Parental Involvement at Two Southeast Washington, DC Elementary Schools: Parents’ Perceptions and Recommendations

Alicia Wilson

CBR Partner: Center for Inspired Teaching

http://www.inspiredteaching.org

Project DC

Dr. Deanna Cooke

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**Introduction**

“The teachers that my children had seemed to never be available for me to talk to unless there was a problem,” is a statement that reflects a common theme in schools throughout the nation (Great Schools Inc, “Orr Elementary School,” 2005). This parent writes about a communication problem between parents and teachers at Orr Elementary School, a Southeast Washington, DC School. Yet, even though the parent clearly wanted to become involved in his/her children’s education, Orr Elementary School’s administrations voiced frustration about the lack of parental involvement and communication. Combined, these experiences and perspectives express a mutual dissatisfaction with ways in which these parents and schools engage with each other.

To address both parties’ concerns, the Center for Inspired Teaching (Inspired Teaching), an organization that partners with two schools, Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School, is working to assist them in bridging this gap for these two schools. The initial stage of this work involves ascertaining several things as they relate to parental involvement at these two public elementary schools in the District of Columbia. This study assesses “how” involved parents are, “what” types of activities parents are or would like to be involved in, and “why” they are involved or not involved. The current study is an initial phase of this project and advances the work in parent-community interaction by utilizing qualitative research methods to assess parents’ experiences with and concerns about their involvement in their children’s school.
Purpose and Problem

Through the partnership with the Center for Inspired Teaching, this project focuses on parental involvement and seeks, through preliminary survey data and phone interviews, to understand both the extent to which and ways in which parents are involved in their children’s schools. By doing this, the study works to determine ways to improve and/or increase that involvement. Since this study seeks to help improve family-school relations, the term parental involvement is limited to involvement with organized school activities and the school community in general, for example, parent-teacher communication or PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) participation. Within this framework, the study aims to assess three types of information related to parent’s involvement at both Orr and Tyler Elementary Schools: the parent’s current level of involvement at the respective schools, the types of activities parents are involved in at the schools, and the ways the schools can improve or increase parental involvement. The specific problems and sub-questions follow.

What is the current perception of the level of parental involvement at the school?
1) What level of involvement do parents classify themselves as having (none, a little, some or a lot)?
2) How do parents define this involvement?

Why do parents participate in the activities that they do?

3) What do parents do when they are involved? How many parents actively participate in the opportunities the schools provide for parental involvement (PTA, parent-teacher conferences, mother-daughter tea, father-son lunch, etc.)?
4) Why do parents choose the activities that they do?
5) Which activities are more popular?

In what ways can the schools improve/increase parental involvement?

6) What other activities would parents like to see at the schools?
7) How would parents be more likely to become engaged at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School?
Background Information

The Center for Inspired Teaching

The Center for Inspired Teaching believes that the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) are not educating children to their full potential. Therefore, Inspired Teaching focuses on improving education in the DCPS through training teachers to both challenge and inspire students in their learning. These ideal teachers would encourage students to think about solving larger community problems. In addition, Inspired Teaching believes that teachers are responsible for creating a way to reach every student and that the classroom should be an environment of mutual learning and respect.

To achieve their goals Inspired Teaching has various programs for teachers and works closely with several partner schools to improve local education. The Center for Inspired Teaching began a partnership with Tyler Elementary School in Fall 2004 and with Orr Elementary School in Fall 2005. One goal of these partnerships is to improve the community school relationship through such programs as outreach to parents.

Orr Elementary School

Orr Elementary School has 407 students ranging from pre-K to 5th grade. Sixty-six percent of Orr Elementary School students are eligible for free lunch and 9% are eligible for reduced lunch. One hundred percent of the students are black. There are 18 students per full-time teacher.

The school is labeled “in need of improvement” by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards. Test score performance for grade four on the SAT 9 standardized
tests test was 51 for reading and 59 for math. These results are based on norm comparisons and indicate that in reading the school performed better than 50% of schools in the District of Columbia and better than 58% of the District of Columbia schools in math. No national data for comparison is available. (Great Schools Inc, “Orr Elementary School,” 2005)

Only 15% of the residents in Orr Elementary School’s zip code 20020 ages 25+ have a college degree, compared to the DC average of 50%. As shown below in Table 1, the median household income is $27,964 compared to a state average of $36,401. (Public School Review, “Orr Elementary School,” 2005). This data places Orr within a socioeconomically disadvantaged zip code.

Although zip code data was obtained from the school system, one can also examine the census tract data for the 2000 census. The following chart shows data on median household income for Orr Elementary Schools.

Table 1: Census and Zip Code Household Income for Orr Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>DC</th>
<th>Census Tract 76.01 (Orr Elementary School)</th>
<th>Zipcode 20020 (Orr Elementary)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median household income in 1999¹</td>
<td>41,994</td>
<td>40,127</td>
<td>32,930</td>
<td>27,964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that Orr Elementary School has a lower than average income. Census Tract 70 had a median household income of approximately $7,000 less than the

DC average. In addition, since 75% of students qualify for free or reduced lunches, this school classifies as serving students from an economically disadvantaged background.

Tyler Elementary School

Tyler Elementary School is also labeled as “in need of improvement.” Test scores for grade 4 in 2003 indicated that that the school is performing exactly at the median for math (score of 50) and below average (doing better than only 38% of schools) in reading. Ninety-nine percent of students are black and less than one percent is Hispanic. The school has 290 students from pre-K to grade 6. (Great Schools Inc, “Tyler Elementary School,” 2005).

As shown below in Table 2, fifty-one percent of people in Tyler Elementary School’s zip code have a college degree and the median income is $50,663 (Public School Review, “Tyler Elementary School,” 2005). However 89% of Tyler Elementary School’s students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch (Great Schools Inc, “Tyler Elementary School,” 2005). Although Tyler Elementary School is in a community with a higher income, Tyler Elementary School has more students receiving free and reduced price lunch than Orr Elementary School. This information suggests that the actual population that attends Tyler Elementary School is more economically disadvantaged than the general community in which it sits, and also possibly more disadvantaged than the student population at Orr.

Table 2: Census and Zip Code Household Income Data for Tyler Elementary School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>United States</th>
<th>DC</th>
<th>Census Tract 70 (Tyler Elementary School)</th>
<th>Zipcode for Tyler</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Median household income in 1999\(^2\)  | 41,994  | 40,127  | 67,109  | 50,633  

Although this table shows a higher than average median household income for Tyler Elementary School in 1999, these are not the typical students who attend Tyler Elementary School. While 99% of Tyler Elementary School’s students are Black, only 61% of the Census Tract is Black. In addition, the zip code’s median household income is quite different as shown with only $50,663 as compared to the $67,109 of the census tract. Finally, since the qualifications for the free and reduced-price lunch program are based on poverty rates and the poverty line, this shows that those making the median household income probably do not attend Tyler Elementary School because 89% of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

*Census Map* (attached, Appendix A)

The two target schools are mainly composed of an African-American populous. Attached is a map that compares White and Black enrollment in public schools by Census Tract. The map also displays the location of Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School. As one can see, more White students are enrolled in the Northwest area of DC. Very few White students are present in the Southeast region where Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School are located. The Black students are concentrated more heavily in the Southeast, with few in the Northwest region of the District. This suggests that the high percentage of African-American students found

within both schools is common within the Southeast region. This information further defines the population of this study as African-American.

Qualifications and Role of the Researcher

I was responsible for conducting phone interview with parents from the schools, as well as analyzing the data. Through previous work I gained familiarity with schools in the District of Columbia and parents. Specifically, although I had not had experience in these two schools, I volunteered in some manner with the DC Public School System over the past four years. In addition, I completed a similar parental involvement project at Ron Brown Middle School in Fall 2004, which gave me a basis from which to build.

Furthermore, I had research experience that allowed me to sufficiently conduct this study. Previously, I worked at the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty conducting phone interviews with homeless service providers across the United States. In addition, I conducted interviews with the Council of Latino Agencies members to understand their roles in the community. This background familiarized me with phone protocol and interview techniques of this study.

Review of Relevant Literature

Trotman proposed that in the early history of public schools, the schools became more territorial and “decreased parental involvement by taking on more responsibilities once assumed by parents” (Trotman, 2001, p 276). Now, as our nation realizes the importance of parental involvement, schools are seeking ways to evaluate and increase parental involvement within schools such as Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School.
Theoretical Framework

Social Capital

There is a well-known agreement that “schooling is a fundamental basis for success in meritocratic societies” (Parcel & Dufur, 2001, p 881). Therefore, by helping students achieve more in schools, the students will theoretically have more success in society. Furthermore, to help students be more successful, the theory of social capital shows how individuals can bring about the common good by working together in networks, such as those that this study seeks to create between the school and the home. More specifically, in these school environments, social capital refers to bonds between parents and their children’s schools in ways that affect the achievement of the students. Putnam (1995) notes that “parental involvement represents a particularly productive form of social capital” as it can greatly influence the future success of students (p 69). The bond between home and school itself creates a network for communication and a team working for the education of the child, thus increasing the social capital of the students. In turn, by the network of individuals working towards the common goal of improved education for the child, the child will have greater educational achievement. By achieving the long-term goal of this project and increasing participation of the parents, the students at Tyler and Orr Elementary Schools will ideally be more exposed to educational opportunities and therefore obtain a stronger education, more social capital, and can thus advance further in society.

As noted, the theory of social capital can be utilized to understand the importance of parental involvement in education because strong social capital within schools can improve educational outcomes (Portes, 2000; Putnam, 1995). To achieve the goal of this
project we must foster social capital in schools, and activities must be created that build a relationship between parents and children while promoting educational achievement (Parcel & Dufur, 2001).

