Fostering parental engagement in a rural Title I elementary school

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FOSTERING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

FOSTERING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN A RURAL
TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

by

Joyce R. McDowell

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FOSTERING PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT
IN A RURAL TITLE I ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family for their continual support for me. My siblings, Fredia, Glenn, and Sheryl, have always been there for me. They checked on my progress and encouraged me with phone calls, emails, text messages, and prayers. I love them and thank them for being there every step of the way.

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My husband, Dexter, never complained when I worked all night, sent him to family occasions without me, and failed to cook many meals. He joined me on every trip to the D. C. area for the past two and a half years. When I doubted myself, he told me that I could complete this journey. He had tremendous faith in me that I could and would complete this process, and he put up with me on a daily basis. I love and appreciate him. I offer a big “thank you” to my husband, Dexter R. McDowell.
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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this study was to find out how to encourage Title I family engagement as the school funds were decreasing in the next school year. I wanted to determine how to continue, as well as increase, parental engagement at a Title I elementary school in a rural setting.

The Title I program focuses on assisting students who are economically disadvantaged in order to raise their academic skills in the areas of reading and math. The parents of the children eligible for Title I reading services at the time of the study were the participants. I used the Appreciative Inquiry method to gather information from parents. By using a set of appreciative interview questions, I learned the parents’ perspective about the reading activities that the school offered to the Title I parents.

Parents selected themes from several paired interview sessions. The data analysis of the story circles of parents, frequency analysis of themes, the per capita costs of each activity, and the design team of parents, gave me insight as to what activities attracted parents and why parents chose to participate at school sponsored Title I events at this school. Recommendations for continued family engagement include a challenge to seek ways to engage all families in a school – family partnerships and to involve parents who could, but who choose not to attend school events.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

At Ginsburg Elementary School, there are parents reading to their children in the library after school hours. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) hosts a “Family Fitness Night” one evening in the spring. The Watch DOGS (Dads of Great Students) partner with children to assist them in taking an Accelerated Reader test. The PTA Board meets with the teacher liaison to discuss upcoming plans. These are examples of family engagement activities at Ginsburg Elementary School. Family engagement is an important aspect of a school and family partnership. Before we can get the families into the school, it is necessary to create a bond between the school staff and the families of the children that we teach. There are several mutual benefits to this partnership. The Title I program addresses and funds school – family partnerships. “Title I- Part A” of the Elementary and Secondary School Act was put in place to help local educational agencies close the achievement gap between the low-performing disadvantaged and minority students and their high-performing peers. The Title I program provides financial assistance to schools based on the school’s high percentage of children from low-income families. Schools qualify to participate in the Title I program as a targeted assistance program or a school-wide program. Three elementary schools in the Justice County School District are Title I targeted assistance schools.

Problem

Parent participation is essential to the success of students (Comer, 2007; Epstein, 1986; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Schools need families to communicate to children the importance of school and the expectation that the child will graduate. Parental
involvement has a positive effect on student achievement and is an important part of the academic success of the students (Henderson & Mapp). Henderson and Mapp asserted that families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and that schools need their assistance. We must uncover ways to encourage families to invest in a better future in their children's lives by becoming engaged in school activities. Educators need to find ways to engage all families, especially Title I families, to become involved in schools so that these schools will be filled with families during parent-teacher conference days, Parent Teacher Association meetings, and other events such as these. And, more importantly, educators need parents as partners in the education of children. While parents have their own obligation to facilitate this partnership of increased family engagement, it also might be fairly considered the responsibility of the schools to eliminate barriers and offer parents a welcoming and trusting environment that encourages their engagement.

Schools cannot disregard the benefits of family engagement, nor can they ignore the opportunities that family engagement offers toward the success of the children. The Title I program requires schools to plan activities for family engagement (Title I, Part A). Schools need parents to encourage and support their children as the students strive to meet with success. Through this study, I will discover the best practices, and practical options that have allowed the three Title I schools to keep families engaged with the schools such that this involvement will continue in a time when there are fewer funds available. The results of this study will also offer solutions that will encourage the development of strong ties between families and the schools.
The federal funds for parental involvement in school activities in the three Title I elementary schools in Justice County Schools, a pseudonym for the school district, is dwindling fast. The schools must find a way to continue to offer support to our families in order to garner their continued engagement. Through this research, I would like to find what strategies have been the most successful in increasing family engagement in Ginsburg Elementary School, one of the three Title I elementary schools in the Justice County Schools. I want to find out what activities Ginsburg Elementary School has sponsored in the past that parents have enjoyed the most. This information is important to schools across the nation as all are tasked with school and family partnerships that support student success.

**Context**

Justice County is a rural area with nearby rivers, swamps, and pocosin wetlands. Justice County is described as an intermodal community with access to waterways, highways, railways, and airports. The county is surrounded by larger cities with entertainment, theme parks, and beaches. The residents can also find enjoyment and relaxation right in the county where there is plenty of hunting, fishing, golfing, and campgrounds.

The pocosin wetlands are described as wetlands that contain acidic peat soil. The groundwater that soaks the soil is high in fluoride. This is of particular importance because many of the people living in the county use well water as their main source of drinking water. The county does not send the water through a water treatment plant. The excessive fluoride found in the well water can cause children's teeth to be brownish in color and/or pitted in its appearance, and can lead to skeletal fluorosis. There are many
cases of fluorosis in Justice County. As advised by the local dentists, many parents began to purchase bottled water for their children to avoid this problem. The Board of Supervisors continues to work with the residents of the county to resolve the drinking water problem.

There are several large places of business in Justice County. They include three industrial parks and a food processing plant. The county is well known for agriculture, in particular its pork, peanuts, cotton, and vineyards. Justice County is also known for forestry. Many of the residents are farmers and it is not uncommon to see local farmer’s markets alongside the road as one travels throughout the county. During the recent economic crisis that Americans have faced, Justice County has also had its share of business closures. The closures included a paper plant and a portion of a food processing plant. This had a great impact on the families in the area. In 2009, Justice County had a median income per household of $62,573 with 8.1% of the families living below the poverty line.

According the 2010 census, the population of Justice County was slightly higher than 35,000. The majority of the residents in Justice County are Whites at about 72%, followed by Blacks at almost 25%. The Latino population represents fewer than 2% of the population and the remaining population is made up of Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, Asians, other races, and those who self-identify as belonging to two or more races. The Board of Supervisors governs the county with a representative from each of the five county districts. The local Sheriff’s Office and the local Police Departments support the Board of Supervisors.


_Schools._ Justice County School District (JCSD) is made up of nine schools that
serve students in Robertsfield, Robertsville, Roberts, and Robertstown, Virginia. There
are two high schools, two middle schools, and five elementary schools. Of the five
elementary schools, three are Title I schools. R. B. Ginsburg Elementary School, one of
the Title I schools, is the focus of this study.

The student enrollment of the district is approximately 5,550 students. The
student population is made up of 63% White, 31% Black, 2% Hispanic, and 1% Asian.
The division average for students with free and reduced lunch is 34.1%. There are 413
teachers for these students.

J. G. Roberts Elementary School is a Title I school located in Robertsville. There
is a student population of about 245 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade.
Scalia Elementary School is also located on the south end of the county, in Robertstown.
Scalia serves students in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade, with a student
population of about 625 children. It is also a Title I school. Another elementary school is
R. B. Ginsburg Elementary School. It is located in Robertsfield and is also a Title I
school. R. B. Ginsburg has an enrollment of approximately 503 students in pre-
kindergarten to third grade. The fourth elementary school, with a student population of
611 children, is C. Thomas Elementary School. This school is also located in
Robertsfield. Like R. B. Ginsburg Elementary, C. Thomas serves students in pre-
kindergarten through third grade. The fifth elementary school in the division is Rehnquist
Elementary School, located in Robertsfield. Rehnquist Elementary serves students in
fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The student population is approximately 814 students.
Alito Middle School is located in Robertsfield and they receive students from Rehnquist Elementary School. Students in grades seven and eight attend Alito Middle School. There are 617 students enrolled at Alito Middle. The other middle school is S. D. O’Connor Middle School, located in Robertstown. S. D. O’Connor Middle School receives students from J. G. Roberts Elementary School and most of the students from Scalia Elementary School. S. D. O’Connor Middle School has a student population of 323 students.

Robertsfield High School is in Robertsfield and there is a population of 1316 students. Robertsfield High School serves students from grade nine to grade twelve. In Robertstown, there is S. Breyer High School. The enrollment at S. Breyer High is about 500 students. An Alternative School is also located in Robertstown. The student enrollment is included in the sending school’s count.

**Strengths and Challenges.** The strengths of the district are the low teacher turnover, creative and dedicated staff, and strong community support. One of the challenges in Justice County School District, however, is the need for the students receiving Title I services to achieve academic success. There are many strategies in place, but the students continue to show weaknesses in reading on local and State assessments.

Another challenge is to provide continuous professional development for the teachers. The professional development needs are two-fold: to focus on teaching teachers to use research-based strategies; and, to develop the teachers’ leadership skills. To have the greatest effect, this training should be ongoing to frequently remind teachers of the strategies that are required to ensure that students make progress toward grade level goals and objectives, and to help teachers each professional goals.
Involving Parents. In the recent past, the district received a large Title I grant of thousands of dollars in funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that schools used to engage the parents of Title I students in school activities. The schools offered give-away items to students when parents attended school meetings. The schools also offered family dinners in conjunction with Title I meetings. During the 2013 - 2014 school year, the district will not receive a large “Title I – Part A” grant for parental involvement in the three elementary Title I – Targeted Assistance Schools. There is still a need, however, and a requirement, to involve parents in school activities. The purpose of this study is to determine how to encourage parents of Title I children to engage in school activities without the dinners, books, and student technology that were provided during the 3 years preceding this study when the schools received additional funding to support parent involvement.

Three to 124. These numbers represent the range of parents in attendance at the Justice County School District’s Title I events. There are three Title I schools in the school district and during the 2010 – 2011 and the 2011 – 2012 school years, these schools benefitted from funds designated to the schools from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The disbursement of funds totaling over $200,000 shared among the three schools allowed the schools to plan Title I family engagement events that included guest speakers who were paid an honorarium, book give-aways, school supplies for the children, and dinners. For example, one dinner included chicken parmesan with a green salad, dinner rolls, drinks, and desserts. The attendance at these events was strong, reaching as high as 124 parents and students in attendance on that
night that our guest speaker, Clinical Therapist Dr. Jesse Jackson Jr., offered guidance and encouragement to our families.

The attendance at Title I parent activities has not always been successful. As recently as the 2009–2010 school year, before the ARRA funds were available, there were a total of three parents in attendance at one school’s annual Title I Night. At that time, low attendance at Title I activities was similar across the district. During the 2012–2013 school year, the Title I schools depleted its ARRA funds. Without these funds, schools will have limited resources to plan and carry out family engagement events. Yet, schools need parents and must continue to find ways to encourage parent participation in school activities. These schools cannot allow the family engagement to drop back down to the low levels evident prior to the specialized funding. As Auerbach (2011) stated, “What matters most...is bringing parents to the table in a true spirit of partnership to learn and work together for the mutual benefit of schools, families, and communities (p. 21).”

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how to build on the strengths of the parental involvement initiatives and to determine the state-of-the-arts of parental involvement in the Justice County School District. The results of this study will reveal the activities that the parents of children at Ginsburg Elementary School, one of the three Title I schools in Justice County School District, choose to engage in. This information should create an awareness of what other parents of school-age children value and are willing to participate in at elementary schools in this school district. Administrators at elementary schools throughout the Justice County School District could use the
information in this study to plan for family engagement activities or to develop the School Improvement Plan. Lastly, teachers and administrators could become more aware of the barriers that exist between the schools and home, find ways to break down the barriers, and learn ways to develop a welcoming school environment that is all-inclusive of school staff, students, and parents.

