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What are Parents' Perceptions of the Nature of Their Participation at the High School Level?

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The purpose of this study was to gain insight from parents and guardians about their experiences of involvement in the education of their high school aged children. Data were gathered using interviews for nine randomly selected participants from an urban high school in Alberta, Canada. Thematic analysis identified the types of activities parents perceived to constitute participation, barriers encountered, and potential school structures to enhance future involvement. Findings revealed that parents considered volunteering, attending activities, academic support, school council, and providing feedback as valued types of participation. Barriers were classified as child-based challenges, school-based challenges, and parent-based limitations.

L'objectif de cette étude était d'obtenir des informations de la part des parents et des tuteurs sur leurs expériences de participation à l'éducation de leurs enfants en âge de fréquenter l'école secondaire. Les données ont été recueillies au moyen d'entretiens avec neuf participants choisis au hasard dans une école secondaire en milieu urbain en Alberta, au Canada. L'analyse thématique a permis d'identifier les types d'activités que les parents considèrent comme constituant une participation, les obstacles rencontrés et les structures scolaires potentielles pour améliorer la participation à l'avenir. Les résultats ont révélé que les parents considéraient le bénévolat, la participation aux activités, le soutien scolaire, le conseil d'école et le fait de fournir des commentaires comme des types de participation appréciés. Les obstacles ont été classés comme des défis liés à l'enfant, des défis liés à l'école et des limites liées aux parents.

For students between the ages of 14 and 19 in Alberta, Canada, high school constitutes the last phase of their K–12 schooling when they demonstrate their increased independence, skills, breadth of interests, and social development. Each of these may influence their potential career paths and, accordingly, are accompanied by varying levels of involvement from parents.

Some researchers contend that the level of parent involvement is correlated to the culture and beliefs upheld within the family structure (Hill & Taylor, 2004). According to these researchers, there are varying reasons that parents participate in their children's lives during the high school years. These include career exploration, course or program selection, extracurricular support, knowledge of peer groups, academic assistance, and ongoing conversations related to decision-making. The impetus for parental participation differs considerably between elementary and junior high students. The frequency of involvement also varies considerably between parents of elementary through high school students. Dauber and Epstein (1993) and Epstein et al. (2018) concluded that as children age, the level of parent involvement steadily decreased. If it is true that

parental participation is lowest in high school, further investigation may seek to understand the factors that contribute to this decrease.

The Context

Alberta Education, the ministry of education, oversees school authorities in the province of Alberta for students in kindergarten to grade 12. It supports students, parents, teachers, and administrators with decisions related to education in Alberta. To gather feedback, Alberta Education distributes a yearly electronic survey, referred to as the *Accountability Pillar* (Alberta Education, 2010), to teachers and parents of students in grades four, seven, and 10, to compile data in a variety of areas, including stakeholder satisfaction with schools. This data is used by school administrators and school authority officials to assess current levels of performance and identify areas for future improvement. The *2015–2016 Accountability Pillar* results of an urban high school reflected a large discrepancy between the perceptions of teachers and those of parents in relation to a question about parent participation. The data yielded two conflicting opinions: teachers perceived that parents were highly involved in their children's education; in contrast, parents felt they were only minimally involved. The incongruent results of the survey were cause for further examination, particularly since the school's staff had been working purposefully for over 12 months to increase communication with parents in order to help them feel more informed about school operations and activities. Staff had hoped the focus on parent contact would foster conversations between parents and their children to further support the educational journey through high school; yet, the survey results seemed to indicate that this goal was not being realized.

Why, with an increased focus on providing various forums to engage the parent community, was there still a large discrepancy between teacher and parent perceptions of parent involvement in the *Accountability Pillar* survey? This study sought to address that question by exploring a broader examination of the nature of parent participation in the education of their children at the high school level.

This paper will begin by presenting literature around the often-confused terminology of parent participation. It will then describe a study conducted with nine randomly selected parent participants from one urban high school situated in Alberta, Canada. Participants were interviewed to gain an understanding of their perceptions about their participation at the high school level in order to address the primary research question: What are parents' perceptions of the nature of their participation at the high school level?