If parents are more involved in their children’s schools they might be able to do many things such as:

1. Parents could be able to better understand the cultures of the school, as well as impact and create a school environment that is more consistent with their own values. This consistency can support students learning by lessening the hurdle of transgressing two cultures on a daily basis.

2. Parental involvement in their children’s schools also promotes social capital because their involvement can help to obtain multiple resources that are needed within the school (Parcel & Dufur). For example, parents who are aware of the administrative needs or the specialization needs within a school can use their networks outside of school to perhaps support the school environment.

3. Children benefit from their parents’ involvement in school because with this involvement, the parents gain a wider support network of individuals within the school that can help them with their children and with other issues outside of school. Specifically, children are thought to benefit from “continued exposure to the social connections both parents have with others outside the family group such as school personnel” (Parcel & Dufur, 2001, p883) because they help to socialize children into an enjoyable educational experience that is part of both home and school.
Therefore, by creating an environment in which parents become involved with the students, parents can increase their child’s social capital and produce greater success for students both in school and in society.

Outcomes of Parental Involvement

An example of success with the social capital of parental involvement comes from the immigrant population. Immigrants often have a more difficult time in school due to language and culture differences, and thus they need more support to achieve within American school systems. Specifically, “for immigrants, the educational attainment of the second generation can be expected to depend heavily on parental guidance as well as support from other members of the community” (Portes, 2000, pp. 5-6). Thus, the connections between the school and parents can help to bridge cultural gaps and socialize students into school. To prove this Portes (2000) took data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 3400 second-generation youths (with at least one foreign born parent) to determine the effect of parental involvement on their academic achievement. Portes’s defined indicators of social capital (“parents’ participation in school activities” and “frequency of meetings with school”) correlated “positive and statistically strong” with academic achievement as measured by GPA and scholastic achievement tests as shown by the following table (Portes, 2000 pp 7-8).

Table 3: Portes’s 2000 Study Results (Portes, 2000 p 8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental school involvement</th>
<th>Achievement test scores</th>
<th>Grade point average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little or none</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>52.79</td>
<td>3/13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the students in this study are not immigrants, they are from an underprivileged background and thus may need more support through parental involvement to gain higher achievement in education. Therefore increasing parental involvement at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School holds promise for improving the students’ academic achievement.

**Cultural Capital**

If parents do not utilize their social capital, education can become a “cultural reproduction” that “blocks the realization of the interest and needs of deprived and potentially ascendant social groups,” such as the groups within this study (Wexler, 1981, pp 247-248). While social capital focuses on building networks to influence the school, bringing resources into the school, and effectively utilizing resources; some call cultural capital a medium of parental involvement (De Carvalho, 2001) because it is a means through which parents can use school resources to socialize their children into academic activities such as reading literature, liking art, and liking classic music (De Graaf, De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000). Typically, due to the family members’ own educational levels and financial resources, middle-class and upper-class families have a better ability to provide these cultural resources. Often lower socioeconomic families, like those at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School have less cultural capital, due to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>54.71</th>
<th>3.23</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>55.21</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$r^b$</td>
<td>.21$^b$</td>
<td>.12$^b$</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
less cultural resources. This lack of resources can serve to reproduce the current 
economic situation for future generations and place the students at a lower socioeconomic 
level.

However, if they are more involved in the schools, the parents will have more 
ability to control the types and amounts of resources provided to their kids and therefore 
limit the negative impact of not being able to provide these resources at home. This 
shows that parental involvement in the school can have a mediating effect and access to 
cultural resources does not necessarily predetermine a students’ future success. As 
evidence, in several studies, student achievement was found to be “based on students 
cultural interests” not on parents’ available cultural resources. (De Graaf, De Graaf, & 
Kraaykamp, 2000, p 93). Basically, those families that demonstrate higher aspiration for 
the students, through such things as involvement in the students’ education, can promote 
upward mobility (De Carvalho, 2001). Thus, although it will be difficult, if parents such 
as those at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School can take an active role in 
their children’s’ education and foster cultural capital desires through parental 
involvement, they may be able to overcome their lack of actual cultural resources.

In sum, the theories of social capital and cultural capital provide an important 
framework for understanding the impact of parental involvement on student achievement 
and advancement. Specifically parents who are more involved should be able to help 
guide and to better understand the culture of the school; to benefit from the resources of 
the school; and also bring resources to the school. In addition the theory of cultural 
capital suggests that low-income students can benefit from parents’ involvement in 
school because it helps to develop and allows the parents to utilize the tangible resources
within the school for their children’s educational advancement. These theories have guided a good deal of research on parents’ involvement in school that began with the importance of parental involvement.

**Importance of Involvement**

Many aspects of student life are affected by parental involvement. Repeated studies have found that higher levels of parental involvement lead to better achievement, better attendance, higher rates of homework completion, and fewer discipline problems (Carter, 2002; Huntsinger, Krieg, Balsingk, Joae, 1998; Jacobi, Wittreich, & Hogue, 2003; Secada, 1989; Trotman, 2001). A study by Aduyarittigan, as discussed in Machen, Sandra M; Wilson, Janelle; & Notar, Charles (2005), showed that parental involvement could also influence students’ feelings about themselves as readers and increase the students’ desire to read. In addition, repeated studies, such as Anne Henderson and Nancy Berla’s 1994 review of more than 85 studies spanning 30 years, showed that active involvement by parents led to higher graduation rates, higher college enrollment, more positive attitudes towards school, higher parent satisfaction with education, stronger home-school relations, and higher motivation to do well in school and learn (Jacobi, et. al, 2003; Secada, 1989).

Furthermore, in more specific studies by Miedels and Reynolds as summarized in Machen, et. al (2005), parental involvement has not only been related to achievement, but has also decreased students’ years in special education. The literature discussed no negative effects of parental involvement. Therefore, it seems only beneficial to create strong levels of parental involvement at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary
School, especially since Tyler Elementary has a large number of special education students.

**Literature Directed Towards African Americans**

This study focuses on two predominantly African-American schools and therefore it is important to examine literature targeting the specific experiences of this population. Much of parental involvement literature notes that ethnicity is a factor that affects parental involvement (Bridge, 2001; Secada, 1989). Minority students are more likely to have other variables that hinder parental involvement such as lower economic status, less education, and more single parent households (Wenfan, 1999). As a result, most poor minority parents are less involved at the school level and less knowledgeable in education (Wenfan, 1999) than white middle-class families. Thus, because these parents have many obstacles to overcome in order to be involved, it is not surprising that schools with the populations of Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School are have low levels of parental involvement.

Nevertheless, like most schools, successful African American schools often have more parental involvement in “day to day” activities of the schools than less successful African-American schools (Secada, 1989, p 33). Specifically, in a study utilizing a nationwide sample through the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, Wenfan (1999) found that successful students from low socioeconomic African-American backgrounds usually had involved parents that held meaningful conversations with their children, assisted with homework, emotionally supported their students, and set clear behavioral restrictions. Thus, increasing the number of involved parents is
important because it can potentially increase the number of academically successful students.

Definitions of Involvement

Although most researchers note that parental involvement is beneficial, when studying parental involvement one finds many different definitions and measurements that arise from related studies. When trying to compare studies, methodological problems can occur due to different operational definitions of related terms (ERIC Development Team, 1998). First, few articles seek to define a parent, and it is assumed that the term parents represent the actual biological parent in the home. However, Secada (1989) chose an approach that defined parents as “any adult caregiver in the home” (p 33) thus broadening the realm of actors for parental involvement itself. This definition of any adult caregiver as parents has been supported by social research of Casper & Bryson (1998). Understanding the various social situations in the world today this study will adopt a similar method to Secada allowing the “parent” to be any adult caregiver in the home.

Defining the term parental involvement is also done in a vast array of methods. Many studies examined engagement in the two areas of school and home. Some parental involvement definitions excluded parent involvement at home and focused only on activities that occurred at the school (Machen, Wilson & Notar, 2005). School involvement included such activities as volunteering or PTA membership. In contrast, many other studies also examine parental involvement at home. Home involvement included such activities as encouraging reading, encouraging higher education, and homework assistance. (ERIC Development Team, 1998; Secada, 1989) Others studies
went farther including not only school activities, but also personal involvement and exposing children to activities, such as museum visits, that stimulate thought outside of the classroom (Huntsinger, Krieg, Balsingk & Joae, 1998). Others still focused on parents’ expectations or discussions of extra-curricular activities (Wenfan, 1999). Some even included monitoring TV viewing (ERIC Development Team, 1998). As Trotman (2001) found, even to parents, parental involvement has many meanings that require different skills and thus interest each individually differently. For the purposes of this study, examining the family-school relationship, parental involvement will be defined as those activities that occur at the school such as volunteering or attending PTA meetings. These school-based activities are more pertinent to inform Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School of ways to reach their goal to increase parental involvement at the schools.

Aside from parental involvement, several studies mentioned parental empowerment, a theme that shows how parents help shape school practices and how they work and interact with teachers (Barton, *et. al*, 2003; Shepard & Rose, 1995). These studies portrayed parental leadership in activities as the ultimate goal. As a result, by examining the attitudes of parents towards school involvement this study will examine parents’ conceptions of parental empowerment as well as parental involvement.

