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**IMPLEMENTING PARENTAL COMMUNICATION AND  
INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES IN A  
SECONDARY CLASSROOM**

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**ABSTRACT**

This qualitative research study examines the effects of implementing parental/family communication and involvement strategies in a secondary classroom. This study was completed at a large urban high school in eastern Pennsylvania with a culturally, socio-economically, and academically diverse group of eleventh grade students.

Methods of data collection included field notes, interviews, questionnaires/surveys, and archival artifacts. The study suggests that although parental communication and involvement are important factors in student success, the need for building relationships and community is just as important. The study also suggests that there are many barriers that hinder communication, most communication between the teacher and the student's family deal with inappropriate behaviors or failing grades, and parental visibility in the school building is not indicative to how much they value their child's education.

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In the past seven years that it has taken me to complete this chapter of my educational career, I have watched my sons grow into young men, survived breast cancer, divorced my husband, and helped my oldest son cope with mental illness. It has been a long, hard journey both personally and professionally, but if I had to go back and do it all again, I would not change a single bump or twist in the road. I am so blessed to have had so many wonderful people supporting me and loving me along the way.

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Oliver Wendell Holmes said, “One’s mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.” This is so true when it comes to the education I received from the many of the wonderful Moravian faculty members. My mindset and my practices as teacher will never be the same. But I need to give a special “shout out” to both Dr. Joseph Shosh and Dr. Christie Gilson. Dr. Shosh, thank you for supporting my efforts and for your undying enthusiasm for education. Thank you for encouraging me to reflect on my teaching practices and showing me ways to improve upon them. Dr. Gilson, thank you for being an amazing teacher and woman. You are a true inspiration. Your patience, laughter, expertise, and constant encouragement kept me sane throughout this whole process.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES.....	vii
RESEARCHER STANCE.....	1
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	5
Introduction: The Need for Increased Parental Involvement.....	5
Benefits of Increased Parental Involvement.....	6
Socio-Economic Factors.....	9
Best Practices.....	12
Communication, Communication, Communication!.....	12
Parent/Teacher Conferences & Open House.....	17
Getting to Know Students and Their Families.....	19
Guest Lecturers.....	23
Parental Involvement at Home.....	24
Conclusion.....	26
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	28
Setting and Participants.....	28
Procedure.....	28
Data Collection Methods.....	30
Trustworthiness Statement.....	32
Timeline.....	34
OUR STORY.....	40
A Cast of Characters.....	40
My Door is Wide Open. Please Come In.....	41
A Sweet Incentive.....	45
From the Mouths of Teenagers.....	47
Conversing with Parents.....	52
Student Snapshots.....	55

Adam.....	55
Juan.....	59
Home Visit #2.....	63
Ariel.....	67
Like Mother Like Daughter.....	67
A Surprising Conversation.....	71
Frank.....	72
An Inconvenient Truth.....	72
Redemption? Maybe.....	73
Taking the Show on the Road.....	75
A Night at the Theater.....	75
Leaving the “Township”.....	79
“Dropping Science”.....	83
Juan.....	83
Ariel.....	84
Peyton.....	86
Is Anybody Out There?.....	88
In the End.....	90
DATA ANALYSIS.....	92
RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	97
THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING.....	107
APPENDIXES.....	114
A. Student Survey.....	114
B. Parent Survey.....	116
C. “Why??” Student Survey.....	118
D. Principal Consent Form.....	119
E. Parent Consent Form.....	120
F. Parent Note.....	122
G. Parent Information Form.....	124

H. Invitation to Parent/Teacher Conferences.....125



### **RESEARCHER STANCE**

When I began my teaching career over 20 years ago, I was shocked to find that teaching was so much more than enthusiastically sharing knowledge of my content area with my eager students. I reluctantly accepted this reality, and dutifully worked on my classroom management skills, graded essays, and tried to adopt the ever-changing initiatives sponsored by my school district. As times have changed, my students have changed along with it too, and I have had to change my practices and methodology as a teacher, some times successfully and other times not so successfully. There is, however, one area in my practice as a teacher that I have struggled with from the very beginning of my teaching career, namely communicating with and involving the parents in the education of their secondary school students.

As teachers, we are advised by our school's administrative staff to contact parents in the event of failures or misbehavior. Throughout my career, though, I have had legitimate reasons for not doing so. Part of the problem is logistical. For example, it is difficult to find a private spot at school where a teacher can sit and talk to a parent without there being someone else within earshot or without the rumble of a copier running in the background. Another deterrent to calling home is the likelihood of actually talking to a parent. More often than not, I have gotten a parent's voicemail, a pre-recorded message that "this number is no longer in service" or a parent who does not speak English. With "as assigned duties" and

PLG (Professional Learning Groups) that take up half of our prep time, and meetings upon meetings scheduled after school, where do I find the time during the school day to call back or hunt down a correct contact number or find a native speaker to help me talk to a parent? In some instances, email is convenient, but many of my students come from homes where there are no computers or internet connections. My final excuse is that I both expect and fear a negative parental reaction to my call due to the fact that historically I have contacted parents only when the student is either failing my class or misbehaving.

Despite my excuses for not communicating or involving parents regularly, it has been my experience that most parents welcome that phone call when I finally do make it. After discussing a student's grades or behavior in my class with a parent or guardian, failing students begin to show up after school for extra help or to make up missed work and student behavior often improves. Parental involvement not only helps improve grades and behavior, but it can also help improve attendance. Every semester, a number of students fail my class due to absenteeism, which is a variable that I may not be able to change, but I think that it is worth the effort. According to Musti-Rao & Cartledge (2004), "Children who are aware of the collaborative relationship [between parent and teacher] know that parents and teachers care about their education. They are more likely to do their best academically and exhibit good behavior in class" (p. 19).

Parental communication and involvement are not limited to phone calls or emails home, but also open houses and parent/teacher conferences, newsletters, and classroom visits. Through clear, consistent, and positive communication on the part of the teacher with all his/her students' parents, the parents will feel that they play an important role in their children's education (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004, p.16). Growing up, I lived in an upper class, white household where my dad went to work and my mom stayed home. My parents were involved in our education; my mom was even the president of the school PTO. Although I am very content teaching in a district with a much more diverse population both socio-economically and culturally, I am not always sure how to bring about the parental participation that I desire. When I shared with my mother my topic for research, I did not expect her to understand its importance. Surprisingly, she started to cry, saying that she understood all too well.

Neither one of my grandparents went to high school. My grandfather was raised in an orphanage and worked in the coal mines of Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania at an early age. He moved to Philadelphia and took a job in a factory where he met my grandmother. According to my mother, neither one of them ever attended a parent/teacher conference, while she or my aunt were in school. I was astonished and asked her why. She said that they were embarrassed by their lack of education and were afraid of embarrassing themselves as well as my mother and my aunt in front of the teachers. Still shocked, I realized why my grandfather

was so proud of me. I was not only the first one in the family to graduate from college, but I became a teacher, a profession that he held in awe. I had indeed forgotten my own roots, and this saddened me. In reality, I am not that far removed from the circumstances of many of my students and their families, thus fortifying my resolve to continue researching this topic.

Sentimentality aside, I have taken “the road less taken” in exploring the question: *What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences of parents and their secondary school children when implementing parental contact and involvement strategies?* Unlike my fellow teacher researchers, my topic does not focus on my classroom practice with my students, and there are variables, such as parental response, that are out of my control. Whatever the outcome of my research, I strongly believe that by communicating with and involving the parents of my socio-economically diverse students in my classroom, I have become a better teacher, a teacher who wants success for all her students and takes new actions to ensure that those students find that success.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction: The Need for Parental Involvement**

Research suggests that parental involvement in schools is “associated with a number of positive educational outcomes, such as increased achievement, better attendance, and fewer behavior problems” (Chen & Gregory, 2010, p. 54). The National Center for Education Statistics (2000) showed that parental involvement in middle and high schools tend to be lower than that in the elementary school (Sirvani, 2007, p. 33). In 1996 and 1999, 86% of elementary school parents had a least one meeting with their child’s teacher, while 50% of parents of high school children had one visit with a teacher (Sirvani, 2007, p.33). In 2007, The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) indicated that not only was there less parental participation in the secondary schools than the elementary schools, but it also showed that parental participation among those families considered “nonpoor” was higher than those families considered “poor.” “At the 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade level, 73 percent of students in nonpoor families had parents who reported attending a school or class event, compared with the 43 percent of students in poor families” (NCES, 2007). While no official record is kept of parental visits with teachers in my own urban Pennsylvania secondary school, my experience suggests it is much lower than what Sirvani and the NCES report.

There are reasons for this drop in parental involvement from elementary school to middle and high schools. First of all, secondary school students are

expected to be more autonomous and take on more responsibility for their schoolwork. When students transition from elementary to middle school and high school, not only do they move to larger buildings with larger populations of students, but they also have multiple teachers, thus making communication with each individual teacher more challenging (Chen & Gregory, 2010).

Likewise, secondary teachers find it difficult to communicate and involve parents in the education of their children. Secondary teachers typically instruct large numbers of students daily, making it difficult “to develop and maintain productive relations with the parents of each student” (Hill & Tyson, 2009, p. 742). Secondary teachers want to use parental involvement strategies, but they have not been trained to do so. “There are few teacher-training classes that deal directly with parent involvement (Becker & Epstein, 1982, p. 32). Additionally, schools need to help promote parental involvement by training faculty and staff on how to effectively involve parents. Teachers need the opportunity and the time to communicate and meet with parents (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007).

### **Benefits of Increased Parental Involvement**

Academic success of their students is a priority for most teachers and parents. It motivates many students to do well in school in order to obtain a certain Grade Point Average (G.P.A.) or achieve honor roll. On the other hand, there are many students who struggle academically and need the support of both their teachers and parents on a more consistent basis. Academic achievement for

some students means passing the class. “Studies confirm that when families are involved, more students earn higher grades in English and math, improve their reading and writing skills, [and] complete more course credits” (Epstein, 2008).

According to Lynne Yermanock Strieb (2010), “Many teachers’ relationships with parents, whether good or not so good, are built on the common ground of a child’s behavior” (p. 82). In the urban district in which I teach, there is the Code of Conduct, which spells out the district’s expectations, rules, and regulations that all students are expected to adhere to. The Code of Conduct is enforced in individual classrooms in varying degrees as well as the individual teachers’ class management plans. These rules are in place to ensure the safety and well being of the entire school community, and they are necessary in order for learning to take place in a classroom (2010). Both teachers and parents expect “good behavior” from their students/children, but there are times when a teacher needs to “judge” whether a student’s behavior is acceptable or unacceptable (Strieb, 2010, p. 82). In my own classroom, behavior that disrupts my ability to teach and others to learn is the most prevalent and most frustrating. Often times, these behaviors become “an issue of power and control” in the classroom (Strieb, 2010).

Many teachers report having the most contact with the parents of disruptive students. According to Epstein, “when teachers and administrators communicated with parents about student behavior, the number of disciplinary

actions in school decreased over time” (Epstein, 2008, p.10). Although parental involvement has been associated with positive outcomes when dealing with behavior issues (Chen & Gregory, 2010), teachers believe that there are “limits” to the support and assistance of parents of disruptive students (Becker & Epstein, 1982). Few studies have examined the effect of parental involvement on student behavior and even fewer have examined adolescent behavior (Chen & Gregory, 2010).

Likewise, studies have suggested that the more parents are involved in their children’s education and the more communication there is on the part of teachers and staff, the less likely these children will be truant or absent from school (Marzano, 2005). Students of involved parents may see school as a “safe and valued place where one would choose to spend time” (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007, p. 488). When parents were made aware of attendance policies and how absenteeism affects learning, “daily attendance improved and chronic absenteeism declined (Epstein, 2008, p.10). For students of parents who resist involvement, the teacher can try to help the student see “school success as self-defining.” This may increase the student’s willingness to spend time in school, “reducing the risk of skipping school” (Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007, p. 488).

**Socio-Economic Factors**

“Educational literature has demonstrated that children’s academic success is highly associated with family background” (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993, p.115). According to Becker and Eptstein (1982), “participation in the school is primarily a middle-class phenomenon” (p. 36). Middle-class, suburban school districts have parents who are more likely to be college educated and more actively involved in their children’s schools and education. These schools have higher achieving students and fewer minority students. In contrast, the students in urban school districts disproportionately perform below standards on state tests, struggle, receive free or reduced lunches, and come from African-American or Latino descent (Mahler & Zehm, 2000).

Studies suggest that there is a “positive correlation between the child’s performance and education and income level of the parent” (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004, p.15). Despite the lack of research and literature available that focuses on teacher practices of involving parents in urban schools, there is a pervasive perception that less-educated, low-income parents “cannot or do not want to become involved in their children’s education” (Epstein & Dauber, 1989, p.1). Studies suggest that low-income parents value education as a means for their children “as a route to economic and social mobility” (Drummond & Stipek, 2004, p. 198). A study referenced by Drummond & Stipek (2004) compared parental involvement in two different schools, one middle-class and the other low-

income. The researcher found that “although teachers at both schools had similar expectations, parents in the low-income community were less familiar with school curriculum, engaged less in teaching at home, and were less likely to attend school events”(Drummond & Stipek, 2004).

Many teachers make “stereotypical judgements” about these parents and see these parents in terms of their “deficiencies” (p.1) or “inabilities” (p. 15). Because teachers at times have difficulty communicating with these parents, they become frustrated and, in turn, come to believe that the parents do not care about their children’s education (Musti- Rao & Cartledge, 2004). In contrast, teachers who involve and encourage all parents by varying their parent involvement practices, and do not “prejudge less educated, poor, or single parents... rate all parents as successful helpers with reliable ‘follow-through’ on learning activities at home” (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004, p.16). Therefore, teacher attitude, not socio-economic status, was an important variable to parental involvement success (Epstein & Dauber, 1989, p.1). There is clearly no justification for ignoring parents as a resource just because they are labeled economically disadvantaged.

Utilizing parental involvement practices in a secondary classroom is a challenge for teachers in general, but there are “ill-defined obstacles” that children of disadvantaged families face and obstacles that both teachers and parents need to overcome (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993, p.115). These children need the

support of their parents while the parents and teachers need to support each other (Kerbow & Bernhard, 1993).

Ethnographic studies suggest that low-income parents, many of whom did not graduate from high school themselves, often lack confidence when dealing with the education of their children and often defer to “teacher expertise” (Drummond & Stipek, 2004, p. 198). Additionally, some parents believe that they are responsible for meeting their children’s basic physical and emotional needs, and teachers are responsible for educating their children (Drummond & Stipek, 2004). Therefore, through clear, consistent, and positive communication on the part of the teacher, parents need to believe that they play an important role in their children’s education (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004).

Another obstacle that teachers encounter when working with low-income families is an increase in mobility. Low-income families tend to move from place to place in search of “stable housing.” As a result, student mobility causes low student achievement. “It is hard to imagine how teachers, no matter how well trained, can be as effective for children who move in and out of their classroom as they can be for children whose attendance is regular” (Rothstein, 2004, p. 422).

Moreover, low-income families are usually single parent households. These single parents may work more than one job, have larger families, and may not have a means of transportation, thus making it difficult to meet face-to-face with a teacher, attend open house, or assist with homework. Despite these

barriers, parents often still want to take part in these activities. Teachers need to design parental involvement practices that help overcome some of these barriers (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005).

### **Best Practices for Involving Parents**

#### **Communication, communication, communication!**

Researchers, teachers, and parents all agree that “clear, consistent, positive” (Mahler & Zehm, 2000, p. 176) two-way communication between parents and teachers is crucial to student success, and, if it is lacking, is “at the root of problems between home and school” (Sirvani, 2007, p. 42). Parents report that the most common form of communication practices include phone calls, notes home, emails, conferences, classroom visits, and progress reports and usually deal with matters related to curriculum, grades, and behavior (Mahler & Zehm, 2000). Studies have shown that communicating with parents of middle and high school students has had positive academic outcomes (Crosnoe, 2009).