**Research Questions**

1. Which Title I activities offered at the Ginsburg Elementary School, a Title I school in Justice County School District, during the 2008-2013 academic years had the highest parent participation?

2. Which Title I activities did parents at Ginsburg Elementary School perceive to be the most beneficial to assisting their children to learn?

3. How would parents like to be involved in their children’s education at Ginsburg Elementary School in Justice County?

4. What strategies do Title I parents at the Ginsburg Elementary School in Justice County suggest would be most effective in enhancing their involvement at the school where their children attend?

**Definition of Key Terms**

Family engagement or parental involvement – Title I defines parental involvement as:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way, meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as
appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the
education of their child; and the carrying out of other activities, such as those
described in section 1118 of the ESEA.” (Title I – Part A, p. 3)

Barriers - a behavior that hinders or blocks parents from participating in parental
involvement at the schools

Title I Targeted Assistance Program – Schools enrolling less than 40 percent of students
from poor families must spend the Title I funds on only those children who are
failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet state academic standards.

Title I Schoolwide Program - Schools enrolling at least 40 percent of students from poor
families are eligible to use Title I funds to serve all children in the school.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Parent Engagement

We must consider several factors as we explore parental engagement in schools and the reasons for the success or demise of a school and family partnership. Schools must acknowledge the levels of family involvement and the requirements for family engagement per the Title I Program. There are also barriers to parental involvement, such as parents’ attitudes towards and beliefs about school. Schools must consider the parents’ living conditions and the likenesses and differences that parents perceive between school staff and parents. Lastly, school must consider how the school environment impacts parents’ feelings and experiences at school. These factors will give schools insight as to parents’ willingness to work with the schools.

Levels of Family Involvement

There are several broad levels of family engagement that could be available to parents if schools afford parents that opportunity. Epstein (1986) described these levels of engagement as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community. According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), family engagement includes parents making informal visits to school, joining in-school activities, volunteering their assistance, communicating with teachers, and participating in school governance. Comer (2007) outlined three levels of engagement that included: Level I - broad participation and general support, such as attending PTA meetings and fundraiser, or monitoring the student’s homework; Level II - active daily participation, such as volunteering in the classroom; and Level III - participating in
school management. Using Comer's model, any form of parent participation in school activities are categorized under these levels of engagement.

Family engagement at every level is important as it does impact the success of the student and the success of the engagement is contingent upon the quality of the programs that are offered. One form of parental involvement identified in the literature is parents that visit and volunteer at school and those who communicate with the school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Comer, 2007; Epstein, 1986). Parental involvement also occurs when parents participate in school governance. Epstein (1986) and Comer (2007) identified parenting and assisting children with homework as being a part of parental involvement. Epstein (1986) was the only researcher that identified community collaboration as a part of parental involvement. The three descriptions of family engagement overlap and in general, engagement covers parents' involvement at the school from a lesser degree to a more powerful level, and to the parents' involvement at home whether it is completing work for the teacher from home, or assisting the student with homework.

Empirical Evidence of the Importance of Family Engagement

There is a well-documented link between family engagement and student success in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hattie, 2009). In their meta-analyses, Henderson and Mapp analyzed 80 studies and literature reviews in areas involving family and community involvement and the impact on student achievement and other outcomes. They found that when parental involvement is linked to student learning, it has a positive impact student achievement. Fan and Chen completed a meta-analysis of 25 studies that reported empirical findings about parental involvement and student achievement. The cumulative study size was about 133,577. The results of the study
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showed an effect size of $d = 0.52$ (moderate) of the correlation between parental involvement and individual subject-specific area classes (reading, math, science, social studies). When they compared parental involvement and an academic achievement measure, they found an even greater effect size on these areas, such as on the student's GPA, which is a more global representation of academic achievement. Hattie (2009) also completed a meta-analysis of parental involvement in learning. After reviewing the studies of 13 researchers, with a cumulative study size of over 320,000 participants, his findings indicated that parental involvement has a moderate effect size ($d = 0.51$) on student achievement when parents take an active role in student learning. Hattie also ranked the order of the influence (effect size) of each domain studied in the meta-analyses and found that parental involvement ranked 45 out of 138.

The most effective activities are those that engage families and equip them to use what they have learned in the home. Cotton and Wiklund (1989) found that family orientation events and family training activities that are focused on teaching parents how to assist children with homework were the most effective forms of family engagement that lead to student success. According to Cotton and Wiklund, schools should organize high-quality activities that are designed to inform and engage all families. Some successful programs, like the “Second Cup of Coffee” monthly parent forums in St. Paul, Minnesota, and the many “Reading at Home” programs have earned good reports from administrators, citing the programs as factors in student gains of 10% - 13% in reading and math scores (Epstein, 2005). These practices have components that allow teachers to meet with parents to share strategies for assisting children with academic skills at home. According to Epstein, the administrators credit the student gains to good teaching and
family engagement at their schools. Students have made gains in achievement in other schools where parental involvement is a priority.

Studies reveal that families that are actively engaged in school activities produce a greater outcome in student achievement. Family engagement at schools with a high percentage of families qualified for free and reduced lunches, such as those found Title I schools, can have a high rate of family engagement. At the Patrick O’Hearn School in Boston, Massachusetts, family engagement is at least 90%, despite the school’s urban location and low socioeconomic setting (Mapp, 2003). With a population of 220 students, where there are a majority of African-American students, 25% of the population identified as students with special needs, and 67% of the students qualifying for free and reduced lunches, the students still excel academically. Between 1989 and 1995, the students’ scores on the Massachusetts Achievement Test increased from 44% to 62% in English and from 48% to 79% in math. This gain is attributed to the strong partnership that Patrick O’Hearn School’s teachers and staff have developed with its families. Sandi Pinksy, a parent from the Patrick O’Hearn School stated, “It’s the parents’ job, too. You can’t just send [your kid] to school and think your child is going to learn. You need to get involved and help out. ... I’d like them to be able to do the best that they can so when they get older, they have options and choices and need not to just think about surviving (2003, p. 42).”

Epstein (2005) reviewed the academic progress of students in two school districts that have focused on parental involvement strategies. At a school in Los Angeles, students made significant gains in reading and math on the California Academic Performance Index and the district credits the gains to its increased focus on parental
involvement, literacy, and math. In Seattle Public Schools, the district focused on developing partnerships with highly diverse families. The school district met with success as they aligned their parental involvement practices with academic goals.

If these schools can create an environment where parents feel welcome and are supportive of the school at every level of engagement, it is possible for that same level of family engagement to happen in other similar schools. The Title I schools are offering opportunities for family engagement, but the parents of Title I students do not participate in most of the school functions. There must be some barriers that prevent the parents from coming to school to support their children.

Title I and Family Engagement

Parental involvement is described as the centerpiece of the Title I program. “The one historical constant is the research and practice that links between low-income families engaging with their school, which leads to higher student achievement, greater social and political capital for families, and empowerment to demand high achieving education” (Moles & Fege, 2011, p. 3). Title I bases the requirement for parental involvement on the research that indicates that parental involvement has a positive impact on student achievement. According to the “Title I- Part A Parental Involvement Guide” (2004), the research of Henderson and Mapp (2002) concluded that students whose parents are involved with their education earn higher grades, attend school on a more regular basis, are more likely to pass to the next grade level, and continue on to postsecondary education (p. 7).

The goal of the Title I program has not always included parental involvement. Senator Robert Kennedy challenged the original law in 1965 (Fege & Moles, 2011).
Senator Kennedy questioned why there was no component for parental involvement and he asked how schools were held accountable for student success. In the 1970's, there was a move toward strengthening the role of parents whose children were served in the Title I program. At time, the law added that schools must establish a Parent Advisory Council before receiving federal Title I funds.

From 1988 to 2011, the requirements for the Title I program increasingly added parental involvement components. During 1994, the Improving American Schools Act sharpened the focus on aligning standards to assessments and including parental involvement to assist with improving student achievement. In 2001, “No Child Left Behind” defined parental involvement for the first time. Including that the purpose was to encourage schools, families, and communities to work together towards student achievement. As the focus of the Title I program has widened, to include families and communities, the term “parental involvement” is now used interchangeably with the term “family engagement” or Family and Community Engagement (FACE).

The Title I definition of parental involvement is appropriate for the research that I will conduct to determine which family engagement activities meet the needs of the parents in the district. Fan and Chen (2001) warned researchers to pay special attention to the operational definition and measurement of parental involvement when developing a research plan. For purposes of this study, family engagement is defined as the education of the students being shared equitably by schools and families, through broad levels of interaction between the schools and families, where schools develop relationships with families that are observed through parental involvement in schools, parental support of
students at home, and parental involvement of school management, all in an effort to promote student success.

The concern of the Justice County School District is to provide the greatest opportunities for families to become involved in school activities and to involve families in activities that should lead to a positive impact on the students' overall success. Since the Title I schools are offering opportunities for family engagement as required by the grant, and the schools believe that family engagement has a positive effect on the child, it would be very useful to learn why the parents of Title I students choose to participate in school functions, as well as the barriers that prevent them from coming to school to support their children.

**Barriers to Parental Engagement**

**Parent Attitudes and Beliefs**

There are many barriers that parents and schools face when challenged with family involvement. Epstein (1986) conducted a study with the parents of 1,269 Maryland students to determine parents' attitudes towards public school teachers and the schools. She found that parent attitudes were positive and that parents felt that the schools were run well. The parents also believed that teachers had the same goals as they had for their children. But when asked about parental involvement, 88% of the parents had never helped at school. Fifty-eight percent of the parents said that they had never heard from their child's teacher. When asked why they had never volunteered, the answer was simple – they had never been asked. It would be of interest to learn the extent to which these dynamics persist more than 25 years later.
Hornby and Lafaele (2011) stated that, “Parents’ beliefs about various issues can act as barriers to effective PI [parental involvement]” (p. 39). If parents believe that they are not supposed to assist with their child’s education and that it is the school’s responsibility, the parents most likely will not become involved in school activities (Hornby & Lafaele). Another example comes from Comer (2007), who found that parents who had negative school experiences from their past may be afraid for their children to experience that same failure. Some parents also shared that they did not feel as if they fit into the school environment. These experiences and beliefs certainly influence a parent’s willingness to come to school and parent’s participation once they arrive at school.

**Living Conditions**

During this time when the economy has taken a downward turn (Zaki, 2012), many families are focused on basic survival skills as they struggle day-to-day to make ends meet, as some are unemployed, underemployed, or disabled and unable to work. Family engagement with a school is difficult for mentally or physically disabled parents that do not have effective social support (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Added to their day-to-day stress, some families that are unemployed or underemployed, experience instability as they move from place to place, causing the children to move from school to school (Comer, 2007; Egeland, Englund, Luckner, & Whaley, 2004). Sometimes unemployment is not the problem; rather, it is the opposite problem in that both parents must work. Other parents have problems with transportation or keeping telephone service, making it difficult to maintain communication with them.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) pinpointed another barrier to family engagement as being the parents’ current life contexts. Family circumstances such as single parents,
parents that did not complete high school, and parents' work situations, can influence parents’ beliefs about family engagement with schools. For example, when parents have not completed high school, they may feel inferior to teachers, and become reluctant to engage with the “educated” staff (Comer, 2007; Hornby & Lafaele). Some parents also shared that they did not feel as if they fit into the school environment. These experiences and beliefs certainly influence a parent’s willingness to come to school and the parent’s participation once they arrive at school. All of these barriers make it difficult to reach parents and engage them in school activities.

**Likenesses and Differences between School Staff and Parents**

Parents with more in common with the school staff tend to become more engaged with in school activities. A parent’s educational level and income impact whether or not a parent will become involved at school. One study found results indicating that parents with more income and education have more in common with school staff and can build better relationships (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Another study demonstrated that a parent’s educational level has an impact whether or not a parent will become involved at school (Egeland, Englund, Luckner, & Whaley, 2004).