**Measures of Involvement/Coding**

In addition to various definitions of involvement, no consistent measure of involvement was discovered across the studies. All studies defined at least a low-level and high-level involvement, but the operational definitions varied from study to study.
Low-level involvement could be only reading at home (Trotman, 2001) or parents only caring about the educational welfare of their own children (Gbadamosi & Huey-Ling, 2003). Similarly, some studies categorized low-level involvement as no involvement with the school and blaming educational problems on the school and teachers (Ramirez, 2001). High-level involvement generally showed more empowerment and leadership roles, but definitions varied. These high-level involvement definitions included being “involved from day one” (Ramirez, 2001, p 5), sitting on an advisory council (Trotman, 2001), and taking an active role and leadership position (Gbadamosi & Huey-Ling, 2003). Measuring the current level of involvement in understandable ways is important, and therefore this study will allow parents to classify themselves in their levels of parental involvement based on similar hierarchical measures (no involvement, a little involvement, some involvement, or a lot of involvement). However, this study differs and potentially alleviates some of the coding difficulties as it allows parents to classify themselves in these groups and then define their role in this position. Therefore, the parents will formulate the exact definitions of the levels of involvement.

**Variables Influencing Parental Involvement**

Many variables and obstacles have been found to hinder parental involvement. Socioeconomic status, ethnicity, family structure, and education level are common themes that reduce parental involvement. Studies note that the above variables reduce involvement for a variety of reasons including: increased time constraints, decreased levels of comfort in the school (due to education), and varied cultural definitions of involvement (home versus school). (ERIC Development Team, 1998; Ramirez, 2001;
Trotman, 2001; Wenfan, 1999). Similar issues, such as a lack of higher education, can create psychological factors that effect parental involvement since parents may feel inadequate to help within their child’s school and to communicate with educators (Gbadamosi & Huey-Ling, 2003; Trotman, 2001). Other studies note that job involvement, work or schedule constraints, as well as maternal employment, can limit parents abilities to be involved at school (Bridge, 2001; ERIC Development Team, 1998; Frone & Rice, 1987). Lack of transportation as well as lack of day care was noted in several other studies (Ramirez, 2001). Furthermore, in many instances the variables decreasing involvement often overlap, exacerbating difficulties for parental involvement.

However, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) stress that these variables, specifically status, do not always “determine the values parents place on education and their wishes to be involved,” but simply limit the parents’ abilities to become involved (p 8). Therefore, in performing a study on parental involvement, I seek to examine parents’ current levels of involvement and the factors that hinder and support parent’s ability and willingness to engage in their child’s schools environment. Specific questions seek to determine why parents are not involved and what will make them more likely to become engaged. Also, in determining what activities parents would like to become involved in, the study will also work to discover if parents need to be made to feel more comfortable in the school (such as if the focus is on communication). Finally, also in determining what activities parents would like to become involved in, this study will determine if the school needs to work around parents’ schedules or provide additional opportunities for involvement.
Schools’ and Teachers’ Perspectives

The current study does not specifically focus on schools’ and teacher’s perspectives about parental involvement. However, it is important to understand these perspectives because parents often consider the school at fault for being less engaging, while the schools often blame the parents for being uninterested. To understand the complexity of the parent/school interaction, both positions must be explored. Some studies note that schools themselves can inhibit parental involvement. For example, Trotman (2001) found that some schools actively “resist programs to implement parental involvement” (p 280). Teachers’ attitudes as well as the expectations of the school and administrators can influence parents’ willingness to become involved (Ramirez, 2001; Trotman, 2001). In studies concerning urban teachers’ views on parental involvement, Shepard & Rose (1995) and Baker, et. al (1999) found that teachers often have inaccurate conceptions about parents’ attitudes towards education, their involvement, and desire to be involved. Often teachers think that low-income families hold little value in education, have little to contribute to education, and do not desire to participate (Trotman, 2001). Furthermore, in Ramirez’s (2001) study some teachers expressed views that parents were not qualified to help. Other teachers feel threatened by parental involvement and want to limit the involvement to school planned/structured activities (Ramirez, 2001; Rasinski & Fawcett, 1996). As a result, these school members discourage parental involvement, disregard parent comments, and/or practically ignore parents. Activities that parents are involved in will reflect experiences with teachers. If teachers have a more positive attitude towards the parents, parents will be more likely to participate. If parents perceive
that schools do not believe in them or want them involved in the school, then parents will not become involved. To alleviate this barrier Carter (2002, p 11) noted that “teachers must be trained to promote effective parent/family involvement in children’s education.” Thus, through questions on communication and what parents like/dislike about the schools, the study will determine if this is an issue.

Similarly, schools and teachers that do desire to increase parental involvement may not know what parents desire to be involved in (Johnstone, 2005), may not be properly organized to plan programs for parents (Shepard & Rose, 1995), or may not know how to begin putting parental involvement into practice (Rasinski & Fawcett, 1996). If the schools cannot achieve these organizational needs, the parents may not have a way to become involved in schools. Therefore, a sufficient study concerning research on the current level of parental involvement needs to identify the factors that might inhibit parental involvement and determine whether these inhibiting factors stem from the school or elsewhere. By informing Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School of these issues, they will know how to engage parents.

Schools, Teachers, and African-American Parents

Unfortunately, the literature shows that teachers know less about African American parents and these parents’ desire for involvement when compared to white students (Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Piotrkowski, & Parker, 1999). This means that the methods these teachers at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary Schools employ to attract parental involvement may be inappropriate for the targeted group of African-Americans. Teachers may perceive themselves as reaching out to the parents, but in fact they are utilizing methods that would reach a white middle-class audience instead of the
African-American target pool. To attract African-American parents to school, it is useful to know that Wenfan (1999) found that African-American parents usually participated more in cultural activities than whites (Wenfan, 1999). Thus, having parental involvement activities with a cultural element has been found to increase involvement at schools such as those in this study. This information helps shape an understanding of the activities parents at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School would like to become involved in.

Furthermore, African Americans can often be undervalued in the school context due to teachers’ biases (including not only blatant bias, but also indirect prejudice for “White” educational practices). Particularly, teachers, administrators and school personnel may not often observe the strengths and values of African Americans. Parents of successful African-American students at all levels are often more involved in their students education than successful Whites, because this involvement helps overcome other limiting circumstances and the undervaluing of African Americans (Wenfan, 1999). Due to these factors, it becomes more important to understand the culturally specific strengths of underprivileged or undervalued populations within parental involvement because it affects their future more than privileged populations. Thus, by attempting to engage parents in a manner that is arguably more culturally specific, they may become more involved and more willing to act.

**Increasing Involvement**

Understanding interventions that have successfully increased involvement can allow this study to direct questions to see if parents would be interested in such activities. Many suggestions for increasing parental involvement occurred throughout the literature.
Common themes include teachers developing a respectful rapport and individual bond, free of criticism, with parents (“11 Ways to Boost . . .”, 2003; Baker, Et Al., 1999; Jacobi, et. al, 2003; Lunenburg & Irby, 2002; Trotman, 2001) through such methods as having a parent-teacher conference before school starts to see what parents desire (Rasinski & Fawcett, 1996).

In addition, teachers and schools should provide multiple activities for parents that address different interest. Where there is greater interest parents will be more likely to become involved (Gbadamosi & Huey-Ling, 2003; Trotman, 2001). For example, focusing on cultural activities may be more useful in improving parental involvement at the schools in this study since, as discussed in the previous section, African American parents usually participate in more cultural activities that whites (Wenfan, 1999).

Also, programs have shown success in increasing parental involvement when they focus on parents’ role construction (way they position themselves in the context of the school) in the school. Some successful programs target parents’ psychological barriers by giving them greater knowledge/skills, confidence, and trust in the schools (Frone & Rice, 1987; Shepard & Rose, 1995). Programs achieving these goals can change parents’ role perceptions, making them more involved in the school. In a similar manner looking at “whys” and “hows” of parental involvement can show parents the importance of their participation and their social capital within the school. Finally, as this study does, schools should increase parents’ roles as leaders by asking parents what they want to see and urging parents’ involvement in planning (Barton, et. al, 1996; Miller, 1998).

Through studies such as this one, various traditional and nontraditional ways to improve
involvement can be discovered by the parents themselves when they understand the goals and importance of parental involvement (Barton, *et. al*, 1996).

Between 1999 and 2003 parents’ reported level of involvement has increased according to a Barton & Peres & St. Louis & George (2004) study of nationwide data from the US Department of Education. However, the literature suggests that methods to increase parental involvement vary from school to school. Therefore case studies at schools such as Orr Elementary School and Tyler Elementary School are valuable tools to discover the obstacles to parental involvement in these locations. Once these obstacles are discovered, as well as desires of parents are discussed, evidence such as that of Barton, *et. al* (2004), shows that parental involvement can increase.

**Lessons from the Literature**

For the current study, parental involvement will be limited to involvement with school and the school community in ways such as communication with teachers. Although the issues are important, the study will not focus on issues such as TV monitoring or discussion of children’s future plans as other studies chose to do. These variables are harder to measure and are less pertinent to the schools’ goals of increasing parental involvement at the schools. In addition, the measurements of involvement will follow the low level/high level differentiation of previous studies with the parents defining the levels.

Furthermore, understanding the environment and context of this study helps direct phone interviews. Knowing that some teachers feel that parents either do not want to be involved or are not capable of educational involvement (Trotman, 2001; Ramirez, 2001;
Rasinski & Fawcett, 1996) has shaped this study to look for such issues at the target schools. Parents’ perceptions of their roles at the school and ability to be involved at the school remain an integral part to this study.

Similarly, the literature informs the questioning and analyzing process. Knowledge of the basic challenges of parents, such as time constraints and feelings of disempowerment, has informed this study to ask questions to see if these constraints exist at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School. Also, the literature on African Americans has influenced this study to look for themes such as cultural activity involvement across phone interviews of the two schools.

**Significance of Study**

A study on parental involvement has not been completed at Tyler Elementary School or Orr Elementary School. Therefore, by providing these two schools with information regarding parents’ views, the schools and the Center for Inspired Teaching can create programs to get parents more involved in the school community. Furthermore, by providing teachers with evidence of parents’ actual views, I can help educate the teachers on how to get parents involved.