Elementary school teachers appear to use more varied communication practices than their middle and high school counterparts (Epstein & Dauber, 1989, p. 6). Elementary school teachers are more apt to make contact with parents due in part to the fact that they teach “self-contained classes with limited numbers of students” while middle and high school teachers teach a much higher number of students on any given day of the week, making it difficult to communicate effectively with each parent (Epstein & Dauber, 1989, p.14). In addition,

elementary schools offer more opportunities and activities during the school day as well as after school and at night for teachers to meet and communicate with parents informally (Becker & Epstein, 1982, p.18). As a result, middle and high school teachers tend to contact only the parents of those students who have issues regarding grades and behavior.

The challenges that secondary teachers face in regard to communicating with parents do not diminish the necessity and benefits of this communication. According to Epstein & Dauber (1989), “strong communication programs can be developed if teachers are willing to make the effort needed to contact parents frequently with clear and purposeful messages about the school and the student” (p. 11).

Becker and Epstein (1982) reported that almost all the teachers in their study had either personal or phone communication with the parents of their students. Unfortunately, phone communication may be time consuming, especially with hard-to-reach parents (Marzano, 2005). Most teachers have limited opportunities during the day to make or receive phone calls. If a parent calls while a teacher is at work in the classroom, a school secretary will likely either take a message or transfer the parent to the teacher’s voicemail (Hornby, 2000). It is the teacher’s responsibility to phone parents as soon as possible. Most teachers are not comfortable phoning parents or having parents phone them at home in the evening while other teachers prefer talking to parents in the

evening. Either way, teachers can set aside a certain time of day or night during the week that is earmarked just for phone calls to and from parents (Hornby 2000). Hornby (2000) offers the following suggestions for a successful phone conversation with parents:

1. Identify yourself as their child's teacher.
2. Ask if it is a convenient time to talk or whether it would be better if you called back later.
3. Use a written list of things you want to ask or tell parents which you have prepared beforehand.
4. Be concise and to the point. If an issue needs lengthy discussion, it is better to do it face to face than on the phone.
5. Listen carefully to what the parent has to say.
6. Give the parent time to ask you questions and to think about the things you have said.
7. Avoid relaying sensitive information by telephone. This is better done face to face so that parents' reactions can be gauged.
8. Always finish the conversation by thanking parents for their time and remind them that they can contact you any time they have a concern.

When speaking with the families of "poverty," Ruby Payne (2006) suggests that teachers deliver "bad news through a story" (p. 14). If a teacher begins the conversation with the "bad news," the family member may respond in a defensive mode. In addition, it is important for the teacher to present him/herself as "human," someone who does not have all the answers (Payne, 2006, p. 14). By doing this, the teacher will more readily gain the trust of these families (Payne, 2006).

"In the last decade, the internet has greatly expanded the options for parent school interaction" (Marzano, 2005, p. 49). Teachers can provide

information to parents by updating their own websites and through email (Marzano, 2005). On the secondary level, teachers usually do not send folders home for parents to sign or handwritten notes since these items often do not make it home (Hornby, 2000). Despite the fact that teachers today are more apt to email parents rather than sending handwritten notes, other difficulties may arise. Some parents may not have email or access to computers at home or at work. Also, some parents do not speak English or have difficulties reading in general. “Therefore, written materials cannot be relied upon to communicate effectively with all parents” (Hornby, 2000, p.37). Hornby (2000) also reminds teachers that written communication needs to be simple, clear and concise, so it can be accessible to the majority of parents. Teachers should try to talk to the parents via phone conversation or face to face about issues concerning grades and behavior. Only as a last resort, should this information be written as a letter and sent home (Hornby, 2000). Because teachers contact the parents of students who are having learning and discipline problems the most and despite the means of communication that a teacher uses, he/she needs to balance the negative communication with positive communication (Hornby, 2000).

Another form of written communication with parents that teachers may utilize is a newsletter. Roker and Shepherd (2007) investigated the effectiveness of using newsletters as a means of communicating information to the parents of 11 through 16 year olds. “The four schools involved in the project were primarily

located in working-class and disadvantaged communities. One school was included because it had a large proportion of minority parents” (Roker & Shepherd, 2007, p. 133). Approximately, 4000 families were involved in the study. Data were collected through phone interviews and questionnaires and included 4000 families. Roker and Shepherd (2007) reported that 50% of the parents reported reading the newsletter. Of those parents who read the newsletter, the majority found the newsletter informative and easy to read.

Hornby (2000) suggests sending out newsletters once or twice a marking period because they are a “very good way of communicating with the majority of parents” (p. 39). Newsletters can be a general one that addresses all of your students, or they can address the parents of certain students (Hornby, 2000). Marzano (2005) cautions teachers that although newsletters are one of the common “school to home communication mechanism[s],” they provide little opportunity for parents to respond (p. 48).

Strieb (2010) used newsletters for 31 years in her elementary classroom in the Philadelphia public schools. She “made the newsletter as conversational as possible and as clear as [she] could, with as little educational jargon as possible” since she knew that some of her parents did not speak English and others had difficulty reading, and she saw the newsletter as a means of inviting “parents into the school lives of their children, both in school and at home” (pp. 30-31).

Strieb (2010) admits that the format of her newsletters did not change much through the years, even when she began using a computer instead of handwriting it. She explains:

I wrote from my teacher point of view. I informed parents about classroom curriculum and sometimes about school policy. I explained why things were done certain ways in my class. I included examples of ways in which parents could help their children with learning and schoolwork at home, and I sometimes modeled how they could do that. (Strieb, 2010, p.31)

#### **Parent-Teacher conferences & open house.**

Marzano (2004) refers to “the time-honored parent-teacher conference” as one of the most widely used parental involvement practices in schools (p. 49). It has also been used for many years as a vehicle for parental/teacher communication (Marzano, 2004). Research has shown that face-to-face conferences with parents are important in creating parent-teacher relationships and have positively impacted student performance (Hornby, 2000). Students whose parents attend parent-teacher conferences often “have higher attendance rates, fewer behavior problems, and improved academic achievement” (Hornby, 2000, p. 41).

In preparation for parent-teacher conferences, Hornby (2000) offers teachers the following suggestions. First of all, send an invitation home to the parents 2 weeks prior to the conferences. Secondly, on the invitation, encourage the parents to ask questions or raise concerns that they would like to address

during the conference. Thirdly, make your classroom inviting and comfortable. Offer refreshments and a snack. Fourthly, have student work available for the parents to peruse. Finally, create a list of questions and/or concerns that you want to discuss with the parents (p. 42-44).

Some parents do not realize that they can meet with their child's teachers at any point during the school year, not just those days scheduled by the district/school. If parents are unable to attend scheduled parent/teacher conferences, teachers need to clearly tell parents that they are available to conference with them at any time that is convenient for both parties (Long, 2012).

During the meeting, it is important that there be a two-way flow of information where both the teacher and parents have time to share concerns and ideas (Hornby, 2000, p. 44). Hornby also suggests the following strategies in order to effectively conduct a parent-teacher conferences. 1. When the parents arrive to your classroom or the meeting place, welcome them and thank them for coming to the conference. 2. Begin the meeting "on a positive note and ask them if there are any specific questions or concerns that they would like to address. 3. Be attentive to what the parents are saying and ask open-ended questions. 4. If there are concerns, be honest not "brutal." 5. If more time is needed, schedule another time to conference. 6. Thank parents for coming (p. 44-45).

In addition, Payne (2006) suggests that as a sign of respect, the teacher should refer to the parents as Mr. or Mrs. Also, using humor, especially humor

directed at yourself, may help to break the ice with parents who come from “poverty” (Payne, 2006, p. 13).

When asked, teachers often report that they always see the parents of the “good students” for parent-teacher conferences. On the other hand, teachers do not normally see the parents of the students who might benefit most from the conference (Hornby, 2000). It must not be assumed that parents who do not attend parent-teacher conferences do not care about their children’s progress in school (Hornby, 2000, p. 41). Drummond & Spisak (2004) report that low-income parents are “less likely to attend school events” (p. 198). There are a variety of reasons why parents are unable to attend these conferences, including transportation problems, child-care issues, as well as their own negative feelings about education. According to a study done in 1993 by the U. S. government, “whether parents actually went to school or attended meetings at school was not a significant factor” in student achievement (Payne, 2006, p. 8). Teachers are not able to fix or remove many of these obstacles that parents face, but teachers can use other strategies to communicate and involve these parents in their children’s education (Hornby, 2000).

### **Getting to know your students and their families.**

According to Kerbow and Bernhardt (1993), educational research consistently demonstrates that a student’s academic achievement is correlated closely to his or her family’s economic status. Students who come from

economically disadvantaged households tend to have lower grades and standardized test scores (Kerbow & Bernhardt, 1993). Kerbow & Bernhardt (1993) go on to note that it is this population of students who “may depend more than usual on support from their parents” (p. 115). Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman (2007) discuss though how some low-income parents do not feel comfortable in a school setting, and therefore, teachers need to have an understanding of their students’ “family backgrounds, cultures, and expectations” (p. 494). Teachers need to “view all pupils within the context of their families” (Hornby, 2000, p. 9).

Becker and Epstein (1982) suggest that teachers can learn more about each student’s family background by participating in informal social activities in school as well as in the community. These opportunities to connect with parents may be less threatening to some parents, and teachers can gain information about diverse families and children, including cultural background, siblings, and family make-up (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004). According to a music teacher at Captain James E. Daly Elementary School in Germantown, Maryland, “We’ve found that if you want parents to come to you, first, you have to come to them” (Long, 2012, p. 38). Twice a year, the staff of Daly Elementary school take a “Walk in the Park,” a nearby trailer park which houses 60% of the school’s Hispanic population. It is their way of “say[ing] hello to familiar faces and break[ing] the ice with new families and those who’ve been reluctant to visit the school” (Long, 2012, p. 38).

It is important for the classroom teacher to “establish a rapport such that the parents feel comfortable with sharing information regarding the child” (Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2004, p. 20). According to Long (2012), parents “do not care about what you [the teachers] know until they know that you care” (p.42). Musti-Rao & Cartledge (2004) also suggest that teachers create opportunities in the classroom for their students to talk and /or write about their families, giving the teacher insight into the students’ families and backgrounds.

Home visits are another common way that teachers can meet and get to know their students’ parents (Marzano, 2005). Hornby (2000) agrees, stating that such visits help to establish a close working rapport with parents. By visiting students’ homes, teachers are able to see the circumstances in which the students live and meet siblings and/or parents and grandparents, who play an important role in the students’ lives (Hornby, 2000). Home visits also enable the teacher to see how students behave at home, how parents handle this behavior, and how much TV is watched (Hornby, 2000). According to Lorelei Gilmore, principal at Roberts High School in Salem, Oregon, teachers and staff need to “step into their world and learn who they are as human beings” (Rosales, 2012, p. 54). Above all, these visits give both the parents and the teacher a crucial opportunity to ask each other questions and voice their concerns. Hornby (2000) goes on to note that many parents appreciate it when teachers meet them on their own “territory” while other parents are too embarrassed by their homes to allow teachers to visit

(pp. 46-47). According to Long (2012), successful home visits often include two teachers/staff members and the focus of the visit should “focus on conversation not intervention” (p. 42).

Hornby (2000) offers the following guidelines for a successful home visit.

1. Home visits should always be pre-arranged via emails, letters, or phone calls, since some parents will want to prepare for the visit by tidying up the house.
2. Teachers should dress casually to the visit since the parents will probably be casually dressed as well. This will help put parents at ease and may help them feel more comfortable sharing information with the teacher.
3. It is best to arrange a time to visit when parent have a chance to talk. For most parents, after dinner and before bed-time is often a preferential time. It is also important to be punctual and not to stay too long. Allow for a 1-2 hour visit. (Rosales (2012) suggests 40 minutes for each visit).
4. It is important to act courteously and to respect the hospitality of different cultures. In some household this means accepting a cup of tea or coffee. In other households, a teacher may be expected to eat something as well.
5. Listen carefully to the questions and concerns of the parents and be prepared to voice questions and concerns of your own.
6. Prepare for distractions during the visit and “be determined not become irritated by them” (p. 48).

Unfortunately, home visits are time consuming and have “shown inconsistent results in changing student behavior and enhancing academic achievement” (Marzano, 2005, p. 50). In their study, Becker and Epstein (1982) reported that only 1 teacher in 5 teachers made home visits, and only 2% of them

made it to more than 5 homes. Unfortunately, the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) and many districts, do not recommend that public school teachers make home visit due to the risks involved (Hornby, 2000, p. 47).

**Guest lecturers.**

Elementary school teachers are also more likely than secondary school teachers to invite parents into their classrooms, especially as volunteers and teacher aides (Epstein & Dauber, 1989). Marzano (2005) does not differentiate between the grade levels when he states that involving parents in the classroom as “guest lecturers” is an effective method of involving parents in their children’s education (p. 48). Strieb (2010) invited parents of different cultures to come into her classroom and teach the students about their culture. Strieb (2010) recalls how she was confronted by an African-American mother named Linda who wanted to her children, as well as the other students in the class, to learn about African American history and culture. As a result, Strieb (2010) invited Linda into her classroom to read and speak to the class about African American history and culture. When Strieb took the class to the Wagner Free Institute of Science, Linda accompanied the class. During the lesson given by a teacher at the institute, Linda added information to the teacher’s discussion. “Linda not only wanted parents to be welcomed into the schools and informed by teachers, she also believed it was important for both White and Black children to recognize Black

parents as knowledgeable, as teachers, and as equal contributors to the school experience” (Streib, 2010, p.49).

### **Parental involvement at home.**

In 2002-2003, the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics reported that “over 90% of parents of kindergarten through fifth grade students were involved in their children’s work compared with 75% of middle school parents, 59% percent of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade through 10<sup>th</sup> grade parents and only 53% of the parents of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students ” (Sirvani, 2001, p. 33). Becker and Epstein (1982) believe that this drop in parental involvement is two-fold. Both parents and teacher expect adolescents to be more independent in their learning in both middle and high schools. In addition, the courses are more difficult and some parents may not know how to help their children with their schoolwork. Therefore, “the lower the grade level, the more teachers use procedures and programs that involve parents in learning activities at home with their child” (Becker & Epstein, 1982, p. 32). Becker and Epstein (1982) sampled 3700 teachers and reported that although elementary school teachers utilized more parental involvement practices, both elementary and secondary teachers agree that parental involvement at home is important. This suggests that teachers of secondary school students may want to use parental involvement strategies as much as elementary school teachers, but they have yet to find methods to successfully do so (Becker & Epstein, 1982).

Epstein and Dauber (1989) report that English/Language Arts teachers tend to be in favor of involving parents in certain at-home activities with their children. These activities include “listening to the child read, discussing school work, practicing skills for spelling or other tests, listening to the child’s writing assignments, and assigning homework that require parent-child interaction and discussion” (Epstein & Dauber, 1989, p.9). Those teachers whom Becker and Epstein refer to as “unusual” in their at-home parental involvement activities do not give “typical teaching assignments” and select different activities for parent to participate with their children at home (Becker & Epstein, 1982, p. 18).

Streib (2010) believed that it was her “job to educate parents as well as children,” so she included information in her newsletter that instructed parents on how to teach their children at home (p. 30). She admits that she assumed that parents wanted to help their children at home so that they could succeed in school and that it was her job to show parents how to accomplish this. She notes, though, that this was not always the case. Some parents took her advice as criticism, thinking that she was “saying that they were not doing enough with and for their children” at home. (Strieb, 2010, p.30).

