behavioral outcomes. Such evidence has given rise to the reactivity hypothesis, or the theory that frequency of parent involvement increases when students act out in school

(as cited in McCormick et al., 2013). For example, controlling for initial behavior problems found that direct communication between teachers and parents in first grade predicted increases in student behavior problems in third grade. The authors noted that parents may have waited until serious problems occurred at school before becoming involved (McCormick et al., 2013). Other studies suggest variation in the effects of parent involvement by racial/ethnic background and socioeconomic status (Bracke & Corts, 2011). For example, McNeal argued that the cultural capital possessed by affluent European-American families may magnify the positive effects of parents' involvement on changes in academic and behavioral outcomes from eighth through twelfth grades (McCormick et al., 2013).

### **Parent and Teacher Perceptions**

Teachers and parents experience reality in different ways (Bracke & Corts, 2011). Their perceptions of what is happening and why it is happening can be diametrically opposed. Teachers are more focused on educational issues and how students learn whereas a parent can often be more focused on why their child is not learning or how their child feels (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2006). While differences in expectations between parents and teachers are prevalent, many similarities and complementary expectations are ubiquitous. As outlined below, teachers and parents want the same things, but do not always communicate with one another effectively (Oyserman et al., 2006).

Teachers want parents to do the following: (1) be open with them about their children's special needs or health problems; (2) tell them about any home circumstances which could affect pupils; (3) cooperate in reinforcing school discipline and school

programs at home by supervising homework or listening to their children read; (4) teach their child what is expected of them at school and have realistic expectations of what their children are capable of doing; (5) regularly attend Parent-Teacher meetings and discuss their children's progress with them; (6) read and acknowledge reports and letters sent home, and make sure the school has up-to-date address and phone detail in case they need to be contacted during the day; (7) keep their children home if they are not well; and (8) volunteer to help out in various ways in school (Oyserman et al., 2006).

Parents also have some expectations regarding teachers, as they expect them to do the following: (1) consult parents more frequently and listen to their point of view; (2) have a more open or approachable attitude, and be willing to admit if they do not know something; (3) treat their children with respect; (4) and, more importantly, contact them if they suspect their children have a problem of any kind (Bracke & Corts, 2011).

Teachers would like parents to be more open with them, and parents want teachers to listen to them and consult them more frequently (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). In addition, teachers want parents to do more volunteer work in schools, and parents say they are willing to do this. Parents and teachers both reinforce the importance of parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). These meetings are valuable as they help to clarify expectations on both sides. In most professional development workshops on parental involvement, there is a genuine surprise in the minds of many teachers and parents regarding the expectations placed on them (Oyserman et al., 2006). This indicates the necessity for more consideration to be given to the relationship between teachers and parents since it seems that assumptions are made on both sides without these being made explicit. This raises the issue: How should parents and teachers

relate to each other? In order to solve this, various approaches to parent-teacher relationships should be discussed (Oyserman et al., 2006).

### **Summary**

Parent involvement at the home and at the school is a critical component for student success. There are so many approaches that a parent can take to being involved. Schools must realize that it is not a “one size fits all” approach. It is up to the parent to determine what approach works best for their child and family lifestyle. Schools and teachers must model interactions with the parents to encourage participation and cooperation from the parents. After all, the parents and teachers have the same goal—for the child to be successful in and out of school.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter presented the research design for the study. The purpose of the study was to determine if AAD had a significant impact on the family's involvement in their child's education through the parent involvement program. The chapter includes sections that address the following topics: methodology, research questions, population, sample, instrumentations, and procedures for data collection, analysis and adherence to the professional program evaluation standards.

### **Evaluation Questions**

The program evaluation is designed to answer four evaluation questions. The questions are:

1. To what degree is the AAD environment welcoming to AAD families?
2. To what degree does AAD effectively communicate with the families?
3. To what degree does AAD influence parental involvement?
4. To what degree does parental involvement relate to student success at An Achievable Dream?

### **Participants**

The population for this study was families of students in grades 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11 at An Achievable Dream Academy and An Achievable Dream Middle and High School in Newport News, Virginia. Although participation was voluntary, the goal was to secure a high participant response rate to gather sufficient data.

## **Data Sources**

The program evaluation included four data sources: 1) a parent survey, 2) parent focus groups (8-10 participants), 3) parent contact logs, attendance logs from parent conference night, club showcases, and teacher contact logs, and 4) behavior, attendance, and SOL data on students in grades 7 and 10. The researcher used a mixed method strategy to collect feedback on the parent involvement program. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The parent survey, served as the primary source of data collection. Evaluation questions one, two, and three were answered by the parent survey, parent focus group, and home/school communication documentation. The fourth evaluation question was answered with the SOL, behavioral, attendance data sources and home/school communication documentation.

### **Parent Survey**

Research recognizes parent involvement as an important factor in the quality of a child's education. Joyce Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model is an influential model in parent involvement research (Epstein, 2005). The model redefines the relationship between schools, families, and communities as one of the overlapping spheres of influence that share the concerns about the success of a child (Fan & Williams, 2010). The overlap of the spheres represents that the interests and influences of the stakeholders in a child's education are mutual. The primary shared interest is a caring concern that children are successful. Additionally, according to the model, there are two types of interaction: those within the organizations and those between the organizations. At the center of this half of the model is the child, who interacts with schools and family (Fan & Williams, 2010). Because the research indicates that socio-economic status and

level of the parent’s education have a strong impact on parental involvement, the survey also sought to determine if the parents were encouraged to continue their own education.

The survey was originally developed during the 2013-2014 school year based on the Epstein model (see appendix A). The survey was intentionally very basic and simplistic so parents/guardians were not apprehensive when completing it. The parent/guardian survey was evaluated and rated for clarity and association with the given domain. It contains questions related to six domains: opportunities, parenting techniques, values, school improvement, child’s education, and their own education. These six domains were aligned with Epstein’s six types of parental involvement. The six types of parental involvement as outlined by Epstein are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community (Epstein, 2005). Once the appropriate domains were identified for the survey, Dr. James Stronge assisted in the development of the survey questions.

The survey was distributed to 365 parents of students in grades 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11 at An Achievable Dream Academy and An Achievable Dream Middle and High School. The parents of the students in grades 7 and 10 took the original survey in 2013-2014. The breakdown by grade level was as follows:

Table 2

*Breakdown by Grade Level*

<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
Grade 5	82
Grade 7	92
Grade 8	73
Grade 10	51
Grade 11	68

The survey had two components: the first set of six questions was developed by the PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide based on Epstein's model and the additional nine questions were developed specifically by An Achievable Dream. The PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide provided a framework for how families, schools, and communities should work together to support student success. The six questions were aligned with six standards defined by the PTA as being vital for a parent-school partnership. The six questions based on the PTA framework were incorporated into the survey to ensure national continuity and the solid foundation that the PTA national model provides.

The questions were forced-choice items with responses in a five-point Likert-type scale format. The points on the scale were the following: 4 = SA (Strongly agree), 3 = A (Agree), 2 = D (Disagree), 1 = SD (Strongly Disagree), and N/A = Not Applicable. The survey also included three open-ended questions to encourage elaboration of the topic.

**Reliability and validity of the survey.** In 2013-2014 this survey was administered to 208 parents in grades 5, 8, and 11. The survey was mailed home to all parents with a cover letter explaining the survey. A total of 146 surveys were completed and returned for a response rate of 70%. The reliability analysis indicated a very high (.93) level of reliability and the factor analysis showed a single factor that accounted for 65% of the variability in responses. The factor analysis results indicated that the scale generated an overall assessment and not specific component parts.

Since the administration of the 2013-2014 survey, a section for the parents to include the student's grade level as well as six questions developed by the PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide based on Epstein's model

were incorporated into the survey. These questions were incorporated because of the eminence associated with the PTA model for developing solid family-school partnerships.

### **Home and School Communication Documents**

The attendance logs from parent conference nights, club showcases, and teacher call logs were tracked for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years. These documents were used to determine if there was an increase in the level of parent involvement as well as communication between the parents, teachers, and staff.

### **Behavior, Attendance, and SOL Data**

Behavior, attendance and SOL data were collected on the students whose parents completed the survey in 2013-2014. The data were collected for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years to determine if there was a correlation between the number of times parents were contacted and attended events and the attendance, behavior, and SOL data.

### **Parent Focus Groups**

Focus groups were held with identified parents to generate in-depth insight on the survey questions. Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction amongst interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information (Creswell, 2009). When well executed, a focus group creates an accepting environment that puts participants at ease allowing the participants to thoughtfully answer questions in their own words and add meaning to their answers (Creswell, 2009). With this approach, care

must be given to avoid allowing one individual to dominate the conversation (Creswell, 2009). Surveys are good for collecting information about people's attributes and attitudes, but a focus group allows for a deeper level of communication.

Each focus group consisted of 8-10 parents with a mix of 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade parents included in each focus group. There were three focus groups. A selection of low, middle, and high range involved parents were determined by reviewing the paperwork related to involvement in school to include the parent sign-in sheets collected at school events and parent contact logs maintained by teachers and staff.

**Focus group protocol.** The researcher conducted the focus groups using a semi-structured interview protocol to gain in-depth feedback on topics of six domains: opportunities, parenting techniques, values, school improvement, child's education, and their own education. The focus group questions were developed based on the survey questions and Epstein's six types of parental involvement. However, additional questions may be developed after analyzing the survey results. A copy of the focus group protocol and focus group questions are located in Appendix B. The protocol provided guidelines for the facilitator on the procedures as well as any follow-up prompts that were used in the focus group. An assistant audio recorded the responses (Creswell, 2009). The assistant also made handwritten notes of the participant's responses. Each participant completed the Informed Consent Letter to Focus Group (Appendix C).

**Facilitator's instructions.** During the focus groups, the researcher greeted the participants and provided them with the informed consent form. They were given the opportunity to sign read it and sign it (Appendix C). Once the participants had an opportunity to sign the consent form, the researcher then provided the participants with

an overview of the facilitator and assistant's roles, review the purpose of the focus group, and discuss the guidelines for the focus group (Creswell, 2009). As the group facilitator, the role was to nurture disclosure in an open and spontaneous format. The facilitator also attempted to generate a maximum number of different ideas and opinions from as many different people in the time allotted (Creswell, 2009). The introductory script was read and it was contained in the interview protocol (Creswell, 2009). The facilitator then proceeded to the first question. The participants were prompted to expand on a question with one of the following prompts: (a) What observations have you made in regards to this topic, (b) What experiences have you had with this type of situation, and (c) How might this affect the parent or the student (Creswell, 2009). Following the question and answer period, the facilitator thanked the participants for his/her time, candor and will reiterate that the information will be helpful to AAD for program improvement.