Interchanging Terminology

Throughout the literature, the phrases *parent involvement* and *parent engagement* appear interchangeable. The phrase most commonly used by researchers prior to 2004 was parental involvement; from 2005 onwards the phrase parent engagement became more prominent. Discrepancies occurred when comparing studies, since researchers constructed their own meanings associated with the terms. For instance, the term parent involvement is associated with definitions such as parents' physical presence in the school (Baker, Wise, Kelley, & Skiba, 2016); parents' direct interaction with children at the school site (Jeynes, 2013); parents' participation in activities merging school with home (Jowett & Baginsky, 1988); and parents' completion of tasks at home as requested by teachers (Epstein, 1985). The term parent engagement was also

used interchangeably and with differing connotations. Ferlazzo (2011) associated parent engagement with the ability to gain insight from parents about their concerns, thoughts, and experiences with the school system; Redding, Langdon, Meyer, and Sheley (2004) defined parent engagement as the positive effects in a home attributable to targeted interactions between parents and schools. Wolfendale (1983) amalgamated the terms parent involvement and parent engagement into the term *parental participation*.

In order to honor the intent and unique definitions chosen by researchers, the literature review refers to terminology denotated in each study. However, for the purpose of this study, Wolfendale's (1983) definition will be used: the term "parental participation" will incorporate meanings associated with both parent involvement and parent engagement.

Literature Review

Historically, academic study was the sole responsibility of the school, while families focused on the moral, culture, and spiritual needs of their children (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Over time, homes and schools began to operate more sequentially; early education began in homes and then continued in schools. Schools were viewed as a formalized setting for the continuation of learning processes that previously commenced in the home. Many of the ideologies pertaining to parent participation in schools were thought to have evolved alongside political and economic changes (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014). In the 1960s, parent involvement in early education was considered interference (Rogoff, 2003) and schools represented the formal settings with authority over children (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014).

Subsequently in the 1970's, perspectives and social mores shifted. Parents of children with special needs stood on the front lines of some of this change in Alberta. Prior to this, children with special needs had been institutionalized and parents were expected to abide by educational regulations in this regard. In an important move of advocacy, the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools*, including the Worth Commission and the Harder Report strongly recommended that children with special needs be granted access to basic education (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014). Advocacy continued through the 1980s with the establishment of advisory school councils that represented movement toward a shared framework of decision-making. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, created in 1985, outlined the rights of Canadian citizens; this legislation prompted parents to demand equal opportunity for all children in schools (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014). Three years later, the *School Act* affirmed parental rights in education (UNESCO, 1995), giving students with special needs the opportunity to become educated in public, local schools.

Parental advocacy continued to increase in the 1990s. A milestone was achieved on April 24th, 1995 when the *School Amendment Act* legislated involvement of parents by mandating the operation of school councils (Harrison & Kachur, 1999). The legitimization of school councils granted parents opportunities to gain insight into the responsibilities of schools and student learning (Brien & Stelmach, 2009). Henceforth, parents and schools continued to work collaboratively, with a primary focus on student success. (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Elementary, Junior, and Senior High Levels of Parent Participation

Dauber and Epstein (1993) and Epstein et al. (2018) ascertained that parent involvement during earlier years of schooling is much higher than latter years, affirming that as children age, the level

of parent involvement continues to decrease. Researchers in the field have identified reasons for decreased levels of parent participation. These include: increased student independence and more difficult subject matter (Eccles & Harold, 1996); increased complexities of curricular content, personal feelings towards the education system, and a lack of time (Epstein, 1985); parents' own lack of education and understandings of school processes (Hall et al., 2005); and decreased levels of communication as students age (Vaden-Kiernan & Chandler, 1996). Past researchers have justified reasons for decreased levels of parent participation; however, are these trends still experienced today?