Musti-Rao & Cartledge (2004) remind teachers that many parents are not “experts” at teaching and often times need specific strategies from the teacher, the “expert” in order to help their children at home (p. 20). By offering parents “easy-to-do, low-tech interventions at home,” teachers enable parents to have

success at educating their children at home (Musti-Rao, 2004, p.20). They go on to suggest that teachers provide training sessions with groups of willing parents. Teachers will have to be flexible with timing and location when scheduling these sessions so that the majority of the willing parents can attend. Becker and Epstein (1982) also discuss the importance of “workshops:”

Urban schools, the percent of minority students with learning problems, Title I schools, and large classes or many classes are all variables that influence the use of more parent-involvement techniques or the use of workshops to teach parents how to help their children at home. (p. 45)

## **Conclusion**

In order to help students, especially students from low-income families, succeed in school, parents and teachers need to create a partnership and work together. Parents of secondary school children need to become more involved in their children’s education, whereas teachers need to utilize multiple practices that involve parents. Although most teachers are not formally taught how to engage and communicate with parents, there are several practices that they can adapt to their own classrooms. These practices include two-way communication with parents through phone conversations, email, and newsletters. Teachers can also invite parents to parent-teacher conferences and open houses. Additionally, teachers can learn more about their students and their students’ families through informal social events, writing assignments, class discussion, and home visitations. Inviting parents into the classroom as guest speakers is another

method of parental involvement. Finally, teachers can develop assignments that involve parental assistance at home. More importantly, teachers can instruct parents on how to instruct their children at home.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **Setting and Participants**

My study was conducted for 18 weeks at an urban high school located in the Lehigh Valley of Eastern Pennsylvania. The high school has approximately 2000 students encompassing grades 9 through 12. There are two distinct areas of town where the students live, the “Township” which is a suburban area and the “Southside” which is a more urban area. The cultural demographics of the school is as follows: 58% White, 27% Hispanic, 10% Black, 4% Asian, and .25% Native American (Sunguard K-12 Education, 2013). The 27 students who participated in the study are part of an 11<sup>th</sup> grade Academic English class. Two students have IEPs, 9 of them are classified as economically disadvantaged, and 54% of them scored basic or below basic for reading and writing on state testing (Performance Tracker). I chose this class in particular not only due to its cultural, socio-economic, and academic diversity, but also for the reputation of several of the students in the class. A handful of these students were known throughout the entire building as “frequent flyers” in Office 101, the discipline office. It would be my most challenging group of students of the semester, and I was up for the challenge.

### **Procedure**

I began my study by accessing Performance Tracker, a database that the district uses to keep track of student assessment scores, to identify which of my

students were classified as economically disadvantaged, have IEPs, and whether they scored advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic on the state standardized testing (4sight). I also spoke to former teachers and counselors of the students who struggled with inappropriate behaviors, truancy, and academics.

In addition, I revamped my letter of introduction to my students' parents by reminding them of the dates for open house and parent/teacher conferences and asking them to provide current cell phone numbers and email addresses since the information found on the school database was not always current. This information became crucial as the study commenced and there was the need to contact parents on a regular basis.

As the study progressed, I implemented many different communication and involvement strategies that I did not use in the past. In addition to phone calls and emails, I sent home personal invitations and reminders for parent/teacher conferences, participated in 2 home visits and numerous parent conferences, composed group letters/newsletters for all my students parents, and attended a staff/parent outreach for the parents of our students who lived on the "southside" of town and often cannot attend open houses and parent teacher conferences due to job obligations and lack of transportation.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The data collection methods that I used included surveys, interviews, group polls, copious amounts of field logging, and the downloading of student records that showed grades, conduct referrals, and attendance history.

Early into my study, I gave the students a survey that I created, asking them 10 questions about their feelings toward parent/teacher communication and involvement (Appendix A). For each question, they needed to respond with D for disagree or A for agree. Six of the questions asked the students to explain their response. I also surveyed the students' parents at the end of the study about their feelings about my interventions as well as their own perspectives on the role of parents in the education of their high school student (Appendix B). This survey was similar to the one that I had given the students. The survey included 6 questions where the parents needed to respond with either D for disagree or A for agree. Four out of the 5 questions asked the parents to explain their responses. Despite the lack of parental response, these surveys gave me some expected responses, but they also gave me morsels of information that were unexpected and helped change my own mindset toward my interventions.

Another data collection method that I used was an informal group poll. The day after parent/teacher conferences, I asked the students who actually gave their parents the personal reminder/invitation. As always with teenagers, their responses were both honest and disconcerting. In connection to parent/teacher

conferences, I had the students fill out a quick survey entitled “Why?” (Appendix C). This quick survey asked them to speculate as to why none of their parents participated in parent/teacher conferences.

Throughout the entire study, I took copious amounts of field notes on a daily basis, where I documented my observations of student behavior, student/parental responses, and my own interpretations and analysis. I also documented and responded in my log to each phone call, home visit, conference, and interview. This information will prove invaluable to my story.

The most important data that I collected came from my parent and student interviews. This data helped me to fine tune the information that I already knew but opened my eyes to a whole different perspective and conclusion. Due to the lack of parental participation for parent/teacher conferences, I was able to spend 30 minutes at a time interviewing the parents who did attend the conferences. I asked them why they were at the conference when the majority of parents were not. I also asked them if their own parents were involved in their education. In the same vein, my interviews with my students provided me with such rich data that I realized that my research was leading me to unexpected results and conclusions.

At the end of my study, I downloaded and collected data that pertains to student achievement, behavior, and attendance. I compared this information with

information that I collected at the beginning of my study, in order to see if there were any reported differences in these areas.

### **Trustworthiness Statement**

For my study, I have followed the ethical guidelines delineated by McNiff and Whitehead (2010) to ensure that my findings were gathered and presented in a trustworthy manner. Before I began my study, I “prepare[d] and distribute[d] ethics documents” to all participants, asking permission, ensuring confidentiality, and allowing for withdrawal from the study (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010, p. 76-78). I received approval from Moravian College’s Human Subjects Internal Review Board to proceed with my study. I also provided my principal, as well as the parents of my students, with a letter explaining my study and asking their consent to use their respective data within my study (Appendixes D & E). In these letters, I promised to keep the names of the participants confidential and anonymous and not to include the data or information of any student, parent, or guardian who opted not to participate without penalty. If any student wanted to withdraw from the study, he/she could do so at anytime. Additionally, I explained that all research material would be secured in a locked location.

In addition to following ethical guidelines, I have also assessed the validity of my data throughout my study. According to Hendricks (2013), there are many methods in which a researcher can increase the validity of his/her study. The methods that I used to establish validity included utilization of member checks,

peer debriefing, and triangulation of data sources (Hendricks 2013). In addition, I provided “thick” details of the setting, participants, and interventions used in my study (Hendricks, 2013, p. 128). I engaged in conversation with my Teacher Researcher Support Group on a weekly basis, as well as with colleagues in my building, in order to ensure that I was able to analyze my data from a multiplicity of perspectives.

I began my research at the very start of the semester and continued it for over four and one-half months. During this time, I kept a field log on a daily basis in which I wrote down a detailed account of my observations and collected hardcopies of correspondence and other data sources. I also spoke to both students and parents about my observations and was open to their observations and input. These discussions often helped me to confront any biases that I may have held when making my observations. I collected my data from various sources, which included interviews with parents, students, counselors, assistant principals, and former teachers. Surveys completed by both parents and students and the perusal of student transcripts, attendance records, and discipline referrals also helped support my findings. Throughout the entire study, I reflected on my interventions and “adjusted my sails” when necessary. There were interventions that I had not planned on doing but saw the opportunity and took advantage of it; there were also interventions that I planned to do and decided against doing.

## Timeline

### August 24, 2012

- Revised parent note by adding a section for cell phone numbers and email addresses and postscript reminding parents of open house and parent/teacher conferences.
- Accessed Performance Tracker to determine which class would best suit my study.

### September 6, 2012

- Decided to choose my Block 3 class as my study group.
- Logged background information on Adam.

### September 7, 2012

- Spoke to Adam's emotional support teacher.
- Logged information gleaned from conversation.

### September 11, 2012

- Spoke with Adam's assistant principal about classroom incident.
- Open House
- Logged information about and reaction to the lack of parental participation at Open House.

### September 12, 2012

- Spoke to Adam's emotional support teacher.
- Spoke to Adam's assistant principal
- Spoke to Nadia, Adam's girlfriend
- Logged information gleaned from conversations with Adam's stakeholders.

### September 13, 2012

- Called and spoke to Juan's mom.
- Spoke to Juan's guidance counselor.
- Logged description of Juan's behavior and reactions and information from conversations with mom and guidance counselor.

### September 14, 2012

- Logged description of Juan's behavior in class.

**September 17, 2012**

- Spoke to Adam's emotional support teacher about attending the home visit.

**September 18, 2012**

- Sent follow up email to Adam's emotional support teacher about attending the home visit.
- Received email from emotional support teacher saying I had permission from the Supervisor of Special Ed to attend home visit.

**September 19, 2012**

- Attended Adam's home visit.
- Logged description and response to Adam's home visit.

**September 21, 2012**

- Spoke with Nadia, Adam's girlfriend about Adam's decision to return or not return to school.
- Called and spoke to Calla's mom about Calla skipping my class.
- Logged description of conversation with both Nadia and Calla's mom.

**September 27, 2012**

- Called Juan's mom and left her a message about Juan's inappropriate behavior in class.
- Called Bruce's mom to check on Bruce's health and to offer support.
- Distributed parental permission forms to my study group.
- Logged description of Juan's behavior, conversation with Bruce's mom, and the class's reaction to my study.

**September 28, 2012**

- Logged descriptions and observations about Juan's behavior in class and Frank's absenteeism.
- Distribute student survey to my study group.

**October 1, 2012**

- Distributed flyers/reminder of Parent/Teacher Conferences to my study group.
- Logged information concerning Frank's absenteeism.

**October 2, 2012**

- Parent/Teacher Conferences
- Conducted interviews with parents.
- Logged descriptions and observations of the parent interviews.

**October 3, 2012**

- Distributed survey to study group concerning parent participation in parent/teacher conferences.
- Took a class poll to see who gave their parents the invitation to Parent/Teacher Conferences.
- Logged information gleaned from survey, poll, and from class discussion.
- Logged information concerning Juan's absences from school.

**October 4, 2012**

- Called Juan's mom to see if Juan was ok, when he planned returning to school, and to offer support.
- Logged description of Ariel's dress code violations.

**October 9, 2012**

- Called and spoke to Ariel's mom concerning Ariel's dress code violation.
- Logged information and response to phone call with Ariel's mom.

**October 10, 2012**

- Shared Juan's mom's cell phone number with assistant principal, so he could call her to tell her about Juan's suspension.
- Conferenced with Ariel and an assistant principal concerning her dress code violation.

**October 11, 2012**

- Spoke with assistant principal about doing a home visit to Juan's home.
- Conferenced with Ariel about our discussion the previous day.
- Logged description of Juan's behavior in class, conversation with assistant principal, and conversation with Ariel.

**October 12, 2012**

- Spoke with Peyton about her grades and talking to her mom.
- Called and spoke to Justin's mom about home visit.

- Logged description and reaction to conversations with both Peyton and Juan's mom.

**October 13, 2012**

- Logged description of conversation with Ariel before Saturday detention.
- Logged description and reaction to phone calls to the parent's of Saturday detention students who were not in attendance.

**October 15, 2012**

- Home visit to Juan's home.
- Logged description and reactions to home visit.

**October 17, 2012**

- Logged information about Juan's absence from school and Peyton's response to my suggestion that I call her mom.
- Called and left a message for Peyton's mom, telling her that Peyton is doing well in my class.

**October 22, 2012**

- Logged about Juan's improved behavior in class, Frank's absence from class, Ariel's proper dressing for class, and Peyton's response to my call to her mom.

**October 23, 2012**

- Logged about Juan's improved behavior in class.

**October 27, 2012**

- Conferenced with Frank, his mom, and his assistant principal about his failing grades and truancy issues.
- Called Bruce's mom about his absences and health. Also spoke to her about my study.
- Logged descriptions and observations of conference and phone call.

**November 7, 2012**

- Inputted email addresses for all the parents of my study group.
- Sent my first class email, updating parents on the happenings of class.

**November 8, 2012**

- Received updated parent email addresses from some students.

- Logged conversation with Juan about his mom's lack of email and about his improved behavior.

**November 9, 2012**

- Called and left a voicemail for Calla's mom concerning Calla's absence from school.
- Logged the reaction from Southside students to seeing a play at a university on the Southside of town.

**November 11, 2012**

- Received my one and only parent response to my parent email.

**November 12, 2012**

- Took my classes, along with parents and family members, to see *The Crucible* at a college located on the Southside of town.

**November 13, 2012**

- Called Matthew's home and spoke to his father, concerning Mathew being high during the play the night before.
- Logged description and reaction to the play the night before and Matthew's father's response to my phone call.

**November 15, 2012**

- Attended a staff outreach night for our parents from the Southside of town.
- Logged description, observations, and reactions to Southside outreach night.

**November 27, 2012**

- Interviewed Juan.
- Interviewed Ariel.
- Interviewed Peyton
- Logged description of interviews.

**December 5, 2012**

- Electronically sent a survey to the parents.

**December 7, 2012**

- Received my one and only parent response to electronic survey.

**December 18, 2012**

- Sent home a hardcopy of survey to parents.

**December 21, 2012**

- Sent an email to the parents updating them on the happening in class.
- Received 4 responses to hardcopy of parent survey and no response to my parent email.

**January, 14, 2013**

- Gathered end of semester data on my study group.
- Spoke to assistant principals, other teachers, and guidance counselors about members of my study group.

## **Our Story**

### **A Cast of Characters**

There was no question which class I would choose for my study group. All I had to do was look at my Block 3 class roster, and I knew that this was the group. My Block 3 class included a very socio-economic and academic diverse population of students, but what convinced me were the names of some very high profile, infamous students, students whose names have been echoed in many faculty rooms, guidance offices, and student service centers, a.k.a the discipline offices, through the years.

The first name that jumped of the page was Adam. Adam is the “babydaddy” of one of my former homebound students. I did not meet Adam while I was tutoring his girlfriend, Nadia, or holding his baby boy while she did her school work, but Nadia’s mom, as well as her guidance counselor, did not have many positive things to say about this young man. I had heard stories about him. As a sophomore, Adam was removed from his English 10 for sexually harassing a student teacher. So when I saw his name on my roster, my heart sank and prepared for the worst. Much to my surprise, Adam walked into class on that first day with a smile on his face, telling me that he heard good things about me and looked forward to being in my class. I did not have the heart to tell him that the feelings were not mutual.

Juan walked into class on that first day and said, “Miss, I just want to tell you that I am going to fail this class. I have not passed an English class since I have been at Freedom.” My response was, “Juan, I would be really sad if you failed my class. Together, let’s make sure that does not happen.” Juan smiled and responded by saying, “I hope you are right, Miss.”

Ariel walked into class and the first thing I noticed were her breasts. I did not want to see her breasts, but they were right there, popping out of her too tight shirt. Unfortunately, Ariel and I did not start off on the best footing considering that I had to ask her to tuck her breasts back into her shirt. She did so with a scowl on her face.

### **My Door is Wide Open. Please Come In.**

After choosing my study group, I needed to begin implementing my parental communication and involvement strategies even before I met my students. I did this by revamping the parent note that I send home with my students at the beginning of each semester (Appendix F). In this letter, I introduced myself, reviewed the content of the course, and explained my classroom management plan. In the past, my parent note just asked for the parent and student signatures, confirming that they read the letter and understood my expectations. This semester, I asked the parents to supply their cell phone numbers as well as their email addresses (Appendix G). From past experiences, I knew that the school’s database was not always up to date with current phone numbers, which made

parental communication difficult. The email addresses would come in handy when I sent out information about the happenings in class.

In addition, I included a postscript that reminded parents of the dates for Open House and Parent/Teacher Conferences. On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 15 parents attended open house. This was about the same number of parents who attended in previous years. My postscript did not incite any more interest than usual. My first attempt for communication failed, but I still had Parent Teacher Conferences on Oct 2<sup>nd</sup> to look forward to. The week of Parent/Teacher Conferences, I sent home a bright pink letter reminding and inviting parents to come to the conferences (Appendix I). Unlike many teachers, I reminded the students everyday to remind their parents about the conferences. In the past, I was able to get at least 8 to 10 parents to attend, but this semester, I had only for four parents signed up. Optimistically, I hoped that some parents would drop in.

Not one parent from my Block 3 class signed up for an appointment or attended the conferences. Conversely, the only parents who showed up were parents of my Block 1 class, a class that did not receive my bright pink invitations. To add insult to injury, only four parents showed up the whole night, an all time low. In previous years, I had between 8 – 12 parents attended. Obviously, my attempts to remind and invite parents to come these events were not enough to create interest. Why didn't they want to meet me? Aren't they interested in how their child is doing in class or what they are learning? Maybe I

should have offered refreshments? Maybe I should have offered some wine and cheese?