The resistance to engaging in parent-school relationships is not a one-way street. Sometimes school personnel are the culprit. Parents have reported feeling unwelcomed at some schools (Comer, 2007). The line drawn between parents and teachers/school staff could be due to the income of the parents, the educational level of the parents, or perhaps, the race of the parents. Cotton and Wikeland (1989) found that schools may have a “deficit model” that is a barrier to family engagement. This model explains that some
school personnel tend to view parents in low-income areas as having little to offer at school.

Studies have shown that Black families and other minority families are less engaged in school activities. It seems that minority parents have more difficulty building relationships with the schools (Auerbach, 2011; Kluger, 2011). Sometimes educators have a stereotyped image of a “good parent” and English language learners do not always fit into that image (Kluger). Hornby and Lafaele (2011) noted that “good parents” are the White middle-class, married, and heterosexuals who possess capital that are valued by the schools, creating an interconnectedness between the white middle-class families and the teachers (as cited in Raey, 1998).

Another barrier might be that some educators do not understand the culture of minority families. For example, the Latino culture and the African culture view their roles in the education of their children to be one of support from home, as well as respect for and belief that the school staff will teach the children (Auerbach, 2011; Kluger, 2011). Teachers and staff must respect parents’ culture and values in order to bridge the gap between home and school.

School Environment

Seemingly, most of the barriers built by the school could be erased if schools offered a welcoming and safe environment. In order to feel welcomed and safe, schools must create a climate of trust, starting with the school staff. When teachers don’t trust each other, that pattern is passed on to the teacher-parent relationship (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Trust matters. It is important for parents to feel as if they can trust the
teachers and administrators. Before parents will come, “they will need an environment that is conducive to their engagement” (Auerbach, 2011, pg.18).

The Title I schools must determine how to break down barriers and ensure that families feel welcome to engage in school activities. The schools must seek to find answers that will allow them to increase the parents’ level of engagement in school activities. Through this study, I will seek to find the barriers that hinder the parents in the district by using the Appreciative Inquiry method to question the parents about the teacher/family relationship and the school climate.

Summary

Family engagement should be an integral part of every school district, whether required or not. Inviting parents into school to volunteer, attend field trips, and assist in classrooms, is helpful to the staff. Seeking parental input in school governance, such as asking parents to serve on school committees or asking them to serve on the PTA, allow parents to have a voice in school decisions. Teaching parents strategies to help their children at home has the highest effect on student learning and student success. Due to personal circumstances, personal beliefs or values, and previous experiences, parents may be unwilling to join schools in a partnership to help children succeed. While it may seem that parents are uncaring, they are not. Sometimes, educators say that they want parents to become actively involved at school, but either knowingly or unknowingly, they place barriers in the way. Educators might obstruct parents by their beliefs and ideas about the staff’s role in school and the parents’ participation in schools.

While family engagement is required as a part of the Title I – Part A grant in the targeted assistance schools in Justice County, schools need to know what to do to ensure
that they are offering a pleasant, welcoming climate, where parents feel valued and
accepted. Schools want the children to experience success in life. It is clear that an
analysis of the barriers that stand between our school and our families is in order.

The Title I schools need parents. Without family engagement, the Title I schools
will lack a valuable resource that leads to the success of the children. As indicated by
research, families have a major influence on the overall achievement of the student. The
doors of the school should stand open, ready to embrace the families of students that
schools serve. The teachers and administrators should stand ready to accept and unite
with families to work towards building a brighter future for the future generation.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This action research project explored family engagement and how we can make it an integral part of the Ginsburg Elementary School, a Title I Targeted Assistance school in the Justice County School District. In order to determine what parents wanted from the schools, the administrators engaged with parents using the Appreciative Inquiry method. This research method is based upon the Social Constructivist worldview. The researcher values the input of the participants and asks the participants open-ended questions. The organization gains an understanding of the wants and needs of participants and is then able to collaborate with the participants. Together, the organization’s leaders and participants can successfully move the organization forward.

Research Questions

1. Which Title I activities offered at the Ginsburg Elementary School, a Title I school in the Justice County School District, during the 2008-2013 academic year had the highest parent participation?

2. Which Title I activities did parents at Ginsburg Elementary School perceive to be the most beneficial to assisting their children to learn?

3. How would Title I parents like to be involved in their children’s education at Ginsburg Elementary School in Justice County?

4. What strategies do Title I parents at the Ginsburg Elementary School in Justice County suggest would be most effective in enhancing their involvement at the school where their children attend?
Study Design

I used a qualitative case study design with an Appreciative Inquiry (AI 4-D cycle) action research method. Cooperrider (2012), the father of the Appreciative Inquiry process, defined the model as “a coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them” (p. 2). This model allowed us to explore the barriers that exist in parental involvement in this context in a positive manner that would lead to more family engagement at this Title I school.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) focuses on strengths within the organization. The twist that makes AI different from other data collection methods is that approach. The four stages of the process are sometimes defined by the 4-I model, and sometimes as the 4-D model. The stages of the 4-I model include: Initiate (selecting a focus of inquiry), Inquire (find the best of what is), Imagine (develop a vision of what might be), and Innovate (plan steps for bringing the positive vision into being). The 4-D model was used in this study which includes Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny, which parallel the four I stages. This method begins with the organizational members first discovering what is working well within the organization and then dreaming of what might be. This is followed by the design of what should be, and finally, the destiny of the organization, meaning living into the dreamed of future (Catsambas, Coghlan, & Preskill, 2003). The power of the AI method is that an organization’s stakeholders collect data through interviews and conversations with the other participants and make meaning of the interview data themselves. The participants are led to express their positive experiences and successes within a group setting. Commonalities of positive experiences and desires to improve the organization (discovery) are shared with other organizational participants.
Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010) noted the importance of this stage of Appreciative Inquiry, stating that appreciative interviews are essential to the appreciative inquiry process. It is imperative to the validity of the Appreciative Inquiry process that the researcher design relevant, open-ended questions that allow participants to freely share personal stories about their positive experiences of the organization or the topic.

During the next step, the team discusses their ideals (dream) for the organization. McNamee (2003) used the Appreciative Inquiry approach to resolve discontent among staff at a high school, so that they could move forward into creating a much needed revised curriculum. During the dream stage, she invited participants to share ideas for the features of an ideal curriculum. Participants listed some resources that were already in place and "dreamed" of some that were needed for the ideal program. They also voiced some issues that had already been addressed, and some issues they "dreamed" would be addressed in an ideal curriculum. In the present study, as the parents the Title I school in this study dream, they will share what this school has and what is needed in order to design an ideal setting for family engagement.

In the design phase, participants determine the actions they could take to make the changes happen. Mohr, Smith, and Watkins (2000) used the appreciative inquiry process at an international pharmaceutical company based in the United States and the United Kingdom. In the design phase of their project, they presented the owners with "provocative propositions" from the participants that were visionary and led to three powerful propositions for continuing and improving the Discovery Simulation training program. Our parents will share how we can continually improve our plan for family engagement.
Finally, the participants find ways to sustain the desired change (destiny). This is when participants have the opportunity to look into the future and plan for what is to come. According to Whitney and Trosten-Bloom (2010), this stage is three-dimensional in that participants look into the future, plan goal-driven, action-oriented changes, and through the AI process, causes a systemic, ongoing, positive change. The beauty of the AI process is that all stakeholders are invited to identify the successes and to come together to discover ways to improve the organization.

The constraining elements would include the parent participation rate, the proposed dates and times for the parents to participate in the AI process, and the willingness of parent interviewers to answer openly and honestly.

Procedures

Participants

The primary participants in this study were parents from a rural Title I (targeted assistance) school. This Title I school serves students in pre-kindergarten through grade 3. The school serves approximately 70 – 100 children in the Title I reading program. This number varies as children enter and exit the program throughout the school year. As the children qualify for Title I services, they are assigned to a teacher. Once the children make progress and test out of the program, he or she is no longer pulled for services. All parents of children that qualify for Title I reading services were invited to participate in the study. (The Title I program in this school district does not offer math intervention services.) When parents agreed to participate in the study, they completed a consent form to participate in the study.
Data Sources

My role was that of a participant-observer. The Title I Parent Liaison, the Title I teachers, and the Reading Specialists led the small group discussions with the parents. These professionals were trained in the Appreciative Inquiry process before they conducted the sessions. As the researcher, I met with the Title I teachers and School District Parent Liaison to prepare for the Appreciative Inquiry method. I held three training sessions for these staff members. They had read the procedures and understood the process.

The Title I schools in Justice County are required to hold at least two Title I Parent Nights per school year. During the May 2013 and June 2013 Title I Parent Nights at the Ginsberg Elementary School, school staff assisted parents in sharing their voices about school activities that contributed to their involvement.

**Appreciative Paired Interview Questions.** The interview questions that pairs of partners used to interview one another are as follows:

1. Tell me a story about your best experience of being involved in this school, a time when you felt really pleased and proud to be a part of this educational community. What made this experience positive and engaging?
2. Tell me a story about a school activity that helped you support your child’s education and development at home? What about that experience did you find particularly helpful? What did you learn and what was the result at home? Describe the event in detail.
3. What is your strength as a parent? What are your favorite ways to be involved in supporting your child’s learning?
4. If you could make it be any way that you wanted, what would your relationship with the school be like? Describe the school as you would like it to be, where you wanted to come and be involved. What would allow you to feel really welcomed and positive about being here?

5. Tell me what you dream for your child to become or achieve as an adult and how would you like to work together with the school system to see that happen?

**Demographics.** As parents signed in for the Title I meeting, each parent or each couple received a card with a number one through four written on the card. Afterwards, I explained the purpose and the process for the study. When parents agreed to participate in the study, the parents completed a consent form. A reading teacher collected the consent forms.

**Data Collection**

Three meetings were held to begin the Discover Phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process. During these meetings, parents responded to questions that revealed their feelings about parental involvement at the school. Next, parents participated in the Dream and Design Phases where they dreamed of what would be a great school and family partnership. Later, parents designed a plan to encourage family engagement with the school. Lastly, parents participated in the Destiny Phases of the Appreciative Inquiry process. During this phase, parents included milestones for reaching the goals of the partnership.

**Discover Phase/Session 1.** The first session was held at 6:00 p.m. on a school night. It was a very stormy night, nonetheless, there were about 50 parents in attendance. With the children, there was a total 93 present for the meeting. Parents signed in with a
Title I teacher as they entered the school for “Title I Night”.

After parents signed in, they received a card with a number one through four written on the card. Then, the families were directed to the back of the cafetorium to eat pizza and drink sodas. After 30 minutes, the Title I teachers gathered their students to prepare for a “Reader’s Theater” presentation. Each child present joined his or her teacher as they participated in choral reading or shared reading from books. The teachers explained how to prompt the children to read when a child had difficulty reading a word. For example, the teacher would tell the child to look at the first letter of the word and “get your mouth ready to read the word”. Another teacher projected a reading game onto the screen. The children use this competitive reading game from the school’s website. The children demonstrated how the game was played while the parents watched. The teacher explained to the parents how this game reinforced the reading skills that were taught in class and gave the parents the address for the website. The presentation lasted about 30 minutes. Then, the children in attendance were dismissed to another part of the building for childcare. There, the children watched a movie, played games, and were allowed to select a book of their choice to take home. The children remained with the sitters until their parents completed the session.

At 7:00 p.m., a Title I teacher assigned each parent to a classroom based on the number on their card (1, 2, 3, or 4). Before leaving the cafetorium, we issued each parent a consent form (see Appendix A). I read the consent form to the parents and the parents were asked to sign the consent form. The Title I teachers, the Reading Specialist, and the Title I Parent Liaison monitored and assisted with this process. Then, the Title I teachers and Parent Liaisons lead each group of parents to their assigned classrooms. Some of the
parents went with their children to the movie area, stayed in the cafetorium to talk with each other, some of the men went outside while their wives participated in the group sessions, and some parents left the school with their children. Of the 50 parents present, only 22 parents participated during the first sessions. The staff collected the consent forms once parents were settled in the classrooms. Throughout the evening, I visited each group.