Academic Impacts of Parent Participation

Researchers such as Oxley (2013), Epstein et al. (2018), Catsambis (2001), Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014), and Williams (2011) concurred that a positive correlation existed between academic success and parent participation based on certain factors. Both Catsambis (2001) and Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) identified positive home-school relationships as one factor of academic success. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) further identified parents' open communication about future plans and behavioural and emotional support as other factors that impacted the academic success of high school students. Overall, most studies concluded that parent participation at the high school level had a positive correlation with a variety of academic successes for children.
In contrast, some researchers postulated that actions such as increased supervision (Catsambis, 2001) and physically volunteering at the school (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014) did not correlate with increased academic success. Clearly, variances exist when examining parental participation and its correlation with academic progress.

Impediments to Parent Participation Noted in the Literature

Plausible barriers that parents encountered in their relationship with high schools constitutes another area of study in the literature. For example, Eccles and Harold (1996) identified increased student independence and difficult subject matter as obstacles; Epstein (1985) determined academic levels, parents' own preconceived attitudes, and time constraints as challenges; and Hall et al. (2005) recognized that parents themselves may have low levels of education and may not fully understand school processes. Catsambis (2001) noted the effects of negative associations when parents perceived school communication to be comprised solely of contacts to rectify problematic behavior of their children. Leitch and Tangri (1988) attested that health concerns and work obligations impacted parents' abilities to become involved. Through her study, Liontos (1991) concluded that time constraints, general energy drive, financial concerns, housing situations, lack of support network, family disputes, social problems, language inadequacies, race, class stature, and cultural demeanour all contributed to the obstacles to parent involvement. Others, such as Duchnowski, Kutash, and Romney (2006), concluded that parents were unsure of the process to assist their children, that staff exhibited condescending attitudes about parent involvement, and that teachers did not consistently communicate ways that parents could be involved.

Overcoming impediments to parent participation. Bloom (1992) provided the following examples of how parents could become more involved at the high school level: monitoring homework, attending meetings offered by schools, accessing supplemental academic supports, attending field trips as volunteers, identifying fundraising opportunities, creating

community networks, offering tutoring at the school, joining school council, and assisting personnel within the school (as cited in Khan, 1996). Khan (1996) built upon these suggestions by offering strategies for school leaders: provide relevant topics of discussion; recommend additional resources for parents; include parent voice in decision-making processes; increase communication between home and school; frequently assess parent needs and perceptions; and sustain a focus on building new relationships. Other suggestions for school leaders to address the impediments associated with parent involvement include communicating a school vision that reflects the notion of parent-student-teacher teams (Ouimette, Feldman, & Tung, 2006), creating a welcoming school atmosphere (Constantino, 2007), and focusing on building positive school climates that promote parent involvement (Rodriguez, Ringler, O'Neal, & Bunn, 2009).

E-nvolvement: An Emerging Consideration

E-nvolvement refers to the process of parents assisting their children with learning experiences at home or school with using various technological devices and platforms (Sad, Konca, Özer, & Acar, 2016). Both Olmstead (2013) and Sad et al., (2016) concluded that access to technology has improved communication, thus supporting increased parental participation. Brown and Vaughn (2015) and Olmstead (2013) reiterated the importance of ensuring that online information remains updated and consistent in order to sustain relevant communication with parents.

Although access to technology had increased in the school participating in the study presented in this article, low parent participation was still evident on the *Accountability Pillar*. Why, with increased accessibility to information, did high school parents continue to report low feelings of participation? Gaining a deeper understanding of the factors that influence these perceptions may provide insights for how to support practices that may increase parent participation at the high school level and, in turn, student success.

Methodology

This study sought to examine the nature of parent participation in the education of their children at the high school level by interviewing nine randomly selected parent participants from one urban high school situated in Alberta, Canada. Three parents were randomly selected to be interviewed from each grade level (10, 11, 12) to explore the primary research question: What is the nature of parent participation at the high school level? Data collected from this study was used to identify promising practices that could enhance parental participation in secondary schools. This research further explored additional elements of high school parent participation, including the types of participation experienced, potential barriers encountered, and how participation may have changed in comparison to earlier years of schooling. These perceptions were synthesized to offer recommendations that might inform processes and structures for future consideration.