The day after Parent/Teacher conferences I gave my students a quick survey that asked them why their parent(s)/guardian(s) did not attend the conferences (Appendix C). I have to admit that I was not surprised with the results. As a parent of 2 teenaged sons, I have used some of the same excuses myself for not attending Parent/Teacher Conferences or Open House.

Table 1

*Why?? Student Survey: Why do you suppose your parent(s)/guardian(s) were unable to attend or chose not to attend parent/teacher conferences last night?*

<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Reasons for Not Attending Conferences</b>	<b>Student Comment</b>
7	Child doing well in class and parent did not think the conference was necessary.	
6	Parent(s) were working	
4	Parent wants to give child more freedom and independence.	“My mom hasn’t been to a parent/teacher conference since I was in grade school.”
2	Parent did not want to attend.	“A waste of 2 hours”
2	Students forgot to remind parent of conferences.	
2	Parents were sick.	
1	Parents/guardians offered to go, but student told them that it was not necessary.	“My guardians do not care about conferences. They will go if I want

		them to, but I told them that it didn't matter.”
1	Parent needed to drop off and pick up sibling from work.	
1	Parent was with significant other.	
1	Parent did not have the time.	

The majority of the parents either felt that the conferences were no longer necessary since their child was now in high school, while other parents were at work.

Once they were done filling out the survey, I polled the 24 students who were in attendance. I was interested to see how many of the students actually gave their parents the bright pink reminder/invitation.

Table 2

*Student Poll: How many of you actually gave your parent(s)/guardians the invitation?*

Number of Students	Responses
13	Students did not physically give their parent(s)/guardian(s) the invite but verbally reminded them instead.
4	Students gave the invite to their parent(s)/guardian(s) but discouraged their parents to attend.
2	Students gave their parents the invite.
5	Students did not respond or were absent.

At this point, I realized that using the students as a conduit for communicating

with their parents was not a reliable means of communication. In the future, I would need to utilize other forms of communication.

### **A Sweet Incentive**

During this time period, I sent home the parent permission forms for the parents to sign in order to allow their child to participate in my study. I shared with my students my research question and my reasoning for picking this topic. I also explained to them that their participation has importance and that my study would also be published. When they heard that others would be reading about them, they became more interested in the study. They also enjoyed the idea that they would even be able to assign themselves new names. The students who returned a signed permission form, even if their parents did not allow me to use their data in my study, would receive a treat. Darryl suggested that I make them brownies. Riley wanted to know more about the study; whereas, Peyton did not like the idea that I would be talking to her parents. When I asked her why, she said that she is always afraid that she will get in trouble at home when a teacher calls home. Did I blame her? Not at all, the majority of the phone calls that I make are to inform parents that their child is either failing my class or misbehaving.

At that moment, I had a flashback to my own school days. I remember one particular open house in grade school. I could not eat dinner that night because I was afraid that, instead of telling my parents what a conscientious, nice

student I was, Miss Urban would tell my parents that Brenda and I were fooling around while we were clapping out the erasers and that I would be grounded the next day.

The next day only two students returned their permission forms. It was time to follow up on my promise of treats. That night, I put together 30 goody bags filled with all things that were chocolate or consisted of lots of sugar and dye. The next day, 1 more student returned the form. With a flourish and big thank you, I handed out the goody bags to the 3 students who returned the form much to the disappointment of the other students. The following day more than half the students returned their forms. Although I was thrilled that the students were finally returning the permission forms, I was disappointed to see that there were a couple of students whose parents did not grant me permission to use their child's data in my study. I should have expected this, but I was still shocked and disappointed. Why wouldn't they want to be a part of my study? Don't they understand how important it is? After class, I asked one of the students why his mom did not grant me permission to use his data in my study. He responded by saying that his mom is busy and didn't need another thing to do. This was the same response that Bruce's mom gave me. When I called her to check up on her son, who had been sick and out of school for a few days, I gathered the courage before we hung up to ask her why she did not grant permission for Bruce to participate in the study. She responded, "I'm busy and don't need another thing

to do.” As a busy woman myself, I understood this. When I explained to her that the onus of the work would be on me, she said, “Ok, I give you permission if it is that important to you.” At that point, my advisor’s words came back to haunt me: “Sandi, you are working with a variable that you cannot control, the parents.”

**From the Mouths of Teenagers**

In order to get a sense of how my students felt about parent/teacher collaboration and communication, I gave them a survey, asking for their perspective (Appendix A). The 18 students in attendance needed to respond with A for agree or D for disagree. For a few of the questions, I asked them to explain their responses.

Table 3

*Student Survey on Parent/Teacher Communication*

Statement	Number of Students Who <b>Agreed</b>	Number of Students Who <b>Disagreed</b>	Student Comments
#1. I really dislike when my teachers contact my parents.	10	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Because it could be for something bad.”</li> <li>• “I don’t like when they know stuff that I don’t tell them.”</li> <li>• “Because it makes you feel more responsible. It’s my education, and I should be able to do</li> </ul>

			<p>what I have to do on my own. “</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I feel like if it’s bad, she [the teacher] should talk to me.</li> <li>• “I get in trouble.”</li> <li>• “Because I think I should do it and learn without my mom know what I am doing.”</li> <li>• “It is usually for a bad reason.”</li> <li>• “It’s weird.”</li> <li>• My mom then compares me to my sister’s accomplishments.”</li> </ul>
#2. My parents welcome phone calls/emails from my teachers.	12	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “They trust in me to let them know news and updates.”</li> <li>• “Because she’s not the one in school and then I hear her yell at me if I’m doing bad but trying my best to get good grades.”</li> <li>• “It could be bad.”</li> </ul>
#3. I don’t mind when my teachers contact my parents/guardians.	10	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Teachers normally do not call for good reasons.”</li> <li>• “I feel like if the teacher has a problem, the student should be talked to not the parents (unless</li> </ul>

			<p>absolutely needed).”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “My mom assumes I got in trouble.”</li> <li>• “They trust in me letting them know news and updates.”</li> <li>• “It bothers me.”</li> <li>• “It’s my job to do good in school.”</li> </ul>
#4. When a teacher calls home, it is usually because I am not doing well in school or am misbehaving.	12	6	
#5. My parents’ motto is: “If you get trouble at school, you will be in more trouble when you get home.”	15	3	
#6. My parents have no influence over my grades or behavior.	6	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I am and try to be very independent. I think teachers greatly affect grades/behavior.”</li> <li>• “My parents worry about my grades, but I’m the one doing it and I am the one who controls me.”</li> <li>• “I get the same grades I always get. They aren’t the best, but they are good to me, and my grades don’t really matter to me.”</li> <li>• “My parents ask and worry about that stuff, but I do it all on my own.”</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Because they want me to learn a lot and want me to do well.”</li> </ul>
#7. My education is my responsibility not the responsibility of my parents/teachers.	15	3	
#8. I appreciate the support of both my parents and teachers.	15	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I get the support, but I don’t feel like teachers or parents should go out of their way for me.”</li> <li>• “Support isn’t something I need. If I want something or to do something then I will achieve it.”</li> </ul>
#9. My parents are too busy to attend parent/teacher conferences.	12	6	
#10. My parents think that parent/teacher conferences are unnecessary now that I am in high school.	8	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Because when I was in middle school, they told my mom that conferences were for people doing bad, like my brother.”</li> <li>• “We are nearly adults as I stated, and parents don’t really need to be involved in something that is now my responsibility.”</li> <li>• “I am independent.”</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “IDK”</li> <li>• “They think it’s my responsibility to show them my grades.”</li> <li>• “I’m old enough to take responsibility for myself.”</li> <li>• “I’m independent. I have a job and my own personal life.”</li> <li>• “I should be responsible for myself.”</li> </ul>
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As I looked at these responses, two themes stood out. The first theme I noticed was that there was a fear of teacher/parental communication. Students associated teacher/parental communication with being in trouble at school and therefore receiving consequences at home. Did I blame them for feeling this way? No, of course not. It is true that teachers normally contact parents for negative behaviors. Being a parent of 2 teenage sons, who has received numerous notes, calls, and emails from teachers, only one teacher ever called me to tell me that I had a great kid. As a teacher, I know that I too communicated with parents predominantly when there was inappropriate behavior or a fear of academic failure. Throughout my study, I did make some positive phone calls home, but my communication with parents was still about concerns and issues surrounding their son/daughter. Secondly, some of the students acknowledge that they were now

high school students and needed start taking ownership for their education. They no longer saw the need for parent/teacher communication.

### **Conversing with Parents**

Although none of my students' parents from my study group, Block 3, attended Parent/Teacher Conferences, six parents of my Block 1 class did attend, and since I had many open slots of time, I was able to have some meaningful conversation with all of them. Often times, the parents who attend the conferences are not really the parents who the teachers need to see. Their children are usually doing well academically and behaviorally. This would lead one to believe that there is correlation between student success and parental involvement. This Parent/Teacher Conference was no different. These parents had children who were succeeding in my class. Once we finished talking about their child, I told them about my study and asked them if I could ask them a few questions. All of them gave me their verbal consent.

My first conversation was with Brianna's parents. I asked them why they attended the conference. It was Brianna's dad who did most of the talking. He said that they wanted their daughter to know that her education was important and to take her education seriously. "If we go to parent/teacher conferences, it shows her that we take her education seriously too. We are asking her to put effort into her education, so we want her to see us taking the effort and the time to talk to her teachers." Brianna's dad continued by telling me that his daughter usually began

the semester off strong but then started to “slack” as the semester progressed.

Because of this, they wanted to me to feel comfortable calling them at any time.

The second question I asked them had to do with their own parents and their involvement in their children’s education. Brianna’s dad said that he was raised, along with his 3 brothers, by a single mom who worked two jobs in an inner city. His mom did not have the time to attend open houses or parent/teacher conferences, but he always knew that his education was important to her. He recalled only once, when he was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, his mom going to his high school. He had been skipping school, and the principal and his counselor called his mom and him in for a meeting. When his mom heard that he was not going to school, she “started smacking” him in front of everyone in the room. From that moment on, he went to school and even received an award at the end of the school year for the most improved student.

The second conversation was with Daniel’s dad. Daniel, like Brianna, was doing well in my class, so after we spoke about Daniel, I asked Daniel’s dad if he had the time to answer some questions. He agreed. I asked him why he was here at the conference while so many other parents were not. His answer surprised me, “I want to teach my son through my actions not my words.” He explained that he could tell his son that his education was important, but by going to parent/teacher conferences after a long day of work, he tried to showed his son that he too thought his education was important. He also apologized that his wife was unable

to attend as well, but reminded me that she attended Open House the month before.

When I asked him about his own parents and their views on education, he admitted, seeming embarrassed, that he was raised in the projects. Neither one of his parents was educated, but they taught him to work hard. They believed that their children would succeed if they had a strong work ethic. They did believe that an education led to success but so did hard work. I asked him if his parents attended school events, and he replied with no. “They did not understand the workings of the school, so they stayed away.” Before we said our good byes and I thanked him for his time, he made sure to tell me that he no longer lives in the projects but owns his own home in the suburbs of town.

These conversations surprised me on different levels. I realized that these parents did not come to the conference to meet me. It was not about me. It was all about their child. These parents wanted to show their child that their education was important. By attending school events, this was one of their ways of showing this. Given that their students are considered good students, their parent’s involvement appeared to be working. On the other hand, both families admitted that their own parents did not attend school events, but they succeeded anyway. This supports Ruby Payne’s (2006) assertion that parents do not need to be physically present in a school building to support a child in his/her education (p.1).

**Student Snapshots**

Although I tried to communicate with all the parents of my study group, I had the opportunity to use communication and involvement strategies with the parents of some students more than others. These are their stories.

**Adam**

I knew so much about Adam from his “babymama,” Nadia, Nadia’s mom, and former teachers to know that he was a handful. Unfortunately, this young man was just diagnosed this year with behavioral and emotional disabilities. He is 17 years old! Why didn’t anyone catch this sooner? Thankfully, he had an emotional support teacher who just began working with him and would be available to both of us during the school day. Since I knew his girlfriend as a homebound student and held his baby boy during her instruction, Adam entered my classroom on the first day of school with a smile on his face. He told me that it was finally nice to meet me since Nadia has told him nice things about me. Was I being too optimistic to think that Adam and I would succeed as student and teacher for the next 18 weeks? At that moment, my anxiety level dropped, and I smiled back at him and welcomed him to class.

Adam’s caseworker informed me that since he was just recently evaluated there was no formal IEP (Individual Education Plan) available for him yet. At a recent meeting with his counselor and assistant principal, Adam told them that he liked my class and loved me as a teacher. Unfortunately, he is “spiraling” out of

control in other classes. I told her that one issue I had with Adam is that he asks to use the lavatory but then disappears from class for 20 -30 minutes at a time. She admitted that he often touched base with her during that time. Although I did not mind this at all, I told Adam the next day in class that I needed to know the truth of where he was going when he left my classroom. He agreed to do so. Another issue with Adam concerned his behavior during class. He was outspoken and frequently sought the attention of his classmates during class. Conversely, he allowed me to rein him without any consequence. He remained respectful and compliant.

Adam's first incident of inappropriate behavior in my classroom occurred when I had taken a sick day from school. According to the substitute teacher, Adam "rubbed her leg and dropped the F-bomb." She wrote a referral about the incident, and the assistant principal suspended him from school for two days. When I spoke to the assistant principal on my return to school, he told me that the reason Adam was suspended was due in part to his behavior toward the substitute teacher but also in part for him "taking too many liberties in the building" as well. According to the assistant principal, Adam "needs to know that it will not be tolerated."

Nadia came to speak to me about the incident. Of course, Adam's story does not match that of the substitute teacher's story. Adam decided that he wanted to drop out of school, and his mother has agreed with his decision since

she was “tired of getting phone calls from the school about his behavior.” Nadia is worried that he is going to follow through with this threat. After his two day suspension period, Adam did not return to school. Now I was worried that he would not return as well. When I spoke to his emotional support teacher, she told me that she and the Supervisor of Special Education for the district were planning a home visit to Adam’s home to speak with both Adam and his mother. I asked her if I could join them. She told me that she would ask and that she would get back to me. She received approval for me to attend the home visit. In her email response, she wrote, “I’m just glad you can come and have another caring adult be there to offer support and show we want him back.” I was thrilled to be able to attend my first home visit, but I was nervous as well.

As I pulled up to Adam’s home on the Southside of town, my anxiety level had risen, and I was feeling a bit queasy. All these questions whirled in my head: Would they welcome me into their home? Would I be expected to speak? What if I said the wrong things? What if no other staff member had arrived yet? As I walked up to the door, I was relieved to see that the supervisor for special ed and Adam’s emotional support teacher were already seated in the dining room. Adam’s brother, a heavily tattooed 20 something young man, answered the door, invited me in, and found me a chair to sit on. The brother did not sit down and join the discussion but paced in and out through the dining area, readying himself to leave the house. Before he left, he said to Adam, “You listen to what they are

saying and get your education.” He spoke with authority. This was the first and only time during the visit that Adam did not respond with a quick, smart, cocky response to something someone had said.

The visit was unannounced, so Adam and his mom were eating their dinner when we arrived. The supervisor for special ed did most of the initial talking, offering Adam several different options and alternatives in lieu of quitting school. If he did not want to return to school, there were alternative schooling opportunities available to him. If he wanted to return to school, he could possibly only be in school for half the day, get some credits and then leave to go to work. Although Adam would like to be a vet or a doctor in the future, he was happy to be working full time at a local chain restaurant. I explained to him that working at the restaurant making minimum wage would not allow him to feed, clothe, or put a roof over his baby boy’s head. His emotional support teacher added that he would need some training or education to become a vet or doctor. Adam’s mom informed us that Adam did not know how to think ahead and that he believed that he would live at home with her for as long as he needed to.