The Title I teachers and Parent Liaison lead each group to a separate classroom and facilitated a small group discussion with the parents present. They each had a copy of the “Appreciative Inquiry Paired Interview” questions, an IPad for recording, notebook paper, pencils, markers, and chart paper. The Title I teachers and Parent Liaison asked parents if they had signed the consent form. After verifying that all consent forms were complete, they asked the parents in each group to pair up or work in a small group of three. The Title I teachers or the Parent Liaison read each question aloud for the benefit of the group, and gave each set of parents some notebook paper and pencil. Each set of parents read the questions and shared their answers with each other. As they talked, they wrote down the stories and thoughts of the person they were interviewing in order to share these when the small group reconvened.

After 30 minutes, the Title I teacher or Parent Liaison brought the group back as a whole. Using their IPads, the Title I teachers and Parent Liaison recorded the parent’s conversations and responses. As the parents shared responses, the teachers and Parent Liaison facilitated the conversation in which the group sought to identify common themes. As parents identified the themes, the teacher/facilitator wrote these themes on the chart paper. After 20 more minutes, all four groups had completed the paired interview
questions. The Title I teacher or Parent Liaison asked for a parent volunteer from each
group to share the group’s finding with all of the parents. Once a parent volunteered in
each group, everyone returned to the cafetorium.

All of the participants gathered in the cafetorium. A volunteer from each group
briefly explained the discussions held in their groups. The volunteers brought their ideas
as noted on the chart papers and shared the themes they had found in their groups. At the
end of this process, the teachers and Parent Liaison collected the chart paper with the
themes.

**Discover Phase/Sessions 2-3.** The Discovery Phase of the Appreciative Inquiry
method was repeated for parents who were unable to attend Session One. A few parents
realized that they had missed the opportunities to share their thoughts with the school.
They asked when they would be able to attend a session. Two additional sessions were
already planned. Once parents indicated that they preferred an afternoon session rather
than a morning session, the Parent Liaison scheduled a time to offer the sessions. These
sessions were offered during the next week following the Title I Parent Night. Discovery
Phase - Session Two was offered Thursday afternoon at 12:30 p.m. and Discovery Phase
- Session Three was held on Friday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. The teachers and Parent
Liaison kept the chart paper to use with the participants at Discovery Phase Sessions Two
and Three. By the end of the third Discovery Phase session, there were a total of 38
participants in the study.

I had planned to recruit and train parents who were present at the Title I Parent
meeting, to go to the homes of other parents who were not present to conduct even more
interviews. No parents volunteered to assist in this manner. After all three sessions were
complete, the Parent Liaison and the Title I teachers submitted their IPads with the recordings to me, along with the chart paper noting the themes parents found in the sessions.

**Dream Phase.** Another Title I Parent Night was scheduled in June 2013. During this follow-up meeting, I shared the common themes from all of the sessions with the parents, Title I teachers, the Reading Specialist, the Parent Liaison, and the Administrative Aide. The themes were posted on the walls of the cafetorium for parents and staff to review as they entered the room. Forty parents and students attended this session. Once the meeting started, I read the themes and asked each parent to count off with numbers 1, 2, or 3. The two Title I teachers and the Parent Liaison led parents into classrooms based on the number that they stated as they counted off. Each team would be tasked with drawing a picture that would represent the dream for the ideal school and parent partnership. The Title I teachers and the Parent Liaison asked for a parent leader to conduct the activity in each group. A parent volunteered to be a leader for each group. Parents discussed their ideas about the ideal partnership for the school and parents. After about thirty minutes, all of the small groups returned to the cafetorium to meet as a whole group to share and explain their drawings. Each parent volunteer came to the front of the cafetorium and shared their group's drawings. I shared that parents would be asked to vote on the picture that best represented the parent – school partnership at the end of the meeting.

Group 1 presented two pictures on their chart (see Figure 1). The first picture showed several hearts within a heart and a small heart with several larger hearts around the small heart, giving the heart the appearance of growing. The parent volunteer
explained that the teachers and parents all love the children and want the best for the children. She explained that each heart represented families and teachers working together to help the children. The parents named the drawing, “Love My Child”.

The second volunteer from Group 1 explained the picture of a tree with its roots showing and its limbs bearing fruit. Seeds were falling from the fruit to the ground. The parent explained that this drawing represented the Ginsburg teachers and administrators as the tree. The parents were the roots helping the tree (the school) grow. The children were the fruit of the tree, indicating that the school and parents worked together to produce the fruit. The falling seeds represented the “gifts” that the students would leave for the school. The parent stated that the children eventually would give back to the community and the school, and one day would become the “roots” of the tree as seen in Figure 1.

The second chart displayed more words than pictures. The parents discussed how elephants travel in a herd, are intelligent, can remember, and take care of each other. They noted the principal as the leader of the herd and the teachers, parents, and students, as the members of the herd. They drew a rainbow at the end to note a happy end to the herd’s journey (see Figure 2).

The last picture from Group 3, pictured a glowing light bulb with hands inside. Hands partnered together were drawn beneath the light bulb. The last volunteer explained that the light bulb was the school staff. The teachers created a glow of knowledge as they taught the children. The children’s hands inside the light bulb indicated that the students were reaching for the knowledge that the teachers offered. Beneath the light bulb, parents and the school held hands, representing the school and family partnership (see Figure 3).
After all pictures were presented, a reading teacher led a group discussion about the common themes and visions. The parents discussed the vision that each small group shared and found the likenesses in each. Next, the Administrative Aide led the discussion as the group made the themes into one written shared vision for parental involvement. The Administrative Aide used a projector on the movie screen to show the parents as she wrote, edited, and revised their statements. The parents shared their thoughts and came to a consensus on a three-word phrase that would concisely express their thoughts in answer to the provocative proposition, “When we are at our best, parents and staff at Ginsburg Elementary School…” (see Figure 4). The parents raised their hands to offer suggestions for the phrase. The final shared vision from the parents was, “When we are at our best, Ginsburg parents and staff have open communication; motivate, challenge, and encourage students to do their best; see students excel; and, focus on remaining and staying involved.” The parents proposed, “Communicate, Empower, Succeed”, as the three-word phrase to describe a strong school and family partnership.

After creating the phrase, parents were asked to join a team to work with the school to bring the shared vision to fruition. We provided a sign-up sheet for parents willing to serve in the parent group to participate in the design phase for the shared vision. At that time, the students rejoined the parents and the cafeteria staff served dinner. As the parents ate and socialized, the Reading Specialist gave each parent a colored dot. Each parent was given the opportunity to vote on one of the drawings as the best representation of the Ginsburg family-school partnership. The light-bulb drawing received the most votes. The reading teacher announced the winning representation and the parents applauded. The meeting ended on a happy note. As the families exited, seven
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parents signed the list to come together to write the plan for the school and family partnership.

*Design Phase.* After identifying the parents that volunteered to serve in the parent group, we scheduled three meetings in July 2013. The school principal invited each parent by email and followed up with a phone call with the seven parents who volunteered to serve on the committee. Only one parent agreed to attend the meeting. All others were committed to other engagements on the date of the meeting. The meeting was rescheduled to better accommodate the wishes of the parents. I sent a formal letter inviting the parent volunteers to come to a scheduled meeting to write the plan. By this time, I had been reassigned to another school, and an interim principal had been named to lead Ginsburg Elementary. The Reading Specialist, Parent Liaison, three parents, the Interim Principal, and myself, as the former principal, joined the meetings. Another three parents met with me subsequently to review the plan. One parent never responded to the email, phone call, or formal letter.

During these meetings, the parents and staff developed strategies and actions to achieve the dreams. We addressed questions such as how we will move forward, what supplies we will need, who will we need to involve, the costs involved, and how we will share information with the parents, staff, and others. We designed a plan to implement in the fall of 2013. It was important to put a plan in place to address how to ensure that the parent group would continue to thrive, grow, and interact with the school from year to year. The final plan was completed in July 2013 (see Figure 5). As school started in September 2013, Ginsburg Elementary School’s Reading Specialist invited parents to join the staff as they prepared to purchase supplies for the new Parent Resource Center.
Participants

Ginsburg Elementary School serves approximately 70 – 100 children in the Title I program at any given time during the school year. This number fluctuates based on student needs. When children are found eligible for Title I reading services, they are placed in the program until their reading skills improve, based on the test results of the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening tool. The two reading teachers serve nine groups of students with a limit of five students per group on a daily basis. The Reading Specialist serves groups of five students, as well, but has the flexibility in her schedule to provide assistance to more students. Once students have shown improvement, they are exited from the program and other students enter into the program. At the time of the study, there were 100 children in the Title I program. There were twelve siblings in the program; therefore, the reading teachers send home eighty-eight invitations. A total of thirty-eight parents of the current students at that time who were placed in the Title I program, or 43% of those parents, participated in the study.

Data Sources and Data Analysis

There were two main sources of data used to answer the research questions. The data used to answer the first research question was archival data on past parent meetings and the appreciative interview phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process. The next two research questions were answered using the qualitative data gathered during story circle phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process. The final research question was answered using data from the design phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process as seen in Table 1.
Table 1

*Data Sources and Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. Which Title I activities offered at Ginsburg Elementary School, a Title I school in the Justice County School District, during the 2008 – 2013 academic year had the highest parent participation and why?</td>
<td>Frequency chart of themes as determined from Appreciative Inquiry Paired interviews sessions Chart of Title I Family Engagement activities and cost for each activity</td>
<td>Frequency analysis, per capita cost analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2. Which Title I activities did parents at Ginsburg Elementary School perceive to be the most beneficial to assisting their children to learn?</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Interview Questions 1, 2, 4 Story Circles of Parents with Facilitator</td>
<td>Story Circles of Parents with Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. How would Title I parents like to be involved in their children’s education at Ginsburg Elementary School in Justice County?</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 Story Circles of Parents with Facilitator</td>
<td>Story Circles of Parents with Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. What strategies do parents in the Title I parents at the Ginsburg Elementary School in Justice County suggest would be most effective in enhancing their involvement at the school where their children attend?</td>
<td>Plan for Parent Engagement Design Team of Parents</td>
<td>Design Team of Parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the study, the teacher facilitators wrote the themes on poster paper as suggested by the parents. When the parent group was satisfied with their selected themes, the parent representative presented the themes to the whole group. I collected the themes recorded on the poster paper and the audio recordings from each session. I transcribed the recordings from each of the seven group sessions. I also collected and reviewed the
parents' and teachers' written notes. As I read over the themes from each session, I reviewed the transcribed notes and the parents' and teachers' written notes to verify the themes as stated by the parents. I looked for specific comments from several different parents in each group that would support the themes found in that group. I highlighted comments from each session that would fall under each category, or theme, as noted on the poster paper from that group. The comments from the transcription, the teachers' notes, and the parents' written notes, supported the themes that the parents determined in their specific group sessions. Where there were similar themes across groups, I combined them. There were no additional themes identified.

To answer the first research question, I also compared the data from past parental involvement activities at the school. I reviewed the activity and number of participants that attended each activity for at least the past 6 years. Using this data and parent comments, I found particular activities that seemed to attract more parents than other activities. I also looked at the amount of money spent on each activity to determine if there was a correlation between the cost of the activity and the number of parents and students in attendance for each activity. I listed the themes as determined by the parents during the paired interview sessions and noted the occurrence of each theme across the group sessions in a frequency table as shown in Table 2. As I reviewed the frequency table of themes, I noted that parents had similar themes across the groups. Theme 2, which stated that parents were interested in what their children were learning in school and had a strong desire to help their children with their studies, was outstanding in that this theme was identified in each parent group session. Finally, I looked to see if the activities that seemed to attract more parents, matched the themes, as indicated by the
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parents.