The school in which this study was undertaken is an urban high school consisting of grade 10, 11, and 12 students with a population of 1113 primarily Caucasian students considered to fall in a moderately high socio-economic category. This urban centre reflects a fairly stable community, with a rapidly expanding economic base. The school offers students a plethora of opportunities and programming choices.

Participants

The research participants in this study were all legally declared parents and guardians of children at this school. Grade specific lists were compiled in accordance with guidelines outlined by the Government of Alberta (2007); three names were randomly selected from each grade level and phone calls were made requesting consent for participation. If parents chose to decline, other randomly selected names were generated by the computer. This selection process continued until nine participants were identified and fit the appropriate design criterion. Selecting three participants from each grade level provided the opportunity to make both grade level and general comparisons from the data.

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview process was used to collect data. This framework provided the opportunity to further probe insights that deviated from the established set of questions (Partington, 2001). This study asked the following seven questions:

1. Describe what parent participation means to you.
2. What advantages do you see to parent participation in high school?
3. Describe specific types of parent participation that have been helpful to you in high school.
4. Describe some ways that your participation in your child's schooling has changed as you have progressed through your child's education.
5. Depending on grade level, each question included:
    a. (Grade 10) Describe how your parent participation has changed since your child was in grade nine.
    b. (Grade 11) Describe how your parent participation has changed since your child has been in high school.
    c. (Grade 12) Describe how your parent participation has changed over the duration of your child's time spent in high school.
6. Describe barriers you have experienced that limited your participation at the high school level.
7. Are there any additional comments you would like to share in regards to parent participation? (If Yes) Please elaborate.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Data were analyzed using Malterud's (2012) systematic text condensation (STC) for qualitative analysis. As part of its framework, STC embedded Giorgi's (2009) four-step procedure; these included: (1) reading the entire description, (2) discriminating meaning units, (3) rereading meaning units and identifying psychological insight, and (4) synthesis of information into a statement that reflected the subject's experiences. In addition to Giorgi's (2009) four-step procedure, the STC also incorporated (1) presenting what participants described, (2) selecting specific sections of participants' descriptions, and (3) using a small number of subjects for the study (as cited in Malterud, 2012). Overall, the four-step analysis of the qualitative data as outlined by Malterud (2012) began with *total impressions—from chaos to themes*, where

preliminary themes began to emerge; the second step, *identifying and sorting meaning into units—from themes to codes*, used only fragments of the transcripts to decontextualize the data; the third step, *condensation—from code to meaning*, sorted meaning units into subgroups, and subgroups reduced into condensates; the last step, *synthesizing—from condensation to descriptions and concepts*, used both condensates and quotations to validate the study as a whole, and designated category headings. The analysis of the data was connected back to the original transcripts to increase the trustworthiness.

Delimitations

This study used participants from only one school. This provided perceptions from one context, rather than multiple schools in the area. The findings in this study reflected the opinions of the participants and are based on their interactions with the school being examined. Furthermore, this study gathered evidence that was reflective of the study's geographical area. It refrained from making globalized conclusions, positive or negative effects of parent participation, or place judgement on the participation of respondents.

Findings

Nine interviews were conducted to gain insight into parents' perceptions of their participation at the high school level. Interviews were transcribed and verified for accuracy. Every question was first examined independently, then grouped by trending values, ideas, perceptions, and opinions. This same procedure was repeated for all seven questions. Lastly, themes were aligned horizontally, by grade level, to identify trends within specific grades. The following data provided insight first by question, then by grade level.

The Meaning of Parent Participation

All participants indicated that parent participation meant being physically present at the school for volunteer opportunities. One parent stated, "Parent participation is being involved with classrooms, being involved actively at the office …" Other responses included examples such as helping teachers with tasks inside the classroom, distributing graduation gowns, library support, and attending field trips. Similar to the idea of being inside the school, four out of nine respondents mentioned attending school-based events and extracurricular activities. These parents felt that being in the school building and observing their children participate in activities connected to the school showed their children they cared and supported them.