The conversation took a circuitous route for 45 minutes, but unfortunately there was no resolution in the end. Adam refused to make a decision about his education at that time but promised to contact the school with his decision by the end of the week. On Friday, Nadia stopped by my classroom to say hello. I asked her if Adam made a decision yet, she said no. She asked me if I met Adam’s

brother. When I told her that I had, she told me that he was 30 years old and still lived at home. She was worried that Adam would end up doing the same thing. The following week she informed me that Adam was officially quitting school and planned to work at the restaurant full time. When I asked his emotional support teacher about his decision, she informed me that although the mother did not approve of his decision, she was more concerned about there being conflict between the brothers in her home. End of story. Adam did not return to school.

### **Juan**

**Ms. Chabot:** Hello class! Let's get started. Please write down the word of the day and take a look at today's grammar lesson. Juan, please put your phone away and start your work.

**Juan:** *(looks at Ms. Chabot and then back to his phone)*

**Ms. Chabot:** *(a few minutes later)* Juan, please put your phone away. Tell whomever you are texting that you are busy getting an education and will be in touch soon.

**Juan:** *(does not bother looking at Ms. Chabot and continues to text.)*

**Ms. Chabot:** *(beginning to get frustrated)* Juan, if I have to ask you one more time to put your cell phone away, you will need to put your phone in my drawer until after class.

**Juan:** *(looking up with a smirk on his face)* Just try taking my phone away from me and my mom will come after you.

**Ms. Chabot:** I am sure your mom would want you to pay attention in class too.

**Juan:** *(mumbles something unintelligible)*

**Ms. Chabot:** *(not wanting to waste anymore class time arguing with Juan turns*

*her attention to the rest of the class)*

**Ms. Chabot:** *(after giving the class instructions, she quietly walks over to Juan)*  
Please see me after class, so we can chat about this.

*The bell rings, signaling the end of class. Juan stands up, puts his backpack on his back, and walks out the door.*

**Ms. Chabot:** *(sighs and shakes her head)*

This was the same student who informed me that he had yet to pass an English class since he started high school. It is no wonder. Between being distracted by his cell phone and being defiant, his focus was not on learning. Due to his behavior, I needed to call home and talk to a parent. From what he said during our interaction, I had the impression that his mom was the one I needed to speak to. Truth be told, I was more than a little anxious talking to a woman who would possibly “come after me.” I ran into two obstacles: 1. Finding a quiet spot in the building with a phone, 2. Finding a current phone number. I easily overcame both stumbling blocks. Thankfully, a colleague’s classroom was unoccupied, so I was able to use his phone and have privacy as well. Although the phone number in the schools database was “no longer in service,” I had a current phone number for Juan’s mom since I asked the parents to supply me with this information through my parent note at the beginning of the semester.

**Juan’s Mom:** Hello

**Ms. Chabot:** (taking a deep breath) Hi, is this Ms Ramos ?

**Juan’s Mom:** Yes.

**Ms. Chabot:** Hi Ms Ramos, this is Ms. Chabot calling from the high school. I Am Juan's English teacher. How are you today? *(trying to sound Friendly rolling her eyes at herself, knowing that her question sounded insincere and that she was possibly ruining someone's day with bad news about her child)*

**Juan's Mom:** *(succinctly)* Fine.

**Ms. Chabot:** Ummm, I was wondering if you could help me with something concerning Juan. There was an incident today in class with Juan and his cell phone. He is much more interested in texting during class than paying attention during class. *(knowing that she has begun to ramble)* I needed ask him several times to day to put the phone away, and he refused to do so. Finally, I asked him to stay after class to talk about this situation and he left class without speaking me.

**Juan's Mom:** *(no comment)*

**Ms. Chabot:** So uh.... I was wondering if you could talk to him about it? He told me that he has yet to pass an English class in high school, so I truly want Juan to succeed in my class, but his phone is going to get in the way.

**Juan's Mom:** Ok.

**Ms. Chabot:** Well, thank you for your time.

**Juan's Mom:** Sure. *(click)*

Although Juan's mom was not very receptive to my call, she did agree to talk to Juan about his cell phone usage during class. There was also the chance that Juan's mom's English was not proficient and felt embarrassed about responding to me. My guess was that she receives many calls from the school on a regular basis. If she was unhappy with my call, he, I did not blame her. What parent is happy hearing that his/her son or daughter is misbehaving in class? It

was my hope that in the future I would be able to redeem myself by calling her with good news about her son.

The following day, Juan walked into class, wearing earbuds and listening to music on his ipod, a different piece of technology from yesterday. Was I now going to have to take issue with his ipod instead of his phone? As I started class, I walked over to Juan and whispered to him saying, “Juan, I really don’t want to have another incident with you and your technology today. Please take out your earbuds, ok? Let’s get along today.” Much to my surprise, he removed the earbuds and did not make a comment. Realizing the war was only beginning, I was happy to win one battle.

Unfortunately, two weeks later, there was another incident with Juan and his cell phone. Again, he completely ignored my requests for him to put his phone away. When I finally asked him to put his phone in my desk drawer until the end of class, he stood up, put on his backpack, and left the room. I made another phone call home to his mom, and left a voicemail message for her explaining what happened and informing her that I would need to write a referral and send it to his assistant principal. After school, I visited with Juan’s guidance counselor, hoping that she could give me some insight into this student. She told me that since she was new to the high school, she had worked with Juan in middle school. At the time, he had a “gifted” IEP and was in the A track; therefore, she was shocked when she realized that he was now in retention classes for failing

classes. She promised me that she would meet with him soon and see what is going on with him.

Unfortunately, Juan disappeared from school the next day and did not return for over a week. After a few days, I called his mom to see if everything was ok and ask her when Juan would be returning to school. She informed me that Juan's sister was very ill and might die. She hoped that Juan would return to school in the near future. I offered her sympathy and told her that I would be happy to send work home for Juan to complete, so he would not be too far behind in his class work. She thanked me, said goodbye, and hung up. Although Juan's mom was still a woman of few words, she was a little more forthcoming in talking to me. I sensed appreciation in her voice.

### ***Home visit #2.***

The day Juan returned to school there was an incident on the way home on the school bus, and he ended up getting suspended again. It was time to do a home visit. The assistant principal agreed to join me during my Block 4 prep time, but at the last minute he was unable to do so. I was faced with a decision. Do I venture to the Southside of town by myself, or do I postpone the visit for another day? I decided to "seize the day" and make the visit alone, making sure that colleagues knew where I was going. If I did not return for the faculty meeting, they were to send out a search party for me. Although I was joking

about the search party, I took comfort in knowing that others knew where I was heading and whom I was visiting.

As I pulled up to his mother's apartment, the second floor of an old house, Juan's mom was sitting on a porch, talking on the phone. I was very nervous. There were a number of men on the street, looking at me. Would my car still be there when I finished with the visit? How would Juan's mom respond to me? I took a deep breath, said a prayer, and got out of my car. As I walked up the rickety, wooden steps leading to the upstairs porch and apartment, Juan's mom ended her phone conversation. She said hello and welcomed me into her home, and led me to sit on the couch in their living room. When I saw Juan, I began to relax just a bit. Then Juan's sister, not the sister who was ill, appeared in the room, and I recognized her as a former student. She was happy to see me and gave me a hug. I was happy to hear that she had graduated from high school and was now attending the community college.

Realizing that I was the one who asked for this visit, I needed to be the one to start the conversation. Seeing his sister's her graduation picture hanging on the living room wall, I asked Juan if he wanted to see his own graduation picture hanging on that wall. He just laughed and shook his head. The visit had begun. Still very laconic, Juan's mom voiced her frustration with Juan to the point of giving up on him; she was also unhappy with the school and district as well. No wonder she was not very responsive to me during our phone conversations; she

was tired of her son's behavior and had received many phone calls in the past 11 years from teachers and administrators, the majority of these calls regarding Juan's inappropriate behavior and failing grades.

After she voiced her frustrations, Juan's mom added that she would support me in whatever interventions were needed to help Juan behave and succeed in my class. At that moment, I knew that I had won her over and that we could proceed forward as a united front in order to help Juan succeed.

Juan's sister spoke up, saying that Juan "had the smarts but his behavior gets in the way." Agreeing with his sister, I saw this as a good segue into the Juan's first major behavior issue in my class, his cell phone use during class. I explained to Juan's mom my policy about cell phones in my classroom. If I have to ask a student more than once to put his/her cell phone away, I would then ask the student to put the phone in the top drawer of my desk until the end of class. Juan's mom nodded her head and said that I had her permission to do whatever I needed to do with Juan's phone, especially if it is distracting him from his education. Both Juan and I were surprised by his mother's support. A couple weeks prior to this visit, Juan publicly announced to me and the entire class that his mom would not approve of me taking his phone away from him. Juan reminded her of an incident in middle school when she had gone to school to confront an assistant principal about a cell phone issue. In a clipped voice, the same voice I had heard on the phone, Juan's mom told him that incident was a

completely different issue and had nothing to do with the problem at hand. This was a major victory for all involved. Juan's mom and I were on the same page, a united front, and Juan now saw this.

For the rest of the visit, Juan and I went over the work he needed to complete before returning to school. Before I left, I reminded him that I wanted him to succeed in my class, but I needed his help. Shaking her hand, I thanked Juan's mom for allowing me to visit. She thanked me in return. I then hugged Juan's sister and left the home. I returned to school within an hour of leaving it, safe and sound and feeling quite proud of myself.

Friere (1970) discussed the importance of creating a relationship between the "oppressed" and the "oppressor" in terms of a mental transformation.

Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture. If what characterizes the oppressed is their subordination to the consciousness of the master, as Hegel affirms, true solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the object reality which has made these 'beings for another.'" (p.49)

I had left my comfort zone, the school building, and had gained the "solidarity" of a parent, who did not attend open house or parent/teachers conferences and who was initially reluctant to give me her support or trust. In the end, both of us were "liberated." I realized that I did not have to conform to the district's expectations of me as a teacher, and Juan's mom was willing to support and trust me with her son's education.

During my annual post-observation meeting with an assistant principal, the assistant principal was shocked to realize that I had become a Freierian “radical.” One of the criteria on the evaluation has to do with parent/teacher communication. For this category, she had given me a “satisfactory.” As she quickly discussed the category and planned to move on to the next category, I stopped her and told her about my study and my improved communication and involvement strategies with parents. She apologized to me for not realizing this and told me, that unless it is obvious to the administrators that a teacher does not regularly communicate with parents, the standard grade for this section is “satisfactory.” Since I was happy with my overall evaluation, I did not argue the score she had given me. To my surprise, she changed my score to “excellent” and reprinted a copy of the evaluation for me.

Juan returned to school a few days later with all of his work completed. He was boisterous as usual and even dropped a couple of “f-bombs,” but his cell phone usage was at an all time low. In addition, he took my redirection without argument, apologizing for his behavior. This was definitely progress.

### **Ariel**

#### **Like Mother Like Daughter**

Ariel likes to show off her breasts on a regular basis. In the past, I have tried to keep it light when asking her to cover them up. Her usual responses have been respectful and her actions compliant. As the weeks progressed her outfits

became more and more revealing. Finally, she snapped the day I asked her to zip up her tight fitting “hoodie.” The following is the posting I made on eschool, documenting the incident:

Ariel wears clothing to class that displays her breasts and cleavage. On multiple occasions, I have asked her to pull her top up to better cover her chest. Last week, she wore a small, white tank top in which I asked her to pull down over her navel area and to pull up to cover her breasts. Unfortunately, there was not enough material to do both. Today, she is wearing a zip front sweatshirt, which was only partially zipped up. I asked her to zip up her sweatshirt, but she refused to do so. She said, “Why don’t you zip it up for me?” At this point, I told her to meet me in the hallway. I tried to explain to her that the way she dressed was inappropriate for 3<sup>rd</sup> Block English class. If I noticed so did the boys. She responded that she had “big tits.” I told her that I did too but that I did not show them off at school because it wasn’t the place to do so. She informed me that she was 16 and that I was older. Again, I asked her to zip up the sweatshirt. She zipped it up but said that the zipper rubbed her skin and was uncomfortable. I offered her a band-aid. She said that she would start wearing a garbage bag to class. I said that was fine as long as her breasts were covered. (eschool)

During my prep, I called her mom. I was not looking forward to talking to her mom because, like Juan, Ariel painted a picture of her mother as someone not to be reckoned with. She enjoyed telling stories to her classmates about how her mom enjoyed screaming at teachers and administrators. Gulp! My fear was that her mom would see my concerns over Ariel’s clothes as a personal attack on her mothering skills. Surprisingly, Ariel’s mom agreed with me that her daughter often wore clothes that did not cover her chest, and that she too has tried to get Ariel to wear appropriate clothing to school. She admitted that Ariel had put on

some weight in the past year and this made her clothes even smaller and tighter. Realizing that she might be willing to support me, I began to relax.

Just when I thought that Ariel's mom and I were on the same page, she began telling me about past incidents concerning Ariel and the dress code. She laughed as she remembered the office asking her to bring another set of clothes because the clothes that Ariel was wearing were too revealing. She also pointed out that she has seen girls walking into school with their "ass cheeks hanging out." She asked, "Why doesn't the assistant principals call their parents?" I told her that my concern was with her daughter and that I was not privy to the assistant principals' phone calls home.

The conversation took one more turn. Ariel's mom explained to me that she and Ariel were very close and that Ariel sometimes had anxiety issues when Ariel's mom was out of town. Ariel feared that her mother would be harmed or die. Not knowing how to respond, I told her mom that it was good to know and thanked her for her time and support. When I hung up the phone, I was happy that the conversation had ended, but it left me with some questions. Did the mother see short skirts/shorts as offensive but not cleavage? Why did Ariel fear her mother coming into harms way? Who stayed with Ariel when her mom was out of town? Was there a dad in the picture? Although I now had some insight into Ariel's family background, it was time to talk to Ariel's guidance counselor.

According to Ariel's guidance counselor, Ariel's dad committed suicide when she was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Although she was not close to her father and only saw him twice a year, the incident has left her shaken. To make matters worse, Ariel's counselor told me not to expect Ariel's dress to change. Ariel's mom dresses just like her daughter.

The counselor was correct. The following day, Ariel showed up to class wearing a see through shirt with a very small white tank top underneath. The tank top did not cover neither her either her breasts nor her mid drift. I asked her to meet me in the hallway and called our one female assistant principal to come to my room. The conference in the hallway did not go very well and there did not seem to be any resolution. Apparently, this assistant principal and Ariel had a history, which was not a happy one. Ariel, who was already on the defense, became even more upset and angry when she saw the assistant principal come down the hallway. The assistant principal was professional as she dealt with Ariel but in the end, Ariel went back in the classroom, still wearing barely anything. The assistant principal just shook her head and told me that she dealt with similar issues with Ariel and Ariel's mom in middle school and did not expect much to change. As she walked away, I wondered why I even bothered. How can I support and uphold our dress code when the powers that be do nothing to support it themselves? Not only was I not going to get the support that I needed from the

administration, but I also realized that I was probably not going to get support from Ariel's mom as well.

### **A Surprising Conversation**

The day after the incident in the hallway and the assistant principal, Ariel asked me if she could talk to me. I closed the classroom door for privacy and sat down next to Ariel. I cautiously asked her what was on her mind. She began by telling me that I offended her and that during our conversation from the day before, I implied that she was a "whore." I physically jumped back in my seat. I said, "Ariel, I can honestly say that word never came to my head while dealing with you. Actually, I don't think that I have ever looked at any of my female students and thought, 'That girl is a whore!'" Me saying the word "whore" made her smile.

She shared with me that she did not want me to "hate" her. In previous years, her female teachers "hated" her. I explained to her that I doubted that they hated her and that I did not hate her now. Just because we disagreed on what she wore did not mean that I hated her. I told her that she is a beautiful, intelligent young lady, but other people did not notice this because "her boobs" got in the way. At this, we both laughed. I gave her a hug and sent her to her next class.

The following Saturday as I made my way across the parking lot to the school building and Saturday morning detention, I heard my name being called. I turned around to see Ariel waving from the driver's side of an SUV. She told me

that she was dropping her friend off to serve detention and she saw me and wanted to say hello. I told her that she “made my day,” and I was glad that she was behaving at school and did not have to serve detention as well.