**Reliability and validity of the focus group protocol.** The researcher followed the focus group protocol with all participants. The participants were given the same questions and were provided ample time to respond to each question (Creswell, 2009). The focus group protocol supports the research on parent involvement that defines involvement as including behaviors at home as well as at school (Ysseldyke, 2002). The research has defined parent involvement by the location in which involvement activities take place, differentiating among home-based involvement, school-based involvement, and home-school communication (Smith et al., 2011). Lee and Bowen employed a typology that takes into account both the activities and the location of the parent involvement (Smith et al., 2011). The measures of their research included: (1) parent involvement at school, (2) parent-child educational discussions, (3) homework help, (4)

time management, and (5) parent educational expectations. The term parent involvement encompasses the gamut of activities parents engage in to help their children succeed at school (Smith et al., 2011). The focus group protocol was aligned to the different locations and types of parental involvement as outlined in the research.

Clarification of researcher bias provided the reader with information as to how the researcher interpreted the findings (Creswell, 2009). Information for potential bias in this study was provided. Information on the evaluator's background provided the reader with a full account of qualities and characteristics that may influence the study's interpretations. This was important to any study but critical to establishing validity of qualitative studies where researchers play a more subjective role than quantitative research (Creswell, 2009). Full disclosure of findings and reports to An Achievable Dream's leadership team also safeguarded against invalid reporting and communication.

## **Data Collection**

### **Survey Data Collection Procedures**

The President of An Achievable Dream, Inc. reviewed the evaluation tools prior to beginning the data collection. The researcher distributed the data collection tools and utilized electronic communications to secure agreement for the sample selection, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis strategies prior to implementing the study.

A cover letter and survey were mailed to all of the parents/guardians of students in grades 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11. A copy of the survey letter and survey are included in Appendix D and Appendix E. The researcher sent out reminders each week for two

weeks until the close of the survey period. To encourage participation, all classes with 100% participation received a pizza party.

### **Data Collections**

The attendance logs from parent conference nights, club showcases, and teacher call logs were tracked for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years. These documents were used to develop a frequency count for each student on the number of times that a parent attended an event and/or had contact with the child's teacher.

Behavior, attendance and SOL data were collected on the students whose parents completed the survey in 2013-2014. A behavior frequency count was used to determine how many behavior infractions the child had each year. The behavior categories that were counted included cheating, disruption, disrespectful behavior, insubordination, profanity, unauthorized use of technology, fighting, firearms, and bomb threats/threats against a person. The behavior infraction had to be reported into the student information system to be counted. The behavior data was collected for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years to determine if there is a correlation between the number of times a parent had contact with the school and/or attended an event and behavior data.

Attendance data was also collected on those students whose parents completed the survey in 2013-2014. An attendance frequency count was used to determine how many absences the child had each year for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016 school years to determine if there was a correlation between the number of times a parent has contact with the school and/or attended an event.

The students whose parent completed the survey in the 2013-2014 school year were in grades 5, 8, and 11. The same students' SOLs data were also collected for the

2015-2016 school year to determine whether each student passed their SOLs. The SOL scores that were collected were reading and math. The students are in grades 7 and 10 for the 2015-2016 school year.

### **Data Analysis**

The use of three data collection instruments (parent survey, parent focus groups, and collected artifacts) provided both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. The mixed-methods approach provided more in-depth answers to the evaluation questions than would occur using a single method approach. The researcher used the CIPP product model of evaluation to monitor the outcomes of the program. The CIPP model lends itself well to a mixed-method approach (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Using the mixed method model, the researcher collected data from the survey during the data collection period and compared it to the same survey that was administered during the 2013-2014 school year. It was also administered to parents of students in grades 5, 8, and 11 during the 2013-2014. After the surveys were administered, the researcher proceeded with the parent focus groups and any additional artifact collection. The researcher analyzed the survey data first prior to analyzing the focus group and artifact data.

### **Analysis of Parent Surveys**

The parent surveys were analyzed by aligning the survey questions to the evaluation questions. The researcher used a structural (theoretical) analysis of the items to create a scale of the combined survey questions and used correlations to determine whether significant differences exist between the 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 survey administrations.

Table 3

*Evaluation Question Analysis*

<b>Evaluation Question</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>
1. To what degree is the AAD environment welcoming to parents?	Survey questions 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, and 12 Focus Group & Artifacts	Correlations  Theme Content Approach
2. To what degree does AAD effectively communicate with parents?	Survey questions 4,5,6 Focus Group & Artifacts	Correlations  Theme Content Approach
3. To what degree does AAD change parent involvement?	Survey questions 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15  Focus Group and Artifacts	Correlations  Theme Content Approach
4. To what degree does parental involvement relate to student success at An Achievable Dream?	Attendance, behavior, and achievement data Artifacts	Correlations  Theme Content Approach

**Analysis of Focus Group Responses and Artifacts**

The researcher analyzed the focus group responses using the theme content approach by counting and comparing the extracted category counts using priori codes and emergent themes. Coding is based on the grounded theory, which is a strategy to code data into categories through “successive but flexible levels of data analysis and conceptual development” (Grant, Stronge, & Xu, 2013, p. 257). This analysis tool served as a method for handling masses of raw data by providing standardization to the process (Grant et al., 2013). The codes supplied a framework to facilitate understanding. The researcher transcribed the focus group tapes, read focus group information examined, compared the information, and divided the data into segments for coding (Gall et al., 2006). In this evaluation, the priori codes were defined based on Epstein’s School-

Family-Community Partnership Model six types of parent involvement. The emergent themes were outlined by Epstein’s sub-categories. Additional sub-categories were developed based on the survey and focus group results.

Table 4

*Categories and Coding*

<b>Epstein’s Categories of Parent Involvement</b>	<b>Type of Code</b>
Type 1 – Parenting Sub-category – workshops and training for parents	A Priori Code Emergent Code
Type 2 – Communicating Sub-category – conferences and weekly folders	A Priori Code Emergent Code
Type 3 – Volunteering Sub-category – family center	A Priori Code Emergent Code
Type 4 – Learning at Home Sub-category – homework policies and calendars of activities	A Priori Code Emergent Code
Type 5 – Decision Making Sub-category – PTA and committees	A Priori Code Emergent Code
Type 6 - Collaborating with Community Sub-category – Health Fair, alumni programs	A Priori Code Emergent Code

The responses were audio recorded as well as documented as handwritten notes. The researcher typed the responses following the interviews using a computer-based word processing system. The researcher analyzed the data for emergent codes and assign prior codes when appropriate. Finally, the researcher interpreted the meaning of the data to determine lessons learned from the focus groups as well as determining how the data explained, supported, or negated the data collected from the survey (Creswell, 2009). A colleague with expertise within the field examined the coding to indicate agreement or

disagreement with the coding analysis. The process for coding agreement was initiated once the first focus group was transcribed. The researcher developed coding and then asked a colleague to review for agreement. The threshold for adequate agreement was 80% so there was evidence that the coding is solid. The same process was repeated after the second focus group.

### **Limitations**

The small sample size and no comparison data from another program were limitations of the study. In addition, most of the information was self-reported through parent responses on a survey. An overarching issue can be the credibility of self-reports (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Why should we trust what people say about themselves? Accuracy is not the only motive shaping self-perceptions (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Among the other powerful motives are consistency seeking, self-enhancement, and self-presentation (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Even when respondents are doing their best to be forthright and insightful, their self-reports are subject to various sources of inaccuracy. Of special interest are limitations such as self-deception and memory (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007).

The role of the researcher was also a limitation to the study. The researcher serves as Vice President of Academics, which could impact the parents being forthcoming regarding negative experiences at An Achievable Dream.

### **Delimitations**

The researcher developed the study to limit parameters in the following ways:

- The study is limited to only grades 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11.
- The study only includes the AAD Newport News site.

- I will select the participants for the focus group based low, middle, and high range parent involvement.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This evaluation adhered to The Program Evaluation Standards (Joint Committee on Standards for Education Evaluation, 2011) in the four areas of propriety, utility, feasibility, and accuracy. The evaluation process was closely monitored and reviewed by the assigned dissertation committee. The College of William and Mary's School of Education Internal Review Board and the An Achievable Dream leadership team ensured a full measure of protection to participants.

#### **Propriety**

The researcher remained open and responsive to the stakeholders' needs and concerns in effort to ensure a smooth and effective evaluation process. Regularly scheduled meetings with the program leadership team were an opportunity to clarify facts, processes, and address stakeholder's needs. The approval process provided a formal agreement between the evaluator and stakeholders, which took "into account the context, needs, and expectations of clients and other parties" (Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 25). Review and approval of the plan and data collection instruments by the assigned dissertation committee ensured a full measure of protection to participants (Mertens & Wilson, 2012).

All participants were fully informed of the guidelines for participation in the study. All participation was voluntary, with no ramifications for not participating. If participants have ethical concerns with the conduct of this study, they were directed to

contact the chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at The College of William and Mary. Contact information was included on the focus group consent form.

### **Utility**

The researcher's education coursework, professional experience, and respect as a professional established a firm foundation for conducting an effective and credible evaluation. The researcher's professional familiarity with the AAD program and stakeholders helped in (a) creating a trusting environment for gathering information during the focus groups, and (b) communicating the practical use of results (Mertens & Wilson, 2012).

The plan promoted ownership of findings. The data collection activities encouraged sharing of individual judgments as well as collegial conversation following participation (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). In this regard, the evaluation fostered an ongoing dialog that will benefit staff, students, and parents for years to come. Anonymity guards against "unintended negative consequences and misuse" (Merten & Wilson, 2012, p.10) such as teachers or staff being singled out for praise or reprimand for comments shared during the survey or focus groups.

### **Feasibility**

This evaluation used procedures and resources familiar to participants. Parents were asked to complete surveys or participate in focus groups for other components of the program. These familiar formats gave parents an outlet for expressing opinions and concerns. Parents may relish the opportunity to be heard on their level of involvement in their child's education.

## **Accuracy**

To ensure accuracy, evaluators used valid and reliable triangulated methodologies that provided useful data for practical program decision-making on the effectiveness of the parent involvement program (Merten & Wilson, 2012). The researcher was committed to clearly documenting the findings, interpretations, conclusions, and judgments without omissions or flaws (Merten & Wilson, 2012). Multiple communication approaches strengthened valid reporting practices. Full disclosure of findings and reports to the An Achievable Dream, Inc. Board of Directors also safeguarded against invalid reporting and communication.