The opportunity to be heard, ask questions, and provide opinions on certain school matters was valued by five participants. For these parents, school council meetings and parent surveys comprised these opportunities. A reoccurring term used frequently throughout the interviews was the word *involved*. Seven parents used the term directly and the other two used statements that, when examined, alluded to different types of involvement. For some parents, the most important aspect of involvement included academic support. One parent affirmed the importance of monitoring her child's grades and stated, "so, I do get Parent Portal sent to me once a week to keep up on their grades or keep track of their attendance." Four responses stated that assisting their children with studying and completing homework provided evidence of their involvement. These parents felt that their time was well invested when supporting their children at home with

academic guidance. One parent reiterated that, "it's also for the children to know that you are a constant in their education. That whether you're studying at home, that you have some kind of impact on them."

Advantages to Parent Participation in High School

A phrase frequently used by participants when inquiring about the advantages of parent participation was to find out "what's going on." This specific phrase was repeated in five interviews across all three grade levels. One parent stated, "… when your kids get into high school the communication is shut off, even more-so than junior high."

Six parents addressed the importance of building relationships with people: two desired insight into friendship circles and four mentioned school staff such as counsellors and administrators. These parents perceived that developing relationships with peers and staff inadvertently supported their children's lives. One parent stated, "I want to be able to know who my principal is and who my vice principals are and be able to go to them if there's any issues and feel comfortable doing that." Support for their children was identified in two ways: academic guidance and the providing emotional support. Four participants described academic guidance as studying with their children, investigating post-secondary opportunities, monitoring marks, accessing tutors, and implementing strategies to improve grades. One parent stated, "and again, tracking the marks is still just as important in high school I think, as it is, maybe more so, that's when they really need to buckle down." Four participants described aspects of emotional support as nurturing their children, ensuring their needs were met, posing questions about daily life, and being available when they were ill. Much like the provision of emotional support, two other parents proposed that remaining an advocate was integral to their children's well-being.

Types of Helpful Parent Participation

Academic involvement was mentioned most often; it appeared in eight interviews as an important component of parent participation. Participants indicated that goal setting, clarifications of academic concerns, communication with staff, helping their children study, tracking marks online, attending interviews, making course adjustments, financing tutoring, and assisting with post-secondary planning outlined their involvement. Following academic involvement, six participants indicated that their physical presence at the school reflected their perceptions of the nature of parent participation. One parent indicated that she enjoyed, "… coming in and being able to help out. I like that because it lets me see the kids; it lets me get a better feel of the school and understand what's happening." Presence at the school took a variety of forms: athletic involvement as a spectator, attending student presentations, assisting with tasks at the school, and spending time waiting around the school when picking up their children.

Four participants mentioned the importance of attending parent advisory meetings. These parents felt the meetings provided information, clarified questions, and provided opportunities to voice their concerns. One parent stated:

> Being part of parent council has been helpful to me, because I have been in the past, not necessarily in the last year or two, but in the past felt like my opinion on a decision, or a potential decision was listened to at council.

Four participants also indicated that familiarity with the staff was essential to the success of their children.

Changes in Parent Participation

All nine participants stated that their involvement in their children's schooling decreased as their children aged. They identified that they were the most involved in their children's elementary years of schooling, less in their junior high years, and exhibited the least involvement at the high school level. Participants provided a few reasons for their decreasing levels of involvement at the high school level: the necessity to respect their children's independence, the decreased number of volunteer opportunities, respect for their children's social status and image, commitments involving their own employment, the increased complexity of curricular content, the lack of need for fundraising supports, and that only certain parents were selected to attend field trips. One parent was certain that the lack of volunteer opportunities contributed to this change and stated, "so volunteerism was much higher in elementary, and decreased almost steadily through junior high and then non-existent in high school." Upon reflection, one parent identified that she was most involved in her child's grade 12 year in comparison to grades 10 and 11, and attributed it to post-secondary planning.