### **Frank**

#### **An Inconvenient Truth**

Frank transferred to our school a few weeks into the semester. He was a quiet young man, who was well behaved and who did not stand out in my very boisterous study group. Unfortunately, he did not attend school regularly enough to become a behavior problem in class. In the first month he attended school, he was absent for ten days. I did what I was notoriously guilty of doing prior to my research. I put off calling home to share my concerns with his family. After some soul searching, I realized the ugly truth about my practice as a teacher. If a student’s behavior did not disrupt my class, I did not involve the parents. Frank’s behavior was hindering his own education but was not getting in the way of my everyday life as a teacher. He was not inconveniencing me in any way or disrupting the education of his classmates, so I allowed him to fall through the cracks.

Fortunately, a fellow teacher, Frank’s Chemistry teacher, asked to be involved in his reinstatement meeting for students returning from suspension. Apparently, when he was present in her class, he was misbehaving and disrespectful, thus his suspension from school. In an attempt to redeem myself, I

asked the assistant principal if I could attend as well in order to talk to his mom about his attendance issue. He gladly permitted me and asked the secretary to get coverage for my class the day of the conference.

**Redemption? Maybe.**

We waited for twenty minutes for Frank and his mom to appear before the assistant principal sent both the chemistry teacher and me back to our classes. As I walked into my classroom, the phone rang. Frank and his mom showed up, and I needed to return to the principals' suite. This was our second attempt to meet with Frank's mom. The first time she did not show up, so we were all anxious to talk to her now that we physically had her in the building.

Mom was a Latina woman, who was dressed in her work clothes and was upset that she had to leave her job to come to this meeting. She did not know about the nine o'clock meeting until eight am and had to scramble to leave work, pick up Frank from home, and drive to the school. I was not sure if her frustration was with the school, Frank, or both. I thought she was probably frustrated with everyone involved. The reason that she has not received any phone calls from the school and did not know about the meeting was due to the fact that the school did not have the correct phone number. The only number in the school's database belonged to Frank's grandmother, not his mother. She gladly gave us her cell number for future use.

Since I did not consider myself a worthy or active participant in Frank's education, I let the assistant principal and chemistry teacher lead the discussion. The chemistry teacher was frustrated with Frank's antics in her class and with not being able to get in touch with his mother. I did not allow myself to feel any vindication over the knowledge that, even if I had tried to contact mom, I would not have been able to do so. Frank's mom was shocked to hear that Frank was failing both of our classes. He was almost eighteen years old and still considered a tenth grader. She worked two jobs and was rarely home. She looked at Frank and said, "Maybe you need to go live with your aunt?"

According to Frank's mom, Frank believes that our classes are too difficult for him. When I told her that I thought that he was capable of passing my class, but with every absence, he got further behind in his work, she informed us that he suffered from migraines and this was the reason he missed so much school. That being said, I informed her that I was available every day after school to help Frank catch up on his work. Frank told me that he worked everyday after school and could not stay after school for the extra help. Feeling defeated, I expressed my sincere hope that he would make a concerted effort to get to school in the future.

From that point on, Frank came to school on a regular basis. He did not make up any of his missed assignments or make arrangements to take meet after school for extra help. He worked after school and did not have time for that, but he was

in class everyday. The mantra “Progress not perfection,” taken from 12 step recovery programs, came to mind.

### **Taking the Show on the Road**

#### **A Night at the Theater**

On the Southside of town, there is a university whose theater department was performing Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*. When I saw the ad for the performance, I was thrilled since we were in the midst of reading the play in class. Before I called the box office, I wanted to see if my students would be interested in attending the performance. They were all eager to see the play until they realized that the performances were at night or on the weekend, and they would not be missing any time at school. When I offered extra credit to those students who attended, I received an overwhelming response to attend the play.

As an English teacher, I was excited to share a theater experience with my students. Some of my students admitted that they never saw a play on stage. This only added to my excitement. It was the enthusiasm of my Southside students that brought out the researcher inside of me. We were going on a field trip to their side of town, their stomping ground, and their home. My Southside students were the first to sign up and pay for their tickets. There would be no bussing to the theater, so my students needed to find transportation there. My Southside students spoke among themselves about walking over to the theater together. In contrast, my “Township” students were not really sure how to get there and

worried about getting lost. When I mentioned us meeting for ice cream before the show, my Southside students made suggestions and knew which eateries would still be open at that time of night and which ones would not be open. They were proud of where they came from, despite the fact that it was considered the poorer side of town.

In addition, many of my students asked if family and friends could attend as well. I was thrilled to know that I was going to meet moms, dads, aunts, cousins, brothers, sisters, girlfriends, and boyfriends. I was leaving the school building, involving myself in a community event, and mingling with my student's families. Could this opportunity get any better? Yes. The box office informed us that the night we chose to attend was also the night they served chicken wings and mozzarella sticks after the performance. We were going to have a wonderful night.

The night of the performance forty-eight students, family members, and friends met in the lobby of the theater. Brian's dad had come straight from work and looked awkward as I welcomed him and handed him his ticket. Chelsea's aunt and cousin offered to help me keep everyone under control during the performance. I handed out the tickets to everyone, and making sure that everyone was accountable and entering the theater, I entered the theater last. The first thing I noticed was the looks on my students' faces. They ranged from fear, to anger, to shame. I asked them what was wrong. From behind me, a middle-aged woman

began to speak. She was not speaking to me but to my students. In a condescending tone, she told them that she was the director of the play and she expected them to respect the performers on stage. She also told them that if she saw them using their cell phones, she would find them during intermission and “confiscate” the phone until the end of the performance. When she was finished, I told her that this was a great group of kids who were excited to be here for the performance and that I did not foresee any problems. Her response was a clipped, “I hope so.” At that, she turned her back on us and found a seat across the aisle from us.

Before I sat down, I asked a group of students seated nearby what happened before I entered the theater. They told me that there was some confusion about where to sit. Forgetting that this was some students’ first time to a play, I had failed to point out to them that this theater was not like a movie theater; they could not sit wherever they pleased. According to the students, the ushers were helpful and polite, but the director hollered at them for trying to sit elsewhere. I was angry and insulted. I was not angry and insulted for myself but for my students. How dare this woman treat them as though they did not belong here? My students did not deserve this. They paid for their tickets just like any of the college students and community members in attendance. Even with us there, the theater was not even one-third the way filled. We were their audience, and this is how we were being treated?

I was reminded of Freire's (1970) discussion on the misconceptions that the "oppressor" has about the "oppressed." He wrote:

For them, having more is an unalienable right, a right they acquired through their own 'effort,' with their 'courage to take risks.' If others do not have more, it is because they are incompetent and lazy, and worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude toward the 'generous gestures' of the dominant class. Precisely because they are 'ungrateful' and 'envious' the oppressed are regarded as potential enemies who must be watched." (p. 59)

I wondered if this group of students were from one of the local private schools, would the director have treated my students with more respect? It saddened me that this representative of higher education possibly reinforced some of the preconceived notions that many of my students already had about themselves, that they were not college material.

To add insult to injury, it was the worst performance of any play that I had ever seen. Our own theater department's production of *The Crucible* five years prior was a hundred times better than this college performance. The sad part was that some of my students thought the performance was good since they did not have any other play to compare it to, while other students were turned off by the performance and swore they would never see another play. The following day, I apologized to my students for how rudely they were treated by the director and then apologized to them for the lousy performance. I made it clear to them that their behavior was wonderful and they deserved better than what they received.

One student added that “even the mozzarella sticks and chicken wings” were not very good. This made us all laugh.

In order to use this experience as a learning opportunity as well as confidence builder, I had my students write reviews of the performance. Attaching my own cover letter in which I clearly described the director’s rude behavior toward us, I sent a sampling of the reviews to the chairman of the university’s theater department.

### **Leaving the “Township”**

When I received an email from my principal on a Sunday afternoon inviting the staff to join him for a community outreach on the Southside of town, I did not take the time to think about it and responded with a big “Yes!” (Appendix D). This event gave me another opportunity to meet parents whom I normally would not meet at open house or parent/teacher conferences. This was a first in my ten years as a teacher in this district, and I was thrilled that the principal put forth the effort to pull this together.

Despite his good intentions, there were a few glitches in his planning. First of all, he sent the staff the email inviting the staff to the event only four days prior to the actual event. This was not much time to rearrange our schedules if need be. Secondly, the letter he sent home to the Southside parents promised them meetings with their children’s teachers. This was false advertising. Attendance was optional and many teachers could not make it due to already

scheduled plans. Out of 112 teachers, only 20 of us participated. Finally, he used the same power point presentation he showed his staff at the beginning of the school year. He had also used it for the parents who attended open house at the school. It was obvious that a lot of time and effort was put into his presentation, but it was very dry and boring.

In the presentation, he used an analogy about being an “owner” instead of a “renter” in their child’s education. For a middle class audience, this analogy would have been understood, but to a population in which many lived in government housing, this analogy fell short. For this population, renting their own home is a dream; many of these people will probably never own a home. To make matters worse, the power point presentation was in English, and the audience who attended was predominately Spanish speaking. There was a Spanish-speaking teacher who tried desperately to translate what the principal was saying, but the principal kept forgetting to give the translator the chance to translate his message and continued talking and talking without hesitation. The staff members sat in front, watching in frustration as the parents lost interest in what he was saying.

The evening was not a complete failure. After the torturous power point demonstration, we had a “break out” session where we could interact with the parents and students in attendance. There were more staff members than parents and students, which meant that each family received the attention of at least five

staff members at one time. When the principal assigned us to our tables and then allowed the families to choose a table of staff members, the apprehension on their faces was apparent. Personally, as a parent, I would have been intimidated by all that professional attention focused directly on me, and I am a teacher. I could not imagine how daunting this was for the mother and her son.

A mother and her son slowly made their way to the table where I sat with my colleagues. There were two questions that we were instructed to ask the families: 1. “What can [our school] do to make your child’s or your experience a better one?” and 2. “What barriers need to be recognized that prevent a better relationship among our south side families?” Doing what we were told, we asked the questions. The mother and son just sat there looking at us. The mother said something to the son in Spanish and the son shrugged. Thankfully, one of the administrators at our table could speak Spanish and repeated the questions in Spanish. Again, the mother and son just stared at us. Finally, the mother said in Spanish that she thought that everything was fine with the school. Then there was more silence. Feeling uncomfortable, I decided to change the subject and asked the son about his classes and what he was interested in doing when he graduated. Thankfully, these questions opened up a lot of discussion among our group.

The son told us that he wanted to be a barber, but the cosmetology classes at the vocational technical school were full, and he was denied admittance. Knowing that one of our colleagues had a husband in the barbering business, I

invited her to join our discussion. Meanwhile, our Spanish-speaking administrator continued to translate the discussion for the mom. The colleague explained to the son what he needed to do to become a barber. She explained that he could apprentice for a certified barber at any time, but he would need to purchase his own clippers and scissors, which would cost him approximately \$100.00. In addition, she gave the son her husband's phone number and prompted him to call, saying that her husband would be more than happy to mentor him. Another colleague told the son that if he decided that this is what he wanted to pursue in the future to see him in room 113, and that he (the teacher) would pay for his clipper and scissors. What had begun as tense discussion between strangers had turned into a meaningful discussion between community members.

Before the evening was over, I was able to visit with the mother of one of my current students. Angela failed my class last year due to skipping class, and she requested to have me again this year for the same class. The mother reminded me of the time that she and her older daughter, a former student of mine, joined me at the movie theater to see the movie *The Lovely Bones*. She told me that she was thrilled to know that Angela had me as a teacher as well. She knew that I would help her daughter anyway that I could and that she appreciated all I did for her family.

As I was leaving, a man called out to me. The boy standing with him was familiar to me because I had taught him at night school a couple years prior. He introduced himself and asked me if I remembered him. I recognized his name but not his face. He reminded me that I taught both him and his wife English for the GED many years ago. At this, I remember them perfectly. I was saddened to hear that his wife had been shot to death the year before. He introduced me to his son and told me that his son was registered for my class next semester and asked me to take good care of him. He explained that his son had difficulty with reading, but he knew that his son was “in good hands” with me as a teacher. I thanked him for his confidence in me and promised to take good care of him.

Even though I only spoke with three families that night, I left that elementary school on the Southside of town with my feet barely touching the ground and feeling that I was truly part of a community and that something very important had happened for both the families and staff members in attendance.

### **“Dropping Science”**

#### **Juan**

Juan was all smiles when I pulled him out of his Human Anatomy class in order to interview him. He sat slouched in the seat in front of me, playing with his new tongue piercings. I mentioned to him that I thought his behavior and our relationship had improved since the beginning of the semester. I asked him why he thought this was? He responded, “I just got use to it --- the work, the class,

and I don't want to take English 11 again." I thought that it was a reasonable response to the question. I asked him if he planned on passing the class, to which he said yes and that "there was not too much to do" and that my expectations were "reasonable."

I changed the subject to my home visit and my communication with his mom. He admitted that he was "cool" with me visiting his home. He told me that his mom thought it "was nice of me" to make the visit, considering that in the past when he was absent or suspended, his other teachers would not take the time once he returned to explain to him or give him the work he missed. He then explained to me that he was 1 of 9 children and that his mom was tired of hearing from the school. The only phone calls she ever received were "bad calls." He laughs as he recalls one phone call in which his mom responded to his assistant principal by saying, "Just stop calling – just suspend him!"

I then asked him if he thought that my visit along with my phone conversations with mom had anything to do with his improved behavior in my class. He laughed and said no. He said that his behavior was his responsibility, and he chose to behave in my class. "Why?" I asked. "I like you, Miss. If I like a teacher and feel that the teacher likes me then I will be good in class."

### **Ariel**

Like Juan, Ariel was happy to get out of her computer class in order to be interviewed. She chatted about numerous topics as we settled ourselves in an

empty classroom. I began the interview commenting on how her dressing habits had improved, and I asked her what changed. She shrugged her shoulders and said that she wanted me to like her. I told her that I would have liked her despite her clothing, but I enjoyed being her English teacher and not the “clothes nazi.” We both laughed at this.

I asked her if my calling her mom about my concerns did anything to help the situation. She admitted that “bringing mom into the picture did not help.” When her mom received phone calls from teachers about inappropriate behavior, she “blows everything out of proportion.” Her mom will scream at her and take her phone and car away from her, but “Miss, I am going to do what I want to do and my mom cannot stop me.”

I asked how her mom responded to my phone calls. According to Ariel, “Communication is key when talking to people’s parents. It is all in how the teacher approaches the situation and the conversation.” She said that her mom could sense that I was “a nice person” and was not “out to get me,” so she was “ok” with the calls.

“Are there any other reasons why you stopped dressing inappropriately in class other than you wanting me to like you?” Her response brought tears to my eyes, “I will do anything for you if I like you and you like me. I am dropping science, Miss.” I asked her to explain to me what she meant by “dropping science.” Of course she looked at me as though I was stupid, but she patiently

tried to explain it to me by smiling and saying, “dropping science means dropping science, Miss.” According to Ariel, “dropping” means giving or sharing and “science” is a metaphor for the word knowledge or belief. Translated, it means that what she is saying is the truth and this is the way things work. I have to admit that the use of the word science is ingenious. It describes her understanding of how things work in her world. Ariel’s “world view” of education and behavior is very relational, and she is very sure of her “science,” her belief. She has been in school long enough to both observe and experiment, and she concluded that the only people worth impressing or working for are those who respect and will work with her.

### **Peyton**

From the very beginning of my study, Peyton was very vocal about me calling her mom. When I explained to the class some of the interventions that I wanted to use, Peyton flatly responded in front of the whole class, “You better not call my mom.” I asked her why. She said that every time a teacher called home, she got in trouble. I explained to her that I would call about good stuff. Peyton shook her head, dismissing me and the possibility.

Despite some chattiness during class, Peyton was not a behavior problem and did well academically. Earlier in the semester, Peyton was out of school for a week, recovering from oral surgery. When she returned to school, she met me after school and made up her work within a week. One day after class, Peyton

asked me to run her a grade report, so she could show her mom that she made up her work. I told her that I would call her mom instead and tell her that she did a great job making up the work and was doing well in class. Peyton screamed, “NO!! Don’t do that. I don’t want you talking to my mom.” I called her mom anyway. Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to talk to mom but left a voice message, singing her daughter’s praises.