**Hypotheses**

Based on the literature and known information, several hypotheses were developed for this study. The hypotheses follow grouped by subquestions.

*Current Level of Involvement at the Schools*

1) Parents feel that they have little involvement in the school. (Involvement will be operationalized by asking parents if they feel they have no, little, some, or a lot of involvement)

*Types of Activities in which Parents are Involved*
2) Parents are involved in more activities in which they have direct contact with their child.
3) Following the predictions of the literature, parents are involved in activities that work around their schedule and in which they feel they have some voice and power within.

*How to improve/increase Parental Activity – What Parents would like to be involved In*

4) Parental involvement can be increased through more positive communication with teachers as shown by the literature on increasing parental involvement.
5) Based on the literature focusing on African-American parents, the parents at these two schools will be more interested in culturally related activities.

**Methodology**

This study utilized phone interviews to determine current levels of parental involvement, how parents are involved, and how parents would like to become involved at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School. See appendix B. In addition to the phone interviews, preliminary survey data from Orr Elementary School was also utilized because it provided a larger sample for two questions. See Appendix C. Finally, upon each trip to the school, the researcher took field notes that serve as supporting data for some of the information from the phone interviews. While the phone interviews serve as primary data, the surveys and field notes serve as supporting data.

*Sampling and Recruitment*

This study focused on the parents of two schools, Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School. The sample included all volunteers from these schools willing to participate in the study. Recruitment was similar to the study of West, Noden, Edge & David (1998), in which parents were initially contacted with a letter and asked to return the letter with their phone number if they wished to be interviewed. Specifically, in this study, early in the school year parents at Orr Elementary School received a form
(Appendix C) allowing them to check what school activities parents wished to become involved in. On this form a brief paragraph explained the purpose of this study and the Center for Inspired Teaching’s work. The parents could then check if they desired to participate in a phone interview. If they did not check either, then they were not contacted. If they checked yes to phone interview or focus group, the parents’ contact information was obtained from the form. At this point, these parents were contacted regarding their participation and phone interviews were arranged. This “opting in method” was found to be appropriate “as it yielded a representative sample” in previous research carried out by West and Varlaam as cited in West, et. a l (1998, p. 493).

In contrast, no form was sent out to parents at Tyler Elementary School because pre-existing contacts existed and administrative procedures were different. Some parents from Tyler Elementary School requested to participate in a focus group concerning their involvement and perceptions of the school. These parents requested participation in the study from their own knowledge of the Center for Inspired Teaching’s work and were able to initiate contact themselves. In other instances, I sat in on monthly meetings to recruit participants for the study.

Finally, especially at Tyler Elementary School, snowball sampling was utilized. Parents who participated in the study were asked to contact any other parents that they felt would be interested in the project. These additional parents were then able to contact us to become involved in the study. Although this “opting in” method was different from that at Orr Elementary School (due to different requests of the schools), and potentially not as representative, it was valid because it provides information from a significant number of participants.
Limitations

Due to the snowball nature of sampling, my data cannot be random. By doing a limited number of interviews we could not generalize all results from the small sample to the larger school. Yet the study gathered important information for the continued development of parent activities at the elementary schools. Finally, this study was concerned with parent perceptions of their involvement. Therefore, although the importance of teacher, staff, and administrator opinions is recognized, these views were not examined.

Survey Data

The recruitment tool at Orr Elementary School (Appendix C) also asked two specific questions of parents: What activities would you like to see at Orr Elementary School? How can Orr Elementary School better work with your schedule? Of the 270 surveys sent out, we received 32 back for analysis (11%). This data supplemented the phone interview data because it provided more responses to two questions asked in the phone interview.

Phone Procedures

Due to the ease of reaching participants, most cases were obtained through phone interviews. Each phone interview took between 15-30 minutes and was conducted from the Center for Inspired Teaching’s office in the evening and on weekends. While I asked to speak to the parent who signed the original form for participation, if the parent was not available, I asked for a better time to call back or if someone else was available to speak with concerning parental involvement in the respective schools. This resulted in the participation of some fathers who were not the original points of contact.
For the parents participating in phone interviews, the informed consent form was read with the phone protocol (attached Appendix E) and the details of the study were discussed. After the attached phone protocol was read and verbal consent was obtained, I asked the questions from Appendix B. While I asked all of the basic questions outlined in the Appendix, but as the discussion flowed, many parents were asked more in-depth questions about specific comments.

Data Analysis

After data was collected following the timeline attached in Appendix F, data analysis began. The focus group and phone interview information was transcribed and input into NUDI*ST programming with each individual receiving a randomly generated 4 digit code. From this transcription a coding system was developed. The coding system is described below. Generally, specific target questions addressed each question and sub-question. However, if the topic or measure was mentioned or brought up by the parent at other times in the phone interview, it was included within the appropriate question or sub-question. Two individuals completed the coding scheme to address reliability issues.

Measures

What is the current perception of the level of parental involvement at the school?

To determine the current perception of the level of the parents’ personal involvement at the school, I asked parents to classify themselves as having none, a little, some, or a lot of involvement. Using their own classification, I described the level of involvement at the school using the number of parents that reported each of the four coding levels.
In addition, to further interpret this answer, I asked parents what they perceived their role in the school was. Based on these responses, I developed a coding system defining the parents’ roles as advocate, empowered, home-involved only, and present. First, several parents mentioned the term advocate, which was further described by Katz (1996) as parents that engage the teachers and ensure their students have their needs met within the school. In addition, parents who mentioned forcing conversations with teachers, or persisting to achieve communication fell within this classification. Another category was the empowered parent as defined by Barton, et. al (2004). These parents performed all of the roles of the advocate parents, but they also took on leadership roles in the school. Next, I classified the individuals who spoke of having limited roles within the school, but stronger roles at home (i.e. helping with homework, but leaving the teachers to do their job at school) as home-involved only. Importantly, this term does not mean that other parents are uninvolved at home, but rather that these home-involved parents are involved only at home and not at school. Finally, other parents were classified as present at school meaning that they are frequently at the school and have conversations with other school members, but do not do anything active or acquire any leadership positions within the school.

Why do parents participate in the activities that they do?

First, I sought to determine how many parents actively participate in the opportunities available at the school. To do this, parents were asked what activities they participated in. First, a strict number count was taken for each activity and I placed activities into four categories: institutional, direct contact, non-institutional, and none available. Institutional activities are those activities organized through the school and its
associations that provide interaction with other adults, but do not provide direct contact with the children. Within this category, it was discovered that various parents participate in PTA, parent-teacher conferences, morning coffee sessions, and the Boys and Girls Clubs. Next, I developed a category for activities providing direct contact with the parents’ children. This category was for those activities that allowed the parents to see their children or directly help their children while being involved. The category only produced two subcategories: chaperoning field trips and assisting with afterschool activities. Furthermore, activities not explicitly organized by the school were also considered and counted as non-institutional. These included the efforts that specific parents had made such as calling the teachers, volunteering in the classrooms, etc.

Finally, a category was developed within this question as none available for the parents who claimed that there were not any activities for them to be involved in.

Following this, to understand why parents are engaged in the manner that they are, parents were asked why they chose certain activities and why they did not choose certain activities. Coding within this category included scheduling, when parents mentioned that their schedule prevented them from participating in some activities or allowed them to participate in others; notice, in which parents did not know of activities occurring far enough in advance to attend; knowledge, in which parents did not even know of the existence of the activities; and a feeling of being welcomed or unwelcomed, in which parents mentioned their perception about coordinator’s/staff’s positive (welcomed) or negative (unwelcomed) perception of them.
In what ways can the schools improve/increase parental involvement?

Parents were specifically asked how to improve/increase involvement. The main focus was communication. First, I determined if parents felt communication was an issue and coded them based on yes, communication is an issue; or no, communication is not an issue. Following this classification, several suggestions surfaced on how to improve communication. These suggestions served as the coding categories for improving communication and included: specific mentions of newsletter, progress reports, notification of events, further discussions between parents and teachers, teachers making the effort to call parents, and establishing a parent-teacher coordinator.

Furthermore, parents were asked what other activities they would like to see at their schools. Within this question, many categories surfaced. Specifically, parents mentioned a parent-resource room, more chaperoning opportunities for field trips, speakers (specifically parents about their jobs) and cultural (play, musical, art, and choral) activities. In addition, parents indicated desires for sports and academic activities such as tutoring, computer classes, and language classes. However, upon asking the parents which activities they would want to be involved in, they only specifically mentioned the cultural activities, chaperoning, and speakers, and resource room because they would just like the other opportunities to be available for their students. Therefore, although the desires of additional activities were reported to the schools, the only additional opportunities analyzed for this study were the parent-resource room and cultural activities because it is the one parents themselves wanted to become involved in.
Finally, since scheduling was mentioned repeatedly, parents were asked how the schools could work with their schedules. Coding was developed according to these responses. They included: good for me (which means parents think the schedule of activities is good for them, but may not be for others), good for all (in which the parents thought the scheduling was fine for everyone), more evening opportunities (in which parents felt that more people would be involved if opportunities were available in the evening), and finally more weekend opportunities (in which parents felt that more people would be involved if opportunities were available on the weekends).