Grade Level Variations.

Grade level comparisons in relation to participation are described in Table 1. Parents identified their increased participation in grades 11 and 12 in comparison to grade 10. The most prevalent reason for involvement across all three grades was the concerns about their children's academic progress. Both grades 11 and 12 reflect similar results: communication with staff and post-secondary investigations. Course planning remained the difference between grade 11 and 12 parent participation.

Barriers to Participation

Participants identified a variety of barriers that limited their participation. These barriers were listed by more than one respondent and included the following factors: the lack of volunteer opportunities, social concerns, the increased levels of independence in their children, their own children's lack of responsibilities, struggles with communication from the school, and their own time commitments. One parent felt the lack of collaboration between home and school

Table 1

Findings From Grade 10, 11, and 12 Parent Participants

Grade	Change to Participation	Reasons for Involvement
10	No change (2 parents), less involvement (1 parent)	Academia, emotional support
11	More in grade 11 (2 parents), more in junior high (1 parent)	Academia, communication with staff, course planning, post-secondary investigations
12	More in grade 12 (2 parents), neutral (1 parent)	Academia, communication with staff, post-secondary investigations

contributed to her limited participation and stated, "let's work, let's do this together. We are a team. Going back to the idea of it takes a village."

Additional Insights

All nine participants affirmed that their children's success in high school was influenced by their involvement. The responses were categorized into two themes: school-related and home-related supports. In terms of school-related supports parents valued the following activities: various information nights; seminars to clarify technological advances, social concerns, and mental health; continued school council opportunities; the ability to provide feedback; opportunities for stronger staff connections; and increased communication. In relation to home-related supports parents wished for extra academic supports and insight for how they might best support their children's emotional well-being.

Discussion

Five themes emerged that identified participants' perceptions of parent involvement in high school: (1) volunteering at the school, (2) attending various activities, (3) academic supports, (4) school council, and (5) survey feedback.

Volunteering

All participants identified the ability to physically volunteer and participate in opportunities the school offered to constitute the primary element of parent participation. Data in this study supports Stelmach and Preston's (2008) findings that parents positively anticipate participating in school activities. Khan (1996) similarly affirmed the importance of parents being provided with opportunities to be non-instructional volunteers. Although parents in this study did not link volunteering with their children's academic growth, they did perceive their ability to volunteer as supporting their children in a broader sense of success in school.

Attending Activities

Parents in this study felt that attending extra-curricular and academic activities reflected support for their children. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) proposed that certain types of parent involvement increased student engagement. The participants in this study demonstrated to their children that they valued non-academic aspects of their education and supported Wang and Sheikh-Khalil's (2014) notion about sustaining engagement of their children. In essence, the physical presence of parents in a school provided emotional support and a sense of caring for their children (Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

Academic Support

Providing academic support was valued by parents in all three grade levels in this study. This support was disaggregated into two types: home and home-school.

Home support. Home support involved parents that required no assistance from school staff. Examples of home support from parents in this study included: conversations involving

studying, financing tutoring, goal setting, use of online portals to access grades, and homework assistance. Parents in this study concurred with the findings of researchers such as Brien and Stelmach (2009) that their roles changed from direct to indirect support as their children progressed through primary and secondary school.

Home-school support. This type of support involved parents needing further assistance from the school in order to assist their children with academic pursuits at home. Parents in this study provided examples such as: contact with counsellors regarding course selections, meetings with staff at the school, and the use of email to clarify concerns or communicate with staff. Findings from a study by Olmstead (2013) concluded that parents found technology useful in improving and sustaining communication between home and school. The parents in this study concurred with Olmstead (2013) and attributed the use of technology to the academic success of their children.

Decision Making

The participants in this study valued the opportunity to participate in decision making processes and shared their opinions about topics related to their children's education at school council meetings. According to Leithwood and Menzies (1998), School-Based Management (SBM) systems provided feedback from parents into decisions involving the school. Parents in this investigation supported the findings of Leithwood and Menzies (1998) that SBM systems provide parents with opportunities to be heard.