## **Role of the Researcher**

There were two areas of potential bias for this study. First, the researcher's role as Vice President of Academics could have had an impact on the parents being forthcoming regarding negative experiences at An Achievable Dream. Second, because the researcher has been at An Achievable Dream for 19 years, there are established relationships between many of the families and me. To eliminate or reduce bias, the following plan was included:

- An Achievable Dream, Inc. had access to all study instruments and results.
- Triangulated data collection methods reduced bias in self-reporting.
- A representative of the AAD leadership team reviewed all instruments and results.
- Focus group participants were asked to describe their interactions during the interviews, which included the length of the interview and type of interaction.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to determine if An Achievable Dream Academies are implementing an environment that is welcoming and inclusive of parents. Additionally, this study investigated whether AAD has an impact on parental involvement, parenting techniques, and if parent involvement affects student attendance, behavior and/or SOL data. Chapter 3 provided an overview of the methodology of the study, including the participants, data sources, and data analysis. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the results of the study and is organized by the evaluation questions. Data for the study were collected from March 1, 2014 through March 16, 2016. Results of both quantitative and qualitative data collection for the study are described in this chapter.

#### **Parent Survey**

The parent survey was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data regarding three of the evaluation questions:

1. To what degree is the AAD environment welcoming to AAD parents?
2. To what degree does AAD effectively communicate with the parents?
3. To what degree does AAD influence parental involvement?

Two versions of a survey were used to collect data from parents of AAD students. The questions for the 2013-2014 survey are in Appendix A, and the questions for the 2015-2016 survey are in Appendix B. Since the administration of the 2013-2014 survey,

a section for the parents to include the student's grade level as well as six questions developed by the PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide based on Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model were incorporated into the survey. These questions were adopted because of the eminence associated with the PTA model for developing solid family-school partnerships. Questions 1-6 on the 2015-2016 survey are the new questions based on the PTA standards. Questions 9-15 correspond to the original questions from the 2013-2014 study.

The surveys were completed in a paper/pencil format by parents. Once submitted, the surveys were manually entered into Qualtrics, a web-based survey software tool. The data were then imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 22 (SPSS), a data analysis program, and analyzed to inform the study. The questions were forced-choice items with responses in a five-point Likert-type scale format. The points on the scale were the following: 4 = SA (Strongly agree), 3 = A (Agree), 2 = D (Disagree), 1 = SD (Strongly Disagree), and N/A = Not Applicable.

The 2013-2014 survey was distributed to parents of students in grades 5, 8, and 11. Surveys were mailed to 208 parents with 148 being completed and returned. The response rate to the survey was 70%. The reliability analysis indicated a very high (Coefficient alpha = .93) reliability. A principal components factor analysis of the item responses showed a single factor that accounted for 65% of the variability in responses. The factor analysis results indicate that the scale is generating an overall assessment and not specific component parts. The results of the survey are in Table 5. The questions are numbered 7-15 to correlate to the numbering on the 2015-2016 survey.

Table 5

*Mean Item Responses for 2013-2014 Survey*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Question 7. Parents feel welcomed.	3.42	.80
Question 8. Parents are provided with opportunities to be involved.	4.35	.82
Question 9. AAD has a positive impact on parenting techniques.	3.36	.92
Question 10. AAD has a positive impact on the values instilled in the home.	3.36	.89
Question 11. AAD has had a positive impact on relationship between parent and child.	3.46	.73
Question 12. Parents are encouraged to be involved in their child’s education.	3.29	1.04
Question 13. Parents are encouraged to further their own education.	3.44	.84
Question 14. Parents receive support with handling attendance, academic, and discipline.	3.47	.82
Question 15. Parents would recommend AAD to other families.	3.50	1.00

The survey results indicated that parents supported the program and believed that they were well-informed by the program and encouraged to participate in the program. Question two has a much higher mean (4.45) indicating the significance of this data to the parent. Parents strongly agree that they are well-informed and that communication with the teachers is easy.

Respondents were also asked to elaborate on their responses through a “yes” or “no” question and two open-ended questions.

*As a parent, have you ever had a negative experience regarding family involvement and support at An Achievable Dream?* Of the 148 respondents, 134 (90.5%) parents responded “no.” Thirteen (9%) parent respondents answered “yes” to having a negative experience at AAD.

*If yes, how did AAD help resolve the negative experience?* There were 17 (11.4%) responses ranging from “a positive solution was reached” to “it was never resolved.” There were 7 (4.7%) parent respondents referencing negative experience with the uniforms and dress code policy.

*Please add any additional comments that you would like to share about AAD’s relationship and support of parents.* Of the 148 respondents, 28 (18.9%) parents responded to this question. Multiple parents responded with phrases such as, “I don’t know what we would do without AAD,” and “AAD isn’t what it used to be.” Five of the responses addressed the dress code and uniform policies. Two of the parents were supportive of the policies and three were not. The uniform and dress code responses included, “The uniform makes our lives so much easier in the morning” and “I understand why there is a strict policy but I sometimes get tired of enforcing it.”

The 2015-2016 survey was distributed to 365 parents of students in grades 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11, with a total of 253 surveys completed. The response rate to the survey was 69%. The reliability of the overall survey was high (Coefficient alpha = .91). In addition, a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation of the item responses indicated three factors accounting for 63% of the original variability. The three factors that emerged were closely aligned to the categories of investigation and were named: Influence, Welcoming Environment, and Organizational Operations/Communications. The Alpha reliabilities of the three new scales were .86, .84, and .66 respectively. Descriptive statistics on the completed survey by grade level is provided in Table 6.

Table 6

*Completed Surveys by Grade Level*

<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Number of Surveys Completed</b>
Grade 5	82	60
Grade 7	92	44
Grade 8	73	45
Grade 10	51	51
Grade 11	68	46

Descriptive statistics on the 2015-2016 survey are provided in Table 7.

Table 7

*Mean Item Responses for 2015-2016 Survey*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Question 1. School is inviting and a place where they belong.	3.38	.81
Question 2. Parents are informed and communication is easy.	3.33	.87
Question 3. Parents know how well their child is succeeding and how the school is progressing.	3.21	.81
Question 4. Parents are full participants in decision-making.	3.11	.99
Question 5. Parents know the school and district policies and how to raise a concern.	3.28	1.00
Question 6. Parents and school leaders work closely with the community and higher ed.	3.38	.99
Question 7. Parents feel welcomed.	3.42	.80
Question 8. Parents are provided with opportunities to be involved.	4.35	.82
Question 9. AAD has a positive impact on parenting techniques.	3.36	.92
Question 10. AAD has had a positive impact on the values instilled in the home.	3.36	.89
Question 11. AAD has had a positive impact on relationship between parent and child.	3.39	.87
Question 12. Parents are encouraged to be involved in their child's education.	3.46	.73
Question 13. Parents are encouraged to further their own education.	3.29	1.04
Question 14. Parents receive support with handling attendance, academic, and discipline.	3.44	.84
Question 15. Parents would recommend AAD to other families.	3.47	.82
Influence	3.39	.81
Welcoming Environment	3.53	.99
Organizational Operations/Communication	3.26	.90

The survey results showed an overall satisfaction with the parents' involvement in the program to include a welcoming environment, influence on parenting skills, and organizational operations and communication. Question eight has a much higher mean

(4.35) indicating the significance of this data to the parents. Parents strongly agree that they are provided with opportunities to be involved with their child's education.

The six questions added from the PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships Assessment Guide provided clarity on whether parents understand the district and school policies and consider the process to be inclusive of parents. Sixty-two parents (24.4%) responded that they do not know the district and school policies and did not feel the decision-making process is inclusive. These questions also provided insight on the parents' knowledge of community partnerships and partnerships with higher education institutions. A total of 45 parents (17.7%) responded that they do not believe the school works closely with community organizations and higher education institutions. This indicates that AAD needs to communicate better with the parents on these initiatives.

Respondents were also asked to elaborate on their responses through a "yes" or "no" question and two open-ended questions.

*As a parent, have you ever had a negative experience regarding family involvement and support at An Achievable Dream?* Of the 254 respondents, 221 (87%) parents responded "no." Likewise, 33 (12.9%) respondents answered "yes" to having a negative experience at AAD.

*If yes, how did AAD help resolve the negative experience?* There were 18 (7%) responses and they ranged from "a positive solution" to "it was never resolved."

*Please add any additional comments that you would like to share about AAD's relationship and support of parents.* Of the 254 respondents, 37 (14.5%) parents responded to this question. Multiple parents responded with phrases such as, "We love

you guys,” and “Can’t imagine my children not being in the program.” Two parents responded, “AAD needs to be more open to parent suggestions.” As in the previous survey, many of the responses addressed the dress code and uniform policies. The responses were broad, from being supportive of the policy to questioning the importance of the policy. One parent commented, “I love the dress code policy. It is so much cheaper than trying to keep my kids in clothes all year.” Another parent responded, “I think it is too strict.”

A descriptive analysis for the mean of the 2013-2014 and the 2015-2016 survey results is outlined in Table 8. The 2015-2016 same grade column compares the mean item responses of the 5, 8, and 11 grade parents to the 2013-2014 mean item responses for the same grade levels. The 2015-2016 same families column compares the mean item responses to the same families who were administered the survey in 2013-2014.

Table 8

*Mean Item Responses for 2013-2014 and 2015-2016 Surveys*

<b>Question</b>	<b>2013/14 Survey</b>	<b>2015/16 Survey</b>	<b>2015/16 Same Grade</b>	<b>2015/16 Same Families</b>
Question 1. School is inviting and a place where they belong.		3.38	3.36	3.41
Question 2. Parents are informed and communication is easy.		3.33	3.30	3.36
Question 3. Parents know how well their child is succeeding.		3.21	3.24	3.18
Question 4. Parents are full participants in decision-making.		3.11	3.14	3.08
Question 5. Parents know the school and district policies.		3.28	3.31	3.23
Question 6. Parents and school leaders work closely with the community and higher ed.		3.38	3.46	3.26
Question 7. Parents feel welcomed.	3.46	3.42	3.46	3.36
Question 8. Parents are provided with opportunities to be involved.	4.45	4.35	4.41	4.25
Question 9. AAD has a positive impact on parenting techniques.	3.43	3.36	3.36	3.35
Question 10. AAD has had a positive impact on the values instilled in the home.	3.33	3.36	3.35	3.36
Question 11. AAD has had a positive impact on relationship between parent and child.	3.34	3.39	3.38	3.40
Question 12. Parents are encouraged to be involved in their child's education.	3.51	3.46	3.45	3.49
Question 13. Parents are encouraged to further their own education.	3.39	3.29	3.28	3.30
Question 14. Parents receive support with handling attendance, academic, and discipline.	3.51	3.44	3.51	3.34
Question 15. Parents would recommend AAD to other families.	3.50	3.47	3.51	3.41
Influence		3.39	3.40	3.37
Welcoming Environment		3.53	3.54	3.50
Organizational Operations/Communications		3.26	3.30	3.20

Examination of the item and scale mean indicated very few differences between the responses to the 2013-2014 and the 2015-2016 surveys. The parents who responded in 2013-2014 as 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade parents had similar responses in 2015-2016 as parents of students in grades 7 and 10. Additionally, the parents of 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in 2013-2014 answered similarly to the parents of 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in 2015-2016. Overall, the parents feel welcomed at AAD and feel they are aware of the operations of the organization. The results also indicate that AAD has had a significant influence in their parenting.