The complete coding scheme is displayed in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question or Subquestion Targeted</th>
<th>Measure – Target Questions</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What level of involvement do parents classify themselves as having?</td>
<td>3) What level of involvement do you see yourself as having in the school – none, a little, some, or a lot?</td>
<td>- None&lt;br&gt;- little&lt;br&gt;- some&lt;br&gt;- a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do parents define their involvement/role in the school?</td>
<td>2) What do you see as your role in your child’s education?</td>
<td>- home involved only&lt;br&gt;- present (defined above)&lt;br&gt;- advocate&lt;br&gt;- empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many parents actively participate in the opportunities that the school provides for parental involvement? What are these activities?</td>
<td>4) Are you involved in any school activities? 5) If yes, what activities are you involved in?</td>
<td>- Number of Participants for Each&lt;br&gt;- Institutional&lt;br&gt;  o Morning Coffee Sessions&lt;br&gt;  o PTA Meetings&lt;br&gt;  o Parent-teacher Conferences&lt;br&gt;  o Boys and Girls Clubs&lt;br&gt;  - Direct Contact with Child&lt;br&gt;  o Chaperoning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| What are parents involved with the activities they are involved in? | 1a) Tell me about your experiences at Orr Elementary School/Tyler Elementary School – what have you liked and disliked?  
6) Why do you choose to be involved in these activities?  
7) Is there a reason you choose some activities over others? | - Scheduling  
- Notice  
- Knowledge of  
- Feeling of being welcome  
- Feeling of being unwelcome (defined above) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| What other activities would parents like to see at the schools? | 8) What activities would you like to see at Orr Elementary School/Tyler Elementary School? | - Cultural  
- Academic  
- Parent Resource Room  
- Speakers  
- Field Trips |
| What could Orr and Tyler Elementary Schools do to improve parental involvement? | 9) How could the school help strengthen parent-teacher communication?  
10) How would parents be more likely to become engaged at Orr/Tyler Elementary School? | - Scheduling or time constraints  
- Notification  
- Teachers Calling Parents  
- Newsletter  
- Parent-teacher coordinator  
- Further Discussion  
- Progress Reports |
| Is communication an issue at the school? | No target question – ded  
if communication was mentioned as a problem the interview. | - Yes  
- No |
| How could the schools address scheduling concerns? | 11) How could the school work with your schedule? | - Good for me  
- Good for all  
- More evening activities  
- More weekend activities (defined above) |
Results

Orr Elementary School

Over the course of contact with Orr Elementary School, a low participation rate was obtained. From the survey the return rate was 11% and only 8 of these individuals (36%) could be interviewed due to various circumstances, such as phone line disconnection. However, the results remain important due to the fact that no such study has previously been conducted at Orr Elementary School.

Problem 1
What is the current perception of parental involvement at the school?
Parents self classified themselves into involvement categories based upon their own interpretation of involvement. As Figure 1 shows, five out of seven (71.4%) parents classified themselves as having some involvement, one out of seven (14.3%) classified themselves as a lot of involvement, and one out of seven (14.3%) classified themselves as a little involvement. One parent chose not to respond to this question.
Figure 1: This Figure describes Orr Elementary School’s parents’ self-assessment of their level of involvement at the school. They were given the options of none, a little, some, and a lot.

To understand their depth of involvement within these definitions, parents were asked to define their roles within the school as shown below in Figure 2. All of the parents, regardless of what level they placed themselves, saw themselves as having a very large role in their child’s education. Three of the parents with “some” involvement and the one parent with “a little” involvement mentioned how their role included communication with the teachers. Specifically, these five parents felt that they were advocates and that parents were responsible for facilitating and encouraging this communication within the school. The one parent placing herself in the category of “a lot” of involvement defined herself as having an active role in the community and sees herself as an organizer because she plans parent activities with the guidance counselors and has attempted to organize an activity to get tutoring for the students. According to the definition of Barton, et. al (1996), this parent is an empowered and sees herself as having the ability to affect change within the school community. One parent also noted that she was only involved at home with homework, and thus fell into the category of
home-involved only. Finally, two parents were present in the school because they were frequently at the school, but did not take any active roles within the school community.

![Orr Elementary School - Parents' Roles in School](image)

Figure 2: Figure 2 displays the number of parents classified in each role within the schools.

**Problem 2**

*What are the ways in which parents are involved?*

All parents reported that they were not involved in any organized school activities. However, in further discussion, it was discovered that one parent went on field trips, two attended the monthly morning coffee sessions, and one organized the coffee sessions. One reported attending PTA meetings. Two others mentioned that the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs, an afterschool activity based at the school, are good programs that they feel more involved in due to more communication. Parents reported that activities that provided hands-on contact with their children were not available, but that they would consider being involved in these activities if they were more available.
Activities Orr Elementary Parents are Involved In

The activities parents reported involvement in reflected that they do participate in activities that are organized by the school. The involvement in the morning coffee sessions does support that parents are involved in more activities which they feel empowered and in which “they have a say in.” Specifically, two of the parents reported that the morning coffee sessions were a time to discuss school problems, and that the parents attending these meetings worked with the guidance counselor to increase parental involvement.

In addition, at Orr Elementary School most parents did not specify why they were involved in the activities that they chose. Two parents did mention that their activities worked best with their schedule. Two others mentioned that as long as they had notification of the activities they would be involved. One parent reported that she was uninvolved due to a lack of knowledge concerning the PTA in particular.

Problem 3
What are the ways to improve/increase parental involvement?
Importantly, two of the eight parents thought that Orr Elementary School was doing all they could to promote parental involvement and that the lack of involvement was the parents fault. Despite their positive opinion of the school, these parents still expressed some discontent with the way the school runs activities. Furthermore, neither one of these parents reported attending the morning coffee sessions or feeling any empowerment within the school environment.

*Communication*

Although six of eight Orr Elementary School parents emphasized that they thought that the staff was one of the strongest assets to Orr Elementary School, they did not feel that communication between the staff and parents was adequate. As Figure 4 presents, in total out of eight documented interviews, six of the eight parents or 75% emphasized parent-teacher communications as an area in need of work. Between these parents, the issue of communication was raised fifteen times. Similarly, in the survey from the beginning of the year, 14% of respondents reported a desire for better communication between parents and the school. For example, one parent wrote that s/he desired, “To have more informative meetings with teachers and parents on how to get better involved with my child's school learning.”
Parents provided many ideas about how to foster better communication in the school environment. As Figure 5 shows, three parents mentioned that they desired a regular newsletter. When the researcher commented that the school claimed to have a newsletter, all three were shocked and one parent (the empowered parent organizing morning coffee sessions) laughed. These actions signaled to the researcher, that if a newsletter did exist, it did not reach the parents. To ensure that parents received information, one parent suggested both emailing the newsletters and physically mailing it home.

**Notification**

On a similar note, 25% of survey respondents suggested that more notification would be helpful to increase parental involvement. For example, one parent wished the communication would be distributed in a timelier manner because notices were often posted the day before a meeting that was not enough time for her to get off work or rearrange her schedule. In my own field research, I noticed a similar notification issue
when the administration was making copies of a flyer about a meeting the next morning at 2pm the day before. The next day, only one parent was able to attend this meeting. During the interview, one parent provided suggestions to improve notification such as having a scheduled day for events (the same every week or month) or producing a monthly calendar that lists all of the events for the month.

_Scheduling_

In addition, as displayed in Figure 5, to improve communication and parent teacher involvement 100% of individuals interviewed mentioned various changes to scheduling of events (although the changes they mentioned were not necessarily consistent). For example, scheduling concerns prevented three of the parents from participating in the morning coffee sessions because of work. From the beginning of the year survey, 50% of parents said they need opportunities that work around their work schedules, such as holding meetings in the evening. Specific suggestions from the phone interview of improving scheduling included five parents or 62.5% of respondents suggesting activities should be held in the evenings or after 6pm. One parent suggested weekend activities since parents were usually off work at this time. Two other parents reported that the current activities fit with their schedule, since they worked in the evenings, but acknowledged that it might not work for other parents.

_Additional Suggestions_

Several other notable suggestions surfaced during interviews. One parent valued further discussions, such as the one we were having. Another parent wanted more constant communication from the teachers about what is going on in the school before parent teacher conferences (such as progress reports or phone calls. One parent
suggested having a parent resource room for parents to use “daily to perform multiple
task,” such as “Xeroxing documents.” Finally, to facilitate opening parent-teacher
communication one parent also suggested a parent-teacher coordinator.

![Parental Ideas of Improving Communication at Orr Elementary School](image)

**Figure 5:** Figure 5 presents the number of parents that reported various ideas to improve communication within the school.

*Other Activities*

While all parents desired more activities in the school, such as academic
opportunities that did not relate to parental involvement; many activities were mentioned
that directly related to parental involvement. Three of the eight respondents (37.5%)
desired cultural activities, such as plays, art, and music for the children which parents
could either directly support through planning, or would likely support through
attendance. From the survey, 21% of respondents would like to see more cultural activities at school, such as a dance program or chorus. Another parent mentioned the desire for more field trips, and thus more chaperoning opportunities. One parent desired more speakers, including more parents speaking about their jobs. Two (25%) mentioned a desire for increased opportunities in general for younger students (pre-K, K, and 1st) where they felt activities and ways of engagement were lacking. These parents reported that older students had more avenues open (such as sports) and the younger students did not. Although sports may not be the perfect activity for a first grader, they wanted something for their children to be involved in that they could help with.

**PTA**

The PTA was a topic in itself because parents felt that it was not successful. No parents reported attending meetings. One mentioned that she had joined the PTA and paid dues, but never received any information. Another felt that the failure of the PTA was related to a lack of funding. No parent mentioned that they actively participated in the PTA or felt that it was a strong program.

**Tyler Elementary School**

Unlike Orr Elementary School, Tyler Elementary School parents were not given a survey at the beginning of the year due to differing administrative procedures. However, Tyler Elementary School parents were interviewed in the same manner and provided results on the same issues. In addition, due to other pressing concerns at Tyler Elementary School (the risking of closure due to No Child Left Behind) the project took longer to begin than it did at Orr Elementary School. Therefore, at present we have a
lower number of respondents, but these respondents do provide baseline data to begin improving parental involvement at the school.