Providing Feedback

Parents in this investigation indicated their desire to be consulted about decisions made by staff that impacted their children's schooling. Participants felt that the completion of school surveys reflected their participation by providing feedback to the school to include their voices in planning and improvements. Both Khan (1996) and Baker et al. (2016) reiterated the importance for schools to value the opinions and insight of parents. Similarly, researchers like Stelmach and Preston (2008) and Robinson and Harris (2014) also recommended that leaders gain an increased understanding of parents' preferences to involve them in beneficial ways. In essence, they advocate for schools and parents working synchronously towards a common vision.

Advantages to Parent Participation

The data yielded three major categories of perceived advantages: providing information, emotional support, and academic guidance. A study by Epstein et al. (2008) proposed that parent participation was positively correlated with children's grades in literacy and numeracy. Participants in this study concurred with Epstein et al. (2018) findings that the primary purpose for providing academic support was to improve their children's grades.

Providing information. Participants indicated that an advantage of parent participation was their increased understanding of "what's going on," a phrase repeated throughout several interviews. Parents were interested in understanding the overall atmosphere inside the school building. Studies by both Constantino (2007) and Rodriguez et al. (2009) concluded that this atmosphere directly impacts parent participation; parents in this study affirmed their findings.

Parents indicated their frustrations with the communication of the events from the school. To

seek information, they used school council meetings, social media, and the school website, which they felt was rarely updated. A study by Olmstead (2013) reiterated that schools needed to have regularly updated websites to sustain parent participation. The participants in this study concurred with Olmstead (2013).

Emotional support. Participants described specific examples of nurturing their children throughout high school. They also connected relationships with emotional support, including both friendship circles and connections with staff. Participants felt that stronger relationships with staff made it easier to make contact, and the more frequently they made contact, the stronger the relationships became. A study by Brown and Vaugh (2015) identified the correlation between communication and relationships; the more communication increased, the stronger relationships became. This correlation was supported by participants in this study.

Academic guidance. Oxley (2013), Epstein et al. (2018), and Catsambis (2001) all identified a positive correlation between parent involvement and student achievement. Other researchers such as Robinson and Harris (2014) provided evidence that opposed the data in this study. They postulated that there was a lack of evidence to support the correlation between parent guidance and student success. Pomerantz, Moorman, and Litwack (2007) concurred with Robinson and Harris (2014) and deemed that instead of academic results, parent involvement impacted children's mental health. Similar to the findings of Pomerantz et al. (2007) and Robinson and Harris (2014), participants in this study identified a positive correlation between their children's mental health and their participation; however, in contrast to these researchers, participants identified a positive correlation between the provision of academic support and their children's increased achievements.

Changes to Participation

Participants in this study provided a deepened understanding of changes in participation by providing increased insight into the high school years specifically. Post-secondary planning provided the motive for parents in grades 11 and 12 to have increased their involvement. This reasoning aligned with the findings of researchers such as Eccles and Harold (1996) that, as children age, the type of parent involvement transforms from behavioural to academic.

Barriers to Parent Participation

Participants were asked to identify their encounters with barriers that they felt impacted their participation. This remains an integral area of study in order to identify the barriers parents face so that leaders are able to make relevant changes to support parent participation. The data in this study yielded three barriers: child-based challenges, school-based challenges, and parent-based limitations.

Child-Based challenges. Child-based challenges were characterized by a child's own beliefs and actions. Six participants indicated that their children conveyed the importance of their social reputation and that the presence of their parents at the school would potentially create embarrassment for them. To honor their children's requests, parents stated that they refrained from going to the school.

Four parents in this study revealed that their own children were barriers to their involvement. Parents felt their children would purposefully withhold information like: grades, permission forms, upcoming assessments, events at the school, and personal information. Researchers like

Pomerantz et al. (2007) supported the situations parents in this study encountered and proposed that the autonomy of children greatly impacted the involvement of parents.