### **Focus Groups**

The qualitative data collected in the parent focus groups were used to inform three of the evaluation questions:

1. To what degree is the AAD environment welcoming to AAD parents?
2. To what degree does AAD effectively communicate with the parents?
3. To what degree does AAD influence parental involvement?

Each focus group consisted of 8-10 parents. Each grade level was represented across the three focus groups. Parents with high-, middle-, and low-range involvement were selected by reviewing the documentation related to involvement in school to include the parent sign-in sheets collected at school events and parent contact logs maintained by teachers and staff. The first focus group included two parents representing high-range involvement, four parents representing mid-range involvement, and three parents representing low-range involvement. The second focus group had four parents representing the high-range involvement, two parents representing the mid-range involvement, and two parents representing the low-range involvement. The third focus

group was comprised of four high-range involved parents and four mid-range involved parents. Table 9 shows the number of parent participants in each focus group.

Table 9

*Grade Levels Represented in Focus Groups*

<b>Focus Group</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Grade Levels Represented</b>
1	9	5, 7, 8, and 11
2	8	7, 8,10, and 11
3	8	8, 9, 10, and 11

During the focus group, the researcher used questions from the parent survey, as well as other questions specifically addressing the parents’ level of involvement and satisfaction at AAD. The focus group protocols are outlined in Appendix B. The focus group responses were coded based one of the six types of parent involvement in Epstein’s School-Family-Community Partnership Model. The codes that were identified from a qualitative analysis of responses were: 1) environment, 2) communication, 3) collaboration, 4) decision-making, 5) parenting, and 6) volunteering. From these codes, emergent themes were identified. A descriptive analysis of the Epstein categories of parent involvement, the codes identified, and the emergent themes are in Table 10.

Table 10

*Major Codes and Themes*

<b>Epstein's Categories of Parent Involvement</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b># of Times mentioned by Parents</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Parenting	Parenting	31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive impact on parenting practices</li> </ul>
	Environment	39	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variability of welcoming to the building</li> <li>• Importance of building</li> </ul>
Communication	Communication	45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiation is important</li> <li>• Some methods are not effective</li> </ul>
Collaborating with the community	Collaboration	21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community collaboration impacts more than academics</li> </ul>
Decision-Making	Decision-Making	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents do not have a voice</li> </ul>
Volunteering	Volunteering	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities are not presented</li> </ul>
Learning at Home			

**Home and School Communication Documents**

The home and school communication documents were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data regarding three of the evaluation questions.

1. To what degree is the AAD environment welcoming to AAD parents?
2. To what degree does AAD effectively communicate with the parents?
3. To what degree does AAD influence parental involvement?

The attendance logs from parent conference nights, club showcases, and teacher call logs were collected for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years. These documents were used to develop a frequency count for each student on the number of times that a parent attended an event and/or had contact with the child's teacher. The researcher used the frequency count to select a combination of high-, middle-, and low-range involved parents for the focus groups and analysis of the impact of parental involvement on SOL, discipline, and attendance results.

### **Behavior, Attendance, and SOL Data**

The behavior, attendance, and SOL data were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data regarding the fourth evaluation question: *To what degree does a parent's level of involvement (LOI) relate to student success at An Achievable Dream?*

Behavior, attendance, and SOL data were collected from Newport News Public Schools on the students whose parents completed the survey in 2013-2014. A behavior frequency count was used to determine how many behavior infractions the child had each year. The behavior categories that were counted included cheating, disruption, disrespectful behavior, insubordination, profanity, unauthorized use of technology, fighting, firearms, and bomb threats/threats against a person. The behavior infraction had to be reported into the student information system to be counted. The behavior data were collected for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 school years to determine if there was a correlation between a parent's LOI and behavior data.

Attendance data were also collected on those students whose parents completed the survey in 2013-2014. An attendance frequency count was used to determine how many absences the child had each year for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016

school years to determine if there was a correlation between a parent's LOI and the number of absences.

The students whose parent completed the survey in the 2013-2014 school year were in grades 5, 8, and 11. The same students' SOL math and reading scores were also collected for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. These scores were used to determine if there was a correlation between a parent's LOI and academic achievement measured through the reading and math SOLs.

**Evaluation Question 1. To what degree is the AAD environment welcoming to AAD parents?**

The indicators for the first evaluation question were Likert Scale survey questions 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15 as well as focus group responses. The survey responses were entered into Qualtrics. Results of the survey were first exported to Excel and descriptive analyses were then run in SPSS. The Likert Scale responses ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Parents could also select a "not sure" response. The mean value for all of the questions together was 3.53 with a .81 SD. Descriptive statistics for the 254 responses appear in Table 11.

Table 11

*Mean Item Responses for 2015-2016 Survey Questions*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Question 1. School is inviting and a place where they belong.	3.38	.81
Question 2. Parents are informed and communication is easy.	3.33	.87
Question 3. Parents know how well their child is succeeding and how the school is progressing.	3.21	.81
Question 7. Parents feel welcomed.	3.42	.80
Question 8. Parents are provided with opportunities to be involved.	4.35	.82
Question 12. Parents are encouraged to be involved in their child’s education.	3.46	.73

**Parent Survey Responses**

The parent survey responses were helpful in providing quantitative and qualitative survey data to inform this evaluation question. The following six questions in the parent survey were analyzed in determining the degree to which parents feel welcomed at AAD.

*When parents walk into the building, do they feel the school is inviting and is a place where they “belong?”* All of the 254 respondents responded to this question. Of the 254 parents who responded to this question, 219 (86.2%) responded that they feel the school is inviting and a place where they belong. Twenty-four (9%) responded that they do not feel the school is inviting or a place where they belong.

*Does the school keep all parents informed about important issues and events and make it easy for families to communicate with teachers?* Of the 254 parents who responded to this question, 209 (82.2%) reported being informed about issues and events

and easy communication with teachers. Likewise, 41 (16%) responded they were not well informed and communication with teachers was not easy.

*Do parents know and understand how well their children are succeeding in school and how well the entire school is progressing?* There were 253 of 254 who responded to this survey question. Of the 253 parents who responded to this question, 212 (83.4%) responded that they know how their child is succeeding in school and how well the entire school is progressing. Thirty-nine parents (15.4%) responded that they do not know how their child or the school is progressing.

*Parents feel welcomed at AAD.* There were 254 respondents to this question. The 223 (87.7%) parents who responded feel welcomed at AAD. Twenty-five parents (7%) responded that they do not feel welcomed.

*AAD provides opportunities for you, as a parent, to be involved in the program.* All of the 254 respondents responded to this question. The 214 (84.2%) parents who responded feel that AAD provides opportunities for parents to be involved in the program. Thirty-one (12.2%) parents responded that they do not feel AAD provides opportunities for parents to be involved in the program.

*AAD has encouraged parents to be involved in their child's education.* Of the 254 respondents to this question, 237 (93.3%) responded that AAD encourages parents to be involved in their education. Fourteen (5.5%) parents responded that they do not feel that AAD encourages parents to be involved in their child's education.

## **Focus Groups**

From the focus groups, two themes emerged that related to this question: “variability of welcoming in the building” and “importance of building relationships with parents.” These themes are described below.

**Variability of welcoming in the building.** The participants were asked if AAD was a welcoming environment for the parents. The first theme that emerged was the variation of the environment. The qualitative data from the focus groups indicated that the parents typically feel welcomed at the schools, but it often varies from staff member to staff member.

One of the fathers felt that teachers/staff at the academy were not as comfortable interacting with fathers since the majority of their interaction is with mothers. The middle/high school office staff and student workers were highly praised for friendly nature when greeting all guests. The question was raised as to whether the academy staff is more guarded with guests because the students are so young (grades K-5).

The parents did indicate that there is a difference in their level of involvement when the students leave the academy. There tends to be a decrease in the opportunities for involvement at the middle and high school. A parent commented, “I don’t really know how to get involved with my child’s education now that she is in high school. Other than asking her if she has homework, I am not sure what to do.” However, the parents felt that the trend was probably traditional for all parents of secondary school students.

**Importance of building relationships with students.** The second theme that emerged pertaining to a welcoming environment was the importance of building relationships with the parents. The parents indicated that they feel more welcomed by

those teachers and staff members who have taken the opportunity to develop a relationship with the parents.

One parent commented, I feel much more comfortable with my child's fifth grade teacher than I did her fourth grade teacher because she took the time to get to know me. She actually asked me about me and that was important to me.

Another parent agreed with the importance of relationships. She said, "When my son was at his previous school, his second grade teacher made me feel stupid and I refused to talk with her. I knew it was wrong but I couldn't help it."

Based on the data gathered to inform the first evaluation question, the parent survey indicated a positive experience for the parents at AAD and welcoming environment in most situations. Additionally, the focus group participants responded favorably in most cases. There are some areas for improvement in terms of developing relationships with parents and consistency amongst the teachers and staff at both schools.

**Evaluation Question 2. To what degree does AAD effectively communicate with the parents?**

The indicators for the second evaluation question were Likert Scale survey questions 4, 5, and 6 and focus group responses. The survey responses were entered into Qualtrics. Results of the survey were first exported to Excel, and descriptive analyses were then run in SPSS. The Likert Scale responses ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Parents could also select a "not sure" response. The mean value for all of the questions together was 3.26 with a .99 SD. Descriptive statistics for the 254 responses appear in Table 12.

Table 12

*Mean Item Responses for 2015-2016 Survey Questions*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Question 4. Parents are full parents in decision-making.	3.11	.99
Question 5. Parents know the school and district policies and how to raise a	3.28	1.00
Question 6. Parents and school leaders work closely with the community and higher ed.	3.38	.99

**Parent Survey Responses**

The parent survey responses were helpful in providing quantitative and qualitative survey data to inform this evaluation question. The following three questions in the parent survey were analyzed to determine if parents feel that AAD communicates regularly with the parents and the parents are well informed of district and school policies.

*Do parents know how the local school and district operate and how to raise questions or concerns about school and district programs, policies, and activities?* There were 254 responses to this question. Of the 254 responses, 174 (68.5%) parents responded they do know how the local school and district operate and how to raise questions or concerns. Sixty-two (24.4%) parents responded they do not know how the local school and district operate or how to raise questions or concerns.