**Problem 1**

*What is the current level of involvement at Tyler Elementary School?*

![Figure 6](chart.png)

**Figure 6:** This figure describes Tyler Elementary School’s parents’ self-assessment of their level of involvement at the school. They were given the options of none, a little, some, and a lot.

Of the parents currently reached at Tyler Elementary School, four out of five report having a lot of involvement, while one reported having a little involvement, as shown in Figure 6. When asked about their role, three of the parents that reported having a lot of involvement were advocate parents (Barton, *et. al*, 2003; Shepard & Rose, 1995) defining themselves as their child’s advocate or speaking of constantly going in the school and “making” the teachers talk to them. The other parent reporting “a lot” of involvement was an empowered parent (Shepard & Rose, 1995) who took a leadership role in the school as PTA president.

The parent reporting a little involvement had just transferred her student to Tyler Elementary School at the beginning of the year. She felt that the previous school was more welcoming to parents and that Tyler Elementary School did not encourage any
parental involvement. Therefore, this parent was home-involved and only helped her child with homework. However, on an important note, the class her child is enrolled in has a teacher who does not let anyone into her classroom including Inspired Teaching’s mentor for her, so this could be an issue specific to this class.

![Tyler Elementary School - Parents' Roles in School](image)

Figure 7: This figure displays the number of parents classified in the various roles at Tyler Elementary School.

**Problem II**

*What are the ways in which parents are involved?*

As Figure 8 displays, four out of five parents went to monthly meetings organized by the social worker (the meeting where parents were first targeted for participation in the interviews). In addition, one parent was the PTA president, one worked with an afterschool program, and the others reported no involvement in other activities. These parents reported that there were not many activities to become involved in. All did say that they were involved in activities that provided notification about meetings or events.
Figure 8: Figure 8 displays the number of respondents involved in various activities at Tyler Elementary School.

**Problem 3**

*In what ways can the school improve/increase parental involvement?*

*Communication*

As Figure 9 reports, four out of five parents expressed issues with communication between the parents and the school. One of these four felt that it was the parents’ responsibility to improve the communication, while the other three felt that the school needed to improve the communication. Furthermore, two parents specifically mentioned a communication issue with the principal in which she would not make time for parents.
Other communication issues within the school were also mentioned. Specifically, one parent saw a great disconnect between the afterschool programs and the actual school. Although the programs were housed within the school building, the parent noted that the teachers and staff at Tyler Elementary School “did not know anything” about the program and that the school and program were not working together.

Another parent felt that there was a disconnect between the teachers and principal. Specifically, she did not feel that the principal adequately addressed teacher’s concerns. Interestingly, this can be contrasted with another parent who felt that the teachers were not supporting the principal’s ideas. This parent said that the principal was “great” and “had a lot of great ideas,” but no teachers to “back her up.” Such information relates that everyone is not on the same page.

First, to improve communication, one parent voiced a desire for progress reports. She informed me that the school sent these reports out in the beginning of the year, but then stopped for reasons unknown to her. This statement demonstrates that parents desire communication in multiple ways. Knowing that meeting with every parent every couple
of weeks would be a difficult task for teachers (both in terms of time and scheduling), this parent wanted written communication.

Several parents reported reasons that they had good communication at Tyler Elementary School. Three of the parents noted how they were at the school frequently and were present in the hall attempting to talk to teachers. Another parent felt valued because her child’s teacher has her phone number and whenever there is a problem in the classroom, this teacher calls the parent immediately during classroom hours.

In contrast, to improve communication, parents also mentioned fostering respect between parents and teachers. One parent felt that the teachers did not respect parents and found them “uneducated” and useless in the classroom. Similarly, this parent voiced an age issue. She is a young parent and feels that the staff disregards her opinions because of her age. She said: They look at me like I don’t know what I’m talking about, but I’m a parent too. I know my kids. She especially voiced concerns that the social workers did not care about her opinion and on one instance simply seemed to ignore what she said.

Similarly, one parent figure, which was actually a grandparent, felt that the school excluded grandparents who actually have as large of a role as the parents. She voiced that “They only want parents” and “I try to be involved but can’t.” This raises issues as to whether other guardian figures are as welcome in the school as other parents and suggested that the school should be more welcoming to parent figures.

Two other parents raised issues of feelings of welcomeness impacting involvement. One parent reported that she was involved because she feels welcome, while another parent reported not being involved due to feeling unwelcome by the
teachers. Thus, along with respect factoring into involvement, feelings of welcomeness also effected parental involvement.

**Scheduling**

None of the parents interviewed at Tyler Elementary School reported issues with scheduling. However, most of the parents interviewed were the ones in attendance at the meeting making the issue not relevant to the sample, but not necessarily generalizable to the whole.

**Additional Activities**

There were some activities that parents wished to see and be able to have involvement in. One noted how “volunteering is not always what’s best,” but she would be more likely to be involved if the school had a Parent Resource Center where she could come in and do some work for the teacher. Furthermore, she noted that if there were opportunities for the parents to gain something from being at the school, many more would come. For example, this parent noted that if the school had computers for parents’ use, parents would be able to “do something for themselves” as well as be at the school to assist. However, several years (the exact number is not recalled by the school) ago the school had a Parent Resource Center with GED classes, a laundry room, and computers; but few parents used these services. Therefore, further exploration into the previous Parent Resource Center must be investigated.

Finally, three parents specifically noted a desire to be involved in cultural activities with all parents noting music, one parent noting drama, and one parent noting art. These parents felt that these activities would both benefit kids and be a more interesting way to be involved at the school.
Figure 10: This figure is a summary of parental suggestions for improving involvement at Tyler Elementary School. It shows the number of parents recommending each method to improve parental involvement.

**A different perspective – PTA President**

Up until 1.5 years ago, Tyler Elementary School did not have a PTA. Now, the school has been able to develop this program. For a different perspective on parental involvement, I interviewed the current PTA President. Last year, the PTA President (a parent) faced the challenges of other parents. However, this year she has both been elected as PTA President and become employed at the office of Tyler Elementary School. She feels that her multiple roles give her a different view on the topic of parental involvement.

The president noted that, on the parents’ side, the PTA is weaker than last year. She feels that the teachers are very supportive and are willing to talk to parents. However, she believes that some parents may have had bad experiences with teachers in the past, and thus feel hesitant to attempt building a relationship with any teacher. Furthermore, the PTA president believes that many parents may not know how to
approach the teachers. However, she did not stress any further role or action that should be taken by teachers. Personally, seeing herself as an advocate parent, she established her own lines of communication at the school, and seems to think other parents should as well.

As PTA President, she is currently searching for ways to draw parents in. During a recent meeting, she attempted to use food, but this did not work. Now, she is currently planning a program to teach parents how to help students with homework (in attempts to get them to the school).

**A Graphic Comparison**

Although the sample size at both schools is too small for percentages to be statistically significant, they are a useful tool to describe the comparison between parents at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School. As Figure 11 displays, parents at Tyler Elementary School see themselves as having more involvement than the parents interviewed at Orr Elementary School. As discussed, this is probably due to the fact that parents at Tyler Elementary School were primarily drawn from attendants at a monthly meeting, and thus were already involved. However, as Figure 12 displays the roles of parents at both schools are similar. For a side-by-side comparison of other issues such as communication and recommendations, see Appendix G.
Figure 11: Figure 11 shows a percentage comparison of self reported involvement at Tyler and Orr Elementary Schools.

Figure 12: This figure shows a percentage comparison of parents’ roles at Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School.

**Discussion**

**Hypothesis I**

*Parents feel that they have little involvement in the school. (Involvement*
will be operationalized by asking parents if they feel they have no, little, some, or a lot of involvement).

The data does not support the hypothesis that parents feel they have “a little” involvement in the school. The data show that only one parent from Tyler Elementary School and only one parent from Orr Elementary School felt that they had only a little involvement. Instead, five of seven (one chose not to respond) or 71.4% of parents from Orr Elementary School felt that they had some involvement, and four of five or 80% of Tyler Elementary School parents felt that they had a lot of involvement. Therefore, these parents felt some connection to the school, whether it was in organized activities or simply a presence in the school.

The noted difference in the level of involvement between Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary Schools relates to the sample pool. The Tyler Elementary School parents that the study was able to reach were already involved in the school to some degree because they were present at a meeting. On the other hand, parents at Orr Elementary School were drawn from participation forms distributed throughout the school. Although it would have been ideal to complete the same procedure at both schools, due to administration policies this was not possible.

Following the reports of involvement, it is possible that the parents that desired to talk to me were already more involved in the school than the general population. The reported involvement shows that parents do feel that they have opportunities to become involved in their child’s education.

**Hypothesis II**

*Parents are involved in more activities which they have direct contact with their child.*
The data also does not support Hypothesis II that parents are involved in more activities which they have direct contact with their child. Only one parent from Orr Elementary School reported being involved in an activity classified as having direct contact with their child through a field trip. Similarly, since only one parent from Tyler Elementary School reported an activity, afterschool assistance, consisting of direct contact with their child, this school’s data also does not support this hypothesis. However, parents also noted that activities for hands on contact were not really available at either school, and some voiced desires for more of these opportunities, specifically through cultural activities and more chaperoning opportunities on field trips.

Instead, as previous studies such as that of West et al. (1998) found, parents are particularly involved in informal discussions with teachers (p 468). Four of the parents at Tyler Elementary School voiced that they made specific efforts to become involved such as spending a lot of time at the school and making specific efforts with the teachers. One parent even invited the teacher over to dinner to foster communication. Similarly, five of the parents involved in Orr Elementary School (the four advocates and one empowered parent) reported making extra efforts such as phone calls to the school. As noted by Katz (1996), these parents see their role as that of advocates for their children. They do not wait for the teacher to approach them, but make specific efforts to understand their child’s teacher and school. Although these activities are not direct contact with the children, these findings most likely occur because the informal discussions are related to the performance of individual children, and thus the parents feel that they are using their limited time more efficiently by becoming involved on a personal level with the teacher.
These advocate parents may feel, and some did express, that other parents should act in the same manner, but often many of the other parents do not. For another alternative to direct involvement with the children, all of the other parents, if they reported involvement in the school, reported more institutionalized involvement such as attending monthly meetings, morning coffee sessions, and PTA. Since these are more established programs and the schools do not have any activities with direct contact with the children, parents probably feel that this is the main way to become involved. In addition, parents may feel that they have more of an impact on school policies by participating in these activities since these activities provide a chance to voice their opinions.