School-Based challenges. Parents in this study conveyed their frustrations with the school in the following areas: the lack of volunteer opportunities, the uninviting atmosphere of the school, the lack of positive relationships, and the absence of communication. Feelings of frustration over the lack of communication from both administration and teachers created feelings of disconnect for the participants in this study. The lack of communication was felt in multiple areas of the school: volunteering opportunities, school-related websites, social media, and decision-making processes. Constantino (2007) classified communication as a barrier to parent involvement and strongly encouraged school leaders to improve their communication by implementing two-way communication, whereby both parents and school staff are engaged. He encouraged leaders to communicate with parents using easier language and increase teacher awareness of communication deficiencies with parents. Parents in this study affirmed the findings of Constantino (2007) and desired improved communication from their school leaders.

Parent-Based limitations. Parents in this study identified their own circumstances and situations that presented barriers to their participation at the high school level. Parent-based limitations were personal limitations that parents disclosed based on their experiences and contexts. The data yielded three barriers: respect for independence, time restrictions, and the level of academia.

Respecting independence. Four participants identified their struggle between balancing their parent participation and respecting their children's rights to increased maturity and rights to make decisions. Researchers like Eccles and Harold (1996) concurred with parents in this study and supported the notion that their children's increased independence directly impacted their parent participation.

Time constraints. Another hindrance identified by participants regarding their participation were their employment obligations and commitments. Parents mentioned that their participation was impacted by their work hours, commitments, tiredness, and increased responsibilities outside of the work day. Researchers like Epstein (1985), Leitch and Tangri (1988), and Constantino (2007) all concurred with participants in this study that time constraints negatively impacted their ability to participate in their children's schooling. Ouimette et al. (2006) proposed that leaders, when making decisions, consider the circumstances of parents and consider working around their barriers.

Level of academia. The last limitation communicated by parents concerned the complexity of curricular content their children were studying. Parents indicated their frustrations with their inability to support their children's studying and tasks, due to their own limited content knowledge. They desired additional supports from the school to increase their understanding in order to provide academic assistance for their children. Some examples included: post-secondary information nights, access to additional online curricular teaching videos, and seminars related to technology. Constantino (2007) supported parents in this study and offered two suggestions for leaders to consider: teachers providing parents with posted online explanations and for curricular work included in newsletters to use parent-friendly descriptors.

Conclusion

Parent participation at the high school level continues to be a topic examined by educational researchers. The purpose of this study was to gain insight from parents and guardians from an

urban setting in Alberta, Canada about their experiences of involvement. Three parents were randomly selected to be interviewed from each grade level (10, 11, 12) to explore the primary research question: What is the nature of parent participation at the high school level?

Four general themes emerged from the data: (1) types of parent participation (2) advantages of parent participation (3) changes in parent participation, and (4) barriers to parent participation. Participants revealed that volunteering, attending school-based events, providing feedback, and school council involvement constituted valued participation. Both academic and emotional support were perceived as advantages to their involvement. All participants concurred that as their children aged, their participation decreased. More specifically, high school participation was reported to be the highest in grades 11 and 12, due to post-secondary exploration. Challenges encountered at the school included the lack of volunteer opportunities, the unwelcoming atmosphere, the absence of positive relationships, and a deficiency in communication. Parents also expressed concerns with balancing their children's desire for independence with their need to provide guidance and support.

This investigation was initiated based on a discrepancy between the perception of teachers and those of parents in relation to a question about parent involvement in the *2015–2016 Accountability Pillar*. Although data were collected from a small sample size of nine participants and from one school, the insights gained in conceptualizing child-based challenges, school-based challenges, and parent-based limitations were abundant. Findings from this study suggest that parents of high school students are more inclined to be involved if structural or procedural barriers are reduced. Future studies may wish to use an increased number of participants and consider sampling multiple sites to further expand findings from this research. The insight gathered from participants in this study has implications for system and school leaders who wish to pursue approaches and strategies to enhance parental engagement in the school and point primarily to the crucial role of relationships in the successful partnering between schools and families.

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