I used Appreciative Interview questions 1, 2, and 4 to answer the second research question. These questions about their best school experiences of being involved, which school activity was particularly helpful in helping them assist their children at home, and how they would change their school-family relationship to make it better, helped me to determine which activities parents perceived to be the most beneficial to assisting their children learn. Parents shared their answers to these questions during story circles led by the teacher facilitators.

The third research question allowed me to find out how parents wanted to be involved in the school. I used all five of the Appreciative Interview questions to gain information to answer this question. During the story circles, parents answered questions about their best experiences being involved in the school, shared stories about the school activity that helped them help their children, talked about their favorite ways of supporting their child’s learning, discussed how they would like for their relationship to be with the school, and how they could work with the school to help their children meet with success.

Research question four asked parents for suggested strategies to enhance family engagement in the school. Parents shared these ideas as we developed the “Plan for Parent Engagement” as seen in Figure 5.

Through this process, I tried to find and understand the strengths of the parental involvement activities in the school and I searched for ways to build upon those strengths. I used this information to assist parents in writing the school – family partnership plan.
Ethical Considerations

W&M Ed IRB Human Subjects Approval was sought to conduct this research. The name of the school district has been changed to protect the identity of individuals. I also used pseudonyms for school staff, parents’, and students’ names.

Before beginning the Executive Ed. D. program at the College of William and Mary, I requested permission to use the district as my laboratory of practice. The former district Superintendent granted me his permission. Since his departure, the current Superintendent has supported my research in the area of Title I Family Engagement in the Justice County Schools.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions. I believe that everyone is valuable and that everyone wants to feel valued in their roles in life. I also believe that there is something positive that happens within every organization. Every organization has at least one good practice or procedure in place. That organization, as a whole, reflects the attitudes and beliefs of the leader, whether it is a positive or negative attitude. The leader must use his or her influence to guide the organization. If the leader wants the organization to be successful, the leader must build upon what works well within the organization. The leader must also value the opinions of the stakeholders and be willing to act upon the stakeholders’ ideas and suggestions. If the stakeholders feel valued, they can help the organization to improve and to move forward. In any organization, stakeholders remember the good and the bad about their past journey together. As the organization moves forward, internal and external stakeholders must hold open and honest conversations with the leader, while they all put forth a collaborative effort to build upon the good practices of the past
journey and leave the poor procedures behind. The leader must listen to the voices of the stakeholders, and work with the stakeholders, to make changes within the organization that will have a positive impact on the future of the organization. I believe that the leader must develop a continuous, collaborative partnership between the organization and the stakeholders to ensure the ongoing success of the organization.

**Limitations.** A limitation of this study was that I could not control which parents or how many parents were involved in this research. I expected that we might need to hold several interview sessions for parents, as transportation was a problem for some parents. Some parents were unwilling to participate in this process for reasons unknown or for reasons that they were not willing to share. Some parents simply were not interested in participating in this research.

**Delimitations.** This research involved parents of Title I students at only one school. Administrators of Title I schools are required to hold meetings for parents of Title I students and to have Title I parents serve on school committees, such as the School Improvement Plan committee and the Parent Teacher Association Board. To date, the school had not been able to secure parents of Title I students to serve on these committees.
Figure 1. Hearts – Dream Phase

Figure 1. This is a photograph of the "hearts" and "tree" drawings displayed on chart paper. Parents drew these illustrations to represent family engagement at Ginsburg Elementary School.
Figure 2. Elephants – Dream Phase

Figure 2. This is a photograph of the “elephant” explanation displayed on chart paper. Parents drew this illustration to represent family engagement at Ginsburg Elementary School.
Figure 3. Light Bulb – Dream Phase

Figure 3. This is a photograph of the “light bulb” drawing displayed on chart paper. Parents drew this illustration to represent family engagement at Ginsburg Elementary School.
When we are at our best, parents and staff...

- Have open, consistent, effective, communication
- Motivate, challenge, and encourage students to do their best
- See students excel
- Focus on remaining/staying involved
- Communicate, Empower, Succeed

Figure 4. This picture is a scanned print out of the Power Point that the school’s Administrative Aide used as she lead the parent discussion to answer the provocative proposition.
CHAPTER 4

Results

Major Findings

There were several themes that became apparent as the parents shared stories about their involvement in the school. These stories included the reasons that parents were not involved, as well as the reasons that parents were encouraged to come to school or to participate in school activities. Each comment is noted by the Appreciative Inquiry session that the parent attended, the group number that the parent participated in, and the source of the comment (parent or a teacher).

The "Frequency Chart of Identified Themes", as shown in Table 2, reflects the themes as identified by parents who participated in each group session. There were a total of 38 parents, representing 43% of the parents of children in the Title I program at that time, who participated in the study. The number of the students enrolled in the Title I program fluctuates throughout the school year. As children make progress in reading, they are exited from the program. When children experience difficulties in reading, their teachers refer them to the Title I teachers. The Title I teachers complete the eligibility process for each student. During the school year, the three Title I teachers serve approximately nine groups of five students daily.

Theme 1: Parents valued the importance of communication between home and school.

The parents’ who participated in the interview process desired clear, open communication from teachers to make them aware of their children’s progress and to
inform them of school events. Some of their comments that expressed this theme are noted below:

"I think most of us want our kids to achieve a lot higher than where we are. You know, want them to do better than what we do … Working with the teacher to help the teachers make sure that they’re at that level and if they start falling."

(Session 1 – Group 1 – Parent)

"I think the best way or the best way we’ve had a lot of feedback is the agenda piece. It is super helpful. It’s gotta be a lot of work, but it’s so important to the parents.” (Session 2 – Group 1 – Parent)

"There will be progress reports that comes home for my son from his teacher, that says, ‘No, he’s not meeting standards’ and there’ll be a progress report coming home from Title I that will say ‘Great job, way to go, you’re doing great, you’re on track’. And, I’m like there’s some confusion there and a little bit of a mixed message there.” (Session 3 – Group 1 – Parent)

Theme 2: Parents were interested in what their children were learning in school and had a strong desire to help their children with their studies.

The parents who participated in these interviews clearly wanted their children to be successful in school and they wanted to help their children as much as possible. In fact, 7 out of the 7 parent groups emphasized that they wanted to know what their children were learning in school and that they wanted to know how to help their children to be successful. Parents in every group session identified this desire as a theme, as shown in Table 2. Some shared that, in order to help more at home, they would need
more assistance from the school. Some shared the strategies that they had learned at school and used at home. Some of their comments that expressed this theme are noted below:

“I wish there were workshops for parents.” – (Session 1 – Group 1 – Parent)

“Or maybe you could let us come in and see, like what they’re doing in class... and then you might get like some ideas of what to do at home to help them also.” (Session 1 – Group 1 – Parent)

“Any of the Title I activities. They help form new ideas and they just help me get new activities to do and encourage me at home.” (Session 1 – Group 4 – Parent)

“I asked the Reading Specialist to help me with increasing my son’s vocabulary and she provided a CD for us to use at home on the computer and now it’s actually got my kindergarten student enthralled in learning new words.” (Session 3 – Group 1 – Parent)

“What we did in our house was we created a word wall in our kitchen. So when we’re making breakfast, when he’s doing anything, he’s in the kitchen, he’s reading his words. Yeah.” (Session 1 – Group 1 – Parent)

**Theme 3: Parents wanted more opportunities to voice their concerns and to talk with other parents.**

Parents had several questions about school rules and asked why some rules in place. Parents knew the rules, policies, and procedures, but they wanted to know how they could find out more information as to why the school implemented and enforced the
rules that are in place. They were aware that they did not understand all of the reasons for many of the school rules. Some of their comments that expressed this theme are noted below:

“Can we have more than two parents in the room at one time in KG? I haven’t been involved in anything because my name is too far down (on the list). Field trips – can someone pay for the chaperone?” (Session 1 – Group 1 – Parent)

“So, I’m interested in being allowed to come to the classroom like at 3:00 or 3:30 to have a birthday celebration. Try not to put off reading, (laughter), but it still something that I need.” (Session 1 – Group 4 – Parent)

“I would love for that (Open Library) to go to two hours.” (Session 1 – Group 1 – Parent)

Theme 4: Parents appreciated teachers that showed a genuine concern for the student as a person and a learner.

Parents wanted teachers that made a connection with their children. Many of the parents discussed how the children talked about their teacher, would complete assignments for a particular teacher, and how some teachers really motivated their children to become readers. Parents from each group expressed these feelings. Some of their comments that expressed this theme are noted below:

“The teacher encouraged children to read on the field trip, (she) is loving and kind – I told my whole family about her and I sent emails out-of-state.” (Session 1 – Group 1 – Parent)
“Anytime I’m approached by my son’s teacher, I feel she’s always been very open. And for a child who has anxiety, that’s huge. I mean, he just lights up when she works with him or gives him encouragement.” (Session 2 – Group 1 – Parent)

“My positive experience wasn’t one particular event, but it was my son is very shy, very quiet, um, and he, he doesn’t need adults who are … very harsh, very firm with him. He needs loving and caring people and that’s what he got when he came here from (teachers),… it really helped him to open up.” (Session 1 – Group 1 – Parent)

“My son is hearing impaired. But, me coming here and hearing him read for the very first time, I can’t, you can’t, imagine how I was feeling or what was going through my mind.” (Session 1 – Group 2 – Parent)

“I’d like to see more parents involved because asking parent to sit down and read to a child, that shouldn’t be a task. And as far as with school, um, you’ve gotta challenge them to do more. You can’t settle. I don’t settle for my job.” (Session 3 – Group 1 – Parent)

**Theme 5: Parents and teachers fully participated in and valued the Appreciative Inquiry approach used to build a stronger school and family partnership.**

Parents seemed to enjoy participating in the Appreciative Inquiry process and they seemed to feel valued because it allowed for an opportunity for the school personnel to listen to them. As indicated by the design of Appreciative Inquiry process, the school provided a safe environment where parents were encouraged to speak openly and honestly. A change began to occur, during the Appreciative Inquiry sessions, in parents’
and teachers’ thinking about what a strong school and family partnership should look like at Ginsburg Elementary School. Parents spoke while teachers and administrators listened.

"I wish there were more nights like tonight." – (Session 1 – Group 2 – Parent)

"There is one thing I’d like to see, too. I would like to see more nights when there’s events like this.” (Session 1 – Group 1 – Parent)

Teachers’ attitudes and beliefs were also impacted as they participated in the Appreciative Inquiry process. The teachers expressed that they were impressed with the Appreciative Inquiry process. They voiced comments that showed that they also gleaned information from this process, they had a better understanding of parents’ feelings, needs, and ideas, and teachers seemed to feel proud of their colleagues as parents shared comments about teachers.

"The experience was enjoyable and rewarding to the parents, I believe.” (Reading Teacher 1)

"I had such a warm feeling after spending time with the parents as they spoke to each other. It changed my outlook about a lot of feelings I have been having. I see great things with the way the parents communicated with each other. I thank you for allowing us to help. It was a great experience.” (Reading Teacher 2)

"It was a great experience. I am looking forward to your compiled information for the parents. I think they had some great ideas.” (Teacher Leader 1)

“Thank you for allowing me to participate!” (Teacher Leader 2)
Table 2

*Frequency Table: Groups That Identified Each Theme*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sessions That Identified This Theme</th>
<th>Frequency Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Number of group sessions where theme was identified / Number of total group sessions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1</td>
<td>Parents valued the importance of communication between home and school.</td>
<td>Session I – Group 1, Session I – Group 2, Session I – Group 3, Session I – Group 4, Session II – Group 1, Session III – Group 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2</td>
<td>Parents were interested in what their children were learning in school and had a strong desire to help their children with their studies.</td>
<td>Session I – Group 1, Session I – Group 2, Session I – Group 3, Session I – Group 4, Session II – Group 1, Session III – Group 1, Session III – Group 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3</td>
<td>Parents wanted more opportunities to voice their concerns and to talk with other parents.</td>
<td>Session I – Group 1, Session I – Group 2, Session I – Group 3, Session II – Group 1, Session III – Group 1, Session III – Group 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4</td>
<td>Parents appreciated teachers that showed a genuine concern for the student as a person and a learner.</td>
<td>Session I – Group 1, Session I – Group 2, Session I – Group 3, Session I – Group 4, Session II – Group 1, Session III – Group 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5</td>
<td>Parents and teachers fully participated in and valued the Appreciative Inquiry approach used to build a stronger school and family partnership.</td>
<td>Session I – Group 1, Session I – Group 2, Session II – Group 1, Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Questions

1. Which Title I activities offered at the Ginsburg Elementary School, a Title I school in the Justice County School District, during the 2008-2013 academic year had the highest parent participation?