**Hypothesis 3**

*Following the predictions of the literature, parents are involved in activities that work around their schedule and which they feel they have some empowerment in.*

Hypothesis III that parents are involved in activities that work around their schedule and which they feel they have some power in was supported. Orr Elementary School parents that attended the morning coffee sessions reported liking that their ideas were heard at these sessions. At these meetings the guidance counselor and teachers are reported by parents to listen to issues and work on a solution with the parents. And, thus, as Barton *et al.* (2003) reported would be likely, these parents are able to shape school practices and become empowered. Similarly, Tyler Elementary School parents attended events or worked in arenas where they felt that their voice was heard.

Furthermore, at Orr and Tyler Elementary School, the parents who attended morning coffee sessions (Orr Elementary School) or monthly social worker meetings (Tyler Elementary School) were those that did not have time conflicts. Similarly, to
improve parental involvement, 100% of parents at Orr Elementary School focused on scheduling issues, which suggests that scheduling is a key variable effecting parental involvement as predicted by Bridge (2001), ERIC Development Team, (1998), and Frone & Rice (1987).

**Hypothesis IV**

*Parental involvement can be increased through more positive communication with teachers as shown by the literature on increasing parental involvement.*

Hypothesis IV that communication will help to improve parental involvement is also supported. Parents from both schools (75% at Orr Elementary School and 80% at Tyler Elementary School bringing the total to average to 76%) emphasized communication as a key issue. These parents feel communication is a limiting factor to their involvement. Since this factor is stressed within both school environments, we can generalize this finding to the larger population of both schools, as well as to parental involvement as a whole.

Those parents who did report involvement reported having good personal communication with the teachers, and those with lesser involvement voiced communication issues. Therefore, these results show that parents see communication as a barrier to involvement, and that if a school works on communication, the level of parental involvement will potentially improve. To do this, parents desire a respectful relationship and rapport with teachers that is free of criticism as noted by one specific parent at Tyler Elementary School and in previous studies (“11 Ways to Boost. . .”, 2003; Baker, *et. al*, 1999; Trotman, 2001).

*Feeling Welcome*
In addition, as a factor effecting involvement, the issue of feeling welcome arose. As Ramirez (2001) predicted, the level of comfort parents feel in schools affects their involvement. Ramirez’s (2001) study of teacher’s perceptions showed that some educators did not feel that parents were qualified to help. In support of this, one parent from Tyler Elementary School stated that she felt unwelcome because she perceived that the school staff did not feel she was qualified to help due to her young age. Such direct statements of unwelcome feelings demonstrate that by increasing the level of comfort or welcomeness in the school, parents are more likely to become involved in the school.

Improving Communication

Following this knowledge, parents from Orr Elementary School are the primary sample to understand how to improve home-school communication because those interviewed at Tyler Elementary School were those parents already most involved. It is important to note that parents at Tyler Elementary School did recommend fostering more respectful bonds with parents and increasing feelings of welcomeness (as discussed above) to improve communication. However, for Orr Elementary School more concrete suggestions were mentioned. Furthermore, issues that arose during interviews with parents at Orr Elementary School have been found in other studies as well. In one study by Rich (1985, as cited in Eric Development Team 1988) keys to increasing involvement related greatly to parents reported desires including: as noted by all Orr Elementary School parents “being sensitive to parents’ scheduling difficulties”; as noted by two Orr Elementary School parents “announcing meetings and other events long enough in advance for parents to arrange time off work;” and finally, as noted by three Orr Elementary School parents’ desires for newsletters and one Tyler Elementary School
parents’ desire for progress reports, “providing both legal and custodial parents with regular information on their child’s classroom activities, and any assistance they may need to become involved with the child’s learning.” This study found that these elements of communication (scheduling, notification, and newsletter) are a key component of improving communication. Thus, to improve parental involvement, Tyler Elementary School and Orr Elementary School must work on these communication issues.

**Hypothesis V**

*Based on the literature focusing on African-American parents, the parents at these two schools will be more interested in culturally related activities.*

Hypothesis V that parents would be more likely to be involved in cultural activities is not supported by the data. Parents did mention a strong desire for cultural activities, with 37.5% of parents interviewed at Orr Elementary School, 21.5% of parents surveyed at Orr Elementary School, and 60% of Tyler Elementary School parents reported desires for cultural opportunities. However, parents reported desires to be involved in many ways and these activities did not surface more than any other activities in the research. Cultural activities will reach some parents, but these same parents spoke of desires for more chaperoning or speaking opportunities, and Parent Resource Centers.

The results for improving involvement relate more to general ideas within the literature to improve involvement, such as parents desires to go on trips (West et al., 1998) improving communication, and Parent Resource Centers. No cultural particularity is demonstrated. However, since levels of parental involvement are so low, it is possible that once certain thresholds are achieved, then more culturally particular parental involvement opportunities will become more relevant.
Other Findings

The Lack of Networks

Ultimately the study of Orr Elementary School and Tyler Elementary School reflects that social capital needs to be built within the schools. As shown through the emphasis on communication building in Orr Elementary School’s and Tyler Elementary School’s data, the needed networks for social capital do not exist. Since most parents reported their involvement was related to their individual efforts - sometimes very extensive efforts such as constantly contacting the teachers - we see a further demonstration of the lack of preexisting networks. These individual bonds can be a starting point for greater parental relations, because as many pieces of literature noted, developing a respectful individual relationships with parents is key to parental involvement (“11 Ways to Boost . . .”, 2003; Baker, Et Al., 1999; Jacobi, et. al, 2003; Lunenburg & Irby, 2002; Trotman, 2001). Furthermore, such individual bonds begin to increase the students’ social capital creating the networks necessary for individual parents to draw on the schools’ resources (which also increases cultural capital) as well as provide the school their own resources.

Furthermore, differing from Orr Elementary School, Tyler Elementary School parents reported many communication networks lacking. Specifically, they felt that no one was communicating within the school including the principal with the teachers, the parents with the teachers, the teachers with the support staff, etc. To improve education at this school, they felt that communication should be a focal point and that building these networks would allow everyone to have more access to resources (or at least know who is able to perform a certain task). Educational coordination throughout the school remains
difficult without proper communication between teachers and principals. These findings show that the lack of networks may be a more structural problem within Tyler Elementary School.

**Helping Teachers Build Bonds with Parents**

Since the parents interviewed appear to be making great effort to become involved in their children’s education, we can see the importance of potential training for teacher’s in promoting effective involvement as noted in Carter (2002). Specifically, at Tyler Elementary School, since the PTA President noted that the teachers were willing to be involved and wanted to be involved with the parents, the teachers could probably benefit from at least one staff development day dedicated to parent outreach.

As suggested by the literature, this training could serve to dispel any of the teachers’ preconceived notions about the parents, such as that low-income families do not value education, do not have much to contribute to education, and do not desire to participate in schools (Trotman, 2001). Furthermore, since each school population is unique this training could involve the parents themselves. Potentially the most active parents in the community could show teachers how to reach out to the parents.

Interestingly, no activities that parents reported being involved in seemed to reflect a difference culturally specific activities. The community itself is slightly different, as is any school community. However, the culture of African-Americans specifically did not have any bearing on how the parents desired to become involved in their child’s education. However, it is possible that more culturally specific activities might engage a larger pool of parents in school-centered activities. Therefore, especially since the literature reports that teachers often know less about African-American parents
(Baker, et. al, 1999), it remains important for the school to try to reach out to all parents at the school to ask them what they would like to become involved in.

Summary

In summary:

- Parents feel they have some involvement within the school. Most parents see themselves as their child’s advocates.

- The current most popular activities are non-institutional, informal discussions and institutional activities that fit into parents’ schedules and give parents a voice in the school community.

- At this point, no cultural particularities to increase involvement have surfaced because parents still desire basic opportunities for involvement such as Parent Resource Rooms and cultural activities.

- Very key to improving parental involvement is improving communication between the home and school at both schools.

- To establish strong relationships with parents and reach goals to improve parental involvement, teachers should have specific trainings on parental involvement.

- Finally, in order to create stronger networks of people and resources within the schools, schools need to strengthen communication at all levels of the schools (principal, teachers, parents, afterschool programs, etc.).

- Achieving all of these goals can increase parental involvement and the social capital of the students, and, as predicted by the literature, lead to better academic achievement for the students.

Current Status and Further Research

In utilizing the results of this study, many new methods and various programs are being implemented at both schools. At Orr Elementary School the Tellin’ Stories Project, another non-profit organization, has planned to become an active part in the school. Tellin’ Stories is a project that works on community building within the schools by providing school-based workshops to bridge differences between parents and teachers.
This project also works to increase parental access to schools and “broaden their school-based roles as supporters, educators, advocates, decision makers and ambassadors” (Teaching for Change, 2006) and works specifically on parents’ role construction within the school as recommended by previous studies by Frone & Rice (1987) and Shepard & Rose (1995).