Like her peers, Peyton smiled as she left her math class and joined me in an empty classroom for an interview. I asked her, “Why are you so vehemently opposed to me calling home?” Her response was the same. “Every time a teacher calls home, there is trouble. My brother’s teachers call my mom all the time, and it is because he is in trouble.” “How does your mom react to these calls?” I asked. Peyton explained that her mom was strict while her dad “doesn’t care.” If her mom received a “bad phone call,” she would get grounded.” Peyton admitted that she is very close to her mom, but lately there was “a lot of crap going on at home” and her mom was “quick to freak out.” Peyton did not want to rock the boat by having a teacher call home.

I asked her if her mom received my voice message. She said yes. I explained that I left a positive message. Peyton admitted that her mom appreciated the call.

**Is There Anybody Out There?**

Toward the conclusion of my study and the semester, I sent a questionnaire to the parents of my students via the internet, using the email addresses the parents had given me for my email updates/newsletters (Appendix G). Unfortunately, out of the 24 parents that I sent the survey to only one parent responded to the questionnaire. Therefore, I had to resort to the traditional, yet unreliable, method of communication, sending a hardcopy home with the students. This yielded a slightly better response, five more responses.

Table 3

Parent Survey

Statement	Number of Parents Who Agreed	Number of Parents Who Disagreed	Parent Comments (All Comments Are Included)
#1: I no longer feel the need to attend open houses or parent/teacher conferences now that my child is in high school.	1	5	
#2: Parent/teacher conferences make me feel uncomfortable.	1	5	
#3: I welcome phone calls/emails from my child’s teachers.	1	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The only time I hear anything from the school is when my son is in trouble.”</li> </ul>
#4: As a high school student, my child needs	4	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I believe the student needs to</li> </ul>

to take responsibility for his/her education. The responsibility does not belong to the teacher or parent.			take responsibility to study, the teacher needs to take the responsibility to teach the students, and the parents need to take the responsibility to support the student.
#5: I would feel uncomfortable, if a teacher visited my home to speak to me about my child and his/her education.	0	6	
#6: I have no influence over my child's grades or behavior in school.	0	6	

On the questionnaire, I asked two open-ended questions, but only one parent out of 24 answered the questions.

Table 4

*Parent Survey: Open-Ended Questions*

Question: From your perspective, how can I (Ms. Chabot)...	Parent Response (Only received one response)
#1: Involve parents more in my high school classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I honestly think a high school student would not want their parent in the classroom.”</li> </ul>
#2: Communicate better with parents?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Just keep sending out emails that works the best.”</li> </ul>

Interestingly enough, the parents' responses mirrored that of their children. Like their children, they recognized the fact their children were now old enough to take responsibility for their education. Attending Open Houses and Parent/Teacher Conferences were not as necessary as when their child was in elementary school or middle school. In addition, although they do not feel uncomfortable at conferences and would not mind a teacher visiting their home, they did not "welcome" phone calls home since the call usually meant there was trouble.

### **In the End...**

I began my study with 27 students, but I finished the study with 25 students. One student enrolled in cyber-school while another student moved away. Twenty-two students from my study group passed my class and will continue on to English 12 next year. The three who failed my class just happened to be Juan, Ariel, and Frank.

Juan continued to act appropriately and respectfully to me in class even when he continued to receive referrals and detentions from other teachers for defiance, but he refused to write his literature analysis and research paper. His failure did not appear to bother him as much as it bothered me. With a smile, he told me that he asked his counselor to place him in my class again next year.

Likewise, Ariel continued to dress appropriately and treat me with respect, even when she continued to receive referrals and detentions for defiance

from her other teachers. Her failure was due in part to not completing assignments.

Although Frank came to class everyday after the conference with his mom, he did not fully engage himself in class and did not hand in his work.

Adam did not return to school and continues to work at a local chain restaurant. According to Nadia, his girlfriend, he is happier not being at school. He works 40 hours a week and watches their son while Nadia takes classes at the community college.

## Data Analysis

### Introduction

Throughout my study, I attempted to make sense of my data to determine what I was finding out and what it all meant. Eager to make meaning of the questionnaires, interviews, observational data, and archival data, I methodically reflect on my data and identify any patterns and big ideas that emerged.

Hendricks (2006) points out that “collecting multiple forms of data can help you answer the *why* questions in your study, which is an important part of the action research project” (p. 73). Admittedly, I may not have answered the “why questions” that I had as I began my research, but the data I collected provided me with insights and conclusions that I did not find in my review of the literature.

### Questionnaires/Surveys

My students and parents responded to one questionnaire during my study. The questionnaires that I administered gave both my students and their parents an opportunity to respond individually about their feelings concerning parent/teacher communication and involvement (Appendix A & B). The questionnaires were similar in their content and asked questions that could be answered with “agree” or “disagree.” Depending on the response, I asked the participant to explain his/her response.

I also gave my students two surveys. One was a quick verbal poll, asking them if they gave their parent(s) the invitation to Parent/Teacher Conferences.

The other was a quick written explanation to why their parents did not attend the conferences.

### **Archival Artifacts**

The archival artifacts that I gathered from Performance Tracker, a database used by the district, offered me information on my students' past standardized test scores, economic statuses, and any specialized education plans. Other artifacts, such as past and present report cards and attendance and behavior records, I gleaned from guidance counselors and assistant principals. The collection of this information was useful to my study because it gave me insights into where these students came from both a personal and educational perspective. I was able to compare my own observations and records about these students with information gathered by former teachers. This information helped me to see if my interventions resulted in any changes in behavior and academics.

### **Observational Data**

The bulk of my data came from my observations in the form of a 102 page field log. I recorded my thoughts and observations on a regular basis. These notes recorded my actions and the observed behaviors of my students and their parents. Additionally, my notes included my observations and reflections on parental phone calls and emails, home visits, conferences, interviews, and neighborhood events.

### **Interviews**

The most important and poignant data that I received came from the interviews I had with both my students and parents. These interviews took an average 20 to 30 minutes each, depending on the participant. I interviewed parents individually during Parent/Teacher Conferences and the students individually during school hours. Due to these interviews, I received insights that I did not receive from my literature review. Unlike the questionnaire, the interview allowed a more intimate and individual interaction between myself (the researcher) and the participant.

Although I had prepared interview questions in advanced for both the parents and the students, I found that my “structured interview” became a “semi-structured interview” (Hendricks, 2006, p. 91). Hendricks (2006) points out that “using a semi-structured interview is a good way to make sure that questions important to the research are answered while providing participants with an opportunity to ask other useful information” (p. 91). My initial questions, such as “Why are you here at Parent/Teacher Conferences while so many parents are not?” and “Why has your behavior changed in my class?” turned into many smaller questions and further discussion.

### **Coding and Binning**

As my field log grew into a major form of data, I began looking for recurring ideas and topics and annotated them with words and short phrases.

These words and phrases became my codes, which in time, led me to see relationships between these codes, thus my bins began to materialize. These bins provided a starting point in which I based my theme statements. Ely, Vunz, and Anzul (1997), describe the importance of binning and coding as such: “There comes a time when we need to plot out, or to review and original plan for the document as a whole, and to consider how each section we intend to include can make an effective contribution” (p.161).

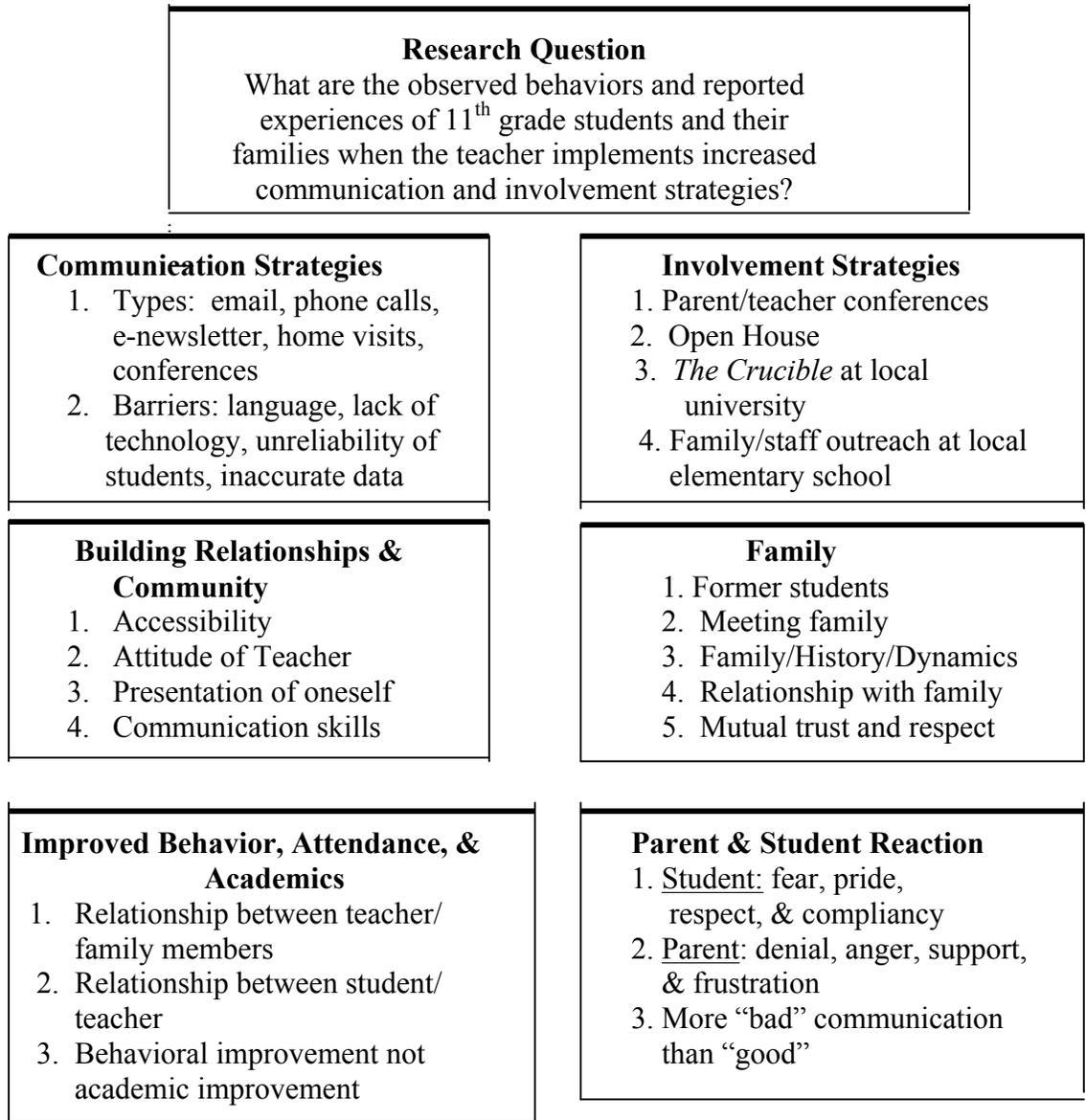


Figure 1. Graphic Organizer of Codes and Bins

### **Research Findings**

Although Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997) metaphorically described the process of sifting through data and creating theme statements as “sorting through the fabric of the whole for our understanding of the threads or patterns that run throughout and lifting them out – as a seamstress lifts thread with a needle – to make a general statement about them,” I found that my theme statements were quite evident to me during my entire study. There were moments through my study where I was not surprised by what the data revealed to me, but then there were those moments that took my breath away. It would be at those “ah ha” moments when I would nod my head and whisper to myself, “I see.”

#### **Barriers to Parental Communication**

Barriers to parental communication include time and opportunity, language, technology, inaccurate data, and student unreliability.

This theme was apparent to me before I even began my study and is one of many reasons that I chose this topic to study. In the past, these barriers kept me from communicating with the parents of my students. Unless the student was failing my class or his/her behavior was inappropriate, I did not even attempt to communicate with the parents. Through my study, I realized that with some effort many of these barriers can and must be overcome. As Epstein & Dauber (1989) point out, the challenges that secondary school teachers face in regard to

communicating with parents do not diminish the necessity and benefits of this communication.

Even though I knew what I was up against when I began my study, I was still surprised by the time, effort, and frustration that came along with it. During my study, I had difficulty making the time to call Frank's mom only to realize that the number in the school's database was not her correct number. When I first called Juan's mom, I was not sure if her succinct responses were due to a language barrier, a barrier in which I would need the help of a Spanish speaking staff member to overcome. When I asked parents for their email addresses, Juan's mom was the only parent who did not have an email address or access to the internet, so I was both surprised and disappointed that so few parents responded to my emails or my survey request.

It is important for teachers to continue using parental communication and involvement practices despite their disappointment and frustration. As Epstein and Dauber (1989) remind us, teacher attitude is an important variable to parental involvement success.

#### **Student and Parental Reaction to Teacher/Parental Communication**

Many students do not want a teacher to communicate with their parents since most past school to home contact has involved discussion of inappropriate behavior, poor grades, or attendance issues. In addition, parents do not enjoy receiving these "bad" phone calls/emails. In order to create a working relationship with parents, the teacher needs to communicate positive news about the student and/or relay class related information and events as well.

It is no wonder that there is a hesitation at the end of the phone line when a teacher introduces him/herself to a parent. As a parent of two teenaged sons, I have only received one positive phone call from a teacher in the 12 years that they have both been in school. Conversely, I have lost count of the number of phone calls I have received from teachers that dealt with behavioral or academic concerns. It is no wonder that students fear teacher/parent communication as well. Both parents and students equate teacher communication with trouble, concern, and consequences. Hornby (2000) reminds teachers that they need to balance the negative communication with positive communication. With effort, I tried to find this balance, but in the end, I still communicated more with the parents/families of those students with whom I had concerns. Therefore, in order to create a working relationship and rapport with parents, it is important for teachers to create opportunities to share the good stuff: good behavior, improvement in grades, classroom activities and updates.

Although Open House and Parent/Teacher Conferences are opportunities for parents and teachers to meet, some parents believe that they only need to attend if there is a concern, while some students fear that the teacher will relay some concern or past misbehavior to his/her parent and will end up “getting in trouble” when the parent returns home. Interestingly enough, most teachers agree

that they do not see the parents they really need to see, the parents of students with whom there are concerns.

Teachers also need to be willing to find time, even if it is after school hours, to participate in school functions that initiate relationships with parents and families of their students. Some low-income parents do not feel comfortable in a school setting (Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007). Therefore, teachers need to leave the building and be willing to do home visits and attend outreach opportunities that put them in the community, not ensconced in the schools walls. “If you want parents to come to you, first, you have to come to them” (Long, 2012, p. 38).

#### **Parental Involvement**

The visibility of parents in the school building or at school functions is not indicative of how much the parent values his/her child’s education.

There are those parents who are visibly involved in their child’s education. These are the parents who attend Open Houses, Parent/Teacher conferences, and PTO meetings. As teachers, we look at these parents and their children and say, “No wonder their child is such a good student and a nice young man/woman. By being involved, these parents really care about their child’s education.” In truth, these parents do care about their child’s education, and we can easily make the correlation between parental involvement and student achievement. According to Chen and Gregory (2010), parental involvement in schools is “associated with a

number of positive outcomes, such as increased achievement, better attendance, and fewer behavioral problems” (p. 54). According to the parents I interviewed during Parent/Teacher Conferences, parents who attend Open Houses and Parent/Teacher Conferences do so because they want to be good role models to their children. Their attendance had less to do with meeting their child’s teachers and more to do with showing their child that the child’s education is important to them.

This is not to say that parents of secondary students who are not visible in the school building or at school functions care any less for their child’s education. As my student and parent surveys demonstrated, many parents no longer felt obligated to attend school functions when their child was in high school. They begin relinquishing control and responsibility of their child’s education by handing it over to the child, believing that the child should begin taking ownership and responsibility for his/her education.

Some parents who do not attend these events care about their child’s education but cannot attend due to other obligations. Work, transportation, and childcare are obstacles for some parents. In their responses to my quick survey about why they thought their parents did not attend the Parent/Teacher Conference, my students named these same reasons.