Data about the Title I activities, attendance, total cost, and cost per participant are displayed in Table 3. A review of the data reveals that the more expensive activities were not always the most well attended. However, some of the lowest expenditures were very well attended. For instance, there were 134 parents and students in attendance for the November 2011 “Building Fluency in Reading” meeting which cost a total of $118.00 or a mere 0.88 cents per person. There were 95 parents and students in attendance for the October 2010 “Make It and Take It” night, which cost the school only $11.50 per person. After school funds decreased in the fall of 2013, there were 138 parents in attendance for the Annual Title I night where the children performed for only $2.75 per person.

Ginsburg Elementary School had the highest number of families in attendance at the June 2011 Title I meeting with a total of 169 parents and students in attendance. During that meeting, parents were offered a meal, but the most attractive activity was when teachers distributed the “Summer Reading Book Bags”. The “Summer Reading Book Bags” consisted of a child’s book bag with a sports or children’s movie character on the front of the bag. Each bag was stuffed with leveled books, pencils, notebook paper, a small whiteboard, crayons, and whiteboard markers. The Title I teachers used one bag to show parents the contents and demonstrate how students used the “We Both Read” books and the whiteboards in the classroom. They also explained that each book bag contained leveled texts (books). The book bags were pre-assigned to the students, so
that the students received books on the appropriate reading level for each individual.

Students and parents lined up at the tables assigned to each Title I teacher. Students reported to their daily Title I teacher to receive their summer reading book bag.

The next highest parent attendance occurred on the night that the teachers distributed the “Leap Frogs”. The large group of 134 parents in attendance that evening was divided into three smaller groups. One group listened to a presentation about the purpose of the Title I program. The second group saw a demonstration about using the “Leap Frog”, and then, received the “Leap Frogs”. The third group discussed how to help their children build reading fluency.

The Title I “Make-It and Take-It” night in October 2011 had the third highest number of parents in attendance. This program allowed parents to make items, such as board games for reading, with the help of their children. The teachers demonstrated how to make the games. Then, teachers discussed the purpose of the game and how the game could help students improve their reading skills. The children showed their parents how to play the games. Parents took the games home to play with the children.

Table 3

Title I Activity Chart with Attendance, Incentives, Total Approximate Cost, and Cost Per Person

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year and Month</th>
<th>Number of Participants (Students and parents)</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Incentive, Total Approximate Cost, Cost per Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008 – 2009, October</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Annual Title I meeting: Explain the Title I Program and daily Title I classes</td>
<td>2 Free books $48.00 ($4 per person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 – 2010, October</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Annual Title I meeting: What Parents Can Do At Home (Reading strategies to use with your children)</td>
<td>1 Free AlphaMats (grant funded) 1 Free book $26.00 ($2 per person)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Event Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>October</td>
<td><strong>Annual Title I meeting: “Make It and Take It”</strong> Chick-Fil-A meal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Free book $1100.00 ($11.50 per person)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>December</td>
<td>Guest Speaker: Dr. Jesse Jackson Pizza for students Lasagna dinner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Free book $1450.00 ($26 per person)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Computer reading games/word study games Sub sandwich meal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Free book $1140.00 ($18 per person)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Getting Ready for Summer Learning Fried chicken dinner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Summer reading book bags (non-fiction books, whiteboards, markers, crayons, pencils, paper)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Free book $5000.00 ($29 per person)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–2012</td>
<td>November</td>
<td><strong>Annual Title I meeting: “Building Fluency in Reading”</strong> (breakout by grade levels) First to get the new Leap Frog kit (keep for the weekend and return to school) Pizza dinner with the Watch DOGS $118.00 ($0.88 per person)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–2012</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Students perform in Reader’s Theater; Guest speaker: “Dream Makers: Setting High Goals for Our Children” Turkey sandwich dinner 1 Free book of your choice from the Book Fair $575.00 ($4 per person)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–2013</td>
<td>October</td>
<td><strong>Annual Title I Meeting: “Increasing Parental Involvement for High Academic Performance</strong> Turkey dinner 2 Free Books $1200.00 ($15 per person)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–2013</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Student Performances in Reader’s Theater and demonstration of reading games on the computer Research Study Free pizza and juice 1 Free Book Babysitter $542.00 ($5.80 per person)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–2013</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Reader’s Theater Research Study Summer reading kit: summer reading workbook with calendar of assignments Babysitter $1700.00 ($42.50 per person)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013–2014</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Annual Title I meeting: “School-</strong> Pizza</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data from the chart indicates that parents want to help children improve their reading skills and that they want to assist the children at home. The activities with the highest parent participation (summer reading books, “Leap Frogs”, “Make-It and Take-It”) offered parents the opportunity to learn how to work on reading skills with their children at home. For each of these activities, the teachers demonstrated how to effectively use each item at home. During the study, parents commented that they allowed their students’ siblings to use items from the school to build their reading skills, as well. It seems that parents are more likely to attend the Title I programs when they receive items that will help the children and their siblings. It also seems that the cost of the item is not what draws the parents to the meeting. The items that parents seem to desire can be simple, hand-made items that help the children build their reading skills.

The data also seems to reflect that parents are more likely to attend meetings when their children are performing. The chart shows that the parent participation rate is comparatively higher than on nights when the school offers a “stand-alone” Title I night. The Title I night in May 2012 and May 2013 had respective participation rate of 59 and 93 attendees. Both of these programs included a portion that was dedication to students presenting a “Reader’s Theater”.

Overall, these data give insight to two strategies that Ginsburg Elementary School must continue to use to involve parents with the school. The first strategy is to prepare students to perform at the evening programs. The parents really want to see their children have speaking parts in a program that is designed to put the spotlight on students in a
positive manner. Secondly, parents will come to get ideas and tangible items to work with the children at home. Teacher demonstration is an essential part of activities, such as the distribution of the "Leap Frogs". Parents will come, but the activity should be partnered with an explanation of how to teach reading skills at home.

The data also indicate that the cost of the incentives varied greatly across the years. The greatest amount of funds spent was an expenditure of about $5000.00 in June 2011 and the activity with the least amount of money was approximately $26.00 in October 2010. An important point to make is that the activities that cost the school the most did not necessarily have the most parents and students in attendance. The data indicates that the attendance rate hinged on the activity, not the cost involved with providing the activity.

2. Which Title I activities did parents at Ginsburg Elementary School perceive to be the most beneficial to assisting their children to learn?

During the research project, parents were asked share a school activity that helped them support their child's education and development at home. Parents voiced that they wanted more activities that allowed parents to learn how to help their children at home. Parents asked if they could be allowed to watch teachers teach in the classroom, if the school could offer workshops that gave parents strategies to assist their children at home, and for opportunities to discuss how to help their children with other parents as teachers facilitated the group.

Some of the parents also shared how they put the strategies they had learned in place at home. One parent shared that she had created a "word wall" in their kitchen near the breakfast table. As her son ate breakfast, she reviewed the words on the "word wall"
FOSTERING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

with him. Another parent told us that she used a CD that the Reading Specialist had given her to help her son build his vocabulary skills. She indicated that the CD was so much fun, that her younger child was also responding to the prompts on the CD.

The data from Table 3 indicated that parents attended activities that assisted them with helping their children learn, such as the “Make it and Take It” activity and the “Building Fluency in Reading” activity. Parents learned strategies to help them help their children at home in both of these sessions. The table also shows that parents attended activities that included their children in a performance, such as the Reader’s Theater, or activities that allowed the children to demonstrate reading activities, such as reading games, for them. Parents stated that they found these nights beneficial to them as they learned how to help their children build reading skills at home. The highest attended activity listed on the table, was the “Getting Ready for Summer Learning” night. On this night, 169 parents and children received book bags full of reading books and other items to assist the children in reading and writing over the summer break. Parents attended the meeting and learned how to use the books and supplies to support and encourage their children to continue building their academic skills during the summer. The cost of this program was approximately $29 per student.

3. How would Title I parents like to be involved in their children’s education at Ginsburg Elementary School in Justice County?

The major findings of the study indicated that parents wanted to be involved at school on every level. Parents wanted more communication with teachers. Parents indicated that they wanted to build relationships with teachers, so that they could intervene as students’ grades begin to fall. Parents said that they did not want the report
card or the interim progress report to be the first time they heard of the student having difficulties in class. Some parents shared that they liked the student agenda books as that allowed parents and teachers to communicate on a daily basis. Other parents preferred a more personal form of contact, such as a phone call or parent-teacher meeting, to keep informed of their students’ progress.

The parents’ comments clearly showed that they wanted to be involved in their student’s learning. Parents stated that they were pleased when teachers offered them strategies to assist their children at home and pleased when teachers showed an interest in their child. One parent shared that when teachers help her with ideas, it helps her to form new ideas and encourages her to help her child at home.

Parents also wanted to be engaged in school decision-making. Many parents had questions about school rules and district policies. Parents confused school rules with district policy and wanted more information about how decisions are made at the school and district levels. For instance, parents asked why they are not allowed to hold children’s birthday parties during the school day (a school rule) and why siblings are not allowed to attend school field trips (a district policy).

4. What strategies do Title I parents at the Ginsburg Elementary School in Justice County suggest would be most effective in enhancing their involvement at the school where their children attend?

As the parents moved through the final stage of the research, it was evident that there were several strategies that the parents wanted for more family engagement. I invited parents to volunteer to meet with administrators and the Reading Specialist to
write a plan for parent engagement. The plan would reflect the wants and needs of the parents, as they sought to support the education of their children. Seven parents signed the list to volunteer to meet with the school administrators and the school Reading Specialist.

Parents met during three different sessions with school administrators and teachers to develop a plan for family engagement. The meetings resulted in a Title I Family Engagement Plan that focused on parent/school communication, how parents could assist with student learning, and how parents could take a more active role in school decision-making. The planning committee sat in the office conference room to develop the plan. The shell of the plan was projected onto a screen. Parents offered suggestions as we displayed each page. During the Dream phase of the study, parents responded to the provocative proposition, "When we are at our best, parents and staff are…", by stating that, "we have open, consistent, effective communication; motivate, challenge, and encourage students to do their best; see students excel; and, focus on remaining/staying involved. The parents summarized the school and family partnership in three words: "Communicate, Empower, Succeed".

As the planning meeting continued, parents referred to their responses to the provocative proposition, and used these responses as the goals for each targeted area of parental involvement. The first goal was communication. The parents summarized the second response to the provocative proposition, "to motivate, challenge, and encourage students to do their best and to see students excel", in two words — "student learning" — for their second goal. Parents shared that the last goal, "school decision-making", was a way to focus on staying involved in school events.
Next, the parents wrote the one goal and added two objectives for each area of targeted parental involvement. See Figure 5 for the complete plan. As the committee reflected on the information gathered during the Appreciative Inquiry process, parents selected two objectives that would allow parents to participate more with the school. The teachers and administrators helped parents to put their thoughts into writing to create the goals. The goals were revised and edited to meet the parents’ satisfaction. At the end of the session, the committee wrote the following goals and objectives:

Figure 5. Title I Family Engagement Plan – Design and Destiny Phases

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this committee is to encourage more parental involvement in school activities to support student success.