*Are the parents full participants in making decision that affect their children at school or in the community?* There were 253 responses to this question. Of the 253 responds, 175 (69.1%) parents indicated that they are full partners in making decisions

that affect their children at school and in the community. Fifty-two (20.5%) parents do not feel they are full partners in making decisions that affect their children at school and in the community.

*Do parents and school leaders work closely with community organizations, businesses, and institutions of higher education to strengthen the school, make resources available to students, school staff, and families, and build a family friendly community?*

Of the 253 respondents, 179 (70.7%) responded that parents and school leaders work closely with community organizations, businesses, and institutions of higher education to strengthen the school and provide resources to the students, school staff, and families.

Forty-five (17.7%) respondents did not feel this was true.

### **Focus Groups**

From the focus group four themes emerged that related to this question:

“differentiation is important,” “some methods are not effective,” community collaboration impacts more than academics,” and “parents do not have a voice.” These are described below.

**Differentiation is important.** During the focus group, the participants were asked if they were well-informed about the school’s policies and felt the school communicated well with the parents. Two main themes emerged from their responses. Those themes were “differentiation is important” and “some methods are not effective.” The parents appreciated a variety of communication methods but felt those methods involving technology were challenging for many parents. For example, parents prefer the progress reports being sent home with the students rather than electronically through the parent assist program. The focus group respondents felt that if parents/guardians are not

involved in the program, then it is because their schedule does not allow it or the family chooses not to be involved. Two parents commented that teachers and administrators were always willing to stay late to accommodate parent/guardians schedules.

**Some methods are not effective.** The second theme was that not all of the forms of communication are effective. This specifically applied to technology. The two concerns involved the Parent Assist System at the middle/high school and invitations to events. The parents/guardians felt that the Parent Assist System information is not updated by teachers in a timely manner and that information on events could be mailed earlier so parents/guardians can make arrangements. One parent stated, “I know technology is important, but it is difficult for me. I prefer phone calls and notes home. I can’t stay up with the Parent Assist System.”

**Community collaboration impacts more than academics.** One main theme emerged from their responses. The emergent theme was community collaboration impacts more than academics. When asked about the community involvement, many of the focus group participants seemed to have attended the Family Health Night. One parent stated, “I was able to learn healthy alternatives on a budget for my child. I didn’t feel intimidated because I couldn’t afford it.” Another parent said she had shared many of the things she learned with her neighbors whose children do not attend AAD.

The parents also appreciated the town hall meetings with the police department’s participation.

One of the fathers stated, I work a lot, so I don’t always know what is going on in the streets, but I was well informed by the police department. I feel like I know what signs to look for with my son and daughter.

**Parents do not have a voice.** During the focus group, the participants were asked if they were full partners in making decisions that impact their children at school and in the community. One main theme emerged from their responses, that parents do not have a voice. The parents were all very vocal that they do not have input on the dress code and uniform policy. One parent stated, “I battle my daughter regularly about the color of her hair but I have no input into the policy. I would like to have ownership if I am going to stand for it.” Another parent stated that she thinks the uniform policy is too strict and she would like to have the opportunity to voice why she feels that way.

The high school parents felt that they were very involved in their children’s high school planning process. One parent said, “I felt like an equal partner in deciding what would be the best classes for my child to take.” Another parent added, “My child does not always like the decision the counselor and I make but it is pushing her to do her best work.”

The second evaluation question sought to identify the degree to which parents are informed on the policies impacting their child’s success and whether the parents are knowledgeable of district and school policies. The parent survey indicated that a high percentage of parents are well-informed on the policies impacting their child and school. Additionally, the focus group participants responded satisfactorily the majority of the time. There are some areas for improvement for parents to feel more involved in the decision-making process.

**Evaluation Question 3. To what degree does AAD influence parental involvement?**

The indicators for the first evaluation question were Likert Scale survey questions 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15 and focus group responses. The survey responses were entered

into Qualtrics. Results of the survey were first exported to Excel and descriptive analyses were then run in SPSS. The Likert Scale responses ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Parents could also select a “not sure” response. The mean value for all of the questions together was 3.39 with a .90 SD. Descriptive statistics for the 254 responses appear in Table 13.

Table 13

*Mean Item Responses for 2015-2016 Survey Questions*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Question 9. AAD has a positive impact on parenting techniques.	3.36	.92
Question 10. AAD has had a positive impact on the values instilled in the	3.36	.89
Question 11. AAD has had a positive impact on relationship between parent	3.39	.87
Question 13. Parents are encouraged to further their own education.	3.29	1.04
Question 14. Parents receive support with handling attendance, academic,	3.44	.84
Question 15. Parents would recommend AAD to other families.	3.47	.82

**Parent Survey Responses**

The parent survey responses were helpful in providing quantitative and qualitative survey data to inform this evaluation question. The following six questions in the parent survey were analyzed to determine if AAD has an impact on the parents and their involvement in their child’s education. Additional information sought was whether or not the parents feel that AAD has had a positive impact on the relationship between them and their child and the values they instill at home.

*AAD has had a positive impact on parents' parenting techniques.* Of the 254 respondents, 250 parents responded to this question. The 195 (78%) parents that responded AAD has had a positive impact on their parenting techniques. Thirty-nine (15.6%) parents responded that AAD has not had an impact on their parenting techniques.

*AAD has had a positive impact on parents' values they instill at home.* There were 252 respondents to this question. Of the 252 responses, 200 (79.3%) parents indicated that AAD has had a positive impact on the values instilled at home. Thirty-seven (14.6%) parents do not feel that AAD has had a positive impact on the values instilled at home.

*AAD has had a positive impact on the relationship between parent and their child.* There were 251 of 254 respondents who responded to this survey question. Of the 251 parents who responded to this question, 237 (94.4%) responded AAD has had a positive impact on the relationship between parent and child. Fourteen (5.5%) parents responded AAD does not have a positive impact on their relationship with their child.

*AAD has encouraged parents to further their own education.* There were 254 respondents to this question. One hundred ninety-five (67.3%) parents responded that AAD has encouraged parents to further their own education. Fifty-five (21.6%) parents did not agree with this statement.

*AAD has provided parents with support handling student attendance, academic, and/or discipline issues.* Of the 254 responses, 212 (83.4%) responded that AAD has provided parents with support handling these issues. Twenty-seven (10.6%) responded that AAD has not provided support of handling attendance, academic, and/or discipline issues.

*Parents would recommend AAD to other families for their children.* All 254 parents responded to this question. The 219 (86.2%) parents responded that they would recommend AAD to other families. Twenty-four (9.4%) parents responded that they would not recommend AAD to other families.

### **Focus Groups**

From the focus group two themes emerged that related to this question: “positive impact on parenting practices” and “opportunities are not provided.” These are described below.

**Positive impact on parenting.** During the focus group, the participants were asked if AAD impacted their parenting techniques and the values instilled in their home. One main theme emerged from their responses. The theme was positive impact on parenting practices. All of the parents in the focus group mentioned the interaction with AAD, Inc. staff and the school counselors in their impact on parenting techniques. Many felt that the school staff assisted them in maintaining their temper when their child was in trouble. A couple of parents also stated there is a feeling of trust with the staff so they are more willing to discuss their weaknesses with parenting.

This conversation led to the social rotation questions at AAD, specifically the etiquette and Speaking Green (standard business English) classes. The parents/guardians felt these skills were instilled in their other children (who may not be in the program) as well as themselves.

Some of the focus group participants also felt that AAD had impacted their parenting because they are encouraged to be involved when they may not be as involved at another school. An example given was An Achievable Dream holding the same

meeting on more than one occasion so that all parents' schedules could be accommodated.

One parent said, I can never make the evening meetings or a Saturday meeting because of my work schedule. I called the school and another meeting was scheduled for a weekday in the morning. This was done just to accommodate my work schedule.

**Volunteer opportunities are not provided.** There was not a specific focus group question pertaining to volunteering. However, the topic came up in two of the three focus groups. One main theme emerged that parents are not provided with opportunities to volunteer. The focus group participants did not feel that AAD offers many opportunities for parents to volunteer during the school day. A parent commented, "If I ask to work in my daughter's class, I am always allowed but I am never asked to volunteer." Another parent added, "I agree. I have never been asked to volunteer."

The third evaluation question sought to identify if AAD has a positive impact on parenting skills and the values instilled in the home. The parent survey indicated that a high percentage of parents feel AAD positively impacts their parenting skills and parenting values. Additionally, the focus group participants responded favorably in most cases. There are some areas of improvement for parents to have opportunities to volunteer in the school.

**Research Question 4. To what degree does parental involvement relate to student success at An Achievable Dream?**

The indicators for the fourth evaluation question were the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 SOL data; 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 attendance data; and 2013-2014,

2014-2015, and 2015-2016 discipline data for the students currently in grades 7 and 10. These grade levels were selected because their parents also completed the survey in 2013-2014. These data were provided by the Newport News Public School's (NNPS) research office. The data were organized by student, and the Excel file was exported to SPSS for descriptive analysis.

The researcher used the parent contact frequency logs to develop a coding system for the parents' LOI. The parent contact logs included every time a parent attended one of the following events: parent/teacher conferences, classroom visits, or a school function. Documented telephone contacts were also counted. Each parent contact with the school counted once on the parent contact frequency log. A descriptive analysis is provided in Table 14.

Table 14

*Contact Frequency and LOI Ranking*

<b>Frequency of parent contacts with school</b>	<b>LOI Ranking</b>
0-5	1
5-10	2
10-15	3
15-20	4

The students were categorized by their LOI category, and the mean scores for the reading and math SOL data were averaged for each LOI group. A statistical description is provided in Table 15.

Table 15

*Grade 7 and 10 Mean SOL Scores by Parent Level of Involvement*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>LOI</b>	<b>Number of Parents within Contact Range</b>	<b>2013-2014 Average Reading SOL Scaled Score</b>	<b>2014-2015 Average Reading SOL Scaled Score</b>	<b>2013-2014 Average Math SOL Scaled Score</b>	<b>2014-2015 Average Math SOL Scaled Score</b>
7	1	17	412	436	392	397
7	2	30	456	443	419	414
7	3	25	423	428	412	409
7	4	19	439	442	441	430
10	1	17	387	N/A	407	413
10	2	14	424	N/A	430	411
10	3	6	538	N/A	440	470
10	4	13	413	N/A	443	460

Table 16

*Correlations between LOI and Achievement*

<b>LOI Correlations</b>	<b>2013-2014 Math SOL</b>	<b>2014-2015 Math SOL</b>	<b>2013-2014 Reading SOL</b>	<b>2014-2015 Reading SOL</b>
Grade 7 Level of Involvement Pearson Correlation	.001	-.061	-.042	-.045
Sig. (2-tailed)	.990	.580	.699	.682
Number	87	85	87	85
Grade 10 Level of Involvement Pearson Correlation	.356	.388	.310	.124
Sig. (2-tailed)	.012	.016	.030	.391
Number	49	38	49	50

Pearson product moment correlations were calculated to examine the relationships between LOI and achievement represented by SOL scores. The Pearson correlations between LOI and the achievement measures are provided in Table 16. There were no significant correlations between the number of parent contacts and SOL scores within the

7<sup>th</sup> grade. There were significant positive correlations of small magnitude for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade between LOI and 2013-2014 reading and math SOL scores and the 2014-2015 math SOL scores.