In Tyler Elementary School more efforts are being made with the PTA and monthly meetings. Since the beginning of this project, parental attendance at social worker monthly meetings has already improved, most likely because notices are more clearly posted. At a recent meeting, which had 10 attendants, the social worker had not prepared enough binders because she assumed attendance would be equal to previous meetings (approximately three to four parents). In addition, the Center for Inspired Teaching is attempting to establish a Parent Resource Room in both schools, as well as researching getting a volunteer parent teacher coordinator for both schools from local colleges. Once these goals are achieved, longitudinal data must be gathered to note any differences in parents’ perceptions of the schools.

Furthermore, at both schools more discussions must be held with parents, administrators, staff, and teachers. In addition, more efforts must be made to reach the larger population. Similarly, more research concerning culturally particular methods of drawing parents into the schools must be conducted. While this study attempted to determine these, none surfaced. Significantly, for Orr Elementary School, research should be conducted to determine why more parents are involved in the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs as opposed to school activities.
**Conclusion**

While the Center for Inspired Teaching and the schools still must do a lot of work to achieve higher levels of parental involvement, this study took a significant step in determining what will engage parents and how parents feel. The study not only began a dialogue within the school community, but also began producing some action with each school taking measures whether through the PTA outreach at Tyler Elementary School or through the Parent Resource Room and Tellin’ Stories project at Orr Elementary School. The goal from this point onward is to keep the current parent participants engaged and to use their suggestions to reach other parents and continue the longitudinal study of parental involvement at these two Washington, DC elementary schools.
Works Cited


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Appendix A: Attached separately in pdf format

Appendix B: Basic Questions for Phone Interviews

Basic Information
1) Tell me about your experiences at Orr Elementary School/Tyler Elementary School.
   a. What have you liked?
   b. What do you think still needs work?
2) What do you see as your role in your child’s education?

Current Level of Involvement at the Schools
3) What level of involvement do you see yourself as having in the school (none, little, some, or a lot)?
4) Are you involved in any school organized activities?

Types of Activities in which Parents are Involved
5) If yes, what are the activities you are involved in?
6) Why do you choose to be involved in these activities?
7) Is there a reason you choose some activities over others?

How to improve/increase Parental Activity
8) What activities would you like to see at Orr Elementary School/Tyler Elementary School?
9) How could the school help strengthen parent-teacher communication?
10) How would parents be more likely to become engaged at Orr?
11) How could the school work with your schedule?
Appendix C

Center for Inspired Teaching is helping Orr Elementary and families become a stronger team. Please fill out this survey to help us. Return it by October 28, 2005.

Also, please let us know if you are able to talk to someone at Inspired Teaching about your ideas for Orr Elementary. We could call you or you could join a group of other family members for an anonymous and informal discussion. If you would be willing to talk with us in a phone call or discussion group, please provide your contact information. Thank you for your help.

Name: _______________________________________ Email Address: _______________________________________

Phone Number:__________________________ Child’s Class: ____________________________

Are you willing to participate in a discussion group?   Yes   No
May we call you?        Yes   No

Check each of the following in which you have interest in participating.

_____ Donating items to the classroom from work   _____ Cafeteria Duty
_____ Working with special projects for teachers   _____ Playground duty
_____ Being a guest speaker (such as about your career)   _____ Photocopying
_____ Participating in the PTA   _____ Being a chaperone
_____ Working with special projects for teachers

What additional opportunities do you wish the school provided?
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

How could the school provide opportunities that work with your schedule?
______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix D
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH INVOLVING TREATMENT

Parental Involvement at Two Local Schools

Principal Investigator          Telephone
Alicia Wilson                  (202)338-3489

Sponsor
Center for Inspired Teaching

Introduction
You are invited to consider participating in a research study to investigate parental involvement. This form will describe the purpose and nature of the research, its possible risks and benefits, other options available to you, and your rights as a participant in the study. Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. The decision to participate, or not to participate, is yours. If you decide to participate, please be sure to sign and date the last page of this form.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH STUDY BEING DONE?
The Center for Inspired Teaching is working to make ____________(Orr or Tyler) and families a stronger team. In order to accomplish this we are conducting several focus groups to investigate what parents are involved with, what parents would like to see at ____________ (school name), and how the school could better accommodate you.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?
Approximately 30 people will take part in the study.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY/CONFIDENTIALITY?
During this focus group session the focus group leader will ask various questions concerning the activities you are and would like to be involved in. The information will be kept confidential, with the researchers at the Center for Inspired Teaching having the only access to the information. ____________ (school name) will not receive any information on who participated or what was said by particular participants. Your name will not be used when data from this study are published.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?
The focus group will last for 1-2 hours.
WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary at all times. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled, and it will not harm your relationship ___________ (the school), Center for Inspired Teaching or Georgetown University.

At any time you may decline to answer a question. If you wish to leave during the focus group, notify the group leader.

WHAT COMPENSATION DO I RECEIVE FOR THE STUDY?

No compensation will be provided for this study.

WHOM DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

Call Alicia Wilson at 202-338-3489 if you have questions about the study or any problems.

Call the Georgetown University IRB Office at 202-687-1506 with any questions about your rights as a research participant.

AUDIO RECORDING

During this focus group audiotape recording will be taken in order to document the group meeting. Shortly after this meeting, the information will be transcribed and all identifiable information will be removed.

Do you consent to audiotape recording?

__________________________________   __________________
Signature       Date

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have fully explained this study to the subject. I have discussed the study’s purpose its methodology. I have invited the subject to ask questions and have answered any questions that the subject has asked.

________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent  Date

Consent of Subject (or Legally Authorized Representative)
I have read the information provided in this Informed Consent Document (or it was read to me by ________________________________). My questions were answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

________________________________________  ________________________
Signature of Subject      Date

________________________________________  ________________________
Signature of Legally Authorized Representative  Date
Appendix E
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH INVOLVING TREATMENT

Parental Involvement at Two Local Schools – Phone Protocol

Principal Investigator     Telephone
Alicia Wilson       (202)338-3489

Sponsor

Center for Inspired Teaching

Introduction
Hi, I am Alicia Wilson, a research assistant at the Center for Inspired Teaching. We are working to increase community and family involvement at _______ (Orr or Tyler), and we have a few questions regarding your involvement at and perceptions of _______ (Orr or Tyler). Do you have time to complete the phone interview now? (If yes) First, I will describe the purpose and nature of the research, its possible risks and benefits, other options available to you, and your rights as a participant in the study. Please take whatever time you need to discuss the study with your family and friends, or anyone else you wish to. The decision to participate, or not to participate, is yours. The interview will last from 15-30 minutes. If you decide to participate, please give me verbal consent.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH STUDY BEING DONE?
The Center for Inspired Teaching is working to make ____________(Orr or Tyler) and families a stronger team. In order to accomplish this we are conducting several focus groups to investigate what parents are involved with, what parents would like to see at _______ (Orr or Tyler), and how the school could better accommodate you.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?
Approximately 30 people will take part in the study.

HOW LONG WILL I BE INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?
The interview will last between 15-30 minutes.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY/CONFIDENTIALITY?
During the phone interview, I will ask various questions concerning the activities you are and would like to be involved in. The information will be kept confidential, with the researchers at the Center for Inspired Teaching having the only access to the information and who participated. _____________ (school name) will not receive any information on who participated or what was said by particular participants. Your name will not be used when data from this study are published.
WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary at all times. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time. Deciding not to participate or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled, and it will not harm your relationship ____________ (the school), Center for Inspired Teaching or Georgetown University.

At any time you may decline to answer a question. If you wish to leave stop the interview, please let me know.

Do you have any questions at this time?

COMPENSATION

No compensation will be given for your participation in this study.

WHOM DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

If you later have any questions or problems you can call, me, Alicia Wilson at 202-338-3489.

Call the Georgetown University IRB Office at 202-687-1506 with any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Do you agree to participate in the study?

I have fully explained this study to the subject. I have discussed the study’s purpose and its procedures. I have invited the subject to ask questions and have answered any questions that the subject has asked. Verbal consent was obtained.

________________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent         Date
Interview will be conducted with the attached questions. The researcher will take notes.

Conclusion

The Center for Inspired Teaching and I would like to thank you for your participation in this study. Once again, I would like to assure you that your responses and participation will be kept confidential. Do you have any questions at this time? If at any time you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (202)338-3489. Thank you.
Appendix F: Actual Time Line

**Orr**

October 11 to October 28 – Prepared phone interview questions and reviewed relevant literature.

October 17 to October 28 – Sent out form to obtain volunteer participants and obtained preliminary information.

November and December – Finalize plans with Orr and obtain final approval.

Mid-January – Began phone interviews.

February – Analyzed data and prepared first report for principal.

March – Analyzed final data and sent final report to principal.

April – May – Sent findings to parents through newsletter.

**Tyler**

October 11 to October 28 – Met with principal. Prepared phone interview questions and reviewed relevant literature.

Mid-January – Met with parents and set up first phone interviews.

Late January – Early February – Conducted first phone interviews, and attend a morning meeting.

February to March – Analyzed data and prepared report for principal at Tyler.

March to May – Distributed findings to parents through PTA. Maintained contact with principal and teachers to see if any ideas have been implemented. Due to late timing in the year, the school may not have had time to implement any changes.

March to May – Compared data from two schools and prepared final reports.
Figure 3: This figure presents the activities that parents at Orr Elementary School reported involvement with.

Figure 8: Figure 8 displays the number of respondents involved in various activities at Tyler Elementary School.

Figure 4: Figure 4 presents the percentage of interviewed Orr Elementary School parents that mentioned communication as a key concern about their involvement in the school.

Figure 9 presents the percentage of interviewed Tyler Elementary School parents that mentioned communication as a key concern about their involvement in the school.
Figure 5: Figure 5 presents the number of parents that reported various ideas to improve communication within the school.

Figure 10: This figure is a summary of parental suggestions for improving involvement at Tyler Elementary School. It shows the number of parents...