**OVERVIEW:**

We will develop goals to guide the parent and school partnership in communication, student learning, and school decision-making.

**TARGETED AREAS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

1. **Communication**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ginsburg parents and staff will have open,</td>
<td>1. Parents and teachers will contact each other as needed. Parents should</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consistent, effective communication</td>
<td>feel free to contact teachers when they need information about student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Parents are welcome to visit the classroom by making arrangements via</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the teacher or main office.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Student Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ginsburg parents and staff will motivate,</td>
<td>1. Parents and teachers will protect instructional time. (Birthday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>challenge, and encourage students to excel.</td>
<td>celebrations at lunch time only; limit appointments during instructional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Teachers will make homework assignments, initial agenda books</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
daily, and write notes in the agenda book as needed. Parents will review the agenda book nightly and sign the agenda book.

3. School Decision-Making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ginsburg parents and staff will focus on getting involved and staying involved. | 1. Parents review and sign-off on the School Improvement Plan. They will also meet with the PTA as needed.  
2. This committee will secure volunteers to help design and suggest purchases for the Title I Parent Center. |

Suggested Activities for Parental Involvement:

- Mid-Year and End-of-Year Title I programs with student participation
- More opportunities for parents to observe in classroom instruction
- School to offer parent workshops during and after school
- No homework passes for student attending school evening meetings (PTA, Title I, etc.)

The committee completed the goals and objectives portion of the family engagement plan on the first day during a two-hour session.

The parents also included milestones for deliverables and a place for documenting the dates that the goals are accomplished as seen in Figure 6. During the second day of planning, the parents met to review the goals and objectives and to make changes, if necessary. There were no changes, so the parents worked on the milestones. The milestones are seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Title I Plan Milestones – Destiny Stage

**Milestones**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Estimate</th>
<th>Deliverable(s) Included</th>
<th>Date Accomplished</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August or Sept. 2013</td>
<td>The principal will speak to the PTA about placing a Title I Parent Representative on the PTA Board.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. – Oct. 2013</td>
<td>Speak at PTA meeting with JCS Parent Liaison</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
The milestones include an estimated date near the end of the school year to meet. During this meeting, the team will discuss the success of the 2013 – 2014 parental involvement plan and revise the plan to create a 2014 – 2015 plan. At the end of the plan, the team added suggested activities for parental involvement. The parents and teachers suggested that the committee work together to encourage parents to attend the yearly Title I school sponsored evening programs, that the parents encourage other parents to observe teachers as they teach in class, that the school schedule workshops for parents during and after school, and that no homework is required of students when parents attend and students participate in evening programs at school.

Once completed, the parents selected the illustration that parents chose to represent “What family engagement looks like at Ginsburg Elementary School” as the cover page of the plan, as seen in Figure 3. They entitled the plan “Communicate, Empower, Succeed”, which is the theme they selected during the stage of the Appreciative Inquiry research, and signed the Title I Family Engagement Plan.

In the fall of 2013, the Reading Specialist extended a letter of thanks to the parents for their help in writing the family engagement plan. She also offered parents the opportunity to join the school in selecting furniture for the new Ginsburg Parent Resource Center (see Appendix B). The letter contains pseudo-names for the teachers noted in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 2013</td>
<td>Share parental involvement information and the Parent Center via a flyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 2014 and May/June 2014</td>
<td>Parent Survey to check on parent perception of parent involvement and the level of student success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every grading period</td>
<td>This committee will meet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
letter. This is an especially exciting time, as the school planned to open the Parent Center during the past school year, but the school had little parental support.

The school held its “Annual Title 1 Meeting” in November 2013 (see Appendix C). The meeting agenda contains pseudo-names for all individuals listed on the agenda. The meeting agenda indicates that two parents of students enrolled in the Title 1 program spoke about parental involvement. It also notes that students attending the program should be sure to pick up a “no homework” pass. These acts are especially encouraging as it shows the impact and success of this study and the Appreciative Inquiry process.
CHAPTER 5
Conclusions

Discussion of Findings

The parents made powerful comments that indicated their desire to help their children to succeed at school and in life. One parent said that she was not a good reader in school and that she always “felt like others were watching her read slow”. She stressed that now, she never reads. Her overall goal for her son is for him to read well and to become motivated to learn. Another parent said that she did not want her child to “just settle” for anything. She wanted more for him than she achieved in school. Still another parent wanted to partner with the school to instill confidence and self-pride in her child. One eye-opening parent comment was the she wanted to help her child to have “incredible memories (of his time at Ginsburg Elementary) that will last for many years”. As the parent groups discussed what they wanted from the school, they also shared their thoughts about what would lead to a successful partnership between the school and the family.

The parents involved in this study were available to assist in different ways and on different levels of engagement, just as has been the case in previous research (Comer, 2007; Epstein, 1986; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). All of the parent participants expressed that they wanted the best for their children and wanted their children to be successful in school. The participating parents also conveyed that they wanted to support the school and to be available to assist with educating their children. These parents shared that they enjoyed helping their children learn at school and at home. In order to partner in ensuring student success, the parents overwhelmingly requested that the teachers to show them
educational strategies to help their children. The comments that these parents shared support Cotton and Wikelund's (1989) findings that the most effective form of family engagement for impacting student learning is parent training focused on teaching them how to help their children at home.

Parent participants in this study expressed a desire to support the school. Many parents shared that they could partner with the school by helping the children with homework and attending school sponsored events. Some parents worked two jobs or did not have transportation, but they had a unique response to how they "do their part" to support their children in school. Several parents shared that they made donations to the school. These were not financial donations; rather, they were "Box Tops for Education", "Coke Reward" bottle tops, and "Farm Fresh" receipts that could be transformed into financial gain for the school. Some parents collected plastic and sent it in for the school/community recycling contest. These parents shared that, while they might not be able to come to school, they felt good about sending in the items that the school collected and traded in for school supplies. While this level of support could fit into Comer's (2007) examples of Level I parental involvement of broad participation and general support, it seemed to bring a different aspect to parental involvement. Parents wanted teachers to understand that, while they might not be able to come to school events, they took an active role in securing supplies for the school, thereby supporting the school.

The parent participants spoke about the importance of building relationships with teachers. Some of them shared that they desired to hold friendly conversations with the teachers, believing that if they could make that connection with teachers, it would be beneficial to their student. Parents stated that they appreciated teachers that were
FOSTERING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

approachable and teachers that showed that they cared for their children. Of course, parents listened to the comments from their children and even commented that they watched the children’s facial expressions as they talked about their teacher. One parent commented that her son’s “face lights up and he’ll do anything for that teacher.” These comments show that parents want their children to feel comfortable and accepted by their teachers. The comments also support Epstein’s (1986) study findings that parent attitudes were positive and that parents believed that teachers wanted the children to be successful, just as they also desired. The way the teacher and school staff treat the students could have an impact on the parent and teacher’s communication, as well as the parents’ level of parental involvement and the parent’s attitude towards parental involvement, as Henderson and Mapp found in their 2002 study. Parents wanted more opportunities to meet with teachers in a more casual setting where they could learn more about the teacher as a person and develop positive relationships with them.

Almost every parent in the study voiced that they really wanted more “interactive activities” to use at home with their children. The parents stated that they enjoyed the “We Both Read” books that children brought home on a weekly basis. Parents and children take turns reading the pages of these books and that seemed to be one of their favorite activities. Another interactive activity that the parents mentioned was the “Leap Frog” books. The parents said that they enjoyed the excitement that the children had when bringing home these books. As the children point the pen to each word, the audio book would read aloud to the children and parents. The parents said that the children were happy to demonstrate how the pen and book worked and in the meantime, the
FOSTERING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

children were learning to read. Parents also said that the children’s siblings benefitted from the books, technology, and games that the school sent home with their student.

Parents asked if there could be a time and place in the school, where they (parents) could meet and talk with other parents. Parents said that they enjoyed the time that they had during the Appreciative Inquiry process and asked for “more meetings like these”. Teachers described the parents in the sessions to be “hesitate at first”, but once the conversation started, the parents “opened up, shared personal stories, and laughed” with each other. Teacher facilitated parent sessions could prove to be invaluable as parents meet and talk about how to help their children succeed in school.

As parents shared the importance of school and home communication, their conversation led to the use of technology at the school and at home. They shared their appreciation of the principal’s newsletter sent weekly via the “Alert Now” system. This system delivers important voicemails and emails to parents. The parents also told us that they use the parent portal to the school’s “Power School” that allows the parents access to viewing the students’ grades at their convenience. Some parents noted that they emailed their children’s teachers frequently. Parents seemed very interested in the interactive tools, such as the “Leap Frogs”, loaned out to children served in the Title I program. They told us that the children shared these tools with other siblings at home and that it helped families to be engaged at home. When parents met to develop that school Title I plan for family engagement, they requested to have computers located in the Parent Resource room. They asked if parents could be allowed to access email and the Internet when they volunteered at the school. Access to email and the Internet would assist those parents without these resources in the home, so that they too could benefit from these
mechanisms for family engagement. Schools must keep up-to-date with technology and the school staff must be able to use advanced technology in ways that assist school and family engagement.

The teachers' comments revealed that the Appreciative Inquiry process allowed them to see school-related concerns from a different viewpoint. One teacher commented that this process "put the ball in the parents' court and it was the parents who had the voice". Teachers said they had a better understanding of what parents had to overcome at home, such as working two jobs as a single parent, and why it might seem that a parent was not concerned with the student's education. The teachers also said that they felt appreciated hearing the parents' positive comments about themselves and their fellow colleagues.

Table 3 displayed the total attendance for families at each Title I sponsored activity from school-year 2008 – 2009 to the fall only of school-year 2013 – 2014. The rise and fall of the families' participation rate for at-school activities was not parallel to the amount of funding available. The most impressive piece of information from the chart was the activity with the most parent participation. The results showed that more parents attended the activity where students received their summer reading book bags, complete with books, whiteboards, writing paper, writing instruments. If we exclude the cost for the meals, the cost of these books and supplies for the children was approximately $3400.00. For the teachers and administrators, this activity seemed to be more valuable than the cost of $29 per student. The parents and students in attendance expressed that they were pleased with the packed book bags. The parents asked question as the teachers demonstrated how to use the "We Both Read" books and how students were instructed to
use the whiteboards in class. Parents asked questions about how to document the time that students worked using the items from their books, how to vary the times for requiring the students to complete work from the book bag, and how to reward their children for working on the items in the book bag. Parents were given a strategy on how to help their children use everything in the book bag. This indicates that parents do support student learning and desired to have the materials that would support student reading over the summer. The implication for the school is that we should spend funds on items that parents can use at home with their children. We foster family engagement as we share these items with the parents and bring them in for a demonstration on how to use the items with their children.

A major implication was that funding was not necessarily linked to the numbers of families engaged in an activity. Some of the activities presented for the parents, and requested by the parents, require little to no funding. Parents wanted to come to school to observe teachers and learn from teachers. There is no cost involved in parents observing student and teacher interactions. Parents enjoyed “Make-It and Take-It” nights, where little funding is necessary to make items to use for building reading skills at home. As indicated in Table 3 by the Title I Attendance Chart, several activities that were not costly had a high rate of attendance. In fact, the Title I night held after funding ended yielded the second highest attendance rate over the six-year period, with only an expenditure of approximately $2.75 per person. This shows that the funding is not the key to the parents’ participation or rate of attendance. The key to keeping ongoing parental engagement for this school hinges upon offering activities that parents deem valuable to them. The activities that these parents deemed valuable were activities that enhanced their ability to
assist their children at home and activities that allowed their children to shine at school. These activities included making games that they could take home and play with their children, learning how teachers use the “We Both Read” books, learning how to use the “Leap Frogs” with their children, and learning how their children use computer-based games to improve their reading skills. Parents also wanted their children to have the opportunity to perform as they watched. In these programs, every child has a speaking part and the parents were pleased to see and hear their children “in the spotlight”.