The NNPS report included absences by student for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. The students were arranged by their LOI category, and the mean scores for the attendance data were averaged for each LOI group. A statistical description is provided in Table 17.

Table 17

*Grade 7 and 10 Mean Attendance by Parent Level of Involvement*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>LOI</b>	<b>Number of Parents within Contact Range</b>	<b>2013-2014 Number of Absences</b>	<b>2014-2015 Number of Absences</b>	<b>2015-2016 Number of Absences</b>
7	1	17	2.82	3.3	2.82
7	2	30	3.56	3.3	2.81
7	3	25	6.12	2.72	2.92
7	4	19	2.63	3.78	2.78
10	1	17	4.94	1.71	2.11
10	2	14	2.67	1.07	2.28
10	3	6	1.5	.33	.05
10	4	13	1.38	.92	2

Pearson product moment correlations were calculated to examine the relationships between LOI and attendance. The Pearson correlations between LOI and absences are provided in Table 18. No significant correlations were found for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. However, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students' attendance did appear to be related to LOI for the 2013-2014 school year. There is a significant positive correlation of moderate magnitude between 10<sup>th</sup> grade attendance and LOI. It should be noted that one to two students swayed the averages in some instances.

Table 18

*Correlations between LOI and Absences*

<b>LOI Correlations</b>	<b>2013-2014 Absences</b>	<b>2014-2015 Absences</b>	<b>2015-2016 Absences</b>	<b>Total Absences</b>
Grade 7 Level of Involvement Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) Number	.109 .325 84	.015 .890 86	.071 .506 89	.064 .548 89
Grade 10 Level of Involvement Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) Number	-.405 .004 50	-.187 .193 50	-.064 .658 50	-.331 .019 50

The NNPS report included discipline by student for the 2013-2014, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. The discipline categories included were cheating, disruption, disrespectful behavior, insubordination, profanity, unauthorized use of technology, fighting, firearms, and bomb threats/threats against a person. The students were categorized by their LOI category, and the mean scores for the discipline combined categories were averaged for each LOI group. A statistical description is provided in Table 19.

Table 19

*Grade 7 and 10 Mean Discipline by Parent Level of Involvement*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>LOI</b>	<b>Number of Parents within Contact Range</b>	<b>2013-2014 Number of Discipline Referrals</b>	<b>2014-2015 Number of Discipline Referrals</b>	<b>2015-2016 Number of Discipline Referrals</b>
7	1	17	.29	.12	.29
7	2	30	.07	.13	.10
7	3	25	.12	.16	.12
7	4	19	.15	.10	.05
10	1	17	.24	.18	.06
10	2	14	.07	.14	.21
10	3	6	.17	.33	0
10	4	13	0	0	0

Pearson product moment correlations were calculated to examine the relationships between LOI and behavior. The Pearson correlations between LOI and the behavior are provided in Table 20. No significant correlations were found for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. However, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students' behavior did appear to be related to LOI for the 2013-2014 school year. The data indicated a significant positive correlation of modest magnitude.

Table 20

*Correlations between LOI and Behavior*

<b>LOI Correlations</b>	<b>2013-2014 Behavior</b>	<b>2014-2015 Behavior</b>	<b>2015-2016 Behavior</b>	<b>Behavior Total</b>
Grade 7 Level of Involvement	.101	.072	-.021	.079
Pearson Correlation	.345	.503	.842	.460
Sig. (2-tailed)	89	89	89	89
Grade 10 Level of Involvement	-.309	-.135	-.138	-.339
Pearson Correlation	.029	.351	.341	.016
Sig. (2-tailed)	50	50	50	60
Number				

Based on the data gathered to inform the fourth evaluation question, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade data showed no significant correlation between parent LOI and student achievement, discipline, or attendance. The 10<sup>th</sup> grade data indicated significant correlations between LOI and the 2013-2014 reading and math SOL scores and the 2014-2015 math SOL scores. The data reflected significant correlations for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade between LOI and 2013-2014 attendance and discipline.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 provided a detailed breakdown of multiple data sources, including parent survey data, parent focus group data, home and school communication data, and SOL, behavior, and attendance data. These data sources were used to inform the four evaluation questions. Chapter 5 will discuss these findings, including the implications of the successes and challenges with the AAD parent involvement program. Additionally implications for other school leaders implementing parent involvement programs will be discussed.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions**

Parental involvement is an important factor in the educational system and can impact a child's education significantly (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Parent involvement includes activities in the school and at home, and it can take on many different forms to include volunteering at the school, communicating with teachers, assisting with homework, and attending school events such as performances or parent-teacher conferences. Research consistently and increasingly indicates that parental involvement has an impact on student success, including academic achievement, student behavior, and student attendance (Chrisler & Moore, 2012). The magnitude of the impact can depend on the level and consistency of the parental involvement. Influential factors include: student age, socio-economic status, level of parent education, marital status, race and ethnicity, teacher attitudes and beliefs, and the school environment (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

The literature makes a positive connection between parent involvement and academic achievement, school attendance, graduation rates, educational aspirations, positive classroom behavior, and favorable attitudes towards school (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). With the research indicating the positive correlations between parent involvement and student achievement, schools are challenged to develop warm, welcoming environments that are engaging for the parents (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). To do so, the barriers that impeded a parent's participation must be identified and

acknowledged to be real. In other words, why are parents not more involved, and what can be done to improve it?

AAD is designed to educate predominately minority youth who are socially and economically disadvantaged (2015a). The majority of the students who attend AAD are minority students who come from single-parent or no-parent homes and who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (2015a). AAD was developed to help this population of students successfully complete high school and become productive citizens (2015a). The student population of the school was approximately 98% minority students, 83% from single-parent homes, and 9% from no-parent homes (VDOE, 2015).

AAD has worked diligently to provide an inviting environment for parents to feel welcome into the school and in their children's educational process. The parent involvement program was developed to meet the specific needs of our parents based on the program demographics. Parents and families are given the opportunity to learn strategies to assist their children in the learning process. They also work with the teachers and administrators on consistent behavioral expectations at school and home. The purpose of this study was to conduct a mixed-methods evaluation on the perceived effects of AAD on the students' parents as well as the relationship between parental involvement and student success. The study sought to identify the successes and challenges that our parents recognize when working with AAD. Findings from the study and recommendations for the program as well as future parent involvement programs are provided in this chapter.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The program theory underlying this evaluation study was Joyce Epstein's School-Family-Community Partnership Model, which is an influential model in parent involvement research (Epstein, 2005). The model redefines the relationship between schools, families, and communities as one of the overlapping spheres of influence that share the concerns about the success of a child (Fan & Williams, 2010). The overlap of the spheres represents that the interests and influences of the stakeholders in a child's education are mutual. The primary shared interest is a caring concern that the child be successful. Additionally, according to the model, there are two types of interaction: those within the organizations and those between the organizations. At the center of this half of the model is the child, who interacts with schools and family. The child is both changed by the interactions and produces change in others (Fan & Williams, 2010). Epstein's model was used as a theoretical framework for this study. The findings presented in Chapter 4 yielded important information regarding the AAD Parent Involvement Program, as well as several strengths and weaknesses about the implementation of the program. The findings related to each evaluation question and to the program in its entirety are discussed here.

### **Findings Related to Epstein's Model**

As a framework for increasing parental participation in education, Epstein's model recognizes six types of educational involvement and encourages schools to develop activities that engage schools, families, and communities (Smith et al., 2011).

**Type 1 parenting.** This type of involvement is designed to help all families establish home environments to support children as students. In this study, a high percentage of

parents felt AAD positively impacted their parenting skills and parenting values. Additionally, parents felt that AAD has had a positive impact on the relationship between them and their child and the values they instill at home. Furthermore, 83.4% of parent respondents indicated that AAD has provided support for parents handling student attendance, academics, and/or discipline issues. During the focus group, the participants discussed how interactions with AAD, Inc. staff and school counselors impacted their parenting techniques. Many felt that the school staff assisted them in maintaining their temper when their child was in trouble. A couple of parents also stated there is a feeling of trust with the staff so they are more willing to discuss their parenting challenges. The study did not capture how parents are incorporating learning into their home environment.

**Type 2 communicating.** This type of involvement designs effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress. This study sought to identify the degree to which parents are well-informed on the policies impacting their child's success and whether the parents are knowledgeable of district and school policies. The parent survey indicated that a high percentage of parents were well-informed on the policies impacting their child and school. Furthermore, the study sought to determine if parents feel they are partners in the decision-making process for their children.

Although 69.1% of the survey results were favorable, the focus group respondents indicated that some methods of communication are more effective than others. For example, the technology options were not always utilized because parents are not always technology proficient. With more reliance on technology for communication, this is an

area that must be acknowledged by AAD to ensure paper/pencil and phone notifications are still accessible.

A review of the literature shows that a program must incorporate a comprehensive communication system between the schools and families in order to be effective (Smith et al., 2011). The traditional method of communication must be expanded to include a variety of modes such as meetings, newsletters, events, phone calls, and text messages. The communication system must also take into account barriers that can impact the families. If time allocation impacts parents from being involved in their child's school, then the communication modules must be flexible for the parents (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). To be accommodating to parent's schedules, AAD holds meetings at a variety of times for different work schedules and encourages administrators and teachers to stay late to accommodate parent conferences.

**Type 3 volunteering.** This type of involvement includes recruiting and organizing parent help and support and is an area of improvement for AAD. Although there was not a specific focus group question pertaining to volunteering, the topic was discussed in two of the three focus groups. The focus group participants did not feel that AAD offers many opportunities for parents to volunteer during the school day. Research has shown that parents' observations while volunteering may lead to effective home learning activities related to school (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). Additionally, volunteering has predicted lower levels of future behavior problems for elementary school children, relative to the children of parents who did not engage in these activities (Bracke & Cortis, 2011). Another study identified multiple dimensions of involvement (school-based, home-based, and home-schooled) related to young children's positive emotional outcomes in a cross-

sectional study of urban, ethnic minority children (McCormick et al., 2013). Although parent volunteer programs can be challenging to implement, AAD needs to reconsider incorporating a volunteer program as a component of our parent involvement program.

The researcher determined that AAD has purposely not asked for parent volunteers. AAD's reasoning involved the challenges in managing the volunteer program, maintaining structure in the classroom, and parents' scheduling conflicts. This policy should be reconsidered given Epstein's model and the data from parents.

**Type 4 learning at home.** Type 4 provides information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum related activities. Although the AAD parent involvement program provides academic workshops for parents and daily communication with the home, this study did not specifically address parents working with students at home. In addition, learning at home was not a theme that emerged in the focus group responses.

**Type 5 decision making.** Type 5 includes parents in school decisions. This study indicated that parents do not fully understand what decisions are made by AAD versus Newport News Public Schools. Seventy percent of the survey respondents indicated they felt they were partners in making decisions for the children, yet the focus group participants identified this as an area of improvement. Many participants felt they did not have a voice in decisions that they were also responsible for enforcing. This concern was primarily focused on the uniform and dress code policy. Research shows parents are more likely to be involved when parents feel empowered to have a voice within the school and recognized for their work in the home (Bower & Griffin, 2011). However, the role of parents in the decision-making process is often defined by and created within the existing

framework of the school, ensuring that parental involvement is defined and evaluated in the school's terms rather than the families' terms (Bower & Griffin, 2011). While it might be advisable to involve parents in some decisions, there are legal considerations regarding parent participation in some aspects of the school. Parents have limited input with policies set by Newport News Public Schools and the Boards of Directors. These policies would include discipline and the uniform cost structures.

**Type 6 collaborating with community.** This type of involvement identifies and integrates resources and service from the community to strengthen school programs and student learning. One main theme emerged from their responses, that AAD provides community collaboration impacts beyond the academic realm. When asked about the community involvement, many of the focus group participants seemed to have attended the Family Health Night and Towne Hall meetings provided by the police department.

### **Other Emergent Findings**

There were other emergent findings identified through the study. The two additional categories that emerged were 'welcoming environment' and 'student success.' These factors did not directly align with Epstein's six types of parental involvement. The findings are discussed in the following sections.

**Environment.** The researcher used a parent survey, focus group, and home and school communication documents to determine the degree to which parents feel welcome at AAD and are provided opportunities to be involved in their child's education. The data revealed that parents, on average, feel welcomed at AAD. Additionally, 82.9% of the survey respondents felt AAD kept the parents informed of events and activities and made it easy for parents to communicate with teachers.

The survey responses agree with the research that suggests that contextual variables related to the school's social environment have a primary influence on parental involvement. Overall, positive and supportive school environments encourage parents' continued involvement in their children's education. Efforts to increase parental participation are most successful when schools engage in open communication and make concerted efforts to work collaboratively with parents (Smith et al., 2011).

The focus group respondents did acknowledge that the welcoming environment varied between the academy and middle/high school. Additionally, the respondents felt this variation continued from staff member to staff member. There were numerous examples cited describing the variation in the school office staff, teachers, administrators, and substitute teachers. The literature supports that schools that actively reach out to parents consistently in multiple ways, allowing for a varied approach for parental involvement, are most effective at establishing positive gains in this arena. Schools that foster partnerships with parents, consistently expressing a need for and appreciation of parental involvement, and maintaining an approachable and positive connection with families naturally see more success.

Parents also acknowledged that their perceptions on AAD's welcoming environment are impacted by the teachers' and staff members' desire to build relationships with the parents. The parents indicated that they feel more welcomed by those teachers and staff members who have taken the opportunity to develop a relationship with the parents. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) assert that parents take an active role in their child's education, in part, when they perceive that their involvement is important because of opportunities, invitations, or demands from the

school's administration and teachers (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009). An invitation for involvement from members of the school community is an important factor in motivating parents to become involved in their child's education (Barnyak & McNelly, 2009).

**Student success.** A review of the literature has established the significant role of families in promoting and sustaining high levels of academic achievement among students (Hayes, 2012). Parental involvement in education is positively associated with a variety of favorable outcomes for children, such as increased academic achievement, student behavior, and student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2005). This study sought to determine if parent involvement impacted student success. The results show there were no significant correlations between the number of parent contacts and SOL scores within the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. There were significant correlations for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade between LOI and 2013-2014 reading and math SOL scores and the 2014-2015 math SOL scores. The same results held true for attendance and discipline. No significant correlations were found for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. However, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students' attendance and discipline did appear to be related to LOI for the 2013-2014 school year.

Researchers have found that a student's age can impact a parent's level of involvement. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, parental involvement for students in middle and high schools tends to be lower than those in elementary schools. Another parental involvement report completed in 2002-03 by the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005) showed that over 90% of parents of kindergarten through fifth grade students were involved in their children's school work compared with 75% of middle school parents and 59% of the ninth parents. In addition, only 53% of the parents

of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students were involved (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). This research correlates to our study indicating that parent involvement played a significant role for our current 10<sup>th</sup> grade students during their 2013-2014 (8<sup>th</sup> grade) school year. Further research would help to determine if the current 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents had a significant impact in previous years. The type of parental involvement that the current 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents participate in could be a primary factor. If their involvement pertains to extracurricular activities and events, student success is not as likely to be impacted. AAD should explore whether equitable opportunities were provided for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade parents to attend academic workshops and activities. In addition, AAD needs to determine if there is more parent contact initiated by the teachers and administrators for struggling students. If so, the teachers and administrators must provide resources and support systems for the parents. It cannot be assumed that parents know how to assist their children academically.

### **Limiting Factors**

It is important to note the limitations of the study that may have impacted the results. Most of the information was self-reported through parent responses on a survey. This presents the overarching issue of the credibility of self-reports (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Even when respondents are doing their best to be forthright and insightful, their self-reports are subject to various sources of inaccuracy. Of special interest are limitations such as self-enhancement, self-presentation, self-deception, and memory (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Further limitations of the study come from the small sample size and having no comparison data from another program. The role of the researcher could also be considered as a limitation to the study. The researcher serves as Vice

President of Academics, which could impact parents being forthcoming regarding negative experiences at An Achievable Dream.

### **Recommendations for the AAD Parent Involvement Program**

The CIPP model of program evaluation framed this study and guided the four evaluation questions (Stufflebeam, 1983). Using the CIPP model of program evaluation as a lens for reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the program, AAD seems to have sufficient inputs for the program by allocating time and resources to lay the foundation for successful implementation of the parent involvement program. AAD had a wide range of knowledge about the parents and families as well as the appropriate resources and strategies that would be most effective with the AAD families. Based on the results in Chapter 4, it is clear that parents were satisfied with their level of involvement in the program and the supports provided by the program.

The logic model in Figure 1 was developed in the initial phase of the parent involvement program and prior to the completion of this study. Although the logic model includes the appropriate inputs and outputs, the implementation was not as thorough or comprehensive as it should have been. For example, the academic workshops (input) were not investigated to determine what content areas would be most impactful for the parents to teach at home. As a result, the student success results (outcomes) were not consistently impacted by parent involvement.

### **Program Planning and Implementation**

Based on the findings in the study, the researcher found that there was a significant gap in the consistency of the program implementation among all teachers and staff. First, AAD did not provide a school-wide staff development for all teachers and

staff on the parent involvement program. A needs assessment of teachers' understanding of the importance of involving parents and the most effective methods for involving parents would have been helpful. A needs assessment would also provide program leader with teachers' limitations and hesitations when involving parents.

### **Program Process and Management**

The process and management of the program seemed to be a weakness. Results indicated that, when school leaders planned, their focus was limited to communication and ways to get parents involved. The focus was not on why involvement was important or how it could impact student success. This resulted in a lack of connection between parental involvement and making it effective for student success. A recommendation for future implementation would be for school leadership to evaluate which parent involvement opportunities were most effective and had the greatest impact on student success. In addition, the program has never explored whether their methods of parent involvement could actually produce negative results.

### **Focus on Student Success**

A third recommendation is for the program leaders to analyze factors that may be impacting students' attendance, behavior, and SOL scores. The students at AAD are overall successful in all three measured domains. If parent involvement is not impacting these successes, what factors are impacting the success of our students? Furthermore, what can be done to redirect the parent involvement efforts at AAD to include opportunities that support student success?

After reviewing Epstein's six types of parenting, AAD needs to put a greater emphasis on learning and home and volunteering. This study does not measure the impact

of the academic workshops and how the skills learned in the workshops are implemented within the home. AAD has not received input from the families on what type of workshops would impact their involvement in their child's learning in the home.

By providing parents with more opportunities to volunteer, teachers and staff can model academic strategies for parents to incorporate at home. In addition, volunteering opportunities will allow parents to feel a connection to the learning environment and their ability to impact it.

### **Ongoing Evaluation**

Finally, the program leaders should continue to evaluate the program, how it is progressing, and the continued successes and challenges of those implementing the program (Stufflebeam, 1983). If professional development is implemented, an evaluation of its effectiveness should also be conducted. Likewise, once strategies to increase parent involvement opportunities to impact student success are identified, these strategies will need to be evaluated for effectiveness.

### **Recommendations for Future Evaluation and Research**

Various recommendations for future research should be considered. Families, teachers, and administrators who resist parent involvement should be studied to understand how to overcome barriers to successful partnerships. Future research should include: types of useful home learning activities for children at various grade levels; attitudes of parents, teachers, and administrators; beneficial roles of parents during home learning activities; helping parents tailor their home learning to meet their child's individual needs; and carefully constructed assignments to promote positive parent-child interactions and academic support (Fan & Williams, 2010).

AAD's recommendations for future evaluation should take into account the unique nature of the program. Because students are enrolled from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, there are opportunities to build upon the parent involvement as the students progress. In addition, the demographics of the population should be considered in future research. Because the majority of the students reside in single parent homes and qualify for free or reduced price lunch, the opportunities for involvement should be tailored to meet their needs.

The context for this program evaluation study was to determine the effectiveness of the AAD parent involvement program. The parental involvement strategies and struggles presented in this analysis are unique to AAD. However, the program presented here could be utilized as a framework for further study in other schools. A comparison study on the AAD program and a similar school may be beneficial to determine what strategies are being implemented as well as the different successes and challenges other programs have encountered.

Going forward, AAD should develop an electronic system to track the number of times parents have contact with the school. Currently, a paper and pencil method is used to track each time a parent has contact with the school. If these logs were immediately entered into an Excel spreadsheet, program leaders would be able to monitor the type of activities parents are attending and use the data accordingly.

A third recommendation would be for AAD to identify opportunities for parents to be involved in the decision-making process. An example would be to develop a Uniform/Dress Code Parent Advisory Committee. The committee should include school and program leaders, teachers, and parents. AAD must be willing to compromise on

specific policies that parents identify as being important pertaining to the uniform and dress code policies. If AAD does not allow for flexibility, the committee will be counterproductive.

AAD should develop a volunteer program to provide opportunities for parents to offer their services and support the learning environment. These opportunities will engage the parents in the learning environment and provide opportunities for teachers and staff to model strategies for learning at home.

Another recommendation would be to identify what factors are impacting the student success at AAD. This could be done through a student survey and teacher interviews to identify what factors are perceived to be the most influential. This would allow program leaders to ascertain which methods of parent involvement teachers and students perceive to benefit the students the most.

A sixth recommendation for future research is to examine which aspects of parental involvement, particularly those that involve creating an educationally oriented atmosphere, are more noteworthy than others. The current home and school documentation should be evaluated to determine what type of parent involvement is participated in most frequently.

Teachers who resist parent involvement should be studied to better understand how to overcome barriers to successful partnerships. Teacher interviews would provide insight as to why the teachers are resistant to including parents in the learning process. Additionally, interviews with teachers who are successful in developing positive relationships with parents would provide the program leaders with a blueprint for successful implementation.

Many of these recommendations should be incorporated into the input section of the logic model. The volunteering program, decision-making process, and electronic tracking system for LOI are inputs for the parent involvement program that may have impact on the student success outcomes. Additional data would need to be collected to determine the effectiveness of these variables. Parent volunteers in the classroom could impact a student's academic success because the parent will be exposed to strategies to utilize in the home.

### **Conclusion**

It is the long-term intent of the AAD parental involvement program to create a school environment where parents can feel welcomed and be engaged in their child's educational experience. Additionally, AAD is striving to develop a parent involvement program that impacts students' success. These goals are important and can have a substantial impact on the overall success of the AAD program. Through ongoing evaluation of the program, program leaders will gain valuable insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the program as well as recommended changes to improve the quality of the program.

The focus of this study was to determine if parents feel welcomed, are involved in their child's education, and the degree to which the involvement is impacting their children's success. Through the study, the researcher has identified other important factors that must be considered. The study illuminated the successes and challenges of the program as well as areas of recommended improvement. The results indicated that there was a high level of parent involvement but that it did not greatly impact the students' success. With ongoing program monitoring and evaluation, the program can overcome

these challenges and make recommended changes that will result in increased successes for the school and students.

## Appendix A

### An Achievable Dream 2013-2014 Parent Involvement Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is important to us in how we can better improve the family involvement component of An Achievable Dream.

This survey should only take about 5 to 10 minutes of your time. Please return the survey to your child's homeroom teacher by April 15, 2014.

From 1 to 5, please rank the following questions to be best of your ability based on individual experiences with An Achievable Dream.

Strongly Disagree = 1

Disagree = 2

Agree = 3

Strongly Agree = 4

Not Sure/not applicable = N/A

Question					
1. Parent/family member feel welcomed at AAD.	1	2	3	4	n/a
2. AAD provides opportunities for you, as a parent/family member, to be involved in the program.	1	2	3	4	n/a
3. AAD has had a positive impact on parents'/family members' parenting techniques.	1	2	3	4	n/a
4. AAD has had a positive impact on parents'/family members' values they instill at home.	1	2	3	4	n/a
5. AAD has had a positive impact on the relationship between parent/family members and their child.	1	2	3	4	n/a
6. AAD has encouraged parents/family members to be involved in their child's education.	1	2	3	4	n/a
7. AAD has provided parents/family members with support handling student attendance, academic, and/or discipline issues.	1	2	3	4	n/a
8. Parents/family members would recommend AAD to other families for their children.	1	2	3	4	n/a

As a parent/family member, have you ever had a negative experience regarding family involvement and support at An Achievable Dream?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, how did AAD help resolve the negative experience?

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Please add any additional comments that you would like to share about AAD's relationship and support of parents/family members.

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## Appendix B

### Focus Group Protocol

#### Format Outline

- **Welcome**

Introduce facilitator and assistant

- **Topic and Purpose**

The results will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the parent involvement program at An Achievable Dream.

- **Review the Informed Consent Letter**

- **Guidelines**

- No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view.
- We are audio e recording, one person speaking at a time.
- We're on a first name basis.
- You don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views.
- Rules for cellular phones and pagers if applicable. For example: We ask that your turn off your phones. If you cannot and if you must respond to a call, please do so as quietly as possible and rejoin us as quickly as you can.
- My role as facilitator will be to guide the discussion.
- Talk to each other.

#### Introductory Script

Good evening and welcome to our session. Thanks for taking the time to join us to talk about An Achievable Dream's Parent Involvement Program. My name is Lee

Vreeland and assisting me is Amy Runge. We're both employed by An Achievable Dream, Inc., and we are doctoral students at the College of William and Mary.

You were invited because you indicated your willingness to participate when you completed the survey. There are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said. Keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and at times the negative comments are the most helpful.

You've probably noticed the microphone. We're tape recording the session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and we can't write fast enough to get them all down. We will not use any names in our reports. You may be assured of complete confidentiality.

Well, let's begin. We've placed name cards on the table in front of you to help us remember each other's names. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the table. Tell us your name and anything else you would like to share with the group.

Focus Group Questions:

1. When you visit An Achievable Dream do you feel welcomed? Is it a warm and inviting environment?
2. Are you well informed about issues at the school and your child's success in school?
3. Does the school make you aware of school and district policies, programs, and activities?
4. Does AAD provide you with opportunities to be involved in the program?
5. Has AAD had a positive impact on your parenting techniques?

6. Has AAD provided you with support handling student attendance, academic, and discipline issues?
7. Would you recommend AAD to another family?
8. Would you like to add any additional information about AAD's ability to form relationships and provide support for parents?

### **Closing Script**

Following the question and answer period, the facilitator will thank the participants for his/her time, candor and will reiterate that the information will be helpful to AAD for program improvement.

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent Letter to Focus Group

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in a focus group on An Achievable Dream's impact on the student's families.

As a doctoral student in educational policy, planning, and leadership at the College of William and Mary, the researcher is interested in analyzing the perceptions of An Achievable Dream by the student's families as well as the impact that the program has had on family relationships and development. Your feedback will assist the program in making future decisions.

I understand that my participation will entail one focus group, lasting approximately one hour. Following the focus group, should additional clarification and/or elaboration be needed, I will be available for follow-up communication. If at any time I am uncomfortable answering a question or sharing my perceptions or perspectives, I understand that I can refrain from comment without consequence.

I understand that the researcher will protect the identities of participants through the use of pseudonyms in this and any future reports or publications. I understand that participants may be quoted directly in the study's results, but their names will not be used in any part of the report. Audio recordings will be used for data collection and analysis purposes only and will not become a part of the presentation of the study's results. All data will be stored in a secure location during the study, and will be destroyed after the study's results have been shared through publication and/or presentation. Furthermore, I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. Other individuals will not be made aware of my preference not to participate if I so choose and no consequences shall exist because of my refusal to participate. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence.

I am aware that I may report dissatisfactions with any aspect of this experiment to Dr. Ray McCoy, the chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at The College of William and Mary at (757)221-2783 or rwmcco@wm.edu. Also, any concerns may be directed to the chair of this study, Dr. Leslie Grant, at 757-221- 2411 or lwgran@wm.edu. I understand that An Achievable Dream is interested in collecting data to determine the impact the program has on the student's families.

My signature below signifies that I am at least 18 years of age, that I have received a copy of this consent form, and that I consent to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D

### Letter Requesting Participation in Survey

Date

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Lee Vreeland and in addition to serving as the Vice President of Academics for An Achievable Dream, Inc., I am also a doctoral student at the College of William and Mary. My dissertation proposal is to evaluate the effectiveness of our Parent Involvement Program to include parental satisfaction and the impact the program has on students' families. As a method for collecting this information, we are conducting a survey for all parents/guardians of students in grades 5, 8, and 11. Your response to this survey is crucial in providing the necessary information to formulate useful programs to support our parents and families.

Your responses will not be identified with you personally. Please know that your participation is voluntary and there is no penalty if you do not participate. You may also withdraw from this study at any time. Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Leslie Grant at (757) 221- 2411 or lwgran@wm.edu or Dr. Ray McCoy, the chair of the Protection of Human Subjects Committee at The College of William and Mary at (757) 221-2783 or rwmcco@wm.edu.

Enclosed you will find a self-addressed, stamped envelope to use when returning the survey. Please feel free to include any additional comments you deem necessary or relevant to improving the program. Your response and time is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Lee Vreeland  
Vice President of Academics

**Appendix E**  
**An Achievable Dream**  
**2015-2016**  
**Parent Involvement Survey**

Student's Grade Level \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your feedback is important to us in how we can better improve the family involvement component of An Achievable Dream.

This survey should only take about 5 to 10 minutes of your time. Please return the survey to your child's homeroom teacher by March 15, 2016.

From 1 to 5, please rank the following questions to the best of your ability based on individual experiences with An Achievable Dream.

- Strongly Disagree = 1
- Disagree = 2
- Agree = 3
- Strongly Agree = 4
- Not Sure/not applicable = N/A

Question					
1. When parents walk into the building, do they feel the school is inviting and is a place where they "belong?"	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
2. Does the school keep all parents informed about important issues and events and make it easy for families to communicate with teachers?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
3. Do parents know and understand how well their children are succeeding in school and how well the entire school is progressing?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
4. Do parents know how the local school and district operate and how to raise questions or concerns about school and district programs, policies, and activities?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
5. Are all parents full participants in making decisions that affect their children at school and in the community?	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
6. Do parents and school leaders work closely with community organizations, businesses, and institutions of higher education to strengthen	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>

the school, make resources available to students, school staff, and families, and build a family-friendly community?					
7. Parents feel welcomed at AAD.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
8. AAD provides opportunities for you, as a parent, to be involved in the program.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
9. AAD has had a positive impact on parents' parenting techniques.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
10. AAD has had a positive impact on parents' values they instill at home.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
11. AAD has had a positive impact on the relationship between parent and their child.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
12. AAD has encouraged parents to be involved in their child's education.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
13. AAD has encouraged parent to further their own education.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
14. AAD has provided parents with support handling student attendance, academic, and/or discipline issues.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>
15. Parents would recommend AAD to other families for their children.	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>n/a</b>

As a parent, have you ever had a negative experience regarding family involvement and support at An Achievable Dream?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No

If yes, how did AAD help resolve the negative experience?

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Please add any additional comments that you would like to share about AAD's relationship and support of parents.

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