Just because these parents are not visible in the school building does not mean that their child’s education is not important to them. Friere (1970) warns us

that from our “oppressor” standpoint we may mistakenly see the behavior or the circumstances of the “oppressed” as “incompetent or lazy” (p. 59). Although he was referring to the economic status of the “oppressed,” I believe we can apply his theory to how teachers view the behavior of economically disadvantaged families. Just because some parents will not or cannot attend school functions does not mean they care less than the parent who does attend about their child’s education. The percentage of students who succeeded in my classes was far higher than the number of parents that I met at Open House and Parent Teacher Conferences last semester. None of the parents of my study group attended these events; whereas, 20 students out of 25 passed my class and will now continue toward their senior year and graduation.

#### **Communication Skills**

A teacher needs to build a relationship with both the student and the families by being personable and accessible within the school, during a conference, over the phone, at a home visit, or during a school event.

A fellow teacher once said to me, “Sandi, your students might do that for you because you are nice to them, but my students won’t because they hate me.” Sadly, my colleague did not realize that her own unfriendly, impersonal way of dealing with her students is the reason why they “hate” her, but I was not in a position at the time to point this out to her. The way a teacher presents him/herself to both the student and the parents is important to building a

relationship with them. If a teacher already has a personable demeanor and good communication skills, he/she will have an easier time creating these relationships. Yes, a teacher needs to be professional, but that does not mean that he/she needs to present his/herself in a superior, unfeeling, or rigid manner during a conversation with a student, parent, or family member. Most people, in or outside of the educational setting, do not respond well when treated in this manner. Therefore, when I greeted parents during conferences, home visits, and community activities, I made a concerted effort to smile, look in their eyes, shake their hands, and thank them for their time.

It is important to treat all students and parents with respect, but when dealing with the families of the students who come from poverty, do not speak English, or have had unpleasant experiences with the educational system, a teacher needs to present him/herself as an ally, not a superior. According to Friere (1970), the oppressed lack self confidence and see the oppressor with a distorted sometime negative lens. Therefore, “the oppressed must see examples of vulnerability of the oppressor so that a contrary conviction can grow within them. Until this occurs, they will continue disheartened, fearful, and beaten”(p. 64).

Like Freire, Ruby Payne (2006) advises that teachers approach economically disadvantaged families in a very real way. By showing these parents that you are kind, sincere, and at times, flawed, teachers will have more positive results when dealing with these parents. A sense of humor can also be

welcoming way of breaking the ice. As a parent myself, I often share with them those things that have challenged me as a parent of teenagers. This makes me a peer, just another mom/parent, not an educated, middle class woman who sees herself as someone superior to them.

#### **Creating Relationships and Community**

Respect from an individual student may correlate with how well the teacher knows and has built positive relationships with a student's family and/or friends. Key example: If a sibling, parent, or girl/boyfriend has a good relationship and respects a teacher, the student will see the teacher as someone to respect and trust.

As previously mentioned, some students and families have had negative experiences with the teachers, administrators, and/or the whole educational system and may mistrust the school and its staff members. The people in their lives who they do trust are their families and friends. Therefore, if a family member or friend has had positive experience with the school or staff member, it is easier for a person to trust and respect the school and staff member as well. Unlike many of the teachers and staff, I did not need to earn Adam's respect on the first day of class; he already respected me and wanted a working relationship with me due in part to my good relationship with his girlfriend. Hornby (2000) suggests that teachers "view all pupils within the context of their families" (p. 9). Although I agree with Hornby, I would counter that "pupils" view their teachers through the eyes of their families and friends.

By creating a respectful, positive relationship with students and families, students and family members will be more at ease communicating and working with the teacher for the future success of the student. Every semester, I have at least a handful of students who tell me that they are the brother/sister of a former student. It has been my experience that I am more likely to have a better relationship and more success with this student than another teacher who has had no connection to this student's family. At the beginning of my visit to Juan's home, I was not yet sure of how Juan's mom was going to respond to me, but when I realized that his sister was a former student, I began to relax. I knew at that point that I had an ally in the room, and I felt confident that even if mom was not willing to work with me, Juan's sister would support me. Thankfully, in the end, the three of us formed a united front in supporting Juan's success as a student.

**Teacher/Student Relationship**

Improvement in student behavior is more a result of a trusting relationship between the teacher and student than through increased communication and involvement with parents.

Both students and parents admit that high school is a time when the student should begin taking ownership and responsibility of his/her education. Due to this push for independence, many high school students do not attribute their successes and/or failures in school as a result of parental influence or

involvement. When a teacher is in communication with parents, concerning behavior and grades, students, like Juan, Ariel, and Peyton, admitted that their parents would “scream” and punish them for inappropriate behavior or failing grades in school, but their parents’ responses did not influence their behavior or grades.

By showing interest in the student and by communicating, visiting, meeting, and/or involving the parents of students in the process, the student appreciates the teacher’s efforts and is aware that the teacher cares about him/her. In turn, a mutual relationship forms between the teacher and the student. As Ariel so eloquently stated, “I will do anything for you if I like you and you like me.” Some students do not want to let the teacher down by continuing to misbehave, failing a test, or skipping school.

According to Chen and Gregory (2010), parental involvement in schools “is associated with a number of positive outcomes, such as increased achievement, better attendance, and fewer behavior problems” (p. 54). In my study, I found that student behavior and attendance improved, but unfortunately, academic success was not one of the “positive outcomes.” Despite my efforts to communicate and involve their parents, Juan, Ariel, and Frank failed my class.

### **This Changes Everything**

Overall, I feel a strong sense of accomplishment in my study. There was not a moment in the entire process where I questioned my sense of purpose or the importance of my interventions. My passion for the topic remained strong throughout. Through my study, I have gleaned a lot of insights into how both my students and parents view parental/teacher communication and involvement. Most importantly, this study has compelled me to improve upon some of my practices as a teacher. I plan not only to continue implementing many of the parental/teacher communication and involvement strategies that I used in my study but also to share and build upon those strategies.

When it comes to communicating with my students' parents, I plan to communicate with them not only when there are concerns and issues with their child, but also for positive reasons as well. In the future, I plan to continue requesting parental contact information via my initial parent letter home and to block out time on a weekly basis for just phone calls to my students' families. I have found a quiet place in the building, the probation officer's office, where I can make phone calls in privacy and without interruption. It is my hope that I will be able to touch base with all the families before the end of the first marking period. In my conversations with these families, I want to introduce myself and learn more about my students as well as their families. I will also continue to email parents on a regular basis about what is going on in class. It is my hope that

by receiving mail from me, parents might be incited to respond by mailing me in return with their questions and concerns. I will not allow their unresponsiveness to deter my efforts to involve them.

I also plan to start taking classes that will teach how to speak Spanish. By learning this language, I will remove one of the many obstacles that keep me from communicating effectively with some of my families and which will also make me more accessible to these families.

Although my reminders about Open House and Parent/Teacher did not incite parental/family participation, it is important for my students to know that I want to meet their parents and families and involve them in their education, so in the future, I will continue to send reminders home. The parents who attended these events explained to me that although they were happy to meet me, the real reason they attended these events was to show their child that the child's education is important to them. If my students see that both their parents and their teacher think that their education is important then the student may view their education as important as well.

For students like Juan, who have the academic ability to succeed but choose not to succeed, I need to rethink my traditional mode of teaching him the curriculum. When I gave him his work to do at home during his suspension, he completed the work assigned and then some. Although his behavior improved during class, he was not productive during class time, and he chose not to do the

work. Since Juan has requested to repeat English 11 with me next year, I want to recommend that Juan and I do an independent study together instead of having him in the classroom. I can assign him work, which he will complete on his own time and return to me for feedback.

Probably one of the biggest lessons that I learned throughout my study was the importance of building relationships and a sense of community with my students and their families. How I interact with my students on a daily basis is important, but my interaction with their families in their own communities is just as beneficial. By physically placing myself in their homes and neighborhood, I am showing my students and their families that I am a real person who is not afraid to leave the school building and “rub elbows” with them in their own environment. As part of my practice as a teacher, I plan to continue doing more home visits as well as attend as many school run community outreach programs as I can. I have already spoken to my principal about putting together a “Walk through the Southside,” where staff member will receive “flex time” to walk around the Southside of town, introducing themselves to the families of their students and bearing school attire and gifts. The principal was excited about the idea and is willing to support my efforts. It is my hope that my colleagues will be just as excited and adventurous.

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**APPENDIX A: Student Survey****Student Survey**

Please respond to the following statements by using an **A for Agree** or a **D for Disagree**.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. I really dislike when my teachers contact my parents.

If you **agree**, please explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. My parents welcome phone calls/emails from my teachers.

If you **disagree**, please explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. I don't mind when my teachers contact my parents/guardians.

If you **disagree**, please explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. When a teacher calls home, it is usually because I am not doing well in school or am misbehaving in class.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. My parents' motto is: If you get in trouble in school, you will be in more trouble when you get home.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. My parents have no influence over my grades or behavior.

If you **agree**, please explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. My education is my responsibility not the responsibility of my parents and/or teachers.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. I appreciate the support of both my parents and teachers.

If you **disagree**, please explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. My parents are too busy to attend parent/teacher conferences.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. My parents think that parent/teacher conferences are unnecessary now that I am in high school.

If you **agree**, please explain why?

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix B: Parent Survey****Parent Survey**

**Please respond to the following statements by using an **A** for Agree or a **D** for Disagree.**

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. I no longer feel the need to attend open houses and parent/teacher conferences now that my child is in high school.

If you agree, please explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Parent/teacher conferences and open houses make me feel uncomfortable.

If you agree, please explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. I welcome phone calls/emails from my child's teachers.

If you disagree, please explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. As a high school student, my child needs to take responsibility for his/her education. The responsibility does not belong to the teacher or parent.

If you disagree, please explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. I would feel uncomfortable, if a teacher visited my home to speak to me about my child and his/her education.

If you agree, please explain why:

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. I have no influence over my child's grades or behavior in school.

From your perspective, how can I (Ms. Chabot).....

1. Involve parents more in my high school classroom??
  
2. Communicate better with parents?

**Appendix C: “Why?” Student Survey**

Why?????

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Why do you suppose your parent(s)/guardian(s) were unable to attend or chose not to attend parent/teacher conferences last night???

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**Appendix D: Principal Consent Form**

September 24, 2012

Dear [REDACTED],

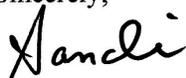
I am currently working toward the completion of a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. The courses involved have helped me reflect on my own teaching methods and practices and have shown me how to improve upon these methods by instructing me in the most current pedagogical trends. In order to finish the program, I am required to conduct an action research study that focuses on a major component of my teaching practices. The following is the question that I hope to answer through this study: What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students and their families when the teacher implements increased communication and involvement strategies?

I plan to keep track of students' daily attitudes and attendance through a field log that lists the students who fit into this category. In order to identify the students who will be used in this study, I will utilize Performance Tracker, former teachers, and guidance counselors. I also plan to keep a phone/email log in which I will keep track of each phone I make. I will comment on whether I was successful in contacting the parent, the parent's response to my call, and each student's response as well. This will entail personal interviews with both the parent and student before and following the conversation. Parental participation in parent/teacher conferences will also be encouraged and noted. Of course, I will also monitor through daily quizzes, projects, and class participation. Behavior will be monitored through daily observation and by the number of private detentions, school referrals, teacher/student conferences, and phone calls home due to inappropriate behavior. At the conclusion of the study, I plan to survey both the parents and the students.

Only data from those who sign on as research participants, however, will be used in my study. This study is completely voluntary, and a student may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If the student withdraws, or the parent/guardian does not provide consent, I will not include that student's information or data in my study.

The names of all participants will remain confidential. Additionally, all research materials will be secured in a protected location and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at x53212 or e-mail me at [schabot@bethsd.org](mailto:schabot@bethsd.org). Dr. Shosh, my Moravian College advisor, can be reached at 610-861-1482 or at [jshosh@moravian.edu](mailto:jshosh@moravian.edu). If you approve, please sign the next page of this letter and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Sandi Chabot

### Appendix E: Parent Consent Form

September 26, 2012

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I am currently working toward the completion of a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. The courses involved have helped me reflect on my own teaching methods and practices and have shown me how to improve upon these methods by instructing me in the most current pedagogical trends. In order to finish the program, I am required to conduct an action research study that focuses on a major component of my teaching practices. The following is the question that I hope to answer through this study: What are the observed behaviors and reported experiences of 11<sup>th</sup> grade students and their families when the teacher implements increased communication and involvement strategies?

I plan to keep track of students' daily attitudes and attendance through a field log. I also plan to keep a phone/email log in which I will keep track of each phone I make. I will comment on whether I was successful in contacting the parent, the parent's response to my call, and each student's response as well. This will entail personal interviews with both the parent and student before and following the conversation. Parental participation in parent/teacher conferences will also be encouraged and noted. Of course, I will also monitor through daily quizzes, projects, and class participation. Behavior will be monitored through daily observation and by the number of private detentions, school referrals, teacher/student conferences, and phone calls home due to inappropriate behavior. At the conclusion of the study, I plan to survey both the parents and the students.

Only data from those who sign on as research participants, however, will be used in my study. This study is completely voluntary, and a student may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The student needs only to request and complete a withdrawal form. If the student withdraws, or the parent/guardian does not provide consent, I will not include that student's information or data in my study.

The names of all participants will remain confidential. Additionally, all research materials will be secured in a protected location and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me at x53177 or e-mail me at [schabot@bethsd.org](mailto:schabot@bethsd.org). Dr. Shosh, my Moravian College advisor, can

be reached at 610-861-1482 or at [jshosh@moravian.edu](mailto:jshosh@moravian.edu). If you approve, please sign the back of this letter and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Sandi Chabot

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Please check the appropriate bubble below, sign the form, and return bottom of the form to me:

- I give permission for my child's data to be used in this study.
- I do not give permission for my child's data to be included in this project.

---

Student's Name

---

Parent/Guardian's Signature

**Appendix F: Parent Note**

Dear Eleventh Grade Parents & Guardians,

I am so excited to work with your son/daughter this semester in my 11<sup>th</sup> grade English/Language Arts class. In this course, we will continue to focus on the communication skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking through our study of a wide variety of American literature and authors. In addition, we will concentrate on vocabulary, language skills, text analysis, reading comprehension, and preparation for state testing as well as SAT testing. By the end of this course, your son or daughter will know how to write an effective literary analysis, use primary and secondary sources in the creation of a research paper, speak effectively, and demonstrate critical thinking skills in relation to American literature and its influence.

All students are expected to be responsible, independent, and active participants in their own learning. Eleventh graders need to recognize that college and/or employment will soon be a reality. To this end, you can encourage your child to be successful by reinforcing the importance of hard work, effort, and dedication to achievement.

To ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to learn, a respectful and meaningful learning experience is necessary. Please review the classroom "Survival Guide" that I reviewed with your son/daughter during class and sign and return the slip on the next page. Also, in order for us to maintain communication, please list your email

address, as well as your cell phone number(s). My email address is: [schabot@bethsd.org](mailto:schabot@bethsd.org). Please contact me with any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your support!

PS... Hope to see you at **Open House on September 11<sup>th</sup>**  
& **Parent/Teacher Conferences on October 2<sup>nd</sup>**.

**Appendix G: Parent Information Form**

Parents,

Please complete the following: (Please Print)

Parent(s) Contact Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s) email address(es): \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s) cell phone number(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

By signing below, we are acknowledging that we have read and understand Ms Chabot's Survival Guide which details her policies and expectations.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

14

**Appendix H: Invitation to Parent/Teacher Conferences**

You Are Welcome!!

**Who:** All Parents & Guardians

**What:** Parent/Teacher Conferences

**When:** Tuesday 10/2 - 7pm to 9pm

**Where:** ----- HS - Room 212

**Why:** So I can get to know you and your child better. ☺

**How:** Tell your child what time works for you or email me at **[schabot@bethsd.org](mailto:schabot@bethsd.org)**.

**\*\* Refreshments will be served...yum! \*\***