The school and parents met to form a partnership to design a plan to fulfill the parents’ wishes for family engagement. The plan focuses on ways for the parents to take a more active role in school activities, whether in-school or at home. The teachers and administrators at the school hope that the Ginsburg Title I Family Engagement Plan will lead to improved school practices that will impact student success in a positive manner. The success of the plan does not depend solely on funding, rather on the newly formed parent group that will propel the school – family partnership forward throughout this school year and the coming years. With the joint venture between the school and parents, Ginsburg Elementary might soon find itself buzzing with parental support.

One point of interest related to the rural community was how it challenged the perception I previously held that everyone knows each other, therefore, the research would not reflect a concern from parents or teachers in the area of relationships. While it is true, many parents and teachers at Ginsburg Elementary School went to school together and grew up in the same neighborhoods, parents nonetheless expressed a desire to get to know the teachers better. They expressed a wish to meet and talk with parents in an
informal setting. Parents do want to build personal relationships with their children’s teachers.

Another important finding was the parent and teacher interest in the Appreciative Inquiry method of research. Parent and teacher comments indicated that the method was non-threatening, that both parents and teachers felt valued as teachers listened and parents complimented the teachers for their knowledge, assistance, and for teaching their children. Parents and teachers described the process as a great experience.

In summary, parents at Ginsburg Elementary School wanted to help their children learn at home and at school, but they wanted support from the school to guide them in the right direction. The Title I parents said they wanted interactive games and activities from the school to use with their children. These parents wanted to help their children at home. The Title I parents at Ginsburg Elementary School also wanted to feel welcomed at school, but in order to feel welcomed, they needed to build relationships with the teachers. Not only did they want to build relationships with the teachers, they also wanted the teacher to have a good relationship with their children. During this study, the participants said that they enjoyed talking with each other and they shared that the communication between the home and school was very important to them. Teachers also felt that the communication between the home and school was important. Teachers also said that the Appreciative Inquiry process allowed them to listen to and have a better understanding of the parents and their needs. The most important implication was that what parents really wanted had little to do with money. Parents wanted the school to help them help their children. Teachers can model lessons, share reading strategies, and help parents make simple games to use at home with their children. Schools can have a
positive impact on family engagement using very little or no money, and spending a lot (of time) on building strong relationships with families.

**Implications for Parents, Schools, and Further Research**

This study reveals that, in order to develop stronger school and family partnerships, schools must have open communication with parents, encourage teachers to build relationships with parents, and find effective ways to use technology to engage parents. Furthermore, schools might need to shift their focus of family engagement from "at school" activities to "out-of-school activities" to reach more families and to increase school and family engagement. An example of a tutoring plan that involves families is the "Bring Your Own Tutor Program". This program requires each child in the tutoring program to bring in a parents, sibling, grandparents, etc., to participate in a structured tutoring program. As the tutor participates in the tutoring program, he or she learns methods for assisting the child outside of school. Another example is a program that I designed. The Title I after school tutoring (TOAST) program met twice weekly. Each day that TOAST met, two students received a specially designed invitation to take home to their parents. The parents were invited to come to the tutoring program during the next week to observe in the student’s after school class and to read with their children in the school library. Programs such as these foster family engagement. Much of the results of this study support the research conducted by several frontiers in the area of parental involvement.

Technology has been of growing importance for parents in the areas of communication and family engagement. Parents “visit” school websites, download
school apps, and use schools' web-based Internet programs to track their students' attendance and grades. Parents send emails and text messages to school staff to get information about their children's school athletic events, school performances, and general school information. Some schools use messaging systems that send urgent messages to a large group of parents via their phones and email accounts. Some schools even tweet message and post messages to a school Face Book account. In order to develop an open communication with parents, schools must use technology. Teachers, and parents living in the 21st century must be able to use technology to increase student learning, but it is also an asset to school staff increase communication between the school and family. At this point in time, technology is essential to effective and constant school and family communication.

This school purchases technology for the children served in the Title I program to check out and use at home. The school wanted to give the children a chance to experience technology in ways that they might not otherwise have experienced. They also wanted to extend that opportunity to the families in the comfort of their homes. Schools should seek similar opportunities for their students and parents.

Schools should become more focused on ways to increase school and family partnerships with out-of-school activities, as suggested by Epstein in her conversation with Brandt (1989). When Epstein shared the thought that schools should focus more on helping parents help children at home and on keeping parents as partners, the world had not yet experienced the "technological boom" that we are now facing. Technology has changed the world and has enabled schools and families to reach another level of communication. When asked how they partnered with the school, parents shared many
examples that were out-of-school activities. This study indicates further research into ways that parents support their children and the school in out-of-school activities. Has the level of family engagement increased with the growth of technology? Have parents overcome some of the barriers to family engagement, such as a lack of transportation, time constraints, or even financial restraints, by engaging more in out-of-school activities? Parents who did participate told me that it was important to keep them engaged. They identified communication and empowerment as two important aspects of the school-family partnerships that they envisioned. They also wanted to learn ways to help their children succeed in school and in life. Schools can explore new means of enacting these important themes. Of the parents who did participate, how can we keep them engaged in school-family partnerships and activities? What would it take for parents to continue to participate without a financial incentive? How can we engage even more parents?

A limitation to this study is that the findings were based on the parents who were willing to participate in the study. These parents were not the majority of the parents whose students were enrolled in the Title I program. There is a need for further research to determine responses from those who did not participate. How can we engage the parents who did not attend or who did attend, but chose not to participate?

As others seek to discover more information in the area of parental involvement, this study indicated that the Appreciative Inquiry method allowed parents to express their concerns in a non-threatening environment. Would parents be as open and honest during if researcher had chosen a different method of research? Could the Appreciative Inquiry process become a preferred method of research when used to create solutions in problem
situations? The Appreciative Inquiry proved to be a successful method for seeking input from parents to improve parental involvement at Ginsburg Elementary School.

By using the process of Appreciative Inquiry, the research findings from Ginsburg Elementary School helped parents and school realize what is important to building a great school and family partnership. The impact of 21st century technology is significant. Technology can help us bridge the communication gap between the school and family in the areas of communication, family engagement, and student learning. While technology is important, above all else is the relationships built between the school and families. These relationships can make or break the fundamental partnership that is required to enfold the school and parents to make student learning successful.
Appendices

Appendix A

Letter of Consent to Participate in the Study

Consent Form

Purpose and Procedures: You are being asked to participate in a research study about your feelings toward parental involvement at this school. If you agree to take part in this research, you will be asked to participate in paired interviews and whole group discussions with other parents. You will be given feedback regarding what parents perceive as being most important for parental involvement at our school. You will be asked to discuss your feelings about the school’s parental involvement practices today in this location and during a follow-up meeting in June 2013. This will take a total time of about 2 hours. Parents that volunteer to design a plan for parental involvement for our school will meet in July to develop the plan and share the plan with all parents at the first fall 2013 Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting. This parent group will set dates to meet throughout the 2013 – 2014 school year.

Voluntariness: Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, discontinue participation, or skip any questions you do not wish to answer at any time without penalty or loss of the benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your children’s service in the Title I program.

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks involved. The benefits of this research will be the plan for implementing ideas and suggestions to increase parental involvement in our school. Your children will benefit from this process as we gain more classroom support from our parents.

Compensation: There is no compensation for your participation in this research.

Confidentiality: Your identity will not be linked to your discussions during the paired interviews or open discussions. However, the information that you share during these sessions are not considered private information and the information will not be held confidential. In the event of publication of this research, no personally identifying information will be disclosed. To make sure your participation is confidential, please do not provide any personally identifying information on this signed consent form.

Who to Contact with Questions: Questions about this research study should be directed to the primary investigator and person in charge, Joyce McDowell. I can be reached at 9311 Justice Circle, Robertsfield, VA 23040, by email at jmcdowell@icsd.kl2.va.us, and by phone at (787) 367 - 5204. You will receive a copy of this consent form. I certify that I have read this form and volunteer to participate in this research study.

(Print) Name ____________________________________________

Signature ____________________________________________ Date: __________________
Appendix B

Fall 2013 Letter to Parents – Destiny Stage

Ginsburg Elementary School

Title I Family Engagement Plan

2013-2014

Dear ____________________________,

Thank you so much for all your support of the Ginsburg Elementary Title I program. Mrs. McDowell has shared the completed document of our Title Family Engagement Plan with us. I am sending home a copy for you to review and have for your information.

We are in the process of acquiring furniture for our Parent Center. Mrs. Matfield, Justice County Schools Title I Parent Liaison, will be in touch with you as she begins to set up the center. We know you were interested in supporting this process.

We are excited to have Mrs. Matfield and the center for our parents. We know you will find Mrs. Matfield and the center helpful as you support your child as a reader.

Thank you for all your support. Please do not hesitate to contact myself, redder@ics.k12.va.us, or Mrs. Matfield, matfield@ics.k12.va.us, at any time. You may also reach us by phone at Ginsburg Elementary, 367-3215.

Sincerely,

Ms. Redder

Reading Specialist
## Appendix C

### Annual Title 1 Meeting Agenda for November 2013

**GES Title I Night**  
**November 25, 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welcome</th>
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<tr>
<td>Shining Title I Students</td>
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<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Mr. Turkey, Building Concept of Word</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>Colors of Fall, Building Fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>The Four Seasons, Building Fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>What Does the Fox Say?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Fluency</td>
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**Title I Information**

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<th>What Does It Mean to Be Schoolwide?</th>
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<td>Parental Involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Title I Family Engagement Plan</td>
<td>GES Parents - Mrs. Sack and Mrs. Dee</td>
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<td>School - Parent Compact</td>
<td>Mrs. Thomas, Title I Reading Specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>We Both Read</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended Library</td>
<td>Mrs. Jason, Title I Reading Specialist</td>
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<td>Parent Input</td>
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**Book Signing Celebration**

Please allow your child to select a free book for our book-signing event. Children may have
References


Parental Involvement: Title I, Part A, (2004). [*Section 9101(32), ESEA.*]


Vita
Joyce R. McDowell

Birthdate: May 22, 1957
Birthplace: Meridian, Mississippi

Education: 2010 – 2014  The College of William and Mary
                Williamsburg, Virginia
                Doctor of Education

                2001 – 2003  Old Dominion University
                            Norfolk, Virginia
                            Licensure in Educational Administration

                1986 – 1989  Hampton University
                            Hampton, Virginia
                            Master of Education

                1977 – 1981  Mississippi State University
                            Starkville, Mississippi
                            Bachelor of Arts

Professional Experience:

2013 – Present  Principal at Smithfield High School
                Isle of Wight County Schools, Smithfield, Virginia

2009 – 2013  Principal at Hardy Elementary School
               Isle of Wight County Schools, Smithfield, Virginia

2006 – 2009  Assistant Principal at Windsor Elementary School
               Isle of Wight County Schools, Smithfield, Virginia

2005 – 2006  Special Education Teacher at Magruder Elementary
               School and Bethel Manor Elementary School
               York County Schools, York County, Virginia

2003 – 2004  Assistant Principal at Hampton Christian High School
               Hampton Christian Schools, Hampton, Virginia

2000 – 2003  Dean of Special Education/School Test Coordinator
               at Norview Middle School
               Norfolk Public Schools, Norfolk, Virginia

1999 – 2000  Special Education Teacher at Booker Elementary School
               Hampton City Schools, Hampton, Virginia
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<td>Special Education Teacher at Taylor Elementary School and Blair Elementary School Norfolk Public Schools, Norfolk, Virginia</td>
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<td>1982 – 1985</td>
<td>Special Education Teacher at Kate Griffin Jr. High School Meridian Public Schools, Meridian, Mississippi</